YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #283: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (XCIII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXIX)**

In this *shiur*, we will continue to look at Yerovam's innovations in a comprehensive manner. In the previous *shiur* we began to examine the changes that Yerovam made in time and place. We will first complete the matter of time and then deal with the change that he introduced regarding those who perform the Divine service.

### The significance of the additional month that he devised on his own

As we explained, when Yerovam added the month, he achieved the goal that he had set for himself to separate the two kingdoms with respect to the festivals celebrated in each kingdom. It is reasonable to assume that Yerovam did not content himself with this one-time act, but continued to maintain a one-month difference throughout the years of his reign.

Therefore, if it was an ordinary year in Yehuda, it was an ordinary year in Israel as well; and if it was a leap year in Yehuda, it was also a leap year in Israel. This arrangement preserved the one-month gap regarding the times of the festivals as they were celebrated in each of the kingdoms.

A number of sources in *Chazal* relate to this difference in the time of the festivals as a permanent phenomenon. Thus we read in the *Yerushalmi*, *Avoda Zara*:

Rav Avin bar Kahana said: We find that even Shabbatot and festival days he [Yerovam] devised of his own. (*Yerushalmi*, *Avoda Zara* 1:11)

Or the Midrash in *Eikha Rabba*:

"The Lord has caused to be forgotten in Zion appointed season and Shabbat" (*Eikha* 2:6). Is it possible that the Holy One, blessed be He, would could the appointed seasons and Shabbatot to be forgotten? Rather, [He caused to be forgotten] the appointed seasons and Shabbatot of Yerovam ben Nevat which he had devised on his own. (*Eikha Rabba* [ed. Vilna], 2:10)

And similarly the Midrash in *Bamidbar Rabba*:

"Your new moons and you appointed seasons My soul hates" – this refers to the appointed times instituted by Yerovam. (*Bamidbar Rabba* (Vilna), 21:25)

From here we see that *Chazal* related with harsh criticism to the changes in the times of the festivals, Shabbat and new moons that were instituted by Yerovam and which apparently continued for the entire length of the kingdom of Israel.

As a rule, Yerovam's sins are mentioned in connection with all of the kings of Israel. The usual formulation is: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed not from all the sins of Yerovam the son of Nevat, wherewith he made Israel to sin" (II *Melakhim* 14:24; II *Melakhim*, chapters 13 and 15, and elsewhere).

The only king regarding whom this formulation is not found is Hoshea ben Ela. About him it says: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, yet not as the kings of Israel that were before him" (II *Melakhim* 17:2). In what way was Hoshea ben Ela different from all the kings who went before him?

*Chazal* provide a detailed answer to this question, as we find in *Seder Olam Rabba*:

When Hoshea ben Ela saw that the golden calves were taken into exile, he stood up and removed the guards that Yerovam ben Nevat had put on the borders so that pilgrims should not go up to Jerusalem. For regarding all the kings of Israel it is stated: "And he followed in the ways of Yerovam ben Nevat, and in his sins," whereas regarding Hoshea it is stated: "Yet not as the kings of Israel that were before him" (II *Melakhim* 17:4). Why then was the decree sealed that they should be exiled in his days? Because the people of Israel attributed the corruption to their kings. (*Seder Olam Rabba* [Leiner], 2)

The Midrash clearly understands that there is a connection between the fact that in connection with Hoshea there is no mention of the sins of Yerovam and his removal of the guards who prevented pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The significance of the removal of the guards is two-fold: on the one hand, it allowed for a return to worshipping God in the Temple in Jerusalem (and nowhere else); on the other hand, it allowed for a return to the calendar followed in the kingdom of Yehuda, so that the same calendar was followed in Yehuda and Israel.

Zev Ehrlich makes an interesting suggestion regarding the unification of the calendar that had originated in Yehuda (on the assumption that from the time of Yerovam until the days of Hoshea ben Ela the kingdom of Israel followed a calendar that was different than the calendar followed in the kingdom of Yehuda).

At the beginning of Chizkiyahu's reign, he writes letters to Efrayim and Menashe "to come to the house of God in Jerusalem to keep Pesach … in the second month" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 30:1-2), and according to the verses that follow, the holiday was indeed celebrated in the second month.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 12a-12b) explains that Chizkiyahu intercalated the year because the people were unclean, but he prayed for mercy for himself because the law is that the year can only be intercalated in Adar, but not in Nisan. Indeed, the Gemara (*Pesachim* 56a) says that the Sages did not agree with Chizkiyahu's intercalating the year in Nisan.

It is possible that what helped Chizkiyahu persuade the people of the kingdom of Israel to participate with the people of the kingdom of Yehuda in the celebration of Pesach in Jerusalem was that the year was intercalated in Yehuda and not in Israel, and in that way the calendars of the two kingdoms were reunified, based on the calendar of the kingdom of Israel. As the verse in *Divrei ha-Yamim* puts it, the festival was celebrated in the second month – the month of Iyar.

