

## A Badder, Better Hannah

### 1. 1 Shmuel 1

There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. This man used to go up from his town every year to worship and to offer sacrifice to the LORD of Hosts at Shiloh.—Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD there. One such day, Elkanah offered a sacrifice. He used to give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he would give one portion though Hannah was his favourite—for the LORD had closed her womb. Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the LORD had closed her womb.

This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the LORD, the other would taunt her, so that she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why are you crying and why aren’t you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?”

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose. The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.— In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. And she made this vow: “O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.”

As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. Eli said

וַיְהִי אִישׁ אֶחָד מִן־הַרְמָתִים צוֹפִים מֵהָר  
אֶפְרַיִם וּשְׁמוֹ אֶלְקָנָה בֶן־יִרְחָם  
בֶן־אֵלִיהוּא בֶן־תָּחוּ בֶן־צוּף אֶפְרַתִּי:  
וְלוֹ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם אַחַת חַנָּה וְשֵׁם  
הַשֵּׁנִית פְּנִינָה וַיְהִי לַפְּנִינָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה  
אֵין יְלָדִים: וְעָלָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מַעֲרִירוֹ  
מִיָּמִים יְמִימָה לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת וּלְזַבֵּחַ לַיהוָה  
צְבָאוֹת בְּשִׁלָּה וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־עָלִי חָפְנִי  
וּפְנָחָס כִּהְנִים לַיהוָה: וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיִּזְבַּח  
אֶלְקָנָה וַנָּתֵן לַפְּנִינָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־בָּנֶיהָ  
וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ מְנוֹת: וּלְחַנָּה יָתֵן מְנָה אַחַת  
אָפִים כִּי אֶת־חַנָּה אָהָב וַיְהוֶה סָגֹר  
רַחֲמָהּ: וְכַעֲסָתָהּ צָרָתָהּ גַּם־כַּעַס בַּעֲבוּר  
הַרְעָמָה כִּי־סָגֹר יְהוֶה בְּעַד רַחֲמָהּ: וְכֵן  
יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה מִדֵּי עָלְתָהּ בְּבֵית  
יְהוָה כֵּן תִּכְעַסְנָה וְתִבְכֶּה וְלֹא תֹאכֵל:  
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ אֶלְקָנָה אִשָּׁה חַנָּה לָמָּה  
תִּבְכִּי וְלָמָּה לֹא תֹאכְלִי וְלָמָּה יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ  
הַלּוֹא אָנֹכִי טוֹב לָךְ מֵעֲשָׂרָה בָּנִים:  
וְתִקֶּם חַנָּה אַחֲרֵי אֲכָלָהּ בְּשִׁלָּה וְאַחֲרֵי  
שָׁתָה וְעָלִי הַכֹּהֵן יֹשֵׁב עַל־הַכִּסֵּא  
עַל־מְזוֹזוֹת הַיֵּכָל יְהוֶה: וְהִיא מָרַת נֶפֶשׁ  
וְתִתְפַּלֵּל עַל־יְהוָה וּבָכָה תִּבְכֶּה: וְתִדּוֹר  
נָדָר וְתֹאמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־רָאָה  
תְּרֹאָה בְּעֵנֵי אִמָּתְךָ וּזְכַרְתָּנִי  
וְלֹא־תִשְׁכַּח אֶת־אִמָּתְךָ וְנִתְּתָה לְאִמָּתְךָ  
זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים וְנִתְּתִיו לַיהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו  
וּמוֹרָה לֹא־יַעֲלֶה עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ: וְהָיָה כִּי  
הִרְבֵּתָהּ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְעָלִי שִׁמְר  
אֶת־פִּיהָ: וְחַנָּה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל־לִבָּהּ

to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!"

And Hannah replied, "Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD. Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress."

"Then go in peace," said Eli, "and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him."

She answered, "You are most kind to your handmaid." So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast.

Early next morning they bowed low before the LORD, and they went back home to Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the LORD remembered her.

