

As a Driven Leaf takes place in Judea in the early second century CE. . . . His protagonist is Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah, a gifted scholar who abandons the path of rabbinic Judaism for the rationalism of the Greeks. *The Prophet's Wife* takes place in the biblical period, the eighth century BCE, in northern Israel. Now the alternative to Israelite faith is not Greek logic but the sexually charged paganism of Israel's neighbors, and Steinberg's hero is the prophet Hosea.

Hosea was one of the earliest biblical prophets whose words have been recorded in Scripture. . . . Hosea is the most personally revealing of all the prophets. We know almost nothing of the others' private lives, having been given only passing references to spouses, children, or occupations. Hosea tells us almost too much about his personal life. The first three chapters of the book of Hosea (the last eleven are notoriously difficult to interpret) tell of how he was betrayed by an unfaithful wife. The experience leads him to imagine God's feelings of betrayal when Israel strays from God's ways and prefers the crude sexuality of the cult of Baal.

I can imagine Steinberg being drawn to the story of Hosea as he saw the American Jewish community, and America in general, tempted not so much by philosophical doubts about religion as by the seductiveness of a consumer-oriented way of life.

– From the essay “Conflict of Heart and Mind,” by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, in *The Prophet's Wife*

Consider that the biblical text is one of the cruelest in the Bible. In it, God commands Hosea, ‘Go and marry a harlot.’ The implication is: let her symbolize the harlotry of Israel and the punishment I will visit upon her; you, Hosea, be as swift to punish Gomer.

This text Steinberg turns on its head. His Gomer is no harlot. His astonishing midrashic innovation is to make her a woman who is as independent-minded as she is beautiful. She is embittered by the injustice of her woman's lot, sold in marriage to someone not of her choice, and in rebellion against her uncle's efforts to wring money from her marriage to Hosea.

– From the essay “Unfinished Lives,” by Norma Rosen, in *The Prophet's Wife*