



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Betrayal, wrestling with conscience, a woman's struggle for a voice — how do the concerns and struggles of the characters in this biblical tale resonate for us in modern times? How does the author succeed in bringing the world of ancient Israel to life?
2. The prophet Hosea, who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel prior to its conquest by Assyria in the eighth century BCE, was an important critic of his time. He rebuked the kings of Israel, as well as the people, for their religious and moral transgressions, their idolatry and corruption. Does the Hosea in *The Prophet's Wife* seem a likely candidate to be called for this work? Why or why not?
3. Hosea and Gomer's marriage is presented in the Bible as a metaphor for Israel's Covenant with God. What kind of marriage do the characters have in this novel? Why did their

marriage fail? Under what circumstances could you see Hosea and Gomer reconciling in the unwritten conclusion to this novel? In what ways does the metaphor inform us about Israel's covenant with God?

4. The relationships within the House of Beerli have an important influence on Hosea's childhood—Beerli and Ophra's marriage, Gadiel and Iddo's attitudes toward both parents, the older brothers' treatment of Hosea, the ever-present servants in their lives. What effect do these family dynamics have on Hosea's outlook on God, community, and family?
5. Why do you think the author imagined the young Hosea with artistic talents? How might an artistic disposition inform his view of the world?
6. In her commentary on this unfinished novel, Norma Rosen writes that the author turned the harlot story on its head. In what ways might Gomer be seen as a valorous woman? Do you agree that she is valorous, on the whole? Why or why not?
7. The biblical prophets are often seen as harsh and unforgiving in their words and deeds, even though they were charged by God to deliver them. In his essay, Rabbi Harold Kushner remarks that Hosea is the only Hebrew prophet who "sees God as vulnerable, hurt by betrayal." How does Milton Steinberg's depiction of a gentler Hosea get this point across? Do we see God today as vulnerable, hurt by betrayal?
8. Many Israelites during the time of this novel are less than mindful of God's commandments. They are callous to the

suffering of those among them, they celebrate Canaanite fertility rituals, and they tolerate corruption in their leaders. What was the role of biblical prophets in attempting to warn their people away from self-destruction? Who or what are some modern parallels to these prophets?

9. As Ari Goldman points out in his essay, Steinberg wrote *The Prophet's Wife* at a critical juncture in the history of the Jewish people. The full horrors of the Holocaust were just becoming known. In the Middle East, the modern State of Israel was emerging. In what ways could this novel be seen as a response to world events at this time?

10. How do you think Steinberg intended to finish the novel? How might you have finished it? In what ways do the commentaries by Ari Goldman, Rabbi Harold Kushner, and Norma Rosen contribute to the experience of reading an unfinished work?

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