There is an interesting parallel between Chizkiyahu and Yerovam. Both of them changed the calendar immediately upon rising to power, but with a significant difference. Yerovam intercalated the year in Elul, whereas Chizkiyahu did so in Nisan. It is clear that they had opposite objectives: Yerovam wanted to separate the two kingdoms, whereas Chizkiyahu wished to repair the rift and reunite the entire nation around the festival of Pesach in the second month in Jerusalem.

### The transition from the priests to All the people

The service at the *bamot* built by Yerovam was performed by priests from among all the people, rather than from the tribe of Levi. One of the clearest examples of this is the fact that in I *Melakhim* 13, Scripture describes how Yerovam himself offered a sacrifice in Bet-El. In this way he demonstrated by way of personal example the very significant change that he had introduced – a man from the tribe of Efrayim offering a sacrifice in the house of *bamot*.

But beyond this fact, Yerovam himself served as both king and priest with all that is implied by this combination. In this way, he tried to be like Moshe during the seven days of consecrating the *Mishkan*, when he assumed all leadership positions, and like Shemuel, who during his period of leadership was like Moshe and Aharon together.[[1]](#footnote-1)

On this point as well, it would appear that Yerovam did not introduce something entirely new, but rather in a sense he wished to return to certain ancient traditions found among the Jewish people prior to the period of the monarchy. He himself offered sacrifices on the altar like a High Priest. As we have already mentioned in previous *shiurim*, he fashioned calves like the calf that had been made by Aharon.

Another similarity is found in the names of Yerovam's sons, Nadav and Aviya (I *Melakhim* 14:1; I *Melakim* 15:25), like the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu (*Shemot* 24:1).

Scripture describes the departure of the priests from the kingdom of Israel:

And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel presented themselves to him out of all their border. For the Levites left their open land and their possession, and came to Yehuda and Jerusalem; for Yerovam and his sons cast them off, that they should not execute the priest's office to the Lord; and he appointed him priests for the high places, and for the satyrs, and for the calves which he had made. And after them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord, the God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Yehuda, and made Rechavam the son of Shelomo strong, three years; for they walked three years in the way of David and Shelomo. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 11:13-17)

These verses emphasize that the transition from priests from the tribe of Levi to priests from all the people took three years. This is a significant period of time and it indicates the depth of the process.

Aviya, the son of Rechavam, in his speech before Yerovam on Mount Tzemarayim in Efrayim relates to the replacement of the priests from the tribe of Levi with priests from among all the people:

Have you not driven out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aharon, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the peoples of other lands? so that whoever comes to consecrate himself[[2]](#footnote-2) with a young bullock and seven rams, the same becomes a priest of them that are no gods. But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and we have priests ministering to the Lord, the sons of Aharon, and the Levites in their work… but you have forsaken Him. And, behold, God is with us at our head, and His priests…. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13:9-12)

Scripture states that Yerovam had set up priests for the *bamot*, the satyrs, and the calves that he had made. It is interesting that he mentions the satyrs. Does this mean that in this generation the people returned to some extent to the cult of the satyrs that was practiced in the wilderness by those who had left Egypt?[[3]](#footnote-3)

The final similarity that we will mention is that between the sacrifice offered by them, a bullock, and the sacrifice offered by Aharon and his sons in the section describing the consecration of the *Mishkan*:

And this is the thing that you shall do to them to hallow them, to minister to Me in the priest's office: take one young bullock and two rams without blemish. (*Shemot* 29:1)

In this way as well, the priests from among all the people wished to resemble Aharon and his sons, and so the sacrifice that was offered is a bullock.

### World, Year, and Soul – SUmmary

To complete this discussion of "world, year, and soul" in the actions of Yerovam, it would appear that his reforms related to three main areas which he challenged.

In the dimension of the place, he challenged the uniqueness of Jerusalem and Mount Moriya as the site of the house of God, and proposed an alternative in the form of the house of *bemot* in Bet-El and in Dan.

In the dimension of time, he challenged the Hebrew calendar and by intercalating the year in the month of Elul he essentially cut himself off from the entire system of festivals. In the kingdom of Israel, the festivals were celebrated a month after they were celebrated in the kingdom of Yehuda, and as we have seen, this change appears to have remained in place until the days of Chizkiyahu.

In the dimension of people, he challenged the priesthood by replacing the priests of the tribe of Levi with priests from among all the people, with Yerovam himself serving as a priest and as a king who stands on the altar and offers sacrifices.

Scripture explicitly mentions this matter (I *Melakhim* 12:31-32):[[4]](#footnote-4) "And he made a house of *bamot*," as opposed to Mount Moriya; "and he made priests from among all the people," as opposed to the tribe of Levi; "and Yerovam ordained a feast in the eighth month," as opposed to the festival of Sukkot celebrated in the kingdom of Yehuda; and above all else: "The king took counsel, and made two calves of gold" (I *Melakhim* 12:28), as opposed to the *keruvim* in the Holy of Holies.