רק שפתיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע  
ויחשבה עלי לשכרה: ויאמר אליה עלי  
עד-מתי תשתפרין הסירי את-יני  
מעלי: ותען חנה ותאמר לא אדני  
אשה קשת-רוח אנכי ונין ושכר לא  
שתיתי ואשפף את-נפשי לפני יהוה:  
אל-תתן את-אמתך לפני בת-בלעל  
כי-מרב שיחי וכעסי דברתי עד-הנה:  
ויען עלי ויאמר לך לשלום ואלהי  
ישראל יתן את-שלתך אשר שאלת  
מעמו: ותאמר תמצא שפחתך חן  
בעיניך ותלך האשה לדרכה ותאכל  
ופניה לא-היו-לה עוד:  
וישכמו בבקר וישתחוו לפני יהוה  
וישבּו ויבאו אל-ביתם הרמתה וידע  
אלקנה את-חנה אשתו ויזכרה יהוה:

## 2. Brachot 31 a

**Rav Hamnuna said: How many significant halakhot can be derived from these verses of the prayer of Hannah?** As it says: "And Hannah spoke in her heart, only her lips moved and her voice could not be heard, so Eli thought her to be drunk" (**I Samuel 1:13**). The Gemara elaborates: **From** that which is stated **here: "And Hannah spoke in her heart,"** the halakha that **one who prays must focus his heart** on his prayer is derived. And **from** that which is stated **here: "Only her lips moved,"** the halakha that **one who prays must enunciate** the words **with his lips**, not only contemplate them in his heart, is derived. **From** that which is written **here: "And her voice could not be heard,"** the halakha that **one is forbidden to raise his voice in his Amida prayer** as it must be recited silently. **From** the continuation of the verse **here: "So Eli thought her to be drunk,"** the halakha that **a drunk person is forbidden to pray**. That is why he rebuked her.

On the subject of Eli's rebuke of Hannah, as it is stated: "**And Eli said to her: How long will you remain drunk? Remove your wine from yourself**" (**I Samuel 1:14**); **Rabbi Elazar said: From here** the

אמר רב המנונא כמה  
הלכתא גברותא איכא  
למשמע מהני קראי דחנה  
(שמואל א א, יג) וחנה היא  
מדברת על לבה מכאן  
למתפלל צריך שיכוין לבו  
רק שפתי נעות מכאן  
למתפלל שיחתוך בשפתיו  
וקולה לא ישמע מכאן  
שאסור להגביה קולו  
בתפלתו ויחשבה עלי  
לשכורה מכאן ששכור  
אסור להתפלל  
ויאמר אליה עלי עד מתי

*halakha that one who sees in another*

**31b**

*an unseemly matter, he must reprimand him, is derived. "And Hannah answered and she said no, my master, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit, and I have drunk neither wine nor liquor, but I pour out my soul before the Lord" (I Samuel 1:15). Regarding the words: "No, my master," Ulla, and some say Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Hanina, said that she said to him, in an allusion: With regard to this matter, you are not a master, and the Divine Spirit does not rest upon you, as you falsely suspect me of this...*

Incidental to this discussion of Hannah's prayer, the Gemara explores related topics. In her prayer, Hannah said: **"And she swore an oath and said, Lord of Hosts [Tzeva'ot] if You will indeed look upon the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant and will give Your maidservant a male child, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall be no razor come upon his head" (I Samuel 1:11). Rabbi Elazar said: From the day that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created His world, there was no person who called the Holy One, Blessed be He, Lord of Hosts until Hannah came and called Him Lord of Hosts. This is the first time in the Bible that God is referred to by this name.**

Rabbi Elazar explains that **Hannah said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe**, are You not the Lord of the Hosts, and **of all of the hosts and hosts of creations that You created in Your world**, is it difficult in Your eyes to grant me one son?

The Gemara suggests a **parable: To what is this similar?** It is similar to a **flesh and blood king who made a feast for his servants. A poor person came and stood at the door. He said to them: Give me one slice of bread! And they paid him no attention. He pushed and entered before the king. He said to him: My lord, the King, from this entire feast that you have prepared, is it so difficult in your eyes to give me a single slice of bread?**

As for the double language in the verse, **"if you will look upon [im ra'o tireh]," Rabbi Elazar said: Hannah said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, if You will look upon [ra'o] me now, fine, and if not, in any case You will see[tireh].**

תשתכרין וגו' א"ר אלעזר  
מכאן לרואה בחברו

דבר שאינו הגון צריך  
להוכיחו ותען חנה ותאמר  
לא אדני אמר עולא  
ואיתימא רבי יוסי ברבי  
חנינא אמרה ליה לא אדון  
אתה בדבר זה ולא רוח  
הקודש שורה עליך שאתה  
חושדני בדבר זה

