

# The Book of Yonah

Commentary by  
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Dedicated

"Le-Ilui Nishmat" – in loving memory of

**Ha-Rav Gavriel Noach and  
Rivkah Holtzberg HY"D**

The beloved directors of  
Chabad-Lubavitch of Mumbai, India  
who were tragically taken from us in a  
terrorist attack  
on their Chabad House

28 Mar Cheshvan 5769



Dedicated  
with honor, respect and appreciation  
to our dear friends of  
Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

**Mr. & Mrs. Simon and  
Jana Falic**

Whose actions fulfill:  
"For the Torah comes forth from Zion,  
and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem"  
(Yeshayahu 2:3)



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## Introduction

Our Sages teach: "Eliyahu demanded the honor of the father...Yonah demanded the honor of the son." This is to say that the prophet Eliyahu demanded the honor of Hashem, and Yonah demanded the honor of the Nation of Israel. For her sake, he was willing to do anything, even to distance himself from the Master of the Universe. Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner – Rosh Yeshiva of Ateret Yerushalayim in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem, and Rav of Beit El – serves as our guide through the incredibly gripping story of the prophet Yonah.

*Mordechai Friedfertig*

In the heart of Jerusalem between the Walls



## 1. Who was Yonah ben Amitai?

*"And the word of Hashem came to Yonah ben Amitai saying" (1:1)*

The prophet Yonah is mentioned not only in the Book of Yonah, but also in the Book of Melachim. There we are told about King Yerovam ben Yoash: "He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Chamat to sea of the Aravah, according to the word of Hashem, G-d of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of his servant, Yonah ben Amitai the prophet from Gat Chefer" (Melachim 2 14:25). From Bereshit Rabbah (98:11) we know that Gat Chefer is located in the territory of Zevulun. Our Sages explain that his father was from the tribe of Zevulun and his mother was from the tribe of Asher (Yerushalmi Sukkah 5:1). An additional tradition concerning the mother of Yonah ben Amitai, which is not mentioned in the Tanach, is that she was the widow from Tzarfat (located next to the territory of Yissachar, today temporarily part of the country of Lebanon). Her son, who was revived by the prophet Eliyahu, was in fact Yonah (Melachim 1 17, Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer chapter 33). Yonah ben Amitai was a baby at the time and later became a student of the prophet

Elisha (Rashi to Melachim 2 9:1). For example, our Sages relate that Eliyahu instructed Elisha to anoint Yehu ben Nimshi as King over Israel (see Melachim 1 19:16), and Elisha sent Yonah to anoint him (Sifrei Zuta, Bamidbar 14a).

In the Book of Yonah, Yonah receives a prophecy for the non-Jews. Although prophets of Israel occasionally prophesied to non-Jews (see Yeshayahu 13-23, Yirmiyahu 46-51, Yechezkel 25-33, Amos 1-2, Eliyahu – Melachim 1 19:15 and Elisha – Melachim 2 8:7), it is quite rare. The importance of the non-Jews to us is made clear daily in the prayer "Aleinu," where we say: "Therefore we put our hope in You, Hashem, our G-d, that we will quickly see Your mighty splendor...to perfect the world through the Almighty's kingdom. Then all humanity will call upon Your Name." The Book of Yonah, however, is the only case in which a prophet's entire message is directed to non-Jews.

*"Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to her, for their wickedness has risen before Me." (1:2)*

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria ("Ashur" in Hebrew), was a large and ancient city. The Book of Bereshit already relates that Ashur, son of

Shem, built the city (Bereshit 10:11). The Ramban explains, however, that Nimrod actually built the city, but it was called "Ashur" since Ashur would rule over it in the future. The Book of Yonah tells us that there were one hundred and twenty thousand citizens in the capital city of Nineveh – a huge city. In this period, however, Assyria was not yet the great empire it was to become. During the period when it was a world power, it exiled the Ten Tribes and threatened to destroy the Kingdom of Yehudah. Only by a miracle in the merit of the righteousness of the King Chizkiyahu would we be saved from the siege which they cast on Jerusalem (Sanhedrin 94b). Nonetheless we see that already in the days of Yonah, Assyria was already a very large kingdom.

The Master of the Universe said to Yonah: "Their wickedness has arisen before me" (1:2). Although the entire kingdom of Assyria was evil, the city of Nineveh overflowed its measure – their cup of wickedness was overflowing. The Master of the Universe said to Avraham Avinu at the Covenant between the Pieces: "And the fourth generation will return here, for the sin of the Amorite will not be full until then" (Bereshit 15:16). Although they were full of sins, their cup was still not overflowing. We learn from

this that if you see wicked people in the world who continue to live and cause damage, do not worry: the Master of the Universe has not removed His Divine Providence. He is waiting until their cup overflows to strike them with the final blow. It seems that the measure of what constitutes "overflowing" is not the same for everyone, and we do not understand the Divine calculation. What else, for example, did the Germans need to do in order for their cup to overflow?! But we do know that there will be a Divine accounting. The Master of the Universe said to the prophet Yonah that the evil of the people of Nineveh arose before him. They crossed the line. He therefore told Yonah that he must go and lead them to repent.

## 2. One who Suppresses his Prophecy

*"Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem. He went down to Yafo and found a ship traveling to Tarshish. He paid its fare and boarded it to travel with them to Tarshish from before Hashem." (1:3)*

The difficult question which arises here is: how can one flee "from before Hashem," since the earth is full of His honor? "How shall I leave

from Your Spirit and where shall I flee from Your Presence?" (Tehillim 139:7). Is it really possible to run away from the Master of the Universe? A second question: how could Yonah, who was both a prophet and a supremely righteous person, refuse to prophesy (Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 2 #842)? Suppressing one's prophecy is in fact a transgression, the laws of which are discussed by the commentators.

You may ask: Didn't Moshe Rabbenu respond to Hashem's command to prophesy, with the words: "Please, Hashem, send whomever You will send" (Shemot 3:13)? And didn't the prophet Yirmiyahu resist the command to prophesy? In these two instances, however, we are not discussing the suppression of one's prophecy. "One who suppresses his prophecy" means one who receives a prophecy and refuses to deliver it. In the case of Moshe Rabbenu, Hashem informs him of His desire for Moshe to be a prophet, to which Moshe Rabbenu answers that there are others who are better suited than him. But when Hashem tells him that he is the chosen one, Moshe performs his mission and does not suppress his prophecy. This is similar to being in the army: if an officer gives a command, it is permissible to ask

questions and to suggest that others are more capable of performing the mission. If in the end, however, the officer decides that a particular soldier should perform the mission, and that soldier does so without delay, despite his discussions and questions – it is not considered refusing an order.

In the case of the prophet Yirmiyahu, the chosen one says: "Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child" (Yirmiya 1:6). He is humble, not full of arrogance. He is not like a politician running for office who rushes to be interviewed by the media and to thank everyone for the trust which they have placed in him, since he is undoubtedly better than everyone else. The prophet Yirmiyahu is humble. He is concerned about the difficult task before him, but in the end fulfills his mission. Similarly, when the Master of the Universe instructs him to buy his cousin's field, he does so and only afterwards asks about the meaning of this purchase, since the city is about to fall by the hands of the Chaldeans (Yirmiya 32:24). Avraham Avinu also asked the Master of the Universe many questions regarding the destruction of Sedom, but he performed the word of Hashem without question. Hashem commands him to sacrifice his son, and he prepares to do so without delay.

There is a big difference between expressing concern and fear on account of the mission and refusing to answer the call of Hashem. A community once wanted to appoint a particular rabbi to be the rabbi of the city. That rabbi went to his rabbi and told him that he was concerned and scared. His rabbi responded to him: "And who do you think should be appointed as rabbi, someone who is not scared to be a rabbi?" Only someone who is scared to be a rabbi is fit to be a rabbi. In the case of Yonah, however, the situation is different: Yonah has already performed the duty of a prophet, as we saw in his prophecy to Yerovam ben Yoash, but when the Holy One Blessed be He tells him to prophesy to the people of Nineveh, he refuses to comply. He does not question or argue, but flees towards Tarshish. It is surprising that a righteous person such as Yonah would not want to fulfill a Divine command to help people repent. It may be easier to understand if he had received a command to eliminate, kill or destroy the people, which is a difficult command. But to refuse to help people repent is far more difficult to comprehend.

The Mishnah says that even prophets sin (Sanhedrin 89b). The Rambam agrees that though prophets are completely righteous, filled with

proper character traits and sound ethics, even they can have deficiencies (Rambam, Shemoneh Perakim, chapter 7). Yonah's deficiency was that he suppressed his prophecy. But how is a prophet to be punished for such a sin? In order to be punished by a Beit Din, there must be witnesses and a warning. Since a prophecy is a personal experience between the prophet and the Holy One Blessed be He, it is impossible for another person to give testimony against him. Our Sages compare the receiving of a prophecy to a person eating dates from a vessel. He puts his head into the vessel and eats, and no one is able to know if the dates which he ate are good or wormy (Meiri, Sanhedrim 89b). It seems that one cannot know what Hashem said to the prophet. Our Sages answer, however, that it is possible to know, "For Hashem, G-d, does not do anything without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). That is to say, when the Master of the Universe speaks with one prophet, all of the prophets hear. Everyone who has a prophetic ear hears, each according to his level. The prophets know that Hashem spoke to a particular prophet and told him to prophesy. So a prophecy is not in fact a personal-individual experience, but a commu-

nal experience for Klal Yisrael (the entire Nation of Israel) at its foundation (i.e. its prophets).

A modern book (which we should not refer to as "moderni – modern," but rather as "midroni – slanted") tries to explain why Yonah suppressed his prophecy by quoting a teaching from the Jerusalem Talmud (Makkot 2:6). Wisdom was once asked: What is the punishment for a sinner? Wisdom answered: "A sinner will be pursued by evil" (Mishlei 13:21). Prophecy was then asked: What is the punishment for a sinner? Prophecy answered: "The soul that sins shall die" (Yechezkel 18:20). The Holy One Blessed be He was finally asked: What is the punishment for a sinner? He answered: He should repent and he will be forgiven, as it is written: "Good and upright is Hashem: He therefore teaches sinners the way" (Tehillim 25:8). According to Wisdom (i.e. rational intellect), if a person commits a sin, the situation cannot be rectified. The damage is done. The one who made the mistake must pay the price for his actions. Prophecy too says that since the sinner rebelled against Hashem, he has no merit to exist and no way to atone. The Holy One Blessed be He, in contrast, is above Wisdom and Prophecy, He therefore makes repentance possible. The "modern" book uses

this midrash to explain that since Yonah is a prophet, he believes like Prophecy that the sinning soul must die. He therefore says: "Was this not my claim when I was still in my own land? I therefore fled beforehand to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and merciful G-d, slow to anger, great in love and relent of punishment?" (4:2). But this commentary forgot one important detail – Yonah also knows that it is possible to repent, for the main role of the prophets is to awaken repentance (see Nedarim 22b)! What then are our Sages really teaching us in this midrash? That the possibility of repairing the past is truly above human wisdom and prophecy. If Hashem did not reveal the secret of repentance to us, it truly would be impossible. All of our Sages and prophets are certainly aware of this possibility. After all, they are the one who call others to repent!

### 3. Fleeing from before Hashem

Let's first answer the most obvious question before us: how is it possible to flee from Hashem? Rabbi Yehudah Halevi (Kuzari 2:14), the Radak and other Rishonim (early authorities of the Middle Ages) all agree that Yonah knew that one cannot flee from Hashem. This is

made clear from the text itself, which does not in fact say that Yonah wanted to flee "from Hashem" but rather that he wanted to flee "from before Hashem" (Yonah 1:3). Yonah sought to distance himself from the **place** of prophecy, for it is only possible to receive prophecy in the Land of Israel (Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel and Malbim). The Radak says that if he left the Land of Israel, the spirit of prophecy – through which one is considered to be "before Hashem" – would not be able to rest upon him. It is true, of course, that the Master of the Universe is located in all places, as it says "He is called the Place of the World but the world is not His place" (Bereshit Rabbah 68). He does not have a place, He is the place! (See Nefesh Ha-Chaim 4:1-4). Divine providence, Divine knowledge and Divine intervention too are located in every place, but prophecy is not: prophecy can only exist in the Land of Israel. And so Yonah fled from it.

