YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Understanding the haftarot**

**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

**The Haftara for the First Day of Rosh Hashana**

There was once a man from Ramatayim, of the Zufite clan in the hill country of Efrayim, whose name was Elkana son of Yerocham son of Elihu son of Tochu son of Zuf of Efrayim. He had two wives: the first was named Chana, and the second Penina. Penina had children, but Chana had none. Year after year, that man would make a pilgrimage from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts in Shilo, where the two sons of Eli, Chofni and Pinchas, were priests to the Lord. On the day of Elkana's sacrifice, he would give portions to his wife Penina and all her sons and daughters. And to Chana he would give a single portion, but choice, for it was Chana whom he loved, though the Lord had closed her womb. Then her rival, to provoke her, would taunt her fiercely, for the Lord had closed up her womb. The same thing would happen year in, year out – whenever she went up to the Lord’s House, Penina would torment her, and she wept and would not eat. One year, her husband, Elkana, said to her, "Chana, why do you weep? Why do you never eat, and why are you so heartsore? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" Chana rose after the meal at Shilo and after the drinking. Eli the priest sat stationed by the doorpost of the Lord's Sanctuary. Wretched and bitter, she prayed to the Lord, weeping all the while. She then swore a vow: "Lord of Hosts, if You look down with sympathy on the misery of Your handmaid and recognize me; if You do not forget Your handmaid and grant Your handmaid a son, I will then give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor will never pass over his head." As she prayed on and on before the Lord, Eli was watching her mouth. Chana was speaking in her heart; only her lips were moving, and her voice could not be heard, so Eli thought her drunk. "How long will you act the drunkard?" he said to her. "Deny yourself wine!" "No, sir," Chana answered, "I am a woman of troubled spirit. Neither wine nor beer have I drunk, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not think your handmaid depraved, for it was my overwhelming worry and my torment that moved me to pray just now." "Go in peace," Eli answered, "and may the God of Israel grant what you seek of Him." "May I, your servant, find favor in your eyes," she said. And the woman went on her way, and ate, and was downcast no longer. They rose early in the morning and bowed down before the Lord, then headed back and arrived home in Rama. Elkana was intimate with his wife Chana, and the Lord remembered her. At the turn of the year, Chana conceived and bore a son, and she named him Shmuel,[[1]](#footnote-1) "for I sought him from the Lord." The man Elkana and all his household went up to offer the yearly sacrifice to the Lord and fulfill his vow. But Chana did not go up, for she said to her husband, "When the boy is weaned, I shall bring him; he will appear before the Lord, and he will stay there forever." Her husband Elkana said to her, "Do what seems best to you; stay behind until you wean him. May the Lord only keep His word." And so she stayed behind and nursed her son until she weaned him. Once she had weaned him, she brought him up with her, along with three bulls, an ephah of flour, and an amphora of wine, and presented him at the Lord's House at Shilo, though the boy was young. They slaughtered the bull and presented the boy to Eli. She said, "If you please, my lord; as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the Lord. This is the boy I prayed for – the Lord gave me what I sought from Him. I, in turn, give him over to the Lord – he has been given over to the Lord for all his days." And they bowed down there to the Lord.

Then Chana prayed. She said: "My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is raised up by the Lord; my mouth opens wide against my enemies, for I rejoice in Your salvation! There is no holy being like the Lord, for there are none besides You, no Rock like our God. Do not drone on in pride; let no insolence cross your lips, for the Lord is an all-knowing God; by Him deeds are weighed. Heroes' bows are shattered while the feeble are girded with power. Those once sated hire out for bread, while those once hungry grow fat. By the time the barren has borne seven, the mother of many has withered. The Lord deals out death and grants life, casts down into Sheol and lifts up. The Lord impoverishes and enriches, humbles and exalts. He lifts the poor from the dust, raises the needy from the refuse heap and seats them beside nobility, bequeaths them the seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He set the world upon them. He guards the steps of His faithful while the wicked perish in darkness, for man does not prevail by power. The Lord's foes shall be shattered; He thunders the heavens above them; the Lord shall judge to the ends of the earth. May He grant might to His king and raise up the horn of His anointed!" [[2]](#footnote-2) (I *Shmuel* 1:1-2:10)[[3]](#footnote-3)

**I. Connecting the *Haftara*, the Torah Reading, and the Day**

On Rosh Hashana, we read "On the seventh month" (*Bamidbar* 29:1-6), and for the *haftara*, "Is Efrayim a darling son to me" (*Yirmeyahu* 31:1-20).

