

Editor's Note: Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash by Yael Levine was published in Hebrew in 1996. Since its publication, it has been recited in Israel by various communities and many individuals on the eve of Tisha B'Av or during the day. We are pleased that Dr. Levine is sharing translations of four extracts from her book, together with some background on the text. For the complete work see Yael Levine, Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash, Tel Aviv: Eked, 1996.¹

Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash – The Supplication of the Mothers for the Rebuilding of the Temple

By Dr. Yael Levine

Introduction

I composed *Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash* as a literary work in the style of the aggadic *midrashim* in which biblical and post-biblical female figures, through the end of the Second Temple period, beseech God to rebuild the Temple. The work contains various thematic components that are based upon talmudic, midrashic, and aggadic literature as well as the Zohar. The *tehimot*, or supplications, portray the connection between women and the Temple throughout the generations.

The Destruction of the Temple

The initial inspiration for the piece came from the text in *Eikha Rabbah*, which describes how, following the destruction

of the Temple, various figures come before God begging for the return of the exiles; only when Rachel comes to present her arguments does God relent and say “On account of you, Rachel, I will return Israel to their place.”

Eighteen women or groups of women who beseeched the Almighty—all of whom had an affinity either with the Temple Mount, the Tabernacle, or the First or Second Temples—are represented in the book. The biblical women include Sarah, Rebecca, Aaron’s wife Elisheva, the righteous women of the wilderness, Devorah, Ruth, Hannah, Jonah’s wife, Huldah, and Queen Esther. The women from the post-biblical era include Queen Helena and the maidens and women who wove the curtains for the Temple.

When the Second Temple was destroyed
the souls of our fathers and mothers
descended to the Temple Mount
and composed lamentations.
At that time, the Holy One, blessed be He,
turned to them from the heavens on high and said:
Why are My beloved people reciting dirges in My home?
Thereupon the fathers said:
We are ashamed,
that strangers could enter Your Sanctuary.
Our holy and glorious Temple has been consumed by fire,
all that was dear to us has been laid waste,
and Your people are dispersed amongst the nations.

כשחרב הבית בשנייה
נתכנסו אבות העולם עם האימהות
ובאו למקום המקדש וקשרו שם מספד גדול.
אותה שעה נוקק להם הקדוש-ברוך-הוא
משמי מרום ואמר להם:
מה לאוהביי בביתי עושים מספד?
פתחו האבות ואמרו:
כיסתה כלימה פנינו
כי באו זרים על מקדשי בית ה'.
בית קדשנו ותפארתנו היה לשרפת אש
וכל מחמדנו היה לחרבה
והעם היה לכלי נידח בין אומות העולם...

Hannah’s Petition

Hannah’s husband, Elkanah, used to come “from his town every year to worship and offer sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts at Shiloh” (Samuel I, 1:3). Hannah participated in the pilgrimage, and prayed to God regularly at Shiloh. The Talmud and Midrash attribute various specific prayers to Hannah. The *Tanakh* contains one version of her prayer, and the text suggests that God responded to that singular prayer. In *Tehinnat ha-Nashim*, Hannah beseeches God to remember the people of Israel based on all her prayers. Hannah’s biblical prayers, both her petition to God for children, as well as the prayer she

recited when she returned to the Tabernacle in Shiloh after Samuel was weaned, were considered by the Sages to be the ultimate paradigms of prayer. Because of this, they are the source of many fundamental laws of *tefilla*.

The concluding phrase is from Lamentations 3:56, and serves here as an expression of protest. Other sections of *Tehinnat ha-Nashim* also contain articulations of protest, including the protest to God by a group of women in the generation of Nehemiah. This theme of protest is also found in other *midrashim* concerning the destruction of the Temple.

Then the soul of Hannah spoke:
On the pilgrimage festivals
I would ascend to the Temple in Shiloh
and behold all of Israel spread out before me. I said to You:
Master of the Universe, Your multitudes serve You
and I have not even one of them?
And You have now scattered Your people
amongst the nations of the world,
and they cannot go up and appear in worship before You
to perform their obligations in the House of Your choice,
in the great and holy House
upon which Your Name was proclaimed,
because of the hand that struck Your Sanctuary.

באה נשמת חנה, סחה ושאלה:
בפעמי רגלים הייתי עולה לבית המקדש שבשילה,
וראיתי את כל ישראל שם. אמרתי לפניך:
ריבונו של עולם, כל העבאות האלו יש לך
ולי אין אחד מהם?
ועתה, פיורתם לבין אומות העולם
ואין הם יכולים לעלות ולראות ולהשתחוות לפניך
ולעשות חובותיהם בבית בחירתך, בבית הגדול והקדוש
שנקרא שמך עליו, מפני היד שנשתלחה במקדשך.
על שהייתי תדירה עולה ומתפללת בבית המקדש
ומתחננת לפניך, על כן שמעת תפילתי ותפקדני,
ולא תפקוד את עמך ישראל הנתונים בצרה ובצוקה?
קולי שמעת, אל תעלם אונך לרווחתי לשוועתי!

