



Daniel Infeld <daniel.infeld@hazon.org>

Re: [RideCommittee] Fwd: Seven Eighths

1 message

Anna Hanau <anna.hanau@hazon.org>

Mon, Jul 30, 2012 at 10:33 AM

To: Rachel Ackoff <rachel.ackoff@gmail.com>

Cc: ridecommittee@hazon.org, Daniel Infeld <daniel.infeld@hazon.org>

Hi Rachel

This is beautiful -- I'd love to file this away to share with our CSA communities for Tisha B'Av next year. Beautiful!

Thanks,

Anna

On Sat, Jul 28, 2012 at 11:53 PM, Rachel Ackoff <rachel.ackoff@gmail.com> wrote:

just wanted to share my tisha b'av appeal in case anyone found parts of it useful for your lists. especially, the dvar torah at the bottom.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Rachel Ackoff** <rachel.ackoff@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Jul 27, 2012 at 6:44 PM

Subject: Seven Eighths

To: Rachel Ackoff <rachel.ackoff@gmail.com>

Hi friends,

Now that I'm $\frac{7}{8}$ of the way through my time at the yeshiva, I thought an update was in order. I can't claim to be fluent in Aramaic -- the language of the Talmud -- and, in truth, I still stumble through the Hebrew liturgy of the daily prayer service, but I have learned so much this summer! I can tell you all about what the rabbis of the Talmud think about stubborn and rebellious children, and I know more than I might care to know about the laws surrounding rape and abortion. I've been pleasantly surprised by how relevant this text that is over 1,500-years-old feels. I've also been keeping Shabbat each week, savoring this sacred time to unplug my iphone, stop striving, and just be.

Some of you may know that my mother's mother's mother, Lucie Golay, was Swiss Calvin. Though all of my other great-grandparents were Jewish, making me $\frac{7}{8}$ Jewish, Judaism is a religion of matrilineal descent. I had been thinking for a long time about this, and while at Yeshivat Hadar, in the midst of thoughtful, progressive Orthodox rabbis I decided to take the plunge -- literally -- into a mikveh, a ritual bath. In front of a beit dein, a court of three Orthodox rabbis, I pledged my commitment to the Jewish people and said the prayer over immersion.

While I have been pouring over my books in a beit midrash, a house of study, your love and support has been pouring in. The generosity of my family and friends (now totaling \$1,616) has inspired me to raise my expectations of what we can contribute as a community to the fight for a just food system. If you haven't yet had a chance to give, please visit:

<http://hazon.kintera.org/2012nyride/rachelackoff>.

This morning, I had the opportunity to give a few words of Torah in front of the entire yeshiva community. This week's haftarah was startlingly relevant to the climate crisis and our broken food system and gives us some words of wisdom! Feel free to read what I wrote below.

All my love and many thanks,

Rachel

This Shabbat is called Shabbat Hazon, Shabbat of vision, named after the first word of this week's haftarah. The vision is that of the prophet Isaiah who relays a divine admonition to the Jewish people. God spoke to Isaiah and called the Israelites rebellious, sinful, and thoughtless. In describing the injustice and moral bankruptcy plaguing Jerusalem and Judah, Isaiah foreshadows Lamentations, which mourns the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. We recite Lamentations on Tisha B'Av, which begins tomorrow night.

You might think that it seems a little unfair for God and Isaiah to blame the Jewish people for the destruction of the Temple. After all, wasn't it the king of Babylon and his armies who laid siege to Jerusalem, conquered the city, and then after its fall, plundered it completely, destroying the Temple? Is it plausible that any of this was the Jewish people's fault?

Instead of highlighting the plunderers' role, our prophets and the rabbis of the Talmud who studied them, ask what role the Jewish people played in the catastrophe. Because as spiritual leaders, they push us to ask -- What is my responsibility for this? How am I complicit? How can I prevent it from happening again?

So, while acknowledging that there were many factors that contributed to the Temple's destruction, it is worth looking at what exactly God and Isaiah think the Jewish people have done wrong.

In the third verse, God says: עָמִי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנֵן "My people are thoughtless."

In verse seven, Isaiah says to the Israelites: אֶרְצְכֶם שְׂמָמָה
"Your land is a waste."

In Verse 23,

Isaiah laments: שְׂרִיד סוֹרְרִים, וְחִבְרֵי גַבִּים--כֵּלֹו אֶהֱב שָׁחַד
"Your rulers are rogues and cronies of thieves, every one loves bribes."