ותדר נדר ותאמר ה'  
צבאות אמר רבי אלעזר  
מיום שברא הקב"ה את  
עולמו לא היה אדם שקראו  
להקב"ה צבאות עד  
שבאתה חנה וקראתו  
צבאות

אמרה חנה לפני הקב"ה  
רבש"ע מכל צבאי צבאות  
שבראת בעולמך קשה  
בעיניך שתתן לי בן אחד  
משל למה הדבר דומה  
למלך בשר ודם שעשה  
סעודה לעבדיו בא עני אחד  
ועמד על הפתח אמר להם  
תנו לי פרוסה אחת ולא  
השגיחו עליו דחק ונכנס  
אצל המלך א"ל אדוני  
המלך מכל סעודה שעשית  
קשה בעיניך ליתן לי  
פרוסה אחת:

אם ראה תראה א"ר אלעזר  
אמרה חנה לפני הקב"ה

What was Hannah threatening? She said: **I will go and seclude myself with another man before Elkana, my husband. Since I secluded myself, they will force me to drink the *sota* water** to determine whether or not I have committed adultery. I will be found innocent, **and since You will not make Your Torah false [pelaster], I will bear children.** With regards to a woman who is falsely suspected of adultery and drank the *sota* water, the Torah says: “And if the woman was not defiled, but was pure, then **she shall be acquitted and she shall conceive**” (Numbers 5:28)...

According to Rabbi Akiva's explanation, **what** is derived from the double language uttered by Hannah: **Im ra'o tireh? The Torah spoke in the language of men**, meaning that this double language is not extraordinary and nothing may be derived from it. It is common biblical vernacular.

In the oath/prayer uttered by Hannah, she refers to herself as “Your servant” [*amatekha*] three times: **“The affliction of Your maidservant...and not forget Your maidservant and will give Your maidservant”** (I Samuel 1:11).

Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Hanina, said: **Why** are these three maidservants [*amatot*] cited in the verse? They are cited to teach that **Hannah said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, You have created three crucibles** potentially leading to **death in a woman**, where she is particularly vulnerable. Alternatively, **some say**: Master of the Universe, You have created **three accelerants of death** in a woman. **They are** mitzvot that, as a rule, pertain to women: Observing the *halakhot* of **a menstruating woman**, separating *ḥalla* from dough, **and lighting Shabbat candles. Have I ever violated one of them?** Hannah attests to her status as God's maidservant [*ama*]. The reference to these three mitzvot is drawn from the etymological similarity between *amatekha*, your maidservant, and *mita*, death...

... The Gemara continues to deal with Hannah's prayer. It is said: **“And Hannah spoke on her heart.”** Several interpretations are offered to explain her use of the phrase “on her heart” instead of the common phrase to her heart (Maharsha). **Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Yosei ben Zimra**: Hannah spoke to God **concerning matters of her heart. She said before Him: Master of the Universe, of all the organs You created in a woman, You have not created one in vain.** Every organ fulfills its purpose; **eyes to see, ears to hear, a nose to smell, a mouth to speak, hands with which to perform labor, feet with which to walk, breasts with which to nurse.** If so, **these breasts that You placed upon my heart, to what purpose did You place them?** Was it **not** in order to nurse with them? **Grant me a son and I**

רבש"ע אם ראה מוטב ואם  
לאו תראה  
אלך ואסתתר בפני אלקנה  
בעלי וכיון דמסתתרנא  
משקו לי מי סוטה ואי אתה  
עושה תורתך פלסתר  
שנאמר (במדבר ה, כח)  
ונקתה ונזרעה זרע  
מאי אם ראה תראה דברה  
תורה כלשון בני אדם:  
בעני אמתך אל תשכח את  
אמתך ונתתה לאמתך  
א"ר יוסי בר' חנינא ג'  
אמתות הללו למה אמרה  
חנה לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע  
שלשה בדקי מיתה בראת  
באשה ואמרי לה שלשה  
דבקי מיתה ואלו הן נדה  
וחלה והדלקת הנר כלום  
עברתי על אחת מהן:...

