

Haftarah Helper 5780: Rosh Hashanah

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Rosh Hashanah is a day not only when we hear God's call, but when God hears our call. As the Talmud states:

Berakhot 29a	ברכות כ"ט עמוד א
On Rosh Hashanah, Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were remembered [and the divine decree that they would conceive their sons was issued.]	בְּרֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה נִפְקְדָה שָׂרָה רָחֵל וְחַנָּה.

This idea is reflected in both Haftarot of the holiday.

Day 1- 1 Samuel 1:1-2:10

The first day's Haftarah, from the opening chapters of the Book of Samuel, clearly demonstrates this theme. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, is heard by God in her prayer for a child, much like Sarah and Rachel before her¹. In response, she composes a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to God.

Haftarah Breakdown

The Haftarah's opening chapter recounts the story of Hannah and the birth of Samuel. Its context is Elkanah and his yearly pilgrimages with his family to the Tabernacle at Shiloh. There, he offered sacrifices, sharing portions of it with his wives, Peninah and Hannah. Peninah had many children and therefore received many portions of food, while childless Hannah received only one. Hannah further suffered emotionally due to verbal abuse by her co-wife. Dejected and weeping, she refused to partake in later years' sacrificial meals. One year, Hannah came to the courtyard of the Tabernacle and silently prayed for God to grant her a child. In return, she promises to place him in God's service. Due to her prayer's silence, the High Priest, Eli, thought she was a muttering drunk. Hannah rebutted his claim, and showed her righteous nature. In response, Eli blessed her. Hannah then conceived, giving birth to a son, Samuel. After weaning him, she fulfills her promise and consecrates him to the Tabernacle. In response to these events, she composes a beautiful prayer, as follows:

[Verses 2:1: God gave Hannah victory over her enemies \(i.e. her co-wife\).](#)

I Samuel 2:1	שמואל א ב:א
And Hannah prayed and said: "My heart has rejoiced through the Lord; My horn has been raised by the Lord. My mouth is opened wide against my enemies, For I have rejoiced in Your salvation."	וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר עַל־י לַבַּיְתָהּ רָמָה קָרְנֵי בָהּ רָחַב פִּי עַל-אֹיְבֵי כִי שָׂמַחֲתִי בִישׁוּעֶתְךָ:

[Verses 2:2-3: God breaks arrogance, as He is the one above all.](#)

I Samuel 2:3	שמואל א ב:ג
Do not increasingly speak haughtily; let not arrogance come out of your mouth. For the Lord is a God of thoughts, And to Him are deeds counted	אַל-תִּרְבֶּי תְדַבְּרוּ גְבוּהָ גְבוּהָ יֵצֵא עֵתְק מִפִּיכֶם כִּי אֵל יְדֻעוֹת ה' וְלֹא [וְלֹא] נִתְקַנּוּ עַלְלוֹת:

¹ The Torah reading for day 1 focuses on Sarah, and the Haftarah for day 2 (see below) features Rachel. These three women create a clear throughline connecting the various readings of the holiday.

Haftarah Breakdown (cont.)

Verses 2:4-8: God also places the weak of society in the place of the mighty, and vice versa.

I Samuel 2:5	שמואל א ב:ה
Those who were satiated have hired themselves out for bread, while the hungry ones have ceased [being hungry]. While the barren woman has borne seven, she that had many children has been bereaved.	שְׂבִיעִים בָּלֶחֶם נִשְׁכְּרוּ וְרַעֲבִים חָדְלוּ עַד־עֵקֶרָה יָלְדָה שִׁבְעָה וְרַבַּת בָּנִים אִמְלָלָה:

Verses 2:9-10: God will destroy His enemies, and uplift his righteous ones.

I Samuel 2:10	שמואל א ב:י
Those who strive with the Lord will be broken; Upon him will He thunder in Heaven; The Lord will judge the ends of the earth. And He will grant strength to His King, And raise the horn of His anointed one.	ה' יַחַתּוּ מְרִיבוֹ [מְרִיבֵי יוֹ] עָלוּ [עָלָיו] בְּשָׁמַיִם יִרְעֵם ה' יְדִין אֶפְסֵי־אָרֶץ וְיִתֵּן־עֹז לְמַלְכּוֹ וְיָרֵם קַרְן־מְשִׁיחוֹ: (פ)

Other Connections

The Talmud considers Hannah's silent prayer in Chapter 1 as a [paradigm for critical laws](#) about the Amidah:

Berakhot 31a	ברכות ל"א עמוד א
Rav Hamnuna said: "How many important laws can be derived from these verses of the prayer of Hannah! 'And Hannah spoke in her heart,' [1:13] teaches that one who prays must focus his heart [on his prayer]. 'Only her lips moved,' teaches that one who prays must enunciate the words with his lips. 'And her voice could not be heard,' teaches that one is forbidden to raise his voice [when reciting the Amidah]."	אָמַר רַב הַמְנוּנָא: כַּמָּה הַלְכְתָא גְבָרוּתָא אִכָּא לְמִשְׁמַע מֵהַנִּי קָרְאִי דְחֻנָּה! "וְחֻנָּה הִיא מִדְבָרֵת עַל לְבָה" — מִכָּאן לְמִתְפַּלֵּל צְרִיךְ שְׂיִכּוּיֵן לְבוּ. "רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נִעוּת" — מִכָּאן לְמִתְפַּלֵּל שְׂיַחְתוֹךְ בְּשִׁפְתָיו. "וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע" — מִכָּאן שְׂאִסוּר לְהַגְבִיחַ קוֹלוֹ בְּתַפְלָתוֹ.

The piyut "[Imru Lelokim](#)," recited by Ahskenazim on Yom Kippur morning, has a stanza derived, in part, from verse 2:3 (cited above):

Machzor Yom Kippur Ashkenaz, The Morning Prayers, Reader's Repetition of the Amidah	מחזור אשכנז ליום כיפור, תפילת שחרית, חזרת הש"ץ
Declare about God! He builds levels in the heavens. He waters mountains with clouds. He provided a remembrance for His wonders, and counts all the actions of men. Therefore the One who constructs a roof of waters above the sky shall be exalted!	אָמְרוּ לְאֱלֹקִים: בּוֹנֵה בְּשָׁמַיִם מַעְלוֹתָיו. מִשְׁקֵה הַרִים מִעֲלִיּוֹתָיו. זָכַר עֲשָׂה לְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו, וְלוֹ נִתְּכָנוּ עֲלִילוֹתָיו. לְכֵן יִתְגַּאֵה הַמְקַרֵּה בְּמַיִם עֲלִיּוֹתָיו:

Day 2- Jeremiah 31:2-20

Much like their foremothers, Israel also needs to be heard, yearly on Rosh HaShanah, and whenever they are in exile. God hears the cry of our matriarch, Rachel, and her children, the people of Israel. Here, Jeremiah speaks to the exiled ten tribes, identified as both Israel and Ephraim, promising that God will answer their cries, accept their repentance, will and therefore return them from exile to their Land , comfort them, and gladden them.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verse 2-6: God still loves Israel, and therefore he will physically restore them.

Jeremiah 31:5	ירמיהו ל"א:ה
For there is a day [when] watchers on the mountains of Ephraim shall cry forth, "Rise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord, our God!"	כִּי יִשְׁׁיִיּוֹם קָרְאוּ נֹצְרִים בְּהַר אֶפְרַיִם קוֹמוּ וְנַעֲלֵה צִיּוֹן אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ: (פ)

Verses 7-10: God will also gather Israel back due to this love...

Jeremiah 31:8	ירמיהו ל"א:ח
With weeping will they come, and with supplications will I [God] lead them. "I will guide you towards brooks of water, on a straight road without stumbling." For I have become a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.	בְּבִכּוֹ יָבֹאוּ וּבִתְחִנּוּנִים אֲבִילֶם אֲוִלִיכֶם אֶל־נַחְלֵי מַיִם בְּדֶרֶךְ יֵשֶׁר לֹא יִכְשְׁלוּ בָהּ כִּי־הָיִיתִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָב וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּכֹרִי הוּא:

Verses 11-13: ... and gladden them.

Jeremiah 31:11	ירמיהו ל"א:יא
And they shall come and jubilate on the height of Zion, and they will stream to the goodness of the Lord, over corn, wine, and oil, and over sheep and cattle. Their soul shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall have no further sadness.	וּבָאוּ וְרִנְנוּ בְמְרוֹם־צִיּוֹן וְנִהְרֹוּ אֶל־טוֹב ה' עַל־דָּגָן וְעַל־תֵּיִן וְעַל־יְצִהָר וְעַל־בְּנֵי־צֶאֱן וּבְקָר וְהִיְתָה נִפְשָׁם כְּגֵן הָרוּה וְלֹא־יִוָּסְפוּ לְדַאֲבָה עוֹד:

Verses 14-16: God hears Rachel's weeping, gives her hope,...