*Question:* From where do we learn this?

*Answer:* The Rishonim explain that the term "from before Hashem" means that the essence of Divine providence (which includes the resting of the Divine Presence upon a person) can only exist in the Land of Israel. Although

the Gemara does say that when the Nation of Israel is exiled, the Divine Presence is exiled along with it (Megillah 29a), there are different levels of the Divine Presence's "intensity." We can see this in the statement "When ten People sit and engage in Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them...even when five...even when three...even two...even one... (Avot 3:7). Why doesn't the Mishnah simply state that the Divine Presence rests on even one person who learns Torah? In order to show that there are different levels of the Divine Presence.

The Divine Presence of prophecy is only found in the Land of Israel. The Torah says regarding the Land of Israel: "A Land which...the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are on from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" (Devarim 11:12). The Land of Israel is the Land of prophecy. Our Sages were therefore surprised by the verse: "It was that the word of Hashem came to Yechezkel ben Buzi Ha-Cohain in the land of Kasdim" (Yechezkel 1:3)." How did he prophesy outside of the Land? The answer: "It was," meaning, "it **already** was" (Moed Katan 25a), i.e. Yechezkel began by prophesying in the Land of Israel and then continued to prophesy in the Exile. The Rambam explains that there is no prophecy outside of the Land be-

cause there is no joy outside of the Land, and prophecy only rests where there is true joy (Moreh Nevuchim 2:36 and Shemonah Perakim, chap. 7). Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel teaches that prophecy is one of the special characteristics of the Land of Israel. It is not, as the Rambam maintains, that the Exile has a different lower spiritual status which prevents the absorption of the prophecy, but rather that the prophecy is solely the purview of the Land of Israel (Introduction to the Book of Amos). Yonah therefore rushed to escape the Land of Israel, to the sea, to Tarshish, to a place where he could not receive prophecy. And so we see that one can carry a prophecy into the Exile but one cannot **receive** it there.

*Question:* It seems that Yonah had already received the prophecy. If so, what benefit was there to fleeing?

*Answer:* According to the Radvaz and the Malbim (from Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel), he still had not received the definite words to relate, as it is written: "Call out to her" (1:2). Yes, he had been "called," but the specifics of that call were as yet lacking. Only after he was spit out of the fish was the prophecy itself related: "You should arise to Nineveh, the great city,

and call out to it the announcement which I tell you" (3:2). The Radvaz, Rabbi David ben Zimra, brings a proof from Targum Yonatan (the Aramaic translation) which explains the verse, "And Yonah arose to flee to the sea **before he prophesied**," i.e. before he received the prophecy. He also offers the possibility that this was Yonah's first prophecy given – before his prophecy relating to Yerovam ben Yoash (see Melachim 2 14:25). Our Sages say that even Moshe Rabbenu, master of all of the prophets, was a novice in prophecy in the beginning of his "career" (Shmot Rabbah 3:1). Sometimes, in the beginning, a new prophet does not fully comprehend the prophecy (Sanhedrin 89b, Derech Hashem of the Ramchal 3:4:7). We see this also with the prophet Shmuel (See Derech Hashem 3:4:3 and Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 2 #842).

*Question:* Returning to the question of prophesying outside of the Land of Israel: how then did Moshe Rabbenu prophesy in the land of Egypt and in the desert?

*Answer:* Rabbi Yehudah Halevi provides two answers to this question: 1. It is possible to prophesy not only in the Land of Israel but also about the Land of Israel, even when one is out-

side of the Land (Kuzari 2, 14). 2. The particular area where Moshe Rabbenu prophesied is part of the Land of Israel. There is a disagreement regarding the southern border of Israel, which is called "the River-bed of Egypt" [Nachal Mitzrayim]. It is unclear whether this refers to the Nile or to Wadi El Arish. According to the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, "the River-bed of Egypt" is the eastern offshoot of the Nile called "Pelusium" and thus the land of Goshen, where Moshe Rabbenu prophesied, is within the borders of the Land of Israel. If this is so, why did we leave Egypt – weren't we already in the Land of Israel? Everyone agrees that there are different levels of holiness in the Land of Israel. We were not to remain in that region. The Radvaz, who lived in Egypt four hundred years ago, relates that there was a Torah scholar in Egypt who was asked, "Why do you not ascend to the Land of Israel?" He responded: "This is also the Land of Israel." Before this Torah scholar's death, however, he requested that he be buried in the Land of Israel. It appears that he did not even convince himself (Shut Ha-Radvaz, vol. 6 #2206). There are levels of holiness in the Land of Israel: the peripheries are not equal to the interior. One should enter the center of the Land and spread

out to the peripheries from there. This is why Moshe Rabbenu pleaded to cross the Jordan (Devarim 2:25), even though the eastern bank of the Jordan is also the Land of Israel. The Jordan River runs down the middle of the Land of Israel, with the eastern side belonging to the tribes of Gad, Reuven and half of Menasheh. Moshe Rabbenu is buried there on Mount Nevo (Devarim 32:49-50), in the territory of Reuven. But the Land of Israel on the western side of the Jordan is holier than the Land of Israel on the eastern side, just as Jerusalem is holier than the Land of Israel, the Temple Mount is holier than Jerusalem, the Temple is holier than the Temple Mount and the Holy (Kodesh) and the Holy of Holies (Kodesh Ha-Kodashim) are holier than the Temple.

*Question:* Nineveh is not in the Land of Israel?

*Answer:* Nineveh is not in the Land of Israel. It is the capital of Assyria, which is located in North-East Babylonia.

#### 4. Self-Sacrifice

The next question we must ask is: why didn't Yonah want to prophesy? Why didn't he want to help the people of Nineveh repent? The fact

that they were not Jewish should not have any fact effect, as we have already noted that many of our prophets were sent to prophesy to non-Jews. Furthermore, we know that the repentance of non-Jews is of great importance, since we conclude our prayers every day with the hope that "all humanity will call upon [G-d's] Name" (the prayer "Aleinu"). Why then did Yonah refuse to prophesy to them?

A hint towards an answer is found at the end of the Book of Yonah when Yonah prays: "Please Hashem, was this not what I said when I was still in my own Land? I therefore fled beforehand to Tarshish" (4:2). The prophet himself explains the reason for his flight: "for I knew that You are a gracious and merciful G-d, slow to anger, great in love and relenting of punishment. And now Hashem, please take my soul from me, for my death is better than my life" (4:2-3). In other words, Yonah says: I know you, Master of the Universe, and I know that You are merciful and gracious and that You would forgive the people of Nineveh. I therefore did not want to prophesy, and fled.

In order to understand this answer we must look to Rashi. But first, a word on the importance of learning Tanach with Rashi: just as we

learn Gemara with Rashi. It is hard to imagine how our predecessors learned Gemara before Rashi! So too do we learn Tanach with Rashi. It is jokingly said: With Rashi, G-d created the Heavens and the earth (a play on the first word in the Torah, "Bereshit" [In the beginning], which is changed to "Be-Rashi" [with Rashi]). There are many commentaries, but Rashi, along with the commentaries of Metzudat David and Metzudat Tzion, suffices. Metzudat Tzion is especially useful for understanding difficult words, while Metzudat David provides short explanations of the subject at hand, sometimes quoting Rashi, the Ralbag, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra or the Gemara. It is necessary to learn Tanach with Rishonim (the early authorities of the Middle Ages), so that one does not explain the text in a completely distorted manner. For example, the Rambam mocks the Christians, and brings their explanation of the verse: "Hear Israel, Hashem our G-d, Hashem is one" (Devarim 6:4): Hashem – one, our G-d – two, Hashem – three (Beginning of the letter on Resurrection of the Dead). This is their "commentary." Without the tradition of our Sages, it is possible to say the most bizarre things in the world.

Returning to Rashi, who brings the words of

our Sages: And what did Yonah see that made him not want to go to Nineveh? Yonah said: "The non-Jews are close to repentance" (1:3) – i.e. they repent easily. The Nation of Israel, however, is not close to repentance. They are stiff-necked. The Nation of Israel had a myriad of prophets. Our Rabbis relate that there were forty-eight prophets and eight prophetesses in addition to hundreds and thousands of prophets who did not leave any writings (Megillah 14a). In the time of Achav, for example, Ovadiah hid hundreds of prophets, fifty in every cave (Melachim 1 18:13); King Shaul met a band of prophets (Shmuel 1 10:10). There were so many prophets and yet the Nation of Israel did not always heed their call. The non-Jews, in contrast, repent quickly. We see this clearly when Yonah, without exhibiting any desire or passion, arrives to the city and says: "Another forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4). He says the absolute minimum possible, and yet they begin repenting immediately! So Yonah reasoned: if I help the non-Jews repent, the Nation of Israel will be judged harshly. I do not want to be part of this process.

There is, in truth, a major question here: why do the non-Jews repent so quickly, while we,

the treasured and holy Nation, are stiff-necked and do not listen to the prophets? The answer is that the non-Jews repent quickly, but they also return to their old ways quickly. Their repentance is not deep and internal. It is true that the people of Nineveh repented: the king, the citizens and even the animals fasted and put on sackcloth and ashes. But it is also true that they returned to their sinful ways with the same alacrity. The proof of this is that we have never heard that the city of Nineveh became a city of righteous people. The opposite is true: Nineveh was the capital of Sancheriv, whose men destroyed the Kingdom of Israel and exiled the Ten Tribes, who have disappeared to this very day. We have heard that they waged difficult and cruel wars. Their repentance was not sincere and true. In contrast, although the Nation of Israel is stiff-necked, when they do repent, their repentance is true and not merely an act of momentary excitement. The Maharal – Rabbi Yehudah Loew – explains that this character trait flows from the fact that the Nation of Israel examines every matter based on intellect. Because the Nation of Israel argues over every issue and is not easily convinced, it is difficult to get them to repent (Netzach Yisrael, chapter 14). The Nation of Israel is not easily moved

because it is intellectual. We see this already during the period of Moshe Rabbenu when the Nation of Israel argued with him constantly: "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?" (Shemot 14:11). They even tried to understand revealed miracles in various ways. This is not a fundamentally negative trait; on the contrary, it testifies to their seriousness, depth and intellectual search for truth. Non-Jews, on the other hand, are more grounded in the physical rather than the intellectual world. They are like a material which easily changes its form.

Thus, Yonah refused to help the people of Nineveh repent so that their repentance would not be used as an accusation against the Nation of Israel. Furthermore, he knew that these non-Jews would later come and destroy the Land of Israel. The Radvaz – Rabbi David ben Zimra – similarly writes that Yonah tried to stall so that in the meantime their cup would overflow and they would be destroyed (Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 6 #2206). If they did not repent, however, their cup would overflow with sin and that would be their end, "their wickedness has risen before Me" (1:2). If Yonah helped them repent, they would survive and destroy the Kingdom of Israel. Yonah was so

determined not to be a partner in the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel that he preferred to die and even lose out on the World to Come.

*Question:* If the Holy One Blessed be He decided to destroy the Kingdom of Israel, wouldn't He find a way to do so with or without Yonah?

*Answer:* Yes, but Yonah said: I will not be a party to this act.

*Question:* But the Holy One Blessed be He Himself asked Yonah to deliver the prophecy?

