

Hannah's Demand

A Modern Midrash By Rabbi Dana Benson

- *Sung, broken line of Shema by Debbie Friedman*
 - *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai....Echad?*
- You will know me by the name Hannah, but the name I call myself is *Isha Keshet Ruach*, the woman of hardened spirit.
 - Not hardened of heart - for I have plenty of love to offer in this world.
 - Not of hardened mind - for I have clarity of thoughts and clarity of what my hopes are for this world.
 - No, hardened spirit - for it is the spirit that is broken by seeing the injustices of the world and feeling powerless to create change in it.
- Why powerless?
 - Well, I'm a woman in the **ancient** near east, I have no money, no land, no clout within my community.
 - I have a loving Husband, Elkanah, who brings me gifts and admits that I am his favorite...*despite* my barrenness.
 - That barrenness of course being the ultimate injury since it is the only way a woman in this society can have an impact, by raising a male heir that will carry her values, her hopes,...her light forward.
 - My sister-wife, Peninah rubs salt into the wounds, she intentionally taunts me and laughs at my misery.
- I'm not what you would call a righteous person,
 - Good, yes. Kind, likely - but righteous, no. When you wake up each day to a broken world feeling you have no resources to create change - you grow skeptical that there is something worth being 'righteous' for.

- I've grown weary of feeling that my contribution to this world will be a footnote in some man's story, my name forgotten, my thoughts and words neglected.
- Yet, when you feel without hope, sometimes everything and anything seems worth trying.
- Last night I went to the place of the priests, the place of prayer.
 - I came in, cheeks red, bolts of lightning sparking off of my being, with rage, with anger, with a broken spirit.
 - Peninah, my sister, taunted me in front of her children, our family, belittling me, and teaching her children with her every word and action how to hate someone different from them, someone who was 'less than' by a meaningless societal 'standard'
 - I was enraged, I never once stepped foot in the place of the priests, but my feet carried me so swiftly to its door. As I passed through the doorposts, I cried, I screamed, I fell, and I punched the dirt - "I'm here not to pray, but to demand."
 - Tears fell on my hand, and the surrounding dirt, I, who have prayed so little in my life, struggled to mouth the words of my demands, my needs. My mouth found its way but my voice rattled low, almost silently, as it acted as the dam for the flood within.
 - Fortunately, Eli hadn't seen this display, and only entered the space when I was listing my demands, my grievances before you.
 - He thought me drunk, seeing my mouth moving, my body shaking on the ground.
 - When my eyes met his face though, he withdrew with growing awareness. He humbly apologized, he even looked at me, almost too knowingly, as though there was a glow around me, it seemed to be filled more with awe and love than pity, pity being a look I've become all too accustomed with.

- “Go in peace,” he said, “And may Adonai grant to you all that you have asked.” Not all that I had prayed for, but I had asked.
- I don’t know that this has changed anything, I don’t know if I will awake tomorrow to my known life, or the beginning of a new one in which I will be able to pass on my values, thoughts, and knowledge to the next generation.
- But I do know that at that moment, I felt seen, I felt valued, Eli, or perhaps something greater, respected for the passion and the depth with which I ‘prayed’ and it seemed that, perhaps, something, someone finally heard me and held me through my anger, and perhaps that will be what helps me continue forward.
- Shema Echad - Your name is one - but you Adonai have supposedly created world big and small from atomic, to cellular, advanced complex structures. I have seen the vividness, the diversity of trees, plants fruits, animals. You should be known as **Adonai Tzvaot - the god of multitudes.**
 - But if you have so many multitudes, if you have an abundance to give, then why overlook me when you should know that I would teach my children kindness, equality, love, to do the work you have commanded us of ‘loving our neighbor?’ Why close the doors to my ability to help raise a better future when I have acted with loving kindness each day of my life.
- That is why I broke, that is why I had to demand from you as opposed to politely ask, quietly pray, because I can’t depend on the systems of our society to keep an eye out for me, for my story.
 - No one is held accountable for making sure the voices of the strong-willed but broken in spirit people are captured for history. And so those of us with enough chutzpah to demand what we want to see, and demand from within ourselves to help manifest it happening.

- My story will continue to unravel, as will yours. Yes, it may feel that we are always a step behind whatever is coming, but we also have the opportunity to choose how we want to approach each step, each moment, what self we choose to bring to it.
 - When your spirit gets broken, some of us respond with righteous anger, Anger isn't something to be feared, it's something to evaluate,
 - It can become fearful of the unknown, so much so that you will angrily defend protect all that you can understand
 - Or that fire can be creative helping to build and shape something new. That spark can ignite the beginning of the great flames of change.
- What is so important that you must demand it from the divine, from the world...from yourself?
 - What can you take into your own hands, what seems beyond your ability that you can fight for? What do you need greater support to create the change?
- Avinu, Adonai - Malkeinu, T'zvaot....renew our days, renew our strength and renew our ability to know the abundance that exists within us.