I cannot read this haftarah of admonition without thinking about today -- specifically about the climate crisis and our broken food system. While we study here in our highly climate controlled beit midrash, there is a serious drought in the American heartland. According to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), a weekly government report, two-thirds of the continental United States is currently in a moderate to exceptional drought. Our corn crop is withering on the

stalk, pastures are being devastated, and wells are drying up. Inevitably, food prices will rise and hunger will increase. Farmers will likely lose their land and their livelihoods. Our land is truly desolate, those of us who buy our corn at the grocery store don't pay much thought to the field it comes from, and the officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture go round and round the revolving door between the agribusiness industry and the government agency that is supposed to regulate it.

Returning to the haftarah, we find divine instruction. Now, as then, our fate may hinge on our willingness to follow God's corrective counsel.

In verses 15 and 16, God says: **יְדִיכֶם, דְּמִיִּם מְלֵאוּ. רְחֲצוּ, הַיָּדַיִם**
 "Your hands are filled with blood; wash yourselves clean."

When faced with our rampant evil-doing, God chooses to believe that we can reform.

In verse 17, God continues:

דְּרִשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט
 "Demand justice"

Verse 19 reads:

אִם-תִּשְׁמְעוּ וְיִשְׁמַעְתֶּם--טוֹב הָאָרֶץ, תֹּאכְלוּ
 "If you are willing and listen, you will eat of the goodness of the earth."

It feels very meaningful to me that the essential element of God's divine directions here is to listen. In daily prayer, the Shema is a radical call to listen up, to pay attention. Every day as we recite the Shema, we say these words from God, "I will give rain in your land in its season, the early and late rain; and you shall gather in your grain, wine, and oil. I will give grass in your field for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied." Today, in our country, the rain is not coming. Our farmers will not be able to harvest their crops. The grass is not growing. And our cattle will not be fed. Will we listen up?

Climate change is obviously a complex environmental problem and there are factors that may be out of our control. But our spiritual leaders would call on us to ask ourselves what is our responsibility for it. Are we consuming wisely? Are we calling on our political leaders to limit our country's emissions? The Ramban, a leading medieval Jewish thinker, wrote that it is a positive commandment to cry out at full volume when we witness or experience injustice. When someone calls out the injustice, the community realizes the role their bad deeds play in the injustice. This is what will cause their behavior to change. Ramban said that if no one calls out, and the people believe this is just the way of the world, this is a cruel fate indeed.

On Tisha b'Av, we spiritually prepare ourselves to pay attention to loss. This year, in addition to mourning the loss of the first and second temples in Jerusalem, I hope we will mourn the ongoing destruction of the "temple" that is our Earth, a tragedy for the Jewish people and for all peoples, and all living things. That destruction is not complete. And with sufficient will and action, we can halt it. Our haftarah shares its name with a Jewish environmental organization called Hazon that offers thought-leadership, capacity-building and transformative experiences to fuel the creation of healthier and more sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond. Being involved with organizations like Hazon give me hope that we can heed God's

instruction to demand justice. May our visions of doom and gloom *not* come to fruition; and may the best of our hazon help us heal the planet and eat of the goodness of the Earth.

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Rachel Ackoff
202-316-7863 (cell)
rachel.ackoff@gmail.com
New York University
Masters of Public Administration and Nonprofit Management '13
Masters of Arts in Hebrew & Judaic Studies '13

check out my BIG ride <http://hazon.kintera.org/2012nyride/rachelackoff> and consider making a donation in support of me and the food justice movement!

"And then all that has divided us will merge,
And then compassion will be wedded to power,
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind,
And then both men and women will be gentle,
And then both women and men will be strong,
And then no person will be subject to another's will,
And then all will be rich and free and varied,
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many,
And then all will share equally in the earth's abundance,
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old,
And then all will nourish the young,
And then all will cherish life's creatures,
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the earth,
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again."

--Judy Chicago

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RideCommittee mailing list
RideCommittee@lists.hazon.org
<http://lists.hazon.org/listinfo.cgi/ridecommittee-hazon.org>

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Anna Hanau
Associate Director of Programs

Makom Hadash, 125 Maiden Lane, Suite 8B, New York, NY 10038
212 644 2332 x307

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