*Answer:* This is correct, but Yonah loved Israel passionately and he had a good role model for his actions: Moshe Rabbenu. The sin of the Golden Calf was a horrible sin which our Sages compare to "a bride who engaged in extramarital relations during the wedding" (Shabbat 88b). In the midst of Hashem's revelation on Mt. Sinai, Moshe goes up to receive the Torah. When he descends, the Jewish People are dancing around the Golden Calf. The Master of the Universe informs him: "Leave Me alone, so that My anger will flare up at them and I may consume them, and I will make you a great nation" (Shemot 32:10). Hashem promises to cre-

ate a new nation from Moshe Rabbenu, with no need for those who are dancing around the Golden Calf. But Moshe replies: No! And if You do not forgive them, "erase me from the book which You have written" (ibid. verse 32). The Zohar explains that the book of the Holy One Blessed be He is the World to Come (brought by Maran [our revered teacher] Rav Kook in *Igrot Ha-Re'eiya* vol. 2, p. 189). Moshe Rabbenu says: I do not want to be a great nation. I only want this Nation as it is. Moshe Rabbenu displayed enormous self-sacrifice when he, so to speak, gave an ultimatum to Hashem: either you forgive this Nation or "erase me from the book which You have written." In the end, the Master of the Universe forgave them.

The prophet Yonah followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Moshe Rabbenu, who acted selflessly for the sake of the Nation of Israel. He chose sin or death over the repentance of these non-Jews even if it cost him to sin and to die. Rabbenu Bachya ben Asher (who lived after Rabbenu Bachya ibn Pekudah, the author of "Chovat Ha-Levavot – Duties of the Heart") wrote: "His thoughts were pure, his intentions were for Heaven, and he acted with humility and wholeness of heart. Yonah made a 'kal

va-chomer' (a priori argument) based on the actions of Moshe Rabbenu, may peace be upon him, whom Hashem [attempted to] send to Pharaoh, but [Moshe] refused... [Yonah thus argued that if Moshe Rabbenu did not agree to bring righteous people out of Egypt, all the more so should he not agree] to warn wicked people to repent. Why then was he punished and thrown into the sea? It was not for this thought, but for his failing to perform the will of Hashem" (Kad Ha-Kemach, erech Kippurim 1). We do not know the secrets of the Holy One Blessed be He. We are obligated to do what we are commanded, and should not try to be wiser than Hashem (Berachot 10a). A doctor who refrains from treating the sick based on the argument that if Hashem has decreed that the patient will die, there is no reason to treat him, and if Hashem has decreed that he will live, he will live even without the treatment – is a sinner. The Rambam criticizes this approach and says that based on this reasoning one should refrain from eating, since if Hashem decreed that he will die, he will die even if he eats and if Hashem decreed that he will live, he will live in any event. Such calculations are not for us to make (Rambam, Commentary to the Mishnah, Pesachim 4:10).

We must, rather, act like the Jews who waged war against the Assyrian-Greeks. From a rational perspective, there was no chance for a few thousand Jews to defeat sixty to a hundred thousand Assyrian-Greeks. Yehudah Maccabe said: we will do what is incumbent upon us and Hashem will do what is proper in His eyes (Sefer Chashmonaim 3:59). A person who is ready to be killed for the Nation of Israel exhibits great self-sacrifice; one who is ready to sacrifice his soul, i.e. the World to Come, the gift of prophecy, is on an even higher level. Yonah forfeited this highest level, for prophecy is our supreme aspiration. Prophecy is drawing close and cleaving to Hashem, hearing the word of Hashem. Yonah was willing to give this up in order to save the Nation of Israel, even if it meant he must transgress. It is possible that he believed that he was not transgressing, since by leaving the Land of Israel he removed the possibility of receiving a prophecy. But even if he did realize that his action was a transgression, he must have assumed that it was justified in this case, just as one may desecrate Shabbat in order to save a sick person. It is also possible that he thought this transgression was one for the sake of Heaven, like the incident with Yael, the wife of Chever Ha-Keni, who seduced Sis-

era in order to kill him (Nazir 23b) or Esther's second visit to King Achashveros (Noda Bi-Yehudah, Tanina #181 and Shut Mishpat Cohain #309 and #316). The first time she was forced to go to him, but the second time was of her own free will in order to save the Nation of Israel.

## 5. The Honor of Israel

Our Sages summarize this idea in one brief statement: "Eliyahu demanded the honor of the father...Yonah demanded the honor of the son" (Mechilta De-Rabbi Yishmael, Bo, parashah #1). This is to say that the prophet Eliyahu demanded the honor of Hashem, and with great forcefulness. As he said to the Jewish People on Mt. Carmel: "How long will you limp between two opinions? If Hashem is G-d, follow him and if Baal [is G-d], then follow him!" (Melachim 1 18:21). He later killed all of the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Yonah, on the other hand, demanded the honor of the son, i.e. the Nation of Israel. For her sake, he was willing to do anything, even to distance himself from the Master of the Universe. As we have mentioned, according to our Sages, there is a connection between Yonah and Eliyahu:

Yonah's mother was the widow from Tzarfat, and it was he who was revived by the prophet Eliyahu. He later demonstrated the same zealotness as the prophet Eliyahu, for the honor of Israel rather than for the honor of Hashem. He did not want to trample on the honor of Israel. Our Sages say: "Yonah went to kill himself in the sea. And you also find the forefathers [cf. Moshe Rabbenu, according to the Vilna Gaon], and the prophets sacrifice themselves for Israel" (Mechilta De-Rabbi Yishmael, Bo). We must remember that earlier Yonah had prophesied during the period of King Yerovam ben Yoash regarding the expansion of the borders of Israel (Melachim 2 14:25). Even though his prophecy was proven correct, it was to no avail: Israel did not repent (Malbim). And now the Master of the Universe was commanding him to do the exact opposite: to help Assyria repent so that it would be a rod of Hashem's anger against Israel (Yeshayahu 10:5). The Malbim explains: "Hashem wanted to show that the Assyrians had greater merit than Israel, since they listened to a prophet and repented while Israel did not repent." If Yonah had not already prophesied to Israel, the shame would not have been so great. But under the circumstances, if Yonah now prophesied to the non-Jews and they re-

pented (which was likely, since they were close to repentance), he would help cause major damage to Israel's honor. Yonah did not want to have any part of this and was even willing to sacrifice himself instead. In the end, the Master of the Universe forced him to accept the prophecy, by having him swallowed by the fish.

*Question:* Where did Yonah get the power to demand the honor of Israel?

*Answer:* Yonah's power exists from the power of the Nation of Israel. The Jerusalem Talmud (Sukkah 5:1) relates that when Yonah entered the "Simchat Beit Ha-Sho'eivah" (the rejoicing at the water libation ceremony during Sukkot which takes place in the Temple) the Divine Spirit rested on him. This was the communal Divine Spirit, i.e. belonging to the entirety of Israel, which appears only three times a year, when all of Israel comes to see and be seen in the Temple.

*Question:* If Yonah was so righteous, why was he punished by Hashem?

*Answer:* Hashem certainly knew that Yonah was righteous, but He wanted Yonah to prophesy and to understand fully the concept of repentance (which we will discuss later). Hashem

therefore forced him to prophesy and Yonah learned this lesson the hard way.

*Question:* How do we know that the prophet's refusal stemmed from his opposition to the repentance of the people of Nineveh?

*Answer:* We learn this from two sources: 1. The verse at the end of the book (4:2) in which Yonah himself testifies that the reason for his flight was that Hashem is gracious and merciful. 2. The idea we learn from the Oral Torah (via Rashi) that the non-Jews are close to repentance.

## 6. A Wealthy Prophet

*"Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem. He went down to Yafo and found a ship traveling to Tarshish. He paid its fare and boarded it to travel with them to Tarshish from before Hashem." (1:3)*

Yonah fled quickly from the Land of Israel: "He went down to Yafo and found a ship traveling to Tarshish. He paid its fare..." Why does this verse point out that Yonah paid the travel fare – isn't it obvious that he would do so? The question is further sharpened by the specific

words of the verse "he paid its fare" instead of "he paid his fare." Our Sages explain that Yonah bought the entire ship. This is because it was not planning to travel to Tarshish. He therefore quickly purchased the entire vessel, even though it cost a great deal of money (Radak and see the Malbim). According to Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer, it cost four thousand gold dinars. We know that Yonah was a wealthy man, as were all of the other prophets, since "the Holy One Blessed be He only rests His Divine Presence on one who is courageous, wealthy, wise and humble" (Nedarim 38a). But what does it mean to be wealthy? There are two explanations of the concept of "wealth," one spiritual, the other financial. As it says in Pirkei Avot (4:1), "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot." Other commentators, however, interpret this wealth more literally. Prophets were rich monetarily so they would not have to be bothered by earning a livelihood and so they would not be dependent on other people. It is certainly possible to do many positive things with money. Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi, for example, was extremely prosperous (Baba Metzia 85a) and used his wealth to support all of the Sages throughout his lifetime. These Sages were thereby able to sit without

worry and arrange the Mishnah (see Baba Batra 8a). Avraham Avinu too was wealthy (Bereshit 13:2), as was Yitzchak (ibid. 26:13) and Yaakov (ibid. 33:11). Maran (our revered teacher) Rav Kook expands this idea and says that just as the Divine Presence only rests on an individual who is courageous, wealthy, wise and humble, so too the communal Divine Presence of Israel only rests on a wealthy nation (introduction to Shabbat Ha-Aretz, p. 13). The Nation of Israel needs to be wealthy. Poverty is not an ideology: it is a compulsory state. Wealth is positive, since it allows a person freedom of movement. This is not to say that the prophets were spendthrifts, G-d forbid! They lived modest and humble lives, but they had powerful resources at their disposal to provide for the Nation of Israel. Yonah was thus able to purchase the entire ship "and boarded it to travel with them to Tarshish from before Hashem." Note that here again it is emphasized "from before Hashem." It is impossible to flee from Hashem, but it is possible to flee "from before Hashem," i.e. from the Land of Israel.

## 7. The Error of a Great Person

*Question:* What was Yonah's transgression if all he did was flee from the Land of Israel in order to avoid receiving a prophecy?

*Answer:* Our Sages teach that he sinned by suppressing his prophecy (Sanhedrin 89a). Based on Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, however, the Malbim holds that Yonah had not yet received the content of the prophecy and as such did not have the status of one who suppresses his prophecy. His sin was therefore that he violated the positive mitzvah of rebuking someone who is sinning. The Radvaz, on the other hand, says that his sin was that he fled from before Hashem (Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 2 #842).

Just as it is a sin to prophesy something which Hashem did not say, as in the case of false prophets, so too is it a sin to suppress a prophecy and not prophesy what Hashem did say. Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, writes in his book "Or Le-Netivati" (p. 144) that even a regular person (i.e. a non-prophet) can find himself in a similar situation. It is sometimes incumbent upon a person to speak up in a given situation, but he remains silent. In such a case, he is similar to a prophet who suppresses his prophecy. At other times,

however, he speaks up when he should remain silent, and in this he is similar, to a certain extent, to a false prophet. It is true that it is quite difficult at times to know what to do, whether to speak up or to remain silent. One therefore needs to deliberate carefully and have Divine aid.

*Question:* Did Yonah act correctly out of self-sacrifice for the Nation of Israel or did he sin?

*Answer:* He certainly erred. If Hashem said to prophesy, he was obligated to comply. He sinned, but he repented.

*Question:* Even though he had proper intentions for the sake of the Nation of Israel?

*Answer:* It is proper to want to save the Nation of Israel, but he erred by violating the word of Hashem. We must remember, however, that a prophet's error is not the same as our error. His error flows out of a love of and self-sacrifice for the Nation of Israel. This is an error of a great and holy person who in the end repented.

*Question:* If one who suppresses his prophecy is liable for death by Heaven, why wasn't he killed?