And there are those who say we read "And the Lord remembered Sara" (*Bereishit* 21), and for the *haftara*, the story of Chana.

Nowadays, when there are two days – on the first day, [we follow the ruling of] “those who say,” and on the next day, "And God tried Avraham" (Bereishit 22), with "Is Efrayim not a precious son to me" for the haftara. (Megilla 31a)

In the Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashana, God remembers Sara and gives her a son; in our *haftara*,God remembers Chana and gives her a son. The Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* (10b) says that both women (as well as Rachel) were remembered on Rosh Hashana. Chana consecrated her son to God from the day of his birth, and Yitzchak, the son of Sara, was also consecrated to Divine service, when he was bound on the altar.

We can find another weighty connection between our *haftara* and Rosh Hashana in Chana's prayer:

Heroes' bows are shattered while the feeble are girded with power. Those once sated hire out for bread, while those once hungry grow fat. By the time the barren has borne seven, the mother of many has withered. The Lord deals out death and grants life, casts down into Sheol and lifts up. The Lord impoverishes and enriches, humbles and exalts. He lifts the poor from the dust, raises the needy from the refuse heap. (2:4-8)

The content of this prayer is very similar to the words of the *piyyut* "*U-netaneh tokef*," the "*reshut*" recited prior to *kedusha* in the *Musaf* service of Rosh Hashana:

On Rosh Hashana will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed… who will live and who will die; who will die after a long life and who before his time… who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried, who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer, who will be impoverished and who will be enriched, who will be degraded and who will be exalted.

Terror of judgment is evident in Chana's prayer as well, along with the great potential for changing an evil decree – such as Chana’s barrenness, or the national threat from enemies like the Philistines.

**II. Elkana**

There was once a man from Ramatayim, of the Zufite clan in the hill country of Efrayim, whose name was Elkana son of Yerocham son of Elihu son of Tochu son of Zuf of Efrayim… Year after year, that man would make a pilgrimage from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts in Shilo. (1:1-3)

Elkana's city, Ramatayim, is located in West Binyamin, close to the southwestern border of Efrayim; therefore, he is called "of Efrayim." According to his full genealogy (see I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 6), Elkana is a Levite – a descendant of Korach and of Kehat son of Levi.

Scripture emphasizes that Elkana faithfully observed the mitzvaof making a pilgrimage to the house of God in Shilo. *Chazal* noted further that Elkana instructed the people of Israel to make this pilgrimage too:

Rabbi Zeira said: If your people got old, get up and repair it the way Elkana did who instructed Israel in the pilgrimage for holidays. That is what is written (I *Shmuel* 1:2): "The man would make a pilgrimage from his town." (*Yerushalmi, Berakhot* 9:5)

The verses in chapter 2 that follow our *haftara* describe the behavior of Chofni and Pinchas, the sons of Eli. Their tyranny in the *Mishkan* well explains why the people of Israel would have stopped making pilgrimages to Shilo. They apparently sought substitutes for the *Mishkan* in temples dedicated to other gods – as seen in *Tehillim,* which describes how the generation before the destruction of the *Mishkan* in Shilo replaced the God of Israel with other gods:

They angered Him with their high shrines and aroused His jealousy with their idols. God heard and grew furious and utterly rejected Israel. He abandoned the Sanctuary of Shilo, the tent where He dwelled among humanity. He let His might fall captive, His beauty into enemy hands. (*Tehillim* 78:58-61)

Elkana continued to try to endear pilgrimage to the *Mishkan* to the people of Israel. According to many *midrashim*, he is also the “man of God” who prophesied about the destruction of the house of Eli:

Elkana is called a man of God; "A man of God came to Eli" (I *Shmuel* 2:27). (*Sifrei Devarim* 342)

**III. Chana and Penina**

He had two wives: the first was named Chana, and the second Penina. Penina had children, but Chana had none… On the day of Elkana's sacrifice, he would give portions to his wife Penina and all her sons and daughters. And to Chana he would give a single portion, but choice, for it was Chana whom he loved, though the Lord had closed her womb. Then her rival, to provoke her, would taunt her fiercely, for the Lord had closed up her womb. The same thing would happen year in, year out – whenever she went up to the Lord’s House, Penina would torment her, and she wept and would not eat. (1:2-7)

As with Rachel and Leah, so too in Elkana's house, the more beloved wife was barren and the less beloved wife had children. Such a situation naturally creates tension. The mother of the children calls upon the father of the family to help her take care of the children, trying to separate him from his more beloved wife and force him to be with her, the mother of his children. We see this dynamic between Rachel and Leah, and it existed even more strongly between Chana and Penina, who were not sisters. Elkana's love for Chana was especially evident during his distribution of sacrificial meat during the pilgrimage, when Penina would taunt Chana about her lack of children.

Based on the continuation of the story, it is possible that there was another factor that caused Penina to provoke Chana specifically during the pilgrimage to Shilo. Chana, like Rivka, Rachel, and other righteous barren women, prayed to God for a child. It is likely that she put her greatest hope in prayers offered in the *Mishkan*; perhaps this is part of why Elkana was so faithful about the mitzva of pilgrimage, to appear before God and pray to him. From Penina's scornful reaction to Chana, we may conclude that again and again, Chana returned from the *Mishkan* disappointed and heartbroken, feeling that her prayer had failed. Perhaps this even relates to the way Eli's sons managed the *Mishkan*. It is possible that they did not allow any man – and all the more so, a woman – to stand in the *Mishkan* and pray to God. Anyone who came to the *Mishkan* had to tell the sons of Eli what was troubling him and let them pray on his behalf in exchange for a "*pidyon*," a redemption – or to be blunt, in exchange for money. Thus, Chana would have been banished time after time, prevented from praying there by the sons of Eli, and her rival Penina taunted her about this.

All this was true until the day Chana resolutely decided to act, entered the *Mishkan* without permission, and stood in tears to pray, with only her lips moving and her voice not being heard.

**IV. The Appeal to the Lord of Hosts**

She then swore a vow: "Lord of Hosts…" (1:11)

 This Divine name, "Lord of Hosts," is mentioned for the first time already at the beginning of our chapter (1:3), but *Chazal* say that Chana was the first to call God by that name:

"She then swore a vow: 'Lord of Hosts.'" Rabbi Elazar said: From the day that God created His world, there was no one who called Him “Tzeva-ot [Hosts]” until Chana came and called Him Tzeva-ot. Chana said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, of all the hosts and hosts that You have created in Your world, is it so hard in Your eyes to give me one son? (*Berakhot* 31b)

Perhaps we can uncover a slightly different rationale for the great innovation Chana introduced with the name "Lord of Hosts." Below, I will try to prove that Chana, with tears in her eyes, prayed not only for her own plight but for the plight of the many women whose dignity was violated when they came to God's *Mishkan* to offer a sacrifice or to pray. The prophet tells us of the savagery and arrogance of the sons of Eli:

Now Eli was very old. When he heard about all that his sons had done to all of Israel, and how they lay with the women who served [*ha-nashim ha-tzov'ot*] at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, he said to them, "How could you do such things? I hear of your terrible deeds from so many people. No, my sons – the rumors I hear spreading among the Lord's people are not good." (I *Shmuel* 2:22-24)

Some of the Sages defended the sons of Eli against the horrific accusation of fornication at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Whoever maintains that the sons of Eli sinned is merely making an error, for it is stated: "…Chofni and Pinchas were priests to the Lord."…

Then how do I interpret: "And how they lay with the women"? Because they delayed their bird-offerings [of women who had given birth, which they brought as part of their purification process] so that they did not go to their husbands, Scripture considers [Chofni and Pinchas] as though they had lain with them." (*Shabbat* 55b)

Indeed, when we examine the verses, we see that we do not have to accept the harsh literal accusation. All that is said is that Eli heard that this is what they were doing, and that he rebuked them based on the rumor. The rumor was not necessarily true – but it does say something about the way the sons of Eli related to the women who came to the *Mishkan*.

