

## COMMUNICATIONS

### DIVINE PATHOS

TO THE EDITOR OF *TRADITION*:

The recent article of Dr. Berkovits dealing with Dr. A. J. Heschel's theology of pathos, while very valuable in alerting the reader to the danger of following Professor Heschel's apparent attempt to invest the essence of God with human attributes, contains a reference to Hosea's marriage which is so misleading that I feel it deserves to be brought to the attention of your readers.

Dr. Berkovits on page 89 of the Spring edition 1964 states that Dr. Heschel offers an original interpretation of Hosea's marriage, and then goes on to reject this interpretation and challenge Prof. Heschel's concept of God. I shall quote partially:

According to the imagery of Hosea's language, God is the Consort of Israel. The Covenant between God and Israel is like that between man and wife. Thus, Hosea, marrying a wife of harlotry, went through an experience similar to the experience of God with Israel. By means of this marriage,

the prophet was able to feel the divine pathos; he and God shared a common experience.

Dr. Berkovits then proceeds to quote Prof. Vervotim along the same lines, and ends by asking "one cannot help wondering what concept of God must a person have in order to be able to appreciate this kind of interpretation?"

It means that Dr. Berkovits accepts this interpretation as being a novel one, invented by Prof. Heschel, when in fact every student of *Tanakh* that skims through the basic commentaries printed in any *Mikraot Gedolot*, must be familiar with the commentary of Kimchi running parallel to the one supplied by Prof. Heschel. In fact, Kimchi's commentary is taken from the *Talmud Pesachim* 87. It runs approximately as follows:

"God said to Hosea: your children have sinned, and he should have replied they are your children, they depend upon your graciousness, they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so bestow your mercy upon them; however not only did he not reply in this vein, but he said to God:

Creator of the universe the entire world is Yours; exchange them for another nation. Thereupon God, trying to teach Hosea to view matters from a better perspective, said to him: 'Go, take yourself a woman of harlotry, have children with her,' and afterwards He would tell Hosea to divorce her. If Hosea could bring himself to divorce her, so would God be able to divorce Israel." So far the Talmud.

I cannot help wondering whether Dr. Berkovits includes the Talmud when he expresses astonishment about the nature of Dr. Heschel's concept of God.

May I venture to suggest that one need not get involved too deeply in the problem of theology of sympathy to understand the concepts involved here. Dr. Berkovits himself in the course of the *addenda* of his article, draws the reader's attention to the finite emanations of God better known as the *middot*. Thus, the relationship between these finite manifestations of God, his *middot*, with Israel are such, that the thought of severing this relationship is extremely distasteful to God (His *middot*). No prophet need be concerned beyond this aspect of God. He must, however, be in sympathy with these *middot* which the Almighty has established as guidelines for human behavior to emulate. Therefore,

until Hosea appreciates the way he ought to feel, he cannot be a fit instrument for preaching the practice of these *middot* to his own people.

In closing, may I say that I consider publication of Dr. Berkovits' article in your journal as having rendered a distinct service to every Jew who seriously endeavours to come to terms with his *emunah* problems.

E. MUNK

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RABBI BERKOVITS REPLIES:

In reply to Mr. Munk's observation I wish to point out that I made no reference to the well-known Talmudical interpretation of Hosea's marriage because it is as removed from Dr. Heschel's interpretation *Kirchok Mizrach Mimaarav*. According to Dr. Heschel, by marrying a faithless woman the prophet vicariously lives through the divine experience of God's mystical marriage with a faithless Israel. Thus, he becomes enabled to identify himself with God's sorrow, to feel it as his own. He learns to sympathize with God for what He has to endure. According to the Talmudical interpretation, the prophet lacks sympathy with Israel. The purpose of the marriage is to teach him sympathy even with a faithless Israel.