*Answer:* He was saved because he repented.

Anyone who is liable for death by Heaven or "Karet" (Divine excision) has the opportunity to repent. Repentance will save them. One who is liable to capital punishment by a human Beit Din (Jewish court) must also repent, but he is still put to death. Yonah truly stood at the gates of death, but he repented and was saved.

## 8. Sleeping in the Eye of the Storm

*"Hashem cast a great wind toward the sea and it was a great tempest in the sea and the ship threatened to break apart" (1:4).*

The ship was in danger. There was a huge storm, unusual and unnatural. The verse refers to G-d by the name "Hashem," which represents His attribute of mercy instead of the name "Elokim," which represents His attribute of strict judgment. It would seem that a huge storm which virtually sank the ship would have been caused by Hashem's attribute of strict judgment. But everything that occurred was Divinely calculated, since Hashem, using His attribute of mercy, desired that the people of Nineveh would repent.

"The ship threatened to break apart." Our

Sages point out that the text says "the ship," using the definite article, since all of the other ships at sea were sailing along in calm water and the storm was only "pursuing" this ship (Bereshit Rabbah 24:4 and Radak 1:7). This is how the sailors understood that an unnatural event was occurring.

*"The sailors became frightened and each one cried out to his god. They threw the ship's cargo overboard to lighten their load. But Yonah descended into the belly of the ship, laid down and fell asleep." (1:5)*

Each of the sailors prayed to his own god. Tradition tells us that they decided to take turns praying to their gods in order to see which god would answer and was therefore the true god. All of the gods disappointed them; none of them answered. At that point "Yonah descended into the belly of the ship, laid down and fell asleep" – the sleep of the righteous. Rabbenu Bachya writes that Yonah was confident that he was acting correctly. He did not fear that he was sinning. It was clear to him that he was justified in refusing to prophesy, and in giving up his status and fleeing. He therefore descended into the belly of the ship and fell

asleep (Kad Ha-Kemach, erech Kippurim #1). The Radal on Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 10), however, explains that he fell asleep out of distress and shame. At times, a person who is depressed, sad or crying, and is pursued by his thoughts and is uncertain what to do, escapes by going to sleep.

*Question:* Why did the sailors have to suffer on account of Yonah?

*Answer:* This is a proper question. The sailors asked this question themselves: "They cried out to Hashem and said: Please Hashem, do not let us perish on account of this man's soul" (1:14). Moshe Rabbenu also asks this question: "Shall one person sin and You will be angry with the entire community?" (Bamidbar 16:22).

According to Rabbenu Bachya, Yonah was full of confidence and went to sleep without worries, with the understanding that even if he drowned, this is what had to be. Some commentators explain that he descended into the belly of the ship because this is the first place that the water enters when it bursts into the ship (Malbim). Others explain that he went to sleep when the sea was completely engulfed in the storm. Yonah too was completely engulfed in a storm within himself, and thus fell asleep

(see Radal on Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 10).

## 9. The Lots

*"The captain approached him, and said to him: 'How can you fall asleep? Arise, call out to your G-d. Perhaps G-d will pay us mind and we will not perish.'" (1:6)*

The captain of the ship approached Yonah. The sailors saw that he was a great man. After all, he had purchased the entire ship and he was now sleeping during this huge tempest. He appeared to be a courageous and unique individual. Therefore, a regular sailor did not approach him, but the captain himself. The captain informed him that they were in a life-threatening situation (Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 10), and asked him to pray, for perhaps the G-d of this great man could help. Yonah did not respond to the captain's request. He did not pray. He continued to sleep while the sailors tried to figure out what to do.

*"They said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots so we can determine on whose account this*

*evil is happening to us.' They cast lots and the lot fell on Yonah." (1:7)*

**Question:** Isn't it strange that they were making such a serious decision based on lots?

**Answer:** This is very strange, but we are talking about idol worshipers who perform many vain acts. They saw a tempest in the heart of the sea, which we already learned was an unnatural storm since all of the other ships were sailing along in calm waters. They therefore understood that one of the passengers on the ship was guilty and responsible for this occurrence.

Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Chasid discusses whether or not it is permissible to make decisions by casting lots. After all, the Land of Israel was divided among the Tribes by the casting of lots. This cannot serve as a proof, however, since those involved with casting the lots at that time were endowed with "Ruach Ha-Kodesh – Divine inspiration" (Sefer Chasidim #679, 701). Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Chasid provides two answers to our question: A. It is forbidden to cast lots, since in the end the lot must fall on someone even if no one is in fact to blame (#701). B. But he also writes that in certain unique situations, it is permissible to rely on casting lots. Yonah's situation was such a case, because it

was clear that someone was responsible for it (#679). We can note that the text says "they cast lots," meaning that they cast repeatedly until it was altogether clear that if the lot landed on Yonah every single time, it was not by happenstance (Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, Akedat Yitzchak 63, Metzudat David. See also Shut Chavot Yair #61 for a discussion on casting lots for certain types of decisions).

*"They said to him: Please tell us: on whose account is this evil happening to us? What is your profession? And where do you come from? What is your land? And of which Nation are you?" (1:8)*

The sailors ask Yonah in a very cautious and vague manner, "Please tell us: on whose account...?" They did not directly say to him: "You are guilty." They attempted to clarify this issue in an indirect way: what is your profession? What is your nation? etc... in order to probe his character and understand why all of this evil was occurring.

## 10. Yonah's Fear of Hashem

*"He said to them: I am a Hebrew, and I fear Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens, who made the sea and the dry land." (1:9)*

Yonah says: I fear Hashem. He still believes in the course he has taken and believes that his actions are justified. He is mistaken, but his error is the error of a G-d-fearing person. Only a great person like him is able to stumble into a transgression that flows from the love of the Nation of Israel. There are transgressions which only great people can commit, as people say jokingly: an ignorant person will never err in his understanding of the words of Tosafot. The prophet Yonah was G-d-fearing and when he later repents, Hashem is not angry with him and does not rebuke him.

Yonah introduces himself with the description: "Ivri – Hebrew." This is the same description that was used for Avraham Avinu, who is "Avraham Ha-Ivri" (Bereshit 14:13). The word "Ivri," which has the same root as the Hebrew word "ever" (side) is explained to mean that the entire world is on one side while Avraham is on the other (Bereshit Rabbah 42). When Yonah says "I am an Ivri" he is saying to the sailors: I

am not like you. I am from the Nation of Israel, and continues: "and I fear Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens." His response does not answer all of the questions that were asked of him: "On whose account is this evil happening to us? What is your profession? And where do you come from? What is your land? And of which Nation are you?" (1:8). His answer is brief but says everything: I fear Hashem, I am an "Ivri." It is a response that answers all of the questions.

*"And the men were exceedingly afraid, and they asked him: why have you done this? For the men knew that he had fled from before Hashem, because he had told them." (1:10)*

The text does not previously indicate that Yonah had told the sailors he was fleeing from before Hashem. So there are two possibilities: 1. That his telling did occur, but is not recorded in the text. Perhaps before they cast lots, he already informed them that the entire storm was on his account (Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer chap. 10, Radal, Radak). 2. That they figured this out on their own, based on his statement: "I fear Hashem, the G-d of the Heavens," meaning, I am fleeing from Him (Rabbenu Bachya).

*Question:* Doesn't Yonah tell them contradictory things: on the one hand that he is fleeing, and on the other hand saying "I fear Hashem"?

*Answer:* His answer certainly confused them. Although he did not enter into all of the details, they understood that he feared Hashem. They saw that he was a great person, a prophet, a person of high standing, and yet he admitted that he was fleeing from before Hashem. Thus, his answer surely confused them: you have a G-d that is so powerful that He created the heavens and the earth, who causes this tempest and who is pursuing you, and still you are fleeing?!

*"They said to him: what should we do to you so that the sea will be calm for us? For the sea grew more and more stormy." (1:11)*

The conversation between the sailors and Yonah clearly shows that they are convinced he is a great person and fears Hashem. They put their trust in him and ask him what they should do (see Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra).

*"And he said to them: Pick me up and throw me into the sea and the sea will be calm for*

*you, because I know that this great tempest is upon you on my account." (1:12)*

It appears that after the lot is cast, Yonah's lot has already been decided, and they want to throw him into the sea. So why don't they do so? Because they are in awe of him. They trembled at his holiness and were not brazen enough to commit such an act against him. Furthermore, they feared killing him because he was fleeing from a Divine mission which Hashem wanted him to fulfill. They were reluctant to serve as accomplices to his flight, for fear that they would be punished for it. Our Sages say that even after their decision to throw him into the sea, they were still concerned. First they lowered him into the sea and saw that the sea stopped raging, so they brought him back into the ship. The tempest immediately returned. So they lowered him into the sea again. This time the water reached up to his knees and the storm stopped. The moment they removed him, the storm returned. They did this over and over again before finally accepting that they had to throw him into the sea (Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer, chap. 10). During all of this, Yonah was calm and collected, but they were confused and did not know what to do.

*Question:* Were the sailors righteous gentiles?

*Answer:* It is possible that initially they were regular non-Jews, while what ensued caused them to become righteous. The Mishnah says: "The majority of sailors are pious" (Kiddushin 4:14). The reason for this is that sailors are generally at sea, where much danger lurks, and they are constantly suspended between life and death. This reality leads them to pray and they then become pious. This is true for most sailors, but obviously not for all. There were of course ships of robbers who conspired against the passengers. We Jews suffered especially from them. Throughout our history, following our many expulsions, we set sail on ships and the robbers lorded over us, killed us and captured us to sell as slaves. There were pirates, for example, called "the Strong Ones of Malta" and "the Strong Ones of Cyprus." While their names give an impression of strength, they were nothing more than murderers, of Jews in particular.

Nonetheless, the majority of sea travelers are righteous, and this also applies to the sailors on Yonah's ship, who became righteous after their experience with him. They were therefore not brazen enough to throw him into the sea. An additional explanation for their not casting him

into the sea, as previously suggested, was their fear of being complicit in his flight from before Hashem.

Yonah rejects their hesitancy and says: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea." Yonah was essentially asking to commit suicide. We must understand this statement of Yonah as incredible self-sacrifice. He is not only sacrificing his body, but his soul. Many Jews have sacrificed their bodies. Every soldier of Tzahal – the Israel Defense Force – is willing to sacrifice his body, to die for the sake of a great principle. But sacrificing one's soul means being willing to forfeit not only one's place in this world, but one's place in the World to Come. Moshe Rabbenu similarly displayed a willingness to sacrifice his soul for the Nation of Israel when he said to the Master of the Universe, "Erase me from the book which You have written" (Shemot 32:32). He was ready to forfeit his portion in the World to Come for the sake of the Nation of Israel (Mechilta, Parashat Bo and see above chapter 4).

*Question:* Did Yonah think that his refusal corresponded to Hashem's will or contradicted it?

*Answer:* Yonah thought that he was fulfilling Hashem's will in refusing to prophesy. He

thought that Hashem was testing him by instructing him to prophesy, and that he needed to pass this trial by refusing to do so.

*Question:* Is it a deficiency to fear Hashem?

*Answer:* Certainly not. Fear of Hashem is the most supreme level of Divine worship. It is a Torah mitzvah. The prophet Yonah feared Hashem, loved Hashem and was connected to Hashem. This is an extremely high level of fear of Hashem.

*Question:* Perhaps Yonah erred in his efforts to help the Nation of Israel and did not understand that there was nothing left for him to do on her behalf.

