Yom Kippur Reader

Torah Readings and The Book of Jonah

with Laws and Commentaries

Yom Kippur Reader

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I. Overview

G-d created man and instilled in him free will so that man may choose to serve his Creator and abide by His commandments, thereby to be attached to the Divine will. The Torah provides the guidelines.

In general, abiding by G-d's will is defined a number of times throughout Tanakh. G-d praised Abraham because "he will instruct his children and household after him to observe the way of Hashem, to do righteousness and justice…" (Gen. 18:17-19). "What is it the Lord requires of you, only to do *mishpat*, love *ḥesed*, and walk modestly with your G-d" (Micah 6:8). "But let him who chooses to be praised be praised in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Hashem who does *ḥesed*, *mishpat* and *sedaqah* in the earth, for in these do I desire, declared Hashem" (Jer. 9:23). "*Ḥesed umishpat* observe" (Hosea 12:7).

Since "there is no man on earth…who does not sin" (Qohelet 7:20), G-d granted Israel one day each year, the day of Yom Kippur, to facilitate repentance, to purify everyone and grant them forgiveness and atonement. He established this day because He does not desire the death of the sinners, neither physically or spiritually, but their repenting and living. Indeed, He does not desire the destruction of the world but its flourishing. His desire is that all human society ceases from all unethical and immoral behavior and return to Him. It is the responsibility of the nation of Israel to play a leadership role in accomplishing this. Of course, the decision to repent is in the hands of man, dependent on his exercise of his free will.

The prohibitions of the day of Yom Kippur, the fasting and other hardships, and the prayers, help us acknowledge the reality that we have sinned, that we have not sufficiently thought about our actions, that there is great need for improvement and that we deserve punishment. Most of our waking hours during the twenty-four hours of Yom Kippur should be devoted to prayer, introspection, repentance (*teshubah*) and some time should be made for study of Torah.

II. Ereb Yom Kippur

It is proper for each person to ask forgiveness from anyone he/she may have wronged before the day of Kippur sets in. When one wrongfully harmed another monetarily, it is best to settle before Kippur. When not practical, at least the apology and the commitment to settle should be given to the wronged party before Kippur.

It is a mitzvah to eat well Ereb Yom Kippur.

Some have a practice to make symbolic *kaparah* on Ereb Yom Kippur (or during the few days before it) with chickens, one for each member of the family. Some give a donation to charity in place of chickens. Some, following Shulhan Arukh (Bet Yosef), which specifically and strongly stated that this custom should be eliminated because it looks like the way of idolators, do not engage in this practice at all.

Minha is prayed early so that there should be sufficient time for all to eat and get ready for the holy day before sunset. Talet and tefillin are worn at minha.

After the final berakha of the individual's amida of minha, but before reciting the amida's concluding portion, viduy (acknowledgment and confession of sins) is recited. It is not repeated in hazara.

It is customary to kindle a remembrance candle or a light in or about the synagogue as a memorial for departed members of the family. Remembrance of the departed may serve as inspiration for the living.

It is customary for men to immerse in a mikveh (or natural body of water) on Ereb Kippur with thoughts of repentance and purification in their minds. When one is not available or it is impractical it is appropriate to intend such purification with a shower somewhat longer than usual. Although a shower is invalid for the law of a woman's fulfilling the mitzvah of mikvah after her period, immersing of men is not an actual law.

***Se`uda Hamafseket*:** The final meal before Yom Kippur begins must be completed before sunset, at which time the fast and all halakhot of the day begin. If one completes this meal early it is considered an early acceptance of the fast unless the person stated (or specifically thought) that he/she does not wish to accept the fast yet. When one accepts the fast early, it is understood that all the laws of Yom Kippur take effect for that individual at that time.

Some communities have the custom to light candles before sunset, as before Shabbat and festivals, and some do not. A widespread practice is to light without a berakha.

Men wear a talet for all Yom Kippur prayers, including arbit. One should try to arrive at the synagogue before sunset so as to be able to say the berakha on donning the talet.

The evening service begins with the chanting of *Lecha Keli*. Although the Torah is not read during the evening, the Ark is opened and the Torah is shown to the congregation, to increase the level of inspiration. Seven Torah scrolls are

brought out and *Kal Nidre* is recited three times in the past tense and once in the future tense. It is preferable that this be done before nightfall. The berakha of *Sheheheyanu* (for the arrival of Yom Kippur) is recited before beginning arbit.

III. Yom Kippur and Repentance

Since Yom Kippur, the final day of the Ten Days of Repentance that begin with Rosh Hashanah, is the time of Teshubah for each individual as well as for the community, each individual is responsible to repent and confess any wrongdoing on this day. The rabbis have formulated comprehensive texts of confession that are incorporated in the prayers of the day. These include *viduy hagadol*, a long list of transgressions. Although this list of transgressions includes some that most people undoubtedly did not commit, it is permitted to be recited by all, as it is considered a communal confession. Also, one may be responsible for a transgression that was committed by another due to having played a role in causing it. The ripple effects of a transgression go far and wide.

Yom Kippur secures atonement only for those who have faith in the power of atonement that G-d placed in the day.

Teshubah and Yom Kippur secure atonement for sins between man and G-d only. For sins against one's fellow man there is no atonement until the penitent has compensated the injured party for any loss and gained his forgiveness. One must seek forgiveness from his fellow man even if he had only angered him with words.