Rav said: Lashes are administered for a bad rumor, as it is stated: "No, my sons – the rumors I hear spreading among the Lord's people are not good." (*Kiddushin* 81a)

It was enough that women whose bird-offerings were not immediately sacrificed would be forced to stay another night near the Tent of Meeting and sleep there under the open sky, near the sons of Eli, who were not known for their modesty. In this scenario, the husbands of those women might experience “a fit of jealousy”[[4]](#footnote-4) and suspect their wives of adultery. The Gemara alludes to this problem in harsh language that is attributed to Chana:

"If You look down" (I *Shmuel* 1:11). Rabbi Elazar said: Chana said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, if You look down, it is well, and if You do not look down, I will go and seclude myself with another man with the knowledge of my husband Elkana, and as I shall have been alone they will make me drink the water of the *sota* (suspected wife) – and You cannot falsify Your law, as it is stated: "Then she shall be cleared and conceive children." (*Berakhot* 31b)

Presumably, Chana did not actually mean to "threaten" God that she would go and seclude herself with another man in order to "force" Him to give her a child. It is more likely that she was speaking in the name of all the *nashim ha-tzov'ot* – the women who came to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and ended up being suspected of sexual misconduct because of an improper smile, wink, or comment on the part of the sons of Eli or one of their assistants, along with an extra stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting as they wait to bring their sacrifices and return to their husbands. This could ultimately lead to the uncovering of the woman's hair in God's *Mishkan*, with her accusation as a *sota,* and to the threatening curse pronounced by the priest and the drinking of the bitter water.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Let us return to the line with which we opened this section: In my humble opinion, Chana, who refers to God as "Lord of Hosts [*Tzeva-ot*]," means God, Lord of the women who serve [*ha-tzov'ot*], the women who struggle for what is left of their dignity in order to purify themselves to be with their husbands, but who fall repeatedly, together with their meager sacrifice of two birds, because of the tyranny and arrogance of the sons of Eli and their assistants. Chana turns to God, the God of the women who serve, with an appeal for His help in repairing that which requires repair in the *Mishkan*.

We will conclude this section with a *midrash* that speaks for itself:

"He made the bronze laver and its bronze base from the mirrors of the women who served [*mar’ot* *ha-tzov'ot*] at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." (*Shemot* 38:8)

“From the mirrors of the women who served” – The Israelite women possessed mirrors of copper, into which they used to look when they adorned themselves. Even these did they not hesitate to bring as a contribution towards the *Mishkan.* Moshe was about to reject them since they were made to pander to their evil inclination, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Accept them; these are dearer to Me than all, because through them the women raised up huge hosts [*tzeva’ot*] in Egypt!"… This is what it refers to when it states, "the mirrors of the women who served." And the laver was made of them (the mirrors) because it served the purpose of promoting peace between man and wife, viz., by giving of its waters to be drunk by a woman whose husband had shown himself jealous of her and who secluded herself with another man.[[6]](#footnote-6) (Rashi, ad loc. in the name of the Midrash)

**V. The Vow**

She then swore a vow: "Lord of Hosts, if You look down with sympathy on the misery of Your handmaid and recognize me; if You do not forget Your handmaid and grant Your handmaid a son, I will then give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor will never pass over his head." (1:11)

In this section, we will discuss the nature of a vow in general and the content of this vow in particular.