*Answer:* Yonah thought that by refusing, he was fulfilling his obligation toward the Nation of Israel while also fulfilling the will of Hashem. Our Sages explain through a parable the need for human effort in the world. The Gemara tells about someone who asked: "If Hashem loves the poor, why doesn't he provide them with food? Why are we involving ourselves and taking care of the poor?" The Sages answered him that through the poor Hashem provides us with the opportunity to help them and to merit the World to Come. The man replied: "The oppo-

site is true. It is similar to a king who put his slave in jail and forbade anyone to give him food or water. A person came and provided him with food and water. When the king heard about this, he was enraged and demanded that this man be punished." Our Sages answered him: "The parable is otherwise. It is, rather, similar to a king who put his son in jail and forbade anyone from giving him food or water. A person came and provided him with food and water. The king heard about this and he was happy about it, and he gave this man a reward" (Baba Batra 10a). When Hashem told Moshe Rabbenu that He wanted to destroy the Nation of Israel, Moshe Rabbenu began to pray. Why should he pray? When it seems like everything has already been decided? Because Moshe Rabbenu knew that Hashem's will was for him to pray. The same is true for when Avraham Avinu prayed for the people of Sedom. The prophet Yonah similarly thought that his role was to refuse to prophesy to these non-Jews. He thought that his job was to argue against what Hashem was planning to do.

## 11. Sanctifying Hashem's Name through Desecrating Hashem's Name

*"The men rowed hard to return to the shore, but they were unable, because the sea was growing more stormy around them." (1:13)*

Even though Yonah tells the sailors to throw him into the sea, they are not brazen enough to do so. They attempt to row to dry land, but to no avail (Metzudat David).

*"They cried out to Hashem, and said, 'Please Hashem, let us not perish on account of this man's soul and do not place upon us innocent blood, for You are Hashem, as You desire so have You done.'" (1:14)*

The sailors pray to our G-d. We thus see how the desecration of Hashem's Name slowly transforms into a sanctification of Hashem's Name. They learn that the Master of the Universe is the awesome and supreme true G-d. They therefore call out to Him and say: "Only You, Master of the Universe, can act according to Your will. If You desire that he prophesies – make him prophesy, if You desire that he dies – make him die. But please, do not involve us in this whole matter" (see Malbim).

*"And they picked up Yonah and cast him into the sea and the sea stopped its raging." (1:15)*

When they saw that there was no choice, they at last relented and threw Yonah into the sea. Perhaps it was on account of this act that they prayed to Hashem not to punish them, since they had no choice in the matter. As Yonah had told them to act this way, it therefore seemed to them in any case that this was an appropriate way to act.

*"And the men greatly feared Hashem and they offered a sacrifice to Hashem and made vows." (1:16)*

This refers to positive fear. But did they offer sacrifices in the heart of the sea? Rather they vowed to offer sacrifices to Hashem and to give tzedakah when they arrived on dry land (Radak), and they also vowed to convert to Judaism (Rashi).

## 12. Inside the Fish

*"And then Hashem appointed a huge fish to swallow Yonah, and Yonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." (2:1)*

How is it possible for someone to live inside a fish for three days and three nights – wouldn't he suffocate and drown? This was obviously a miracle (Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra). There is certainly no need for a fish in order for this miracle to occur, since, with Hashem's aid, Yonah could have survived under the water. But Hashem's way is to minimize miracles as much as possible; he thus provided a "container" to house Yonah while underwater (Ramban, Bereshit 6:19).

A researcher named Olders wrote that in the year 5487 a whale was caught with the aid of a harpoon in the Falkland Islands, off the coast of South America. The whale began to move around in a frenzy, flipped over the fishing boat and swallowed one of the sailors. The sailor was found unconscious inside the whale three days later. They succeeded in reviving him, but he suffered severe psychological damage from this experience for the rest of his life, and was never able to recover. He survived because he

was not in the digestive system of the whale, since its opening is too narrow to pass a full-grown man, but rather he was in its respiratory system. The man was thus able to breathe and did not suffocate. Nonetheless, he was obviously in an extremely distressful situation. We thus see that such occurrences have occurred in the world: a whale swallowed a man and he survived for a few days.

Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi (a kabbalist, philosopher and Torah commentator who lived 700 years ago) writes that the story of Yonah is a parable and that everything in it occurred in a prophetic vision (Yonah 1:1). In the *Moreh Nevuchim* (2:46), the Rambam himself says that many of the events told about the prophets occurred in prophetic visions, rather than in reality. According to the Rambam, for example, many events in the lives of the prophets can only be accounted for as dreams, since they could not have occurred in reality: Yeshayahu walking naked and barefoot (Yeshayahu 20:3), Yirmiyahu hiding a linen belt in Perat (Yirmiyahu 13:4), Yechezkel going from Babylonia to Jerusalem (Yechezkel 8:1-3) and Hoshea marrying a prostitute (Hoshea 1:2). Other episodes can be taken at face value, however, such as Yirmiyahu walking with a

yoke on his neck in order to convey to the people that they should accept the yoke of Babylonia (Yirmiya 27). Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi is the only one, however, to suggest that the story of Yonah occurred in a dream, and our Rabbis were extremely critical of his opinion, almost to the point of rejection.

There is no story as unified and cohesive as the story of Yonah. Biblical critics of course attempt to "untangle" the story, combining the events of many prophets: one who did not want to prophesy, a second who fled on a ship and a third who was swallowed by a fish. But this is utter nonsense for there is no more harmonious book than the Book of Yonah. There is no seam in the middle. Furthermore, they claim that there are anachronistic expressions in the book which are not appropriate for his time period. But we know that the Men of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesset Ha-Gedolah) arranged the books of the twelve prophets (Baba Batra 15a). They did not invent them, but arranged their books in the same way that Chizkiyah and his contemporaries copied and arranged the Books of Yeshayahu, Mishlei, Shir Ha-Shirim and Kohelet (ibid.). It is possible that they added expressions which were current in

their day, which was of course later than Yonah's.

### 13. Yonah's Prayer

*"Yonah prayed to Hashem, his G-d, from the fish's belly." (2:2)*

Yonah understood that Hashem was determined that he would be His messenger. This is clear from the fact that Hashem did not allow Yonah to drown. Even though He had many prophets, His desire was for Yonah in particular to prophesy. This is why He did not kill him, but rather through his distressing experience allowed him to repent.

*Question:* Was Yonah in the belly of a male fish or in the belly of a female fish? The Book of Yonah first uses the Hebrew word "dag" (2:1), indicating a male fish, and then switches to the word "dagah" (2:2), meaning a female fish!

*Answer:* Rashi, based on the midrash, explains that Yonah was first swallowed by a male fish who then vomited him into the mouth of a female fish. The female fish was filled with fetuses, and Yonah was packed in with them. That is where he prayed. The Zohar describes

an even more drastic situation: Yonah was first inside a male fish who then died and was eaten by other fish, including female fish. Yonah was inside the fish's belly when he was being attacked by the other fish, and that is where he prayed (Zohar 2, 47, 2).

"And Yonah prayed to Hashem, his G-d." Hashem was always his G-d; he remained his G-d even when he was sinning. The Master of the Universe does not abandon a person, and all the more so He did not abandon Yonah.

*"And he said: I called to Hashem in my distress and He answered me; from the belly of She'ol (lower world) I cried out and You heard my voice" (2:3)*

These verses are similar in their style to the verses of Tehillim (Psalms). Yonah prays and says, "And You heard my voice," even though Hashem had not yet answered his prayer! There are two explanations: 1. Hashem would certainly answer him. This is called "the prophetic past tense," i.e. speaking about the future in the past tense (Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra). 2. Hashem had already saved him from death's doorstep as a child when Eliyahu revived him (Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel). In addi-

tion, when Yonah made this proclamation, he was already in the heart of the sea, where he would surely drown to death, and yet he was still alive, i.e. he had already been saved.

*"You cast me into the depth, into the heart of the sea, the river surrounded me, all of Your breakers and waves passed over me. Then I said: I was expelled out of Your sight, but I will again look at Your Holy Temple." (2:4-5)*

Rivers, breakers and waves passed over me. I thought you completely distanced me, that You did not want to speak to me at all, that You completely rejected me because of my sin (Radak), "but I will again look at Your Holy Temple." I discovered that I can come close to You again, that I can repent. I will not die even after this horrible sin. Yonah's sin was the sin of a great person, and the sin of a great person is a great sin. "The Holy One Blessed be He is exacting with those around Him like a strand of hair" (Yevamot 121b), i.e. those who are close to Hashem are judged harshly for even minor infractions. Even more so is Hashem particular with the righteous for the sin of refusing to follow His command.

*"The water encompassed me to the point of death, the depth surrounded me, weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the base of the mountains, the earth with its bars against me forever, but You brought up my life from the pit, Hashem, my G-d" (2:6-7)*

"To the base of the mountains" – to the foundations of the mountains in the depths of the sea (Aramaic translation). "The earth with its bars against me" – the earth places its doors before me. A feeling of being in an abyss with no way out. "But You brought up my life from the pit." Perhaps you will ask: why did he not die if he was liable for death? He was truly dead. He was in a grave, in the lower world. He was buried in the heart of the sea and was revived.

*"When my soul fainted within me I remembered Hashem; my prayer came to You, into Your Holy Temple." (2:8)*

A person faints from his distress, "A prayer of the afflicted when he faints" (Tehillim 102:1). All that remains for him is himself and his distress. Despite this, "I remembered Hashem."

*"They that guard utter futilities, they abandon their kindness." (2:9)*

"They that guard utter futilities" – these are the sailors who believed and awaited the aid of utter futilities of their gods (Rashi, Radak and Mahari Kara in the name of Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer). What is the meaning of "they abandon their kindness"? Some explain that they abandoned their idol worship (ibid.). And there are those who explain that although they abandoned their gods and repented, they did so under pressure. It is impossible to know how long their repentance would last. When the pressure ceased, so would the repentance (Radak).

*"But I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving; I will fulfill that which I vowed. For salvation belongs to Hashem." (2:10)*

"I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving." Anyone who is saved from danger sacrifices a thanksgiving offering (Korban Todah). This is the Halachah. Today, we recite the blessing of "Ha-Gomel" (Berachot 54b). I will fulfill that which I vowed.

*"And Hashem spoke to the fish and it spewed Yonah out onto dry land." (2:11)*

Did this fish merit prophecy by hearing the word of Hashem? The Rambam explains that this fish was certainly not a prophet. The Holy One Blessed be He simply arranged that the fish would vomit Yonah onto dry land (Moreh Nevuchim 2:28, Radak, Bechorot 8a).

Yonah repented and arrived at the conclusion that he should not try to be wiser than the Master of the Universe. He still did not understand, however, why Hashem desired the repentance of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, who would later destroy the Kingdom of Israel. Nevertheless, if Hashem utters a command, one should fulfill it. Avraham Avinu certainly did not understand why he was to sacrifice his son, since it contradicted all of the promises he had received from Hashem, but he was not wiser than Hashem and did what Hashem commanded without question (see Ein Aya of Rav Kook, Berachot, chapter 1 #55).

*Question:* But after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbenu prayed and tried to change Hashem's decree.

*Answer:* Moshe Rabbenu displayed self-sacri-

fice and the prophet Yonah followed in his path. Moshe Rabbenu said: If you do not forgive this Nation "Erase me from Your book!" This is self-sacrifice. Yonah's conduct was even more extreme as he did exactly the opposite of what Hashem commanded. Now, however, he was ready to fulfill Hashem's word. He took an oath upon himself and fulfilled it.

*"And the word of Hashem came to Yonah a second time saying." (3:1)*

The Master of the Universe has patience (Pirkei Avot 5:3). Our Sages say that Hashem spoke to Yonah a second time but not a third (Yevamot 98a). Yonah would not have another opportunity to repent (see Iyun Yaakov on Ein Yaakov).

