

# Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



## Components of Love

### Bamidbar

This week's haftara is unusual for two reasons. First of all, it's not really connected to the Torah reading. It's more of a preview for the holiday of Shavuot which mostly falls out in the week after reading this parsha. And secondly, it's really weird. The prophet Hoshei'a seems to marry a woman of ill repute named Gomer (please, don't Pyle on). However, many sources don't believe that he really did. It's just an allegory, to teach us important lessons about love and relationships. Oh, please, let that be the true meaning!

But we're not here to talk about Gomer (phew!), but the lessons and ideas to be garnered from this haftara. Let's begin where the haftara ends:

I will take you to be my wife forever. I will take you to be my wife in righteousness, justice, love, and compassion. I will take you to be my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the Lord (Hoshei'a 2:21-22).

The Hebrew of these verses is very well known to men who wear Tefillin regularly. The most common custom is to recite these two verses while wrapping the Tefillin strap around one's middle finger, as if to place a wedding band upon it. The symbolism is powerful.

Clearly, the prophet is declaring that a good marriage includes three components, and if these elements are present then the relationship will result in the ultimate goal: knowledge of the partner. There's so much to unpack. Let's begin with: What does a good marriage relationship look like?

Actually, that reference comes a couple of verses before our two: On that day, says the Eternal, you will call me, "My husband (ISHI)", and no longer will you call me, "My Master (BAALI) (Hoshei'a 2:18)".

The Malbim explains that the difference between the two terms is the difference between love and fear. A BAAL is an owner and a master to be feared. ISHI describes the love of one's youth. Kedushat Levi adds that as equals both spouses contribute to each other, and Hoshei'a is not only referring to husband and wife, but to the relationship between Creator and creature.

So, a good marriage is a partnership, and encourages a long lasting relationship which includes love, justice, compassion, empathy, faithfulness, etc. But the final accomplishment is described as 'knowledge'.

What is this 'knowledge' or YEDIYA? We've all heard the crude, mocking jokes about 'knowing someone Biblically'. That's based on the verse, 'Now Adam YADA his wife Eve' (B'reishit 4:1), and immediately she conceived and bore KAYIN. However, that position really

ignores the many uses for the term YADA in our Bible.

Hoshei'a is very connected to the concept of DA'AT, especially DA'AT ELOKIM (knowledge of God). He uses that expression in this famous verse: Hear the Eternal's word, O People of Israel; for the Eternal has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land. There's no faithful love (CHESED) or loyalty (EMET), and no knowledge of God (DA'AT ELOKIM) in the land (4:1). He uses it again in 6:4. It is, therefore, critical to try and understand DA'AT ELOKIM, and, therefore, the concept of YEDIYA.

It's important to remember that when Israelis say that they 'know someone', they say, MAKIR OTO, 'I recognize him'. Most people are acquaintances, about whom we have little profound knowledge or understanding. But Hoshei'a wanted us to understand that we should have profound knowledge of our spouse and of our God.

What elements does this YEDIYA of another contain? Yehuda Kiel in his commentary on the book of Hoshei'a for Mosad HaRav Kook, suggested: The conclusion must be that DA'AT ELOKIM is not normal (regular, STAM) YEDIYA. It has within it understanding of the ways of God. It is on the level of sublime insight (TODA'A MOREMET). It must be considered one of the levels of Divine Spirit (RU'ACH HAKODESH)... Furthermore, this DA'AT isn't just based upon understanding, rather it must be based

upon love of God and desire for intimacy (KIRVA). Hoshei'a wasn't satisfied with his explanation until he had compared it to the relationship between spouses... This must be based not only upon emotion, but must include fundamental attention to intellect, as well... In the final analysis, DA'AT ELOKIM is Torah knowledge and fulfillment of HALACHA according to all its details... All this plus, DA'AT ELOKIM implies, as well, that God YODEA the human. This YEDIYA is attachment (DIBUKO) to God.

So, knowing God is an enormous, all-encompassing endeavor. Not easily achieved, but according to Hoshei'a, possible for the serious individual who desires to be a TZADIK. Hoshei'a insists that there must be more DA'AT ELOKIM in the Jewish nation. The importance of this spiritual level was also described by Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heschel, and he observes:

Hosei'a's central complaint is that the people don't 'know' God. He employs the verb 'to know' with striking frequency, and coins the expression DA'AT ELOKIM, usually rendered as 'knowledge of God'... YADA means more than the possession of abstract concepts. Knowledge encompasses inner appropriation, feeling, a reception into the soul. It involves both an intellectual and emotional act. An analysis of the usage of the verb in Biblical Hebrew leads to the conclusion that it often denotes an act involving concern, inner engagement, dedication and attachment to a person. It also

means to have empathy, pity or affection for someone... It implies not just legal obligations but also inner attitudes... the words DA'AT ELOKIM mean sympathy for God, attachment of the whole person, his love as well as his knowledge. The Biblical man knew of no bifurcation of mind and heart, thought and emotion... The word DA'AT in Hosei'a denotes an act involving complete engagement of the person... Personal involvement, like the one which occurs when a man becomes engaged to a woman, seems to be regarded as the prerequisite for, or the essence of, the DA'AT of God.

Wow! That's a tall order. It's important to understand this position and demand of Hoshei'a. It is also crucial that we read, contemplate and endeavor to fulfill Hoshei'a's demand as we prepare for our annual reenactment of Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot.

May we commit ourselves to this sublime effort of 'knowing our Creator', and have a CHAG SAMEI'ACH! 🙏