

HAFTORAH

Te'amim

by Soren Winikoff

Each week, during the Torah service, we read the Haftorah — a selection from the Book of Prophets that is connected in some way to the Torah portion. My Haftorah is about King Solomon building the Temple in Jerusalem, a permanent Mishkan or Tabernacle to hold the covenant.

My tutor Steve and I were talking about the similarities and differences between the Haftorah and the Torah reading, and one piece that interested me was the difference between the melodies. I learned that they are both derived from a system of markings called te'amim, developed in the 10th century. The te'amim tell us how to phrase, accentuate, and chant the biblical texts.

In the Ashkenazi tradition, the te'amim found in the Torah and the Haftorah have different qualities and sounds. To give you a sense, I want to compare two passages that use the same te'amim, but have very different melodies. The first passage is from my Torah portion...

כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׂאָו לְבֹו וְכָל אֲשֶׁר נִדְבָה רוּחוֹ

Now the Haftorah...

אֶת־דִּבְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וְאִקָּם תִּחַת דָּוִד אָבִי

As you may have noticed, the Torah portion is in a major key, while the Haftorah is sung in a minor key.

One source I looked at said that the minor key portrayed darkness, and the rising gestures of the melodies showed a sense of yearning, both of which reflect the prophets' commentaries on the problems of their day.¹

These melodies help define the stories by portraying emotion through the music. This is especially interesting to me because I think about conveying emotion when I play classical guitar. As Rabbi Lekach-Rosenberg taught me, in synagogue, music is meant to support the prayer of the community. Even though these systems for chanting text were developed a thousand years ago, they are still being used all over the world to help us connect to emotions and stories in a powerful and meaningful way.

Shabbat Shalom

1. Malin, Yonatan. "Eastern Ashkenazi Biblical Cantillation: An Interpretive Musical Analysis" 09/03/2021. Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre. Accessed 11/03/2021. Jewish Music Research Centre. (<https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/yuval/22542#>)