*"Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to her the message which I tell you." (3:2)*

Hashem repeats the fact that Nineveh is a great city (see 1:2). He does this in order to explain to Yonah that it is impossible to destroy it with one fatal blow (Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel). The last verse of the book emphasizes this idea again: "And should I not take pity on Nineveh,

that great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right from their left hand, and also many beasts?" (4:11). This is a great city and its citizens are confused. We must help them repent since "His mercy extends to all of His works" (Tehillim 145:9). The Master of the Universe is even merciful toward animals. According to the majority of halachic authorities, "tza'ar ba'alei chaim" (causing distress to animals) is a Torah prohibition. It is forbidden to injure them or cause them distress without reason. One must certainly then have mercy on the people who live in Nineveh, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to her the message which I tell you" (3:2). Whether the exact message was related to Yonah earlier (Radak) or whether it is only being given at this point (Maharam Alshich and Yalkut Shimoni #343), he must go and talk to them.

*Question:* How can one help such a huge city of non-Jews to repent?

*Answer:* If we only knew how to help such a huge city of Jews to repent! If we only knew how to help one Jew repent! Only with great difficulty can we get ourselves to repent. The fact that Yonah was successful in this incredibly

difficult mission demonstrates how great a man he truly was. Before this mission, he was sent to help the Nation of Israel repent. But he was unsuccessful then (Malbim), even though he prophesized about the expansion of the borders, which indeed came to fruition (see Melachim 2 14:25). Here, however, he was successful in helping these non-Jews repent.

## 14. Repentance of the People of Nineveh

*"So Yonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Hashem. Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three-day journey." (3:3)*

Nineveh was truly an enormous city (Radak). Our Rabbis calculate that a "one-day journey" into the city is the equivalent of 40 kilometers (5 km/hr for 8 hours – Pesachim 93b). The length of Nineveh, which is described as a three-day journey, was therefore 120 kilometers! Even if we say that the pace of walking within the city would be slower and that by saying "Nineveh" the Book of Yonah also means all of the outlying areas, we are still left with a huge city. Further testimony to the city's size is

found later, when we learn that one hundred and twenty thousand residents live there (4:11)!

*"Yonah began to enter the city at the distance of a one-day journey and he called out: 'Another forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'" (3:4)*

Yonah informs the citizens of Nineveh that their end is nearing, and their city is about to be destroyed. Just as Sedom was a city of sin and was wiped out, so too will Nineveh be eradicated. The Rambam writes that a person is judged according to the majority of his deeds. If the majority of his deeds are transgressions he is punished. Likewise an entire city (like Sedom) and even the entire world (as during the time of Noach) is also judged according to the character of its majority (Hilchot Teshuvah 3:1-2). It was therefore decreed that Nineveh, whose majority was wicked, would be overturned.

*"The people of Nineveh believed in G-d, proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the smallest." (3:5)*

It is a wonder how quickly they believed in

Yonah's words. Even though we have already seen that non-Jews are close to repentance – i.e. they are easily convinced (as Rashi explains at the beginning of the book) – it is still difficult to understand how easy this really was. After a single day the people of Nineveh believed Yonah and accepted his prophecy. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra and the Radak explain that information from the sailors had reached the city in advance. The sailors had already related the entire miraculous story of what happened to them at sea and had offered sacrifices to Hashem. Their story spread throughout the entire area for as is well known, stories of wonder spread quickly. So when Yonah appeared and spoke to the people, it made a great impression on them.

"The people of Nineveh believed in G-d." Because of this belief, they were certain that Yonah's words were true. They believed that the Master of the Universe was the One who sent him to help them repent. They believed that Yonah had refused, and that this had caused a tempest in the sea, and that the sailors threw him overboard and the sea calmed down. It is possible that they even knew and believed the story of the fish spitting him out on dry land. The "rumor" had wings. They there-

fore believed him immediately and repented, proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the smallest.

*"When the matter reached the King of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself in sackcloth and sat in ashes."  
(3:6)*

The King of Nineveh was also obviously moved to repentance. There are various opinions as to the identity of this King. Some say that it was Sancheriv, King of Assyria (Rashi and see Melachim 2 19:36-37). Others say that it was Asnappar (Yalkut Shimoni #553), who is mentioned in the Book of Ezra (4:10). The text, however, does not mention who it is and we can thus assume that this detail is not a crucial factor.

*"He had it proclaimed and declared in Nineveh, by decree of the King and his nobles, saying: Man and beast, herd and flock, should not taste anything. They shall not graze nor drink water."  
(3:7)*

Why did the animals have to fast and repent? When animals fast along with everyone else,

they groan and scream from hunger. This distresses the people and influences the entire atmosphere of the city.

*"Man and beast are to cover in sackcloth and are to call out mightily to G-d. Every man should turn away from his evil ways and from the robbery which is in his hands." (3:8)*

The people of Nineveh were thieves and were now returning all of the objects they had stolen. They and their King did not only repent through crying, fasting and wearing sackcloth, but also by returning stolen objects. It thus appears that their repentance was a complete one (Ta'anit 16a and see Yerushalmi, Ta'anit 2:1).

*"Who knows? G-d may turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger and we will not perish." (3:9)*

The people reasoned: perhaps Hashem will forgive us if we repent and Nineveh will not be overturned in forty days' time. If Hashem sends a prophet to warn us, it is a sign that He is giving us an opportunity to repent (Malbim).

*"And G-d saw their deeds, in that they turned from their evil ways, and G-d relented from the evil which He said He would do to them, and He did not do so." (3:10).*

The Master of the Universe said that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days' time. So how then could He "change" His mind? We must remember a great principle in the laws of prophecy which not only appears in the book of Yirmiyahu (18:7-8), but also in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 89), and is summarized by the Ramchal (Derech Hashem, 3, 4, 7). If a prophet prophesies a negative prophecy, it is always possible to nullify it if the people repent. This is true even if the prophet does not explicitly mention this possibility, since it should be obvious. If he prophesies a positive prophecy, however, it cannot be nullified, even if people sin. Their transgressions will surely bring punishment, but the prophecy itself will still come to fruition.

## 15. The Pain of a Prophet

*"This displeased Yonah greatly, and it vexed him." (4:1)*

Yonah was extremely distressed about what happened. But how did he know that Hashem had taken pity on the city? Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra explains that he waited forty days and saw that the city had not been destroyed. He did not need a special announcement from the Master of the Universe. He understood based on what he saw that Hashem had taken pity on Nineveh. According to the Radak, however, Yonah was informed of this fact through a prophecy.

Why did this news vex him? Because he wanted Nineveh to be destroyed. You may ask: why didn't Yonah pray for Nineveh not to be destroyed like Avraham Avinu prayed on behalf of Sedom, which was also full of evil people? Not only did Yonah not pray for them, but he even refused to prophesy to them, and was distressed that Hashem forgave them. So what is the difference between the cases of Sedom and Nineveh? There are two differences: 1. If the people of Nineveh were to repent, the Nation of Israel would be judged harshly. As we

already saw, despite all of the prophets, Israel does not repent, while these non-Jews repent with incredible alacrity. This would cause harsh judgment for the stiff-necked Nation of Israel, even though we know that the non-Jews return to their old ways quickly. Their repentance is not deep. The Nation of Israel, in contrast, is not close to repentance for it is difficult to convince them to repent. It takes years and generations. The difference, however, is that after we do repent, we do not return to our old ways. We are stiff-necked both in our unwillingness to repent and our steadfastness once we finally do. Nonetheless, the Nation of Israel would be judged harshly if Nineveh repented quickly. Yonah therefore would not prophesy there. 2. The second difference, which is brought by Rashi in the name of Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer (chap. 10), is even more severe: Yonah feared that now the non-Jews would think that he was a false prophet and this would cause a desecration of Hashem's Name and bring shame to prophecy. Even though they repented in order to nullify the decree (3:9), they did not know in their confused hearts if the decree was lifted on account of their repentance or if it was untrue in the first place (Radal on Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer *ibid.*).

The Malbim brings an even sharper reason why Yonah did not want the people of Nineveh to repent: Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and Assyria would destroy Israel in the future. First, they would destroy the Northern kingdom and exile the Ten Tribes. Later, in the time of King Chizkiyahu, they would conquer the Kingdom of Yehudah and reach Yerushalayim. Only by a miracle would Yerushalayim be saved. Yonah did not want a part in this. He wanted Assyria to be destroyed, not the Kingdom of Israel. This would eventually happen, for Assyria was destroyed by the Babylonians and Egyptians (Yirmiyahu 46:2). Until that time, however, they were to oppress us greatly and Yonah wanted to save the Nation of Israel from this fate.

Our thoughts, however, are not Hashem's thoughts (Yeshayahu 55:8). Our Sages explain that Yonah's prophecy of "Another forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4) has two possible meanings: an overthrow like that of Sedom and Amorah or an overthrow of repentance (Sanhedrin 89b). Hashem implied both of these possibilities. He therefore used the word "overthrow" instead of "destroyed." Yonah did not expect them to repent, and

therefore their repentance "displeased Yonah greatly, and it vexed him."

*"He prayed to Hashem, saying: 'Please Hashem was this not my claim when I was still in my own land? I therefore fled beforehand to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and merciful G-d, slow to anger, great in love and relent of punishment.'" (4:2)*

Yonah said: I knew from the outset, while I was still in the Land of Israel, that you would forgive Nineveh. "I therefore fled beforehand to Tarshish." Why? "For I knew that You are a gracious and merciful G-d." Yonah says this as a criticism: You are taking pity on these evil people when they will strike us in the end? Since I knew this, "I therefore fled beforehand."

*"So now Hashem, please take my life from me, for better is my death than my life." (4:3)*

I do not want to live and see the evil that will befall my Nation (see Esther 8:6). I do not want to see Assyria strike the Nation of Israel. My life has no more value. Yonah already asked to be thrown into the sea once; he had already been on the brink of death. And now, after he

prophesied and saw what the future would bring – that he would indirectly cause the Assyrians to destroy the Land of Israel – better is his death than his life. He wanted to die. Committing suicide is forbidden, so he could not jump from the ship. But he could, and did, tell the sailors to throw him overboard. He was also not committing suicide now, but asking Hashem to shorten his life.

*"And Hashem said: 'Are you that vexed?'" (4:4)*

Are you certain that your anger is justified? Yonah did not answer. He was angry and left the city.

*"And Yonah left the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and made himself a sukkah there and sat under it in the shade, until he would see what would occur in the city." (4:5)*

What did he think would happen in the city? Who knows – perhaps there would still be a destruction.

*Question:* Why did Yonah ask to die?

*Answer:* Yonah said: "Better is my death than my life" (4:3). Since he felt that he indirectly caused the destruction of the Nation of Israel,

he prayed to Hashem to shorten his life. To live and see the destruction of the Nation of Israel was greater suffering for him than death. The halachic authorities write that if a person has terrible suffering, it is permissible to pray that Hashem shorten his life. Even though it is forbidden to provide a medical procedure or refrain from providing a medical procedure to end one's life, it is permissible to pray that one's life is shortened. The proof is from the maid of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi, who was an extremely righteous woman and prayed for him to die (Ran, Nedarim 40). Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, however, points out that the permission to pray for an ill person to die only applies when the purpose of the prayer is for the benefit of that person and not the benefit of the one who is praying. This means that if the sick person is a financial burden or requires family to take care of him or her, it is certainly forbidden to pray to shorten the life of the ill person. But if the prayer is solely for the benefit of the suffering person, such a prayer is permissible and Hashem will do what is proper in His eyes (Shut Tzitz Eliezer vol. 5, Ramat Rachel chapter 5). Yonah prayed like Moshe Rabbenu: Either You forgive this Nation or "erase me from the book which You have written" (Shemot 32:32).

I have no life without the Nation of Israel. Yonah similarly prayed in this way and Hashem would do what was proper in His eyes. Yonah therefore sat on the east side of the city and waited "until he would see what would occur in the city." Perhaps they would return to sinning and the city would be destroyed. Even though it seemed that the Master of the Universe informed him that He would forgive the city, perhaps their repentance would be nullified and the decree would return (Radak).