The Torah relates with utmost seriousness to vows and one’s duty to keep his word and fulfill his vow:

When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath binding himself to an obligation, he must not break his word; whatever he speaks, that he must fulfill. (*Bamidbar* 30:3)

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not delay in fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will certainly require it of you; you will incur guilt. (*Devarim* 23:22)

On the other hand, *Chazal* saw vows and their fulfillment in a negative light, and saw a need to void them through annulment:

Rabbi Natan said: One who vows is as though he built a high place [= a forbidden personal altar], and he who fulfils it is as though he sacrificed on it [= the sacrifice is disqualified, and it is strictly forbidden to do so]. (*Nedarim* 22a)

A review of all the vows in the Bible shows that a vow is meant for one thing only, and only there is it a *mitzva* – a vow in a time of trouble, by a person who wants God to rescue him and who promises something special in "return," something a person is not generally obliged to do. Chana's vow is a vow made in a time of need, by a barren woman who very much wants to give birth to a son. The first vow known to us from the Bible is Yaakov's vow in Bet-El, made when he fled from his brother Esav to the house of Lavan. The people of Israel swore a vow when the Canaanite king of Arad attacked them in the Negev and took captives. Yiftach made a vow when he was in danger from the king of Amon, Avshalom made a vow when he was forced to flee after he killed Amnon, and on and on. In these situations, the vow is even desirable, and according to *halakha*, it is not subject to annulment.

The content of Chana's vow is reminiscent of Yiftach's vow:

Then Yiftach swore a vow to the Lord. He said, "If You deliver the Amonites into my hand, then whatever comes out of the doors of my home to meet me when I return safely from the Amonites shall be for the Lord, and I shall offer it up as a burnt offering." (*Shoftim* 11:30-31)

As it turned out, Yiftach vowed to bring his only daughter to God, just as Chana vowed to bring her only son (for now!) to God. It is not entirely clear that Yiftach actually slaughtered his daughter and sprinkled her blood on the altar. According to the Ibn Ezra and Radak, he set her apart for the rest of her life to seclude herself in the service of God, which would be similar to the actions of Chana, who delivered her son into the service of God in the *Mishkan* and dedicated him for the rest of his life. We will not address all the differences between the two vows and between the two vow-takers, but it seems that Chana vowed her son to God because she felt there was a real need for it – a need for someone to replace the two corrupt priests who controlled the *Mishkan.* But how could Shmuel, who is a Levite, replace the two priests, who are sanctified from birth to the service of God?

I mentioned at the outset that Shmuel son of Elkana was a Levite from the family of Korach.[[7]](#footnote-7) *Chazal* elaborate:

Now since Korach was a clever man, what did he see to commit this folly? It is simply that his eyes misled him. He foresaw a great lineage stemming from himself, [e.g.,] Shmuel, who was the equivalent of Moshe and Aharon, as it is stated: "Moshe and Aharon of His priests, Shmuel of those who called on His name (*Tehillim* 99:6)." Moreover, the twenty-four [Levitical] shifts would stem from his descendants, all of whom would prophesy by way of the holy spirit, as it is stated (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 25:5): "All these were sons of Heiman." He said, "Is it possible that, when this greatness is going to stem from me, I should perish?" (*Bamidbar Rabba* 18, 8)

With her vow, Chana continued Korach's argument regarding the great danger posed by the arrogance of priests whose sanctity is established from birth and by the fact that priests are not chosen based on their actions. Chana wanted her son to replace the current priests, Chofni and Pinchas. There was justice in Korach's claim, but by no means regarding Aharon himself. There was also justice in Chana's claim, but only as a temporary measure, when the sons of Aharon, the sons of Eli, seriously veered from the path of Aharon, their ancestor. Shmuel did indeed serve as a priest, in accordance with an emergency ruling – even as the High Priest[[8]](#footnote-8) – and offered a communal sacrifice on behalf of the entire people.

Chana includes naziriteship in her vow: "And a razor will never pass over his head" – for a nazirite is a kind of High Priest: “his vow of separation to his God is on his head" (*Bamidbar* 6:7), i.e., the nazirite’s hair parallels the gold headplate of the High Priest, and he is forbidden to defile himself even for close relatives. Perhaps Shmuel can be compared to Yosef, who was also "the elect [*nazir*]of his brothers" (*Bereishit* 49:26, *Devarim* 33:16). Rachel also suffered from her barrenness and from tension between her and her rival, Leah, the wife who had children. She too prayed to God and God heard her prayer. Perhaps she too vowed nazariteship for her son, as did Chana.

