

Coopting the Outsider
Introduction to the Haftarah Reading
(based on Tova Hartman's presentation on July 2, 2013)
Rosh Hashanah Morning 5774
September 5, 2013

The rabbis, in Masechet Berachot, the first tractate of the Talmud, ask an astonishing question. “*Amar Rav Hamnunah: Kama Hilchita Gav'r'vata icha limishma meihanai kra'ay d'Chana?* How many important laws – how much of the halacha about prayer – can be learned from these verses about Hannah?” And they go on to answer: that when one prays, one must direct one's heart to God, that one who prays must pronounce the words with one's lips, that it is forbidden to raise one's voice too loud during prayer, that a drunkard is not permitted to pray, and on and on and on.

This is an amazing development! They learn all this about prayer... from a woman?

Tova Hartman, David Hartman's daughter and the woman whose lesson about Hannah forms the inspiration for my teaching later this morning, says that there is a lot of discussion, even in feminist literature, about what to do with a woman who appears an exception to a rule. Is she to be appropriated? Coopted? Brought in to the system, only to be silenced?

And, here, the dilemma is clear: regarding prayer after the *churban*, after the destruction of the Temple, are the rabbis presenting this woman as an *example*, or an *exception*?

Why do I focus on the rabbis here? This Biblical story is but one among many, and its meaning is largely lost in time, perhaps. But it was the rabbis that took it out of the anthology that was before them, and chose to place it before us in this setting, on this day. What, then, are they trying to say about prayer, and desire, and fulfillment, and independence, with this story?

And, as I said, we will return to Hannah, later this morning...