## 16. A Divine Plan

*"And Hashem, G-d, appointed a kikayon and made it rise above Yonah to make shade over his head to save him from his distress. Yonah was extremely happy about the kikayon." (4:6)*

The kikayon provided Yonah with shade in order to cover him. But why was this necessary when he had already built a sukkah? It appears that the sukkah was a meager one and it was extremely hot. The sukkah later flew away because of the stifling east wind (Mahari Kara and Metzudat David). The kikayon, in contrast, has large, wide and green leaves (see Shabbat 21a)

and Yonah felt very comfortable on account of it.

*"Then G-d appointed a worm when the dawn came up the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. And when the sun rose, G-d appointed a stifling east wind, and the sun beat down on Yonah's head and he became faint. He asked to die, saying: 'Better is my death than my life.'" (4:7-8)*

"The stifling east wind" is the hottest type of wind (Rashi). The wind was blowing on Yonah and he decided after the third time "Better is my death than my life." Yonah said: "Either way I am suffering greatly (Metzudat David) and either way I am going to die (see Radak), I therefore prefer to die now."

*Question:* Isn't it true that when a person is sad, the Divine Presence does not rest on him?

*Answer:* This is correct, and the text in fact does not say that the Divine Presence was resting on Yonah. He was not prophesying in this state, he was praying. It is certainly possible to pray when we are sad. A person especially needs to pray when he is in distress (Be'er Heitev, Orach Chaim 106:1 in the name of the

Semak), just as he does in times of joy. Furthermore, it does not say here that Yonah turned to Hashem as he had done before (4:3), rather he was talking to himself (Maharam Alshich).

*"And G-d said to Yonah: 'Are you so greatly vexed over the kikayon?' And he said: 'I am greatly vexed to the point of death.'" (4:9)*

The Master of the Universe asks him: are you certain that your anger is justified over the kikayon that died? After all, it is only a tree and nothing more. Yonah answers: "I am greatly vexed to the point of death." That is to say, I am vexed, but not because of the kikayon, but because of my own state, since I am suffering, faint and about to die of thirst (Malbim).

*"Hashem said: 'You took pity on the kikayon for which you did not toil and which you did not rear, which came up overnight and perished overnight, and should I not take pity on Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many beasts?'" (4:10-11)*

The Master of the Universe says: "You take pity

on the kikayon, shouldn't I take pity on an entire city?" This answer seems unclear, since Yonah is not taking pity on the kikayon, but on himself. We can further ask: why does Hashem emphasize "for which you did not toil"? What is the difference if he toiled for it or not? He is suffering terribly because of the heat. Answer: It is true that the kikayon in and of itself is not worth much, but it sprouted next to Yonah's sukkah as if by chance. But we know that nothing is by happenstance, and everything occurs according to a Divine plan, "and Hashem, G-d, appointed a kikayon" (4:6). Thus the kikayon is similar to the city of Nineveh. Everything is according to Divine direction of the world, even though we do not always understand how He is directing the world. Even Hashem's command to Yonah to save Nineveh is not by happenstance. Are our thoughts like His thoughts? Are our ways like His ways? (Yeshayahu 55:8). Yonah, however, thought that it was far better for Nineveh, which was full of wicked people, to disappear from the world than for the kikayon that provided him with shade to disappear. A prophet also does not know all of the secrets of the Master of the Universe. It is also reasonable to assume that the fish which swallowed Yonah did not appear by happenstance,

as explained by the Ralbag and Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra. Clearly the entire story concerning Yonah – the tempest in the sea, his miraculous rescue by the fish who swallowed him and spit him out on dry land – is all part of the process to help the people of Nineveh repent. Out of the city's excitement, which was caused by the sailors' tale of their rescue, the people of Nineveh came to faith and repentance. Thus, even though Yonah acted sinfully by fleeing and refusing to prophesy, Hashem used his sin to help an entire city repent. If it were not for the fame which Yonah gained from this story, no one would have listened to his proclamation that in another forty days Nineveh would be overturned. So we see that Hashem also uses people's sin and wickedness to direct His world. Everything is interwoven within the fabric of the Divine plan.

Returning to the kikayon: it did have temporary worth. Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Pano said: "The repentance of non-Jews is temporary. Repentance does not uproot their sin, but temporarily suspends it. For this reason too Yonah did not want to pray for them, as Avraham Avinu had prayed for Sedom. Hashem therefore points out to him that the kikayon was also temporary and yet he took pity on it (brought

in Yalkut Mei-Am Loez 4, 6). This knowledge obviously does not permit error and transgression, since Hashem causes good to be brought about through the agency of righteous people and bad to be brought about through the agency of evil people (Semachot, chapter 5). Regarding the Assyrians, it is written: "Assyria is the rod of my anger" (Yeshayahu 10:5). Hashem used them in order to destroy the Kingdom of Israel. They are wicked, but they serve to carry out Hashem's mission and only later will be punished for their wickedness. The Rambam already asked: why were the Egyptians punished for oppressing the Jews when the Torah says (Bereshit 16:13): "Your offspring will be strangers in a land not their own, they will serve them, and they will oppress them four hundred years"? If it was decreed by Hashem, why were they punished? (Hilchot Teshuvah 6:5). We are discussing different calculations. The Master of the Universe determined that the Nation of Israel had to be in exile, enslaved and oppressed. But it was the Egyptians who decided that they would be the ones to fill the role of the oppressors. And since they acted wickedly, they will be punished (see Ramban to Bereshit 15:14).

Isser Harel, the first head of the Mossad (Israel

secret service – similar to the CIA), was once asked if an Arab spy ever succeeded in infiltrating Israel. He related that there was once an incident with a Syrian spy. This spy traveled to South America, disguised himself as a Jew from Syria and was welcomed with warmth and love by the Jewish community. The community members slowly brought him close to Judaism and the mitzvot. They were surprised that a Jew could have so little knowledge, and they were excited by his desire to learn and to embrace traditional Judaism. After he was absorbed into the community and became close to the Zionist groups, they convinced him to make aliyah. He made aliyah and was drafted into the army as a driver. He served as a driver for one of the generals in Tzahal, who customarily held staff meetings in his vehicle with high-ranking officers. The driver/spy listened and passed all of the information to Syria for an extended period of time. One day he met a young Jewish woman and they became engaged. The day after the engagement, the military police came and arrested him. Isser Harel explained that they knew he was a spy the entire time and therefore appointed him as a driver for that general, so that he would unknowingly relate false information to Syria. At

the moment when events reached a personal level, when he became engaged to a Jewish woman, the Mossad decided that a line had been crossed and they arrested him. Could that spy say to them: I served you for an extended period of time, you must pay me for it! Of course not. He will sit in prison his entire life, without a kikayon! The fact that the Master of the Universe used an evil person for our benefit does not earn him a prize. The Master of the Universe used Egypt and Assyria, but they were punished. He also used Yonah's mistake before he repented, but it did not prevent his punishment. The Master of the Universe is the Master of everything and can use any means at His disposal.

*Question:* Can we also say that Hashem used the early Zionists, who were anti-religious, and are therefore not deserving of reward?

*Answer:* The early Zionists built the Land of Israel – this is not a transgression, but a great mitzvah. The building of the Land of Israel did not flow from the fact that they were anti-religious. This is not similar to our case. We are discussing an evil person who acts maliciously, whose evil actions are used by Hashem in order to bring goodness. You are

discussing people who performed good and bad at the same time. They deserve reward for the good and punishment for the bad.

*Question:* What is the meaning of the verse "people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many beasts"?

*Answer:* There are sages who are righteous, there are evil people who use their wisdom to perform evil, and there are those in the middle. Those in the middle, who do not understand and are confused, are like beasts, who do not know their right from their left hand (Malbim). This also includes young children (Rashi).

If so, we do not understand the plans of Hashem. Moshe Rabbenu asked Hashem: "Please show me your way" (Shemot 33:13), The Gemara explains that his question was this: why are there righteous people who suffer and wicked people who prosper? According to one opinion, Hashem answered him that man is not able to understand His reasoning (Berachot 7a). It once happened that a righteous person had a wall in his house which fell. Why did this horrible thing occur to him? It was revealed in the end that there was a treasure inside the crumbled wall. We do not understand Hashem's reckonings. There is a kikayon for

which you did not toil, which came up overnight and perished overnight, and there are many occurrences in reality which appear and then disappear. They are not happenstances, they have meaning and purpose. A huge city also has meaning and purpose. It had one hundred and twenty thousand people, and even though they were evil and appeared superfluous, they too served a purpose, even if we do not understand what it was.

## 17. Repentance Out of Fear and Repentance Out of Love

Our Sages state that the repentance of the people of Nineveh was deceptive (Yerushalmi, Ta'anit 2:1. See Orot Ha-Teshuvah of Maran Ha-Rav Kook 15, 10). They prove this from the affliction of their animals. The Jerusalem Talmud explains that they starved and afflicted the animals and said to the Master of the Universe: If You do not forgive us, these animals are in place of us – abuse and brutalize them (Yerushalmi *ibid.*). This is truly impudence and deceptive. Regardless, we know that the repentance of the people of Nineveh was not for the long run, since we do not find any sources

which state that Nineveh was a city of righteous people. It is therefore clear that they returned to their sinful ways. We have already quoted the verse "Guarding utter futilities, they forsake their kindness" (2:9) with the explanation that it refers to the sailors. But the Malbim explains that it refers to the people of Nineveh: in the end they would abandon "their kindness," i.e. their repentance. This is the claim of the prophet Yonah: their repentance is not sustainable. It is not internal and true. It is not to be considered repentance which merits atonement.

The text nonetheless emphasizes "And G-d saw their deeds in that they turned from their evil ways" (3:10). Furthermore, the prayer which calls for repentance in the Mishnah in Ta'anit quotes this example in a positive light. We are told that we must learn from the repentance of the people of Nineveh. But if their repentance was deceptive, why are they brought as an example from which to learn? Our Sages say: "My brothers, it does not say about them [the people of Nineveh]: 'And G-d saw their sackcloth and their fast,' rather it says, 'And G-d saw their deeds that they had repented from their evil ways'" (Mishnah Ta'anit 3:1, 16a). There is no contradiction. Yes, they performed repentance

of deception, but at the same time, they performed complete repentance with their deeds, and we must learn from them. How so? By understanding that the people of Nineveh were not capable of reaching a higher level of repentance; their repentance was the best they could do. But the Master of the Universe demands a deeper level of repentance from the Nation of Israel. As is known, there are two types of repentance: repentance out of fear and repentance out of love (see Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah, chapter 10). Repentance out of fear flows from the fear of punishment. This means that if you do not repent, you will be destroyed. When the people of Nineveh heard this, they immediately repented, wore sackcloth, fasted and return the items which they had stolen. Why? They feared destruction. In contrast, there is repentance out of love, which a person performs out of the love of goodness and the love of Hashem, without any benefit. On the contrary, even if the person who repents out of love is told: "If you repent, you will die; and if you do not repent, you will live," he will still repent, since this is repentance out of love, ideal repentance. The Master of the Universe demands that the Nation of Israel repent out of deep love, and it is therefore difficult for them

to repent out of fear – especially in our generation: either we repent out of love or we do not repent at all. For the non-Jews of Nineveh, however, repentance out of fear was also considered repentance. Even though their repentance was not for its own sake, Hashem still accepted their repentance at this point. Our Sages state that Nineveh was still destroyed in the end, but only after forty years and not after forty days (Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer). The city was later rebuilt and used, under the reign of Sancheriv, as a staff of anger by the Master of the Universe (Radal *ibid.*). As we know, we recognize that there are levels and stages in many areas of serving Hashem,

In the Rambam's introduction to "Perek Chelek" (the tenth chapter of Mishnah Sanhedrin), he explains such levels and stages in the context of educating children. For example, one should not demand that children immediately learn Torah for its own sake. One should first entice them with sweets, then with clothing, then with wealth and honor, and only later will learning for its own sake become possible. It is simply impossible to jump right away to the ideal level of learning Torah for its own sake. The Torah itself says: "It will be that if you hearken to My mitzvot...then I will provide rain

for your Land in its proper time" (Devarim 11:13-14). The Torah promises an exchange: You obey My commandments and I will provide for you. Why is this so? Because there are people at this lower level who need to receive a benefit. Pirkei Avot says: "Do not be as slaves, who serve their master for the sake of reward. Rather, be as slaves who serve their master not for the sake of reward" (Avot 1:3). The commentaries ask, why is this Mishnah written in such a lengthy manner instead of simply saying do not serve Hashem in order to receive a reward? The Tosafot Yom Tov explains that being at the level of a servant who serves in order to receive a reward is not a negative quality, but there is a higher level to which we should aspire. The same applies to the level of one who repents out of the fear of punishment. It is still considered repentance, but it is not on the same level as repentance out of the love of Hashem. The difference, however, is that one who repents out of a fear of punishment or for a benefit, ceases to do so when the fear or benefit disappears. The repentance disappears as soon as the threat or benefit does. It is no wonder therefore that the people of Nineveh abandoned their repentance. The Master of the Universe, however, accepted their

repentance, since His thoughts are not our thoughts. He wanted the people of Nineveh to live, even if we do not understand why.