Jeremiah 31:16	ירמיהו ל"א:ט"ז
So says the Lord: "Refrain your [Rachel's] voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work," says the Lord, "and [your children] shall return from the land of the enemy."	כֹּה אָמַר ה' מְנַעֵי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמִעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְּעֻלָּתְךָ נְאֻם־ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אֲוִיב:

Verses 17-20: ... and accepts the repentance of her children.

Jeremiah 31:20	ירמיהו ל"א:כ
"Is Ephraim a son who is dear to Me? Is he a child who is dandled? For whenever I speak of him, I still remember him. Therefore, My very innards are agitated for him. I will surely have compassion on him," says the Lord.	הֲבֵן יִקָּר לִי אֶפְרַיִם אִם אִם יֵלֵד שְׁעִשְׂעִים כִּי־מִדֵּי דְבַרִּי בּוֹ זָכַר אֲזַכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד עַל־כֵּן הִמּוּ מֵעַי לֹו רַחֵם אֶרְחַמֶנּוּ נְאֻם־ה'

Important Themes

Weeping: Rachel's weeping for her lost children play a major role in the Haftarah. God states that he will receive these tears, and change them into the joyful weeping of Israel in their return to Zion. See verses 7,9,13, and 15-20.

Other Connections

The **second blessing of the Shema** finds its origins in this Haftarah, as the Talmud records:

Berakhot 11b	ברכות י"א עמוד ב
A baraita states: One does not recite: "An eternal love [ahavat olam]"; rather, one recites: "An abounding love." But the Rabbis say [that one recites]: "An eternal love", and so [Jeremiah 31:2] says: "I [God] have loved you [Israel] with an eternal love. Therefore I have drawn you with kindness."	תָּנִיא .. אֵין אֹמְרִים "אַהֲבַת עוֹלָם", אֶלָּא "אַהֲבָה רַבָּה". וְרַבְּנַן אָמְרִי "אַהֲבַת עוֹלָם", וְכֵן הוּא אֹמֵר: "וְאַהֲבַת עוֹלָם אַהֲבַתְיָךְ עַל כֵּן מִשְׁכַּתִּיךְ חֻסְדִּי".

The **liturgy of the final blessing of the Shema** recited at Maariv also cites the Haftarah:

Siddur Ashkenaz, Maariv, Blessings of the Shema, First Blessing after Shema	סידור אשכנז, מעריב, קריאת שמע וברכותיה, אמת ואמונה
And [Jeremiah 31:10] says, "For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and has saved him from one who is stronger than he." Blessed are you, Lord, Redeemer of Israel.	וְנֹאמַר "כִּי פָדָה ה' אֶת יַעֲקֹב. וַיִּגְאֹלוּ מִיַּד חֲזָק מִמֶּנּוּ." בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', גָּאֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato compares God's love for his people described in the conclusion of the Haftarah, and the **feeling of love that one should have towards God**.

Messilat Yesharim 19	מסילת ישרים י"ט
Loving G-d consists of a person literally yearning and desiring for God's closeness, and chases His holiness as one chases something he desires intensely. This should be to the extent that merely mentioning His Name, speaking of His praises, and occupying himself with the words of His Torah or His divinity literally becomes a delight and pleasure, as a man who loves the wife of his youth or his only son so strongly that even speaking of them gives him gratification and pleasure. This is as [Jeremiah 31:19] states: "[Is Ephraim a son who is dear to Me? Is he a child who is dandled?] For whenever I speak of him, I still remember him."	והנה ענין האהבה הוא שיהיה האדם חושק ומתאוה ממש אל קרבתו יתברך ורודף אחר קדושתו, כאשר ירדוף איש אחר הנחמד ממנו חמדה עזה, עד שיהיה לו הזכרת שמו יתברך ודבור בתהלותיו והעסק בדברי תורתו ואלהותו יתברך, שעשוע ועונג ממש כמי שאוהב את אשת נעוריו או בנו יחידו אהבה חזקה, אשר אפילו הדיבור במ יהיה לו לנחת ותענוג, וכענין הכתוב (ירמיה ל"א): כי מדי דברי בו זכור אזכרנו עוד.

With emendations, biblical translations are by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg and other translations are from Sefaria.org.

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