### Yerovam's reforms – Back to the beginning

Prof. Grintz[[5]](#footnote-5) sees the elements mentioned above – Yerovam's giving his sons the names Nadav and Aviya, like the names of the sons of Aharon the priest who merited to see the *Shekhina*; the selection of Bet-El, the place that was explicitly sanctified in the days of the patriarch Yaakov – as part of a comprehensive reform on the part of Yerovam to return to the stage prior to the *Mishkan.*

Grinz opens with the assertion:

Yerovam's reforms constitute a whole system of religious reformation, which is worthy of our consideration.

Religious reformation… enters the world in order to correct a world of corrupted values, which no longer fulfills its own demands…

The most famous reformations in European history in the Middle Ages, even though the religious and moral motive that operated in them cannot be denied… achieved what they achieved by force of political transformations and exceedingly practical interests… So too in our case [the reform of Yerovam]: the real politics and tribal arrogance [of the tribe of Efrayim], which demanded hegemony and would not waive its honor, are clearly visible.

Less evident than that [the political aspects of Yerovam's actions] is the religious dimension: What did Yerovam see to separate… to stand up and do something obscene in the name of religion, despite the anger of that prophet (Achiya the Shilonite, I *Melakhim* 14:7-9)… What did he see… that he was not satisfied with building a temple corresponding to the Temple?

According to Grintz, Yerovam's religious upheaval was a return to the ancient faith of Israel, that which was practiced even before the days of Moshe. This ancient faith began in the period of the patriarchs, continued during their period of exile in Egypt and ended in the early stages following the Exodus. This faith was the legacy of the people even before Moshe descended from Mount Sinai with the command to build the *Mishkan* with the ark and the *keruvim*. In that early period the ox (= calf) was an accepted religious symbol in Israel of God's chariot, this symbol having originated among the nations who lived in the north – in Syria and in Canaan. The sacrificial service was then in the hands of the firstborns, "the young men of the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 24:5), and it was they who served as "the priests who come near to the Lord" at the time of the Revelation at Mount Sinai (*Shemot* 19:22-24).

After Sinai, a new phase of the Divine service began: Moshe descended from Mount Sinai with a new symbol of the resting of the *Shekhina* in Israel – the ark and the *keruvim* – in place of the calf. In the wake of the sin of the golden calf, the firstborns as well are replaced by the Levites.

Was the Temple that was built by Shelomo in Jerusalem a faithful continuation of Moshe's *Mishkan* in the wilderness and of the *Mishkan* in Shilo that had been destroyed? Or perhaps this was a new stage in the development of the Divine service in Israel. Jerusalem itself was a Yevusite city that was conquered by David, and its sanctity had not been known in the past. The Temple built by Shelomo was not similar to the *Mishkan*, not in its magnificent structure, not in the service of the Levites, which underwent a fundamental change, and most of all, even the *keruvim* were not the same *keruvim* (I *Melakhim* 6:23-28). In this state of affairs, Yerovam tried to return things back to the way they were before the *Mishkan.* According to Grintz, this includes the things mentioned above – Yerovam calling his sons by the names of the sons of Aharon, and choosing Bet-El and Dan, which are connected to the stories of the patriarchs.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Yerovam's actions constitute a complete system, directed against that which existed in Jerusalem and claiming to be a continuation – albeit adapted for the needs of the time – of the ancient *Mishkan* in the wilderness and in Shilo. Yerovam abolished all of the more recent stages, and returned to the period of the patriarchs, to the period that preceded the establishment of the priesthood of the houses of Elazar and Itamar.

Like the Karaite reforms that uprooted the Mishna and the Talmud, and like other reforms that uprooted all of the intermediate stages, so too Yerovam's reforms uprooted fundamentals that had developed over time, and attempted to go back in time and take hold of the practices of the early generations.

In the next *shiur*, we will complete our study of Yerovam's actions with the unique approach of the Netziv.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. According to the opinion in the *Zohar* that Shemuel was a priest, and according to the exposition of the verse: "Moshe and Aharon among his priests, and Shemuel among them that call upon His name" (*Tehilim* 99:6) – that Shemuel was equal to Moshe and Aharon. This point is well explained in Zev Ehrlich, "*Vaya'as Yerovam* – *Olam Shana Nefesh be-Mif'alei Yerovam ben Nevat*," *Kotleinu* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lit., to fill his hand, i.e., to consecrate himself for the service when he first begins to serve. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "And they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to the satyrs, after whom they go astray" (*Vayikra* 17:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Here we bring Zev Ehrlich's summation of the matter in the article cited in note 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In his article, "*Ha-Reforma ha-Rishona be-Yisrael*," *Mechkarim be-Mikra*, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 127-147. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Here we bring from Rav Elchanan Samet's summation of the words of Prof. Grintz, in his VBM *shiur,* "*Pirkei Nevi'im Shonim be-Sefer Melakhim*," *shiur* 18, "*Chat'ot Yerovam* (IV)." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)