One final comment about the vow: According to *halakha*, a woman cannot vow naziriteship for her son and force him to be a nazirite; that authority lies exclusively in the hands of the father (see Mishna *Nazir* 4:6). In light of this, it is possible that Shmuel's naziriteship (see there 9:5) was by virtue of the mitzva to honor one's mother, and by virtue of the honor he showed to his mother's vow. It is also possible that the vow was confirmed by Shmuel's father, Elkana, and therefore it was valid:

Her husband Elkana said to her, "Do what seems best to you; stay behind until you wean him. May the Lord only keep His word." (1:23)

The Torah discusses the intransience of a woman's vow once her husband has confirmed it:

But if her husband keeps silent from that day to the next, then he has upheld all her vows and the obligations by which she has bound herself. He has upheld them by remaining silent on the day when he heard them. (*Bamidbar* 30:15)

This refers to passive confirmation, and therefore the vow is still attributed only to the woman. Elkana, however, *explicitly* confirmed Chana's vow, thus it is possible that it is attributed to him as well.

**VI. The Suspicion**

As she prayed on and on before the Lord, Eli was watching her mouth. Chana was speaking in her heart; only her lips were moving, and her voice could not be heard, so Eli thought her drunk. "How long will you act the drunkard?" he said to her. "Deny yourself wine!" "No, sir," Chana answered, "I am a woman of troubled spirit. Neither wine nor beer have I drunk, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not think your handmaid depraved, for it was my overwhelming worry and my torment that moved me to pray just now." "Go in peace," Eli answered, "and may the God of Israel grant what you seek of Him." (1:12-17)

The elderly Eli was sitting at the doorpost of the sanctuary. It seems he had never seen anyone enter the *Mishkan* without permission and without coordinating entry with the priests (which may have included a considerable "tip"), and all more so, a woman who would dare to do so. He tried to lip read what Chana was saying, but her crying made it impossible. Her very breach into the *Mishkan* appears to Eli as brazenness reminiscent of the behavior of a drunken man. The possibility that the woman was drunk also raises the suspicion that she had been involved in fornication at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting; as above, the gossip surrounding the *Mishkan* and its administrators made such suspicions possible. Eli, who does not know Chana, reacts harshly and scolds her. Chana, in her unequivocal answer, raises the question of why the High Priest, who is supposed to observe the troubles of individuals and understand them, did not even consider the possibility that a bitter and broken woman was seeking God, wishing to pray to him directly and not through intermediaries. Chana's words, "Do not think your handmaid depraved," can be read instead as: "Do not place your handmaid before depraved men (Chofni and Pinchas)" – using subtle wording to maintain respect.

Eli's suspicion of Chana brings to mind the priest's suspicion, which joins the husband's suspicion, in the case of a *sota.* Eli suspects a virtuous woman who has not sinned, and he indeed blesses her that she be redeemed from her barrenness and give birth to a son – the reward of a woman who is suspected as a *sota* but turns out to a woman of virtue.

In our *haftara*,three consecutive sections of the Torah come together, and their closeness testifies to their content: the section of a suspected adulteress (including a virtuous woman who was suspected in vain), the section dealing with a nazirite, and the section containing the priestly benediction. The bringing of Shmuel to the *Mishkan* joins to these the section dealing with the consecration of the *Mishkan*, which is also close to these three sections.

**VII. The Name "Shmuel"**

At the turn of the year, Chana conceived and bore a son, and she named him Shmuel, "for I sought him from the Lord"… "This is the boy I prayed for – the Lord gave me what I sought from Him. I, in turn, give him over to the Lord – he has been given over to the Lord for all his days." And they bowed down there to the Lord. (1:20-28)

"Shmuel" is an abbreviated form of "*sha’ul mei-E-l*" – "sought from the Lord." *She'eila* in Scripture means request. Shmuel is the boy whom Chana sought in her prayers. Starting from the time of his weaning, that is, at age three, he is fit to be called a "*na'ar*," a boy. This is the age that a "boy" leaves his mother's bosom and passes over to his father, who will teach him Torah, and here he is passed over to Eli, the High Priest, who will teach him the laws of the *Mishkan* and its service.