...וחנה היא מדברת על  
לבה אמר רבי אלעזר  
משום רבי יוסי בן זמרא  
על עסקי לבה אמרה לפניו  
רבוננו של עולם כל מה  
שבראת באשה לא בראת  
דבר אחד לבטלה עינים  
לראות ואזנים לשמוע  
חוטם להריח פה לדבר  
ידים לעשות בהם מלאכה  
רגלים להלך בהן דדים  
להניק בהן דדים הללו  
שנתת על לבי למה לא  
להניק בהן תן לי בן ואניק

will nurse with them...

בהן

... After explaining the uncommon expression, on her heart, the Gemara cites an additional statement in the matter of Hannah. **And Rabbi Elazar said: Hannah hurled words at God on High. As it is stated: "And she prayed onto the Lord,"** as opposed to the common phrase: To the Lord. This **teaches that she spoke impertinently toward on High.**

**And** on a similar note, **Rabbi Elazar said** that **Elijah hurled words at God on High** as well in his prayer at Mount Carmel, **as it is stated:** "Answer me, Lord, answer me, that this people will know that You are the Lord, God, **and You have turned their hearts backward**" (I Kings 18:37), claiming that God caused Israel to sin. On this topic, **Rabbi Shmuel bar Rabbi Yitzhak said: From where do we know that the Holy One, Blessed be He, ultimately conceded to Elijah** that he was correct?

...  
ואמר רבי אלעזר חנה  
הטיחה דברים כלפי מעלה  
שנאמר ותתפלל על ה'  
מלמד שהטיחה דברים  
כלפי מעלה  
ואמר רבי אלעזר אליהו  
הטיח דברים כלפי מעלה  
שנאמר (מלכים א יח, לז)  
ואתה הסבות את לבם  
אחורנית א"ר שמואל בר  
רבי יצחק מנין שחזר  
הקב"ה והודה לו לאליהו

| Line of argument  | God's attribute                   | Tactic   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Introduction      |                                   | Sets the scene for Hannah as a teacher of not only prayer but also ethics    |
| 1. Hashem Tzevaot | You are generous and abundant     | where is your generosity and abundance where I'm concerned?                  |
| 2. Sota threat    | Your Torah is pure                | I'm going to exploit a loophole because I know you will want to keep it pure |
| 3. Amata          | You are just                      | Where's the reward for my goodness?  |
| 4. Breasts        | You created things with a purpose | show me the purpose of my organs   |
| Epilogue          |                                   | Hurled words at God. Barrage rather than address.                            |

### 3. E-mail from a friend, Autumn 2012

I remember a heartbreaking Devorah Baron story I read years ago about a young woman in a shtetl who couldn't have children. Her husband didn't care, loved her and was happy with just her, and she had a reasonable level of comfort and status there, but she just faded away wanting and wanting and wishing to be like the other women in the village because that was really what women were for there. Channa without the miracle, really...

On the subject of Channa, Rosh HaShanna was dreadful. It seemed designed to be insensitive. Channa and Sarah, both! And Rachel crying for her children! And endless divrei torah and Artscrollisms about the symbolism etc. I have never had a clearer understanding of why Elkanah doesn't deserve to have the story from his point of view, why the emphasis shifts to Channa, after his 'Am I not better to you than ten children?' line. He had no idea.

### 4. Abraham Joshua Heschel; *The Call of Transcendence*

Shai Held

There was, for Menahem Mendl [The Kotzke Rebbe], "only one way to survive: to be Holy in challenging God, to pray militantly, to worship heroically." His approach was "to protest, to contradict, to reject in the name of higher visions."

### 5. Bereishit 18:25

Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

חֲלֵלָה לָךְ מַעֲשֵׂת | כְּדָבָר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית  
צְדִיק עִם־רָשָׁע וְהָיָה כְּצְדִיק כְּרָשָׁע חֲלֵלָה  
לָךְ הַשִּׁפְטִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט:

### 6. *The Purpose of this World*

Yehoshua November (From his first volume *God's Optimism*)

When some Jews cannot explain the sorrow of their lives  
they take a vow of atheism.

Then everywhere they go,  
they curse the God they don't believe exists.

But why, why don't they grab Him by the lapels,  
pull His formless body down into this lowly world,  
and make Him explain.

After all, this is the purpose of creation—  
to make this coarse realm a dwelling place  
for His presence.