And because I often went to pray in the Temple
and supplicate before You,
my lips moving silently,
You heard my prayer and remembered me.
Will You not remember the people of Israel

who endure trouble and distress,
whose hearts are as broken as Your glorious house?
As You have heard my voice,
“Close not Your ears to my groan, to my cry”!

Jonah's Wife

Jonah ben Amittai is mentioned in two places in the Bible; once in the prophetic book that bears his name, and once in II Kings 14:25 in connection with Jeroboam ben Jehoash, king of Israel. Jonah's wife is not mentioned in the Bible at all, but in the talmudic literature there is a tradition that the wife of Jonah went

up to the Temple regularly on the festivals. According to the Jerusalem Talmud she was not permitted to go to the temple, but the sages of the Babylonian Talmud did not protest her going. “Yo'am” is the name of Jonah's mother in several post-talmudic lists of Biblical women.

The soul of Jonah's wife,
the daughter-in-law of Yo'am, came forth to plead:
Without being commanded,
I would ascend to the Temple for the festivals,
my heart bursting with joy,
my soul full of song,
and the Sages did not object.
And You, who have commanded all males of Your people Israel
to ascend for the pilgrimage festivals
three times a year—
how can Your word now be observed
when the Temple no longer stands?
Reduced to rubble and a pile of stones,
only the voice of the wind is heard there now,
when all joy has waned,
and festival and Sabbath are forgotten in Zion?

יצאה נשמת אשת יונה, כלת יועם, וביקשה:
אף על פי שלא הייתי מצווה,
עולה הייתי ברגלים למקדש
ולא מיוחו בי חכמים.
ואתה, שציווית לעמד ישראל הזכרים
לעלות לרגל שלוש פעמים בשנה,
היאך יוכלו לקיים מאמרך
כשאין המקדש עומד על תלו,
כשערבה כל שמחה
וכשנשכח בעיון מועד ושבט?

My Daughters Have Defeated Me

The concluding section of *Tehinmat ha-Nashim* is patterned after the well-known talmudic passage in *Bava Mezia* concerning the oven of Akhnai. Rabbi Eliezer declared this type of oven, clean, whereas the sages declared it unclean. Rabbi Eliezer presented every imaginable argument, but the sages did not accept any of them. He then declared that if the halakha agreed with him, the carob tree should prove it. The carob tree was uprooted from its place, but the sages said that no proof could be brought from a carob tree. After enlisting several additional proofs, Rabbi Eliezer finally declared that if the halakha agreed with him, let it be proven from heaven. Thereupon a heavenly

voice cried out: “Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halakha agrees with him.” Rabbi Joshua retorted: “It is not in the heavens,” i.e., after the Torah had been given at Sinai, no attention is paid to a Heavenly Voice, but rather, we observe the biblical rule that one must follow the majority. It is related that Rabbi Nathan met Elijah and asked him how God responded to the episode. Elijah said that He laughed and said: “My sons have defeated Me! My sons have defeated Me!” At the end of *Tehinmat Nashim*, God says, “My daughters have defeated Me!”, and the *tehinmah* concludes with the promise of comfort and future redemption. With the destruction, the seeds of consolation were sown.

A heavenly voice came forth and cried:
My daughters have defeated Me! My daughters have defeated Me!
Their tears have compelled me.
For your sake, for your sake I will act!
For a short while I have forsaken you,
but with great mercy I will gather you in.
For a moment, in great anger I hid my face from you.
But with everlasting kindness I will have compassion upon you.
From the day the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed,
there is no joy for me
until I rebuild Jerusalem and return Israel to its midst.
And I shall rejoice in the city and delight in My people.
And the voice of weeping and wailing shall be heard no more.
For I shall return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem.
Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth,
and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the Holy Mountain.

יצאה בת-קול ואמרה:
נצחוני בנותי! נצחוני בנותי!
למענך למענך אני עושה!
ברגע קטן עזבתים וברחמים גדולים אקבצכם.
בשצף קצף הסתרתי פניי רגע מכם
ובחסד עולם ארחמכם.
מיום שחרב בית המקדש וחרבה ירושלים
אין שמחה לפניי
עד שאבנה את ירושלים ואחזיר את ישראל לתוכה.
וגלתי בירושלים וששתי בעמי
ולא יישמע בה עוד קול בכי וקול זעקה.
כי שב ה' אל ציון ושכן בתוך ירושלים
ונקראה ירושלים עיר האמת והר ה' צבאות הר הקודש.

Yael Levine holds a Ph.D in Talmud from Bar-Ilan University and has authored scholarly articles related to women and Judaism.

¹ See further: Yael Levine, “*Tehinmat Hanashim Levinyan Hamikdash: The Supplication of the Mothers for the Rebuilding of the Temple: Excerpts and Commentary*”, *Nashim* 9 (2005), 126-134.