

These Torah readings for Rosh HaShanah are some of the best known, if not the best loved, moments of the High Holidays. The Haftarat, the readings from the Prophets, are less known. In fact, the Haftarat throughout the year are not often studied compared with the weekly Torah portions. That is about to change at Temple Chai: our Wednesday Parshat HaShavua class, which meets at noon every Wednesday, is shifting focus this year to emphasize the weekly text from the Prophets.

So let's take a look at this morning's Haftara, found on p. 128 and taken from the first chapter of the book of Samuel. The story describes the family of Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninah. Peninah is blessed with children. On a family pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah prays for a child and is rewarded by the birth of Samuel, whom she dedicates to God's service and who becomes a leader of the Jewish people. I'd like to briefly point out 4 things we can learn from this Haftara:

Give Benefit of Doubt- The text clearly indicates that Penina was tormenting Hannah about her childless state - see verse 6 -

"Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable would taunt her." In a remarkable reading of the text, the Talmud suggests that Penina's motives were actually noble - to encourage Hannah to reach out to God in prayer. Contrast this with the priest, Eli, who immediately jumps to the conclusion that Hannah is drunk.

Furthermore, he never actually apologizes for misjudging her. At the HH season we experience a sense of judgment as we examine our lives and imagine God reviewing our lives. We are reminded of the value that as we judge others, so will we be judged.

Kindness- Kindness should be the foundation of our relationships, especially with our loved ones. Elknah's words to his wife Hannah in verse 8 are so moving, "Why are you crying and why are you not eating? Why is your heart grieved?" His sensitivity is a model for us in our family lives. He notices her pain and reaches out

with compassion. That is how we should treat our family and friends.

Prayer- The Rabbis derive a number of principles regarding prayer from Hannah's actions - including the importance of praying out loud. Fundamentally we learn from Hannah that the gates of tears are always open. Hannah spoke, in the words of the text, , literally, on her own heart. The power of our prayers impacts and influences us first and foremost. May our words of prayer on these High Holydays penetrate our own hearts.

Borrowed from God- Finally, Hannah understands the gift of the son with whom she is ultimately blessed as borrowed from God. In reality, all that we have, and our very lives, are only on loan from God. The Yamim Noraim are the time of the year when our consciousness of the transience of our own lives is heightened; the story of Hannah reminds us to treat others with kindness and give the benefit of the doubt, to open our hearts in prayer and to

remember the impermanence of all that we possess and therefore
appreciate our many blessings all the more.