



Parashat Yom Kippur 5771

Ask Rav Aviner: mororly@bezeqint.net

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

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Gemar Chatima Tova from Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

On the Haftarah for Minchah of Yom Kippur...

Yonah: The Beloved and Courage Prophet

[The Book of Yonah]

Yonah, a prophet of Hashem, received a Divine command to call for a spiritual awakening in Nineveh, the capital of the huge Kingdom of Ashur. We would think that he would be overjoyed with this amazing challenge: To help an entire empire to repent. But his response is the polar opposite.

As is known, we pray three times a day in the prayer "Aleinu": "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." Our deep aspiration is for all of humanity to find the proper path.

"Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem. He went down to Yafo and found a ship traveling to Tarshish. He paid his fare and boarded it to travel with them to Tarshish from before Hashem" (1:3). The first question which arises 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?

The Radak, Rabbi David Kimchi, explained 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. 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. 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.

But an additional question arises: How then did Moshe Rabbenu prophesy in the land of Egypt and in the desert? 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 outside 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.

Regardless, Yonah was well-aware that Hashem's glory fills the entire world. Therefore, according to the Radvaz, Rabbi David ben Zimra, who lived in Egypt four hundred years ago, Yonah 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 brought 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 (Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 2 #842).

This brings us back to our original question: What did Yonah see that made him refuse to fulfill the Divine order? Rashi explained that Yonah said: The non-Jews are close to repentance (Yonah 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). They 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" (Yonah 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 – explained 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.

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 create 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). 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. Yonah followed in Moshe Rabbenu's footsteps. Our Sages summarize this idea in one brief statement: "Yonah demanded the honor of the son" (Mechilta De-Rabbi Yishmael, Bo, parashah #1). Yonah demanded the honor of the son, i.e. the Nation of Israel. For Israel's sake, he was willing to do anything, even to distance himself from the Master of the Universe.

But, in the end, Hashem was correct. In His great mercy He is willing to accept even partial Teshuvah. If only Nineveh would take a small step towards repentance and Hashem, even if it is fleeting, it would suffice to cancel the harsh punishment which is planned. Yonah learned this idea when he was in the belly of the fish. He repented, and then agreed to fulfill his mission in Nineveh.

We will conclude with an interested historical note. 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. In contrast, upon leaving the fish, Yonah was completely revived, helped the sinners return to Hashem and taught a universal lesson, which applies for all nations and all times.

Rav Aviner in the News:

Leading rabbi joins animal rights group's campaign against kaparot

[www.haaretz.com - By Yair Ettinger]

Ahead of the Yom Kippur holiday, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Israel last week launched its annual information campaign against the ritual slaughter of chickens. That campaign just received a boost from an unexpected source, as one of religious Zionism's most influential rabbis joined the call against the practice of kaparot, in which an individual's transgressions are ceremonially transferred to an animal or inanimate object.

[Rav] Shlomo Aviner, head of Jerusalem's Ateret Yeshiva and rabbi of the settlement of Beit El, has spoken out in the past against the contentious rite. This time, however, he acceded to the SPCA's request and issued a religious ruling that, rather than slaughtering an animal, giving money to the poor is a better method of absolving oneself of transgressions.

"Because this is not a binding obligation but a custom, in light of problems related to kashrut and the suffering of animals, and given the edicts of the aforementioned rabbis, a recommendation must be made to favor performing kaparot through money, by performing the great mitzvah of providing for the needy," [Rav] Aviner wrote, citing religious decrees by rabbinical authorities from various periods throughout Jewish history.

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #10

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

In Birchot Ha-Shachar we bless Hashem who "Gives strength to Israel." Notice that this is the first time in these blessing that we talk about Klal Yisrael, not just human needs. Klal Yisrael has special strength for which we must be grateful. Sometimes this is physical. Other times it is spiritual, for example, when we fight against the Yetzer Ha-Ra. We need this strength as individuals, and to help give this strength to the rest of Klal Yisrael.

Aseret Yemei Teshvah

Amida -1

From Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, we add in the first blessing: "Remember us for life, King who delights in life, and write us in the Book of Life, for your sake Living G-d." Hashem wants life, loves life, and is the Living G-d. He has given us the Torah of Life, which is meant to give us a truly meaningful life. During the Aseret Yemei Teshuva we ask to increase life. We ask Hashem to remember us for life.

This first three blessings of the Amida are all to give praise to Hashem. Only then do we ask Him for things. So what is this addition doing in the first blessing? Why ask for life here? It is because we are not asking for life for our own sake. We ask for it for Hashem's sake. We want to live to make Hashem's Name holy. Therefore, it goes in a blessing where we praise him.

Amida- 2

From Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, instead of saying "Ha-El Ha-Kadosh" (The Holy G-d) in the third blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei we say "Ha-Melech Ha-Kadosh" (The Holy King). Why? During the year, Hashem waits patiently for us. He watches us slip and waits for us to do Teshuvah. And then Rosh Hashanah comes. He emphasizes that he is "Ha-Melech." He sits in judgment, closely following every individual on earth. The time of waiting patiently is over. Hashem expects us to act now. He expects us to do Teshuvah to become better people - better in the way we treat Him and better in the way we treat others. And we all know that there is always room to improve.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

I Did Wrong

I wronged my baby. I got angry with him. "Enough," I yelled, but I was wrong. I felt horrible. I was simply tired and frustrated. I know it is forbidden to become angry with a baby. And even a child. It has no benefit. But at least if I was right, I could have justified myself that I did it for his own good. But in this case, I was to blame. I simply acted improperly.

It is easy to wrong a baby or little child. He does not respond. You are always in an authoritative position. Furthermore, he respects you, considers you an angel, and even considers you G-d. He therefore always thinks he is to blame and that you are right. It is very comforting.

But this time, my baby did not take it. He looked at me with a look of betrayal and burst out with an angry cry. He had a feeling of being right.

Maybe I imagined it. Nonetheless, I hugged him, kissed him and said to him: "I am sorry. I love you. I was tired. I always love you." I do not know if he understood every word, but a smile appeared on his face.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Foreign Workers' Children

Q: Is it permissible to expel foreign workers' and their children from Israel?

A: We must honor the agreements we have with them, not more and not less. We have more than enough foreigners in our Land.

Torah and Humanity

Q: Is it true that there is a contradiction between the Torah and humanity, and one should find the middle path?

A: Incorrect. The Torah includes the highest level of humanity, and contains the solution to any problem.

Homosexual Inclinations

Q: Isn't it denigrating to someone who has homosexual inclinations to say that he can be straightened out through treatment?

A: On the contrary, it shows the greatest value for his pure and strong soul which can overcome anything.

Picture without Permission

Q: Is it permissible to take someone's picture without his permission?

A: Certainly not. Only if you are sure that he agrees (Shut Mishneh Halachot 4:114. See Shut Be-Tzel Ha-Chochmah 4:85

Kosher Medicine

Q: Are pills against heartburn kosher?

A: Medicine which lacks taste is kosher.

Tzitzit for a Child

Q: Is there a problem for a 3-year old to wear ripped Tzitzit?

A: He must wear kosher Tzitzit.

Bride and Groom

Q: Is it permissible for a bride and groom to dance in front of others?

A: G-d forbid. It is forbidden for a woman to dance in front of men, and is it also forbidden for a couple to show affection in front of women (see the book "Gan Na'ul).

Salt and Pepper Shakers

Q: Does one need separate salt and pepper shakers for milchig and fleischig?

A: It is proper since they get dirty.

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: mororly@bezeqint.net