*Question:* Why do we read the Book of Yonah on Yom Kippur?

*Answer:* In order to learn to repent, whether it be the repentance which is incomplete like that of the people of Nineveh or, most importantly, the repentance which is complete, like Yonah's. The prophet Yonah repented twice: once while inside the fish and once after the incident of the kikayon. Even though the latter is not explicitly mentioned in the text, our Sages learn from the fact that Yonah did not answer Hashem, that he accepted His rebuke and fully repented. They say that after the incident with the kikayon, Yonah fell on his face and said: "Direct Your world with the attribute of mercy, as it is written: 'To Hashem our G-d belongs mercies and forgiveness'" (Daniel 9:9, Yalkut Shimoni at the end). The great lesson which we learn is that the Master of the Universe accepts all types of repentance, even repentance of deception, even repentance out of fear and even the thoughts of repentance. Our Sages say that a woman who is betrothed by a man who says: "Behold, you are betrothed to me on condition

that I am wealthy or strong or a sage, is not in fact betrothed if he is not wealthy, strong or a sage. But if he says: on condition that I am righteous, she is betrothed, even if he is completely wicked, since perhaps he contemplated repenting in his heart" (Kiddushin 49b). The mere fact that he contemplated repenting, rendered him righteous during that split second, since even the thoughts of repentance bring much light and salvation into one's soul, and open doors to greater repentance (see Orot Ha-Teshuvah, introduction). The Master of the Universe therefore even accepted the repentance of the people of Nineveh, and so it is fitting that we mention them in the prayers of Yom Kippur.

The Radak explains that the Book of Yonah was included in the Torah in order to emphasize that Hashem's attribute of mercy is above all calculation. We learn from Sefer Yonah that Hashem is merciful to all those who repent, from any nation and especially if they are a multitude (introduction to the Book of Yonah). This is the reason that we read the Book of Yonah on Yom Kippur.

## 18. Repentance and Free Choice

*Question:* Was Yonah's first repentance considered repentance?

*Answer:* The Chafetz Chaim discusses this question in the Mishnah Berurah (6:22:7) and writes that we read this Haftarah on Yom Kippur because it discusses repentance and demonstrates that we cannot flee from Hashem's will. He further explains (in the Sha'ar Tzion) that sometimes a person despairs that he does not have the ability to repair himself, and will therefore continue to act in the same way. If Hashem decrees that he will die because of it, he will die. But this is a mistake, since in the end anything Hashem wants him to fix will be fixed. The person will return to this world again and again until he eventually fixes the problem. Why then does a person have to experience the pain of death and the grave? We learn this from Yonah. Hashem wanted him to go and prophesy, but Yonah refused and fled to the sea, a place where, as we know, the Divine Presence for prophesying would not rest on him. We see that he also drowned in the sea, and was swallowed by a fish and remained inside it for three days. It certainly appeared that he was not going to fulfill Hashem's

instructions. Nonetheless, we see that in the end, Hashem's will was fulfilled, and Yonah went and prophesied. This follows what our Sages say in Pirkei Avot (4:29): "And let not your evil inclination promise you that the grave will be an escape for you – for against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you die and against your will you are destined to give an account before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He" (Sha'ar Tzion *ibid.*). The Master of the Universe wanted Yonah to repent; he therefore directed events in a manner that would bring this about without taking away his free choice. He repented the first time, but it was not complete repentance. The second time he fully repented. We learn from this that both the low level repentance of the people of Nineveh and the supreme repentance of Yonah were accepted by Hashem.

*Question:* But doesn't this contradict free choice?

*Answer:* The meaning of free choice is that the Master of the Universe does not interfere with a person's decisions. If there are two possibilities, one good and one bad, Hashem does not

interfere and force a person to do the good or the bad. If a person has the choice to steal or not, there is no inner, Divine power which forces him in either direction (unless he has a severe emotional illness and thus does not have free choice. In this case he is controlled by an unconquerable inclination, a fact which is taken into consideration both by Halachah and the secular courts of this world). The Master of the Universe pursued Yonah and caused him to have certain experiences and to be brought to different places, until he finally repented (see Tosafot Yom Tov, Avot 5:6). The Mishnah Berurah teaches us that even if Hashem has to bring a person to the world again in a different reincarnation, He will do so until that person repents.

In order for free choice not to be nullified, Hashem directs a person's situation, so that eventually he performs the will of Hashem of his own volition. As proof for this idea, the Mishnah Berurah brings the teaching of our Sages in Pirkei Avot: "And let not your evil inclination promise you that the grave will be an escape for you." Hashem wanted Yonah to repent and he did not do so. He was even on death's doorstep, where it seemed as if there was no possibility for him to repent. But this

was not true: "for against your will you were created." Hashem took him from "She'ol" (the lower world) and brought him back here and he repented. "But He devises means, that none of us be banished" (Shmuel 2 14:14). In fact, our Sages say that after Hashem spoke with Yonah about the kikayon, he prostrated himself and said: "Direct Your world with the attribute of mercy, as it is written (Daniel 9:9) 'For Hashem our G-d of mercy and forgiveness'" (Yalkut Shimoni at the end). Of his own free will, Yonah repented completed.

Yonah's experience within the fish was therefore not only an event that occurred in reality, but was also a parable to show us that the Master of the Universe does what He has decided to do (according to the secrets of souls), i.e. some people live and others die. This is the basis of the Vilna Gaon's commentary to the Book of Yonah.

We clearly saw this idea in the previous generation. The Holy One Blessed be He decided to establish the State of Israel for us and nothing could change this fact, despite all of the internal and external obstacles. On the contrary, those who wanted to block the establishment of the State actually sped up and advanced its estab-

lishment, since Hashem decided that the time had arrived. Great international pressure was exerted on the British to establish a national home for the Nation of Israel, as they had accepted in the Mandate. They transferred the decision to the United Nations with the confidence that there would not be a majority in the UN for a Jewish State, since the Muslims were opposed and the Communists and Americans would never follow the same path. But behold, the unbelievable occurred: there was a majority on November 29th! Everyone voted according to his own considerations. The Russians wanted a stronghold in the Middle East against the Americans. The Americans wanted to evacuate the Displaced Persons camps of Jews in Germany and use them for military bases against the Communist Bloc. Thus, what the English tried to do to bring us down actually helped to build us up. After the decision, everyone panicked and tried to renege. The British said that the UN decision was only an opinion. Many Jews living in the Land of Israel had their spirits broken and considered giving up on the establishment of the State. But the day after the UN decision, the Arabs increased their acts of hatred and began their war against us until the British finally decided to leave the Land of Is-

rael. So in whose merit was the State established? "In the merit" of the Arabs. If they had sat quietly, the British Mandate would have remained here.

Many times in the history of the Nation of Israel, we see that Hashem uses what other people want to do to us to advance His own plans (Maamrei Ha-Re'eiyah of Rav Kook, pp. 360-362). In the martial arts of Judo, there is a technique of using the power of the attacker to his own detriment. This is similar to the way that the Holy One Blessed be He uses the wickedness of evil people and the transgressions of sinners in order to achieve His own goals.

To summarize, the words of the Mishnah Berurah are two ideas which are in fact one: 1. The power of repentance. 2. The impossibility of fleeing from Hashem. They intermingle into one idea: It is impossible to flee from repenting before Hashem.

Whether it is low-level repentance, hasty repentance or even repentance out of fear, it is still considered repentance – "Hashem is good to all and His mercy extends to all of His works" (Tehillim 145:9).

## Author's Biography

Ha-Rav Shlomo Chaim Ha-Cohain Aviner was born in 5703 in German-occupied Lyon, France. As a youth, he was active there in the religious Zionist youth movement, Bnei Akiva, eventually becoming its National Director. He attended university, where he studied mathematics, physics, and electrical engineering. At the age of 23, infused with the ideal of working the Land of Israel, Rav Aviner made aliyah to Kibbutz Sedei Eliyahu, in the Beit She'an Valley of the Galil. He then went to learn at Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim, where he met Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, Rosh Yeshiva and son of Israel's first Chief Rabbi, Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah became his foremost teacher, and he became one of his "Talmidim Muvhakim – leading students." During this time he also served as a soldier in Tzahal – the Israel Defense Force, participating in the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, earning the rank of Lieutenant. At the direction of his Rabbi, he joined a group that was settling Chevron and learned Torah there. In the year 5731, Rav Aviner became the Rabbi of Kibbutz Lavi in the lower Galil, where

he spent half of his day working on the farm. In 5737, he left Lavi to serve as the Rabbi of Moshav Keshet in the Golan Heights. In 5741, he accepted the position of Rav of Beit El (Aleph), in the Binyamin region of the Shomron. Two years later, he also became the Rosh Yeshiva of the newly-established Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim (formerly known as Ateret Cohanim). Located in the Old City of Yerushalayim, Rav Aviner's yeshiva is the closest yeshiva to the Har Ha-Bayit – the Temple Mount, the holiest spot in the world. In its more than twenty-year history, Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim has produced rabbis, teachers, educators and officers in Tzahal, while also promoting the building and settling of the city of Yerushalayim.

Rav Aviner has become a ubiquitous presence in Israel. He has published hundreds of books and articles, including *Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah* (talks by Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah), *Tal Chermon* on the weekly Torah portion and holidays, and his multi-volume responsa *Shut She'eilat Shlomo*. His talks and responsa appear monthly in the Yeshiva's journal, *Iturei Cohanim*. While his opinions are frequently printed in Israeli newspapers, Rav Aviner also contributes weekly to four parashah sheets,

“Ma’aynei Ha-Yeshu’ah,” “Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah” of Machon Meir, "Rosh Yehudi" and "Olam Katan," which are distributed every Shabbat in shuls throughout Israel. He hosts two weekly radio programs, has a video blog ([www.video.maale.org.il](http://www.video.maale.org.il)), teaches weekly classes and gives talks in many different venues. The yeshiva also sends out weekly teachings of Rav Aviner in Hebrew, English, French and Spanish (to subscribe: [mororly@bezeqint.net](mailto:mororly@bezeqint.net)) and has an English blog which is updated on a daily basis ([www.ravaviner.com](http://www.ravaviner.com)). In addition to these scheduled events, Rav Aviner also makes himself available to hundreds of people from all walks of life who come to him with questions via mail, telephone, fax, e-mail, text messages, his radio show and his video blog Q&A.