It is possible that beyond the meaning of "*sha'ul*" as "sought," the name also bears the sense of "*she'eila*" as it was used by the Sages in reference to one of the four bailees – the "*sho'el*," the borrower.Chana "borrowed" the child for three years in order to embrace and nurse him, and now she returns him to his owner, to God, who had given him to her.

**VII. Chana's Second Prayer**

 We will briefly note three separate points regarding Chana's prayer:

Heroes' bows are shattered while the feeble are girded with power. Those once sated hire out for bread, while those once hungry grow fat. By the time the barren has borne seven, the mother of many has withered… The Lord's foes shall be shattered; He thunders the heavens above them; the Lord shall judge to the ends of the earth. May He grant might to His king and raise up the horn of His anointed! (2:4-10)

Chana alludes to three opponents in her prayer:

1. Her rival, Penina, “mother of many children,” who might have suffered some tragic event, while she, the barren Chana, gives birth to many children. Chana did not give birth to seven children; she had Shmuel, and five more in the aftermath of Eli's second blessing: "As the Lord took note of Chana, she conceived; she bore three sons and two daughters" (I *Shmuel* 2:21). However, seven is a number indicating multitude.

2. The sons of Eli, who hindered Chana in the *Mishkan* until she broke in, and who hurt women, for whose cause she was fighting. Her words, "Those once sated hire out for bread, while those once hungry grow fat," bring to mind the prophecy of the man of God about the destruction of the house of Eli:

"And I shall appoint a faithful priest for Myself who will act according to My own heart and soul; I shall build him a faithful house, and he will accompany My anointed one for all time. But everyone left in your house will come and pay homage before him for a pittance and a loaf of bread, pleading, 'Please, add me to one of the priestly groups, just for a crust of bread to eat.'" (I *Shmuel* 2:35-36)

3. The Philistines, who ruled over Israel at that time, and whose rule became more difficult after they defeated the Israelite army at Even-ha-Ezer. Chana speaks of the reversal that will take place when "the feeble are girded with power" (2:4), and she prophesies almost explicitly about the war in which Shmuel will cry out to God and God will answer him:

For just as Shmuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines advanced to attack Israel, the Lord thundered with a mighty voice against the Philistines at that moment, throwing them into a panic, and they were routed before Israel. (I *Shmuel* 7:10).

A short time later, Shmuel will anoint the first king over Israel – "May He grant might to His king" (2:10) – and he will then anoint David from a horn of oil:

Shmuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and the spirit of the Lord seized David from that day onward. (I *Shmuel* 16:13)

Fully understanding Chana's prayer requires analysis of *Tehillim* 113, but that would take us beyond the scope of this study.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Evoking the Hebrew sha’ul me-E-l (sought from God). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I wrote about this *haftara* in detail in "*Al Shetei Akarot ve-al Shetei Haftarot*," in *Ha-Mikra'ot ha-Mitchadshim* (Alon Shevut 5775, eds. R. Gafni and A. Kohen), pp. 414-553. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Unless specified otherwise, all Biblical references are to the book of *Shmuel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Bamidbar* 5:14 describes the process behind the formal accusation of a *sota*, a woman suspected of adultery: “If a fit of jealousy overcomes him [the husband], making him jealous over his wife….” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I expanded on this in my book, *Ki Karov Eilekha* on the book of *Bamidbar* (Israel 2021), pp. 81-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The waters provided by the laver would restore peace by proving her innocence and reuniting her with her husband. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 6:7-13. I expanded on the connection between Chana's prayer Korach's claims against Moshe in my book, *Ki Karov Eilekha* on the book of *Bamidbar*, in the discussion of *Parashat Korach*, especially pp. 330-333. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The *Zohar* in *Parashat Teruma* says this. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)