One being asked for forgiveness should not be difficult to appease but rather quick to forgive with a sincere heart (of course not speaking of monetary debts). If the injured party is confident that the person requesting forgiveness is insincere, he is not obliged to grant forgiveness.

It is proper that each individual specifically state at the beginning of the evening of Yom Kippur that he/she forgives everyone (excluding monetary debts).

Just as one must repent of sins involving actions, so must one repent of evil dispositions that he/she may have. These may include a tendency to anger quickly, jealousy, overweening pride, greediness, gluttony, etc.

IV. The Four Components of Repentance

1. *Viduy* - confessional: this is acknowledgment and identification (mention) of the sin. When done silently it is appropriate to specify the particular transgression being repented for.
2. The decision to abandon the sinful practice.
3. Having a feeling of regret for having transgressed.
4. A resolution for the future. In making a resolution, it is proper to devise a strategy to cope with the temptation that may arise and "build a fence" around the transgression.

V. Prohibitions

All work that is forbidden on Shabbat is forbidden on Yom Kippur. The prohibitions specific to Yom Kippur are:

a) eating and drinking.
b) washing the body.
c) application of ointments to the body.
d) wearing leather shoes.
e) marital relations.

Sick people and women who are pregnant, nursing or who recently gave birth (after the first three days) are not automatically exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur as is the case with the minor fasts. Exemption is based on there

being at least a minor possibility that fasting would endanger life. Medical experts have stated that in normal pregnancies there is no danger in fasting, although in the later months it may induce labor. A medical and halakhic authority should be consulted in individual cases.

A woman in labor on Yom Kippur should eat.

One who must eat or drink on Yom Kippur for medical or health reasons should do so in as limited a fashion as possible. If it does not increase the danger to do so, it is proper to eat less than an ounce of food at a time. After the passage of a ten-minute period from having started, the individual may once again eat less than an ounce of food, and repeat this process as often as necessary. Drinking should be limited to one and a half ounces of liquid in a five-minute period. If necessary, the interval for drinking may be just long enough that it is not considered the same drinking.

One who eats or drinks on Yom Kippur does not recite *qiddush*.

Washing the body on Yom Kippur should be limited to the fingers. *Netilat Yadayim* is up to the knuckles. It is permitted to wipe away the sediment from one's eyes in the morning. After using the bathroom, or if one has touched a covered part of the body, one should wash up to the knuckles. However, if a part of the body became very sweaty or dirty, it is permitted to wash in a limited manner, for the essential prohibition of washing the body is when done for pleasure.

Application of a spray or solid deodorant to prevent body odor is permitted.

An individual who is distressed when not brushing teeth or using mouthwash, may do so in a careful, limited manner.

Non-leather sneakers that have non-structural leather ornamentation are permitted. Leather garments other than shoes are permitted.

VI. Prayers

On both the night and day of Yom Kippur, the phrase '*Barukh Shem Kebod Malkhuto Le`olam Va`ed*' is recited audibly upon reciting Shema.

In Birkhot Hashahar, the blessing of *She`asah Li Qol Sorki* is omitted. Although the appreciation expressed in this berakha is general, it was established to be recited in conjunction with the putting on of leather shoes. Since on this day we do not wear such shoes we omit it. On other days, if one does not wear leather shoes, he still recites this berakha as they could be worn and as others are wearing them.

The Torah reading for *shahrit* is the portion that describes the Yom Kippur service in the sanctuary. Another portion about Yom Kippur is read from a second Sefer Torah. The haftarah is the portion from the prophet Yesha`ya that criticizes superficial repentance on a fast day, describing true repentance and calling on the nation of Israel to comport ethically.

During hazara (repetition of the amida) of musaf, the hazzan recites the *Aboda,* a description of the Yom Kippur service by the high priest in the days of the Temple. The Ark is opened for this prayer.

The Torah reading at minha is the portion exhorting Israel to refrain from immoral conduct, particularly sexual

impropriety. The haftarah reading is *Sefer Yonah*, which deals in depth with the subject of repentance and G-d's compassion on all people, even sinners.

The shofar is not blown during Yom Kippur proper; it is blown after sunset toward the conclusion of the day. The blowing of the shofar does not signal the end of the day, as the day continues until the "stars appear," approximately thirty-five minutes after sunset in the New York region.

There are five *amidot* recited on Yom Kippur. In addition to musaf, *ne`ila* is recited after *minha*. This is the "closing" prayer, also so-called in reference to the closing of the Heavenly Gates that are especially opened on Yom Kippur.

The *Aron Haqodesh* is opened at the beginning of *ne`ila* and is kept open for the duration of this important prayer.

Birkat Kohanim is not recited in minha, but is recited in *ne`ila*. It must be said before sunset.

It is customary to recite "the long viduy" during Yom Kippur. There is a version of the *viduy hagadol* for the positive commandments and a version for the negative ones. Some congregations have the custom to recite the version for the negative precepts in arbit and the version for the positive precepts during musaf.

At the conclusion of Yom Kippur habdalah is recited. The candle must be lit from a flame that was burning all of Yom Kippur and "rested." The berakha on besamim (fragrant spices) is not recited. When Kippur occurs on Shabbat, habdalah may be recited on a candle lit from a fire produced at the moment.

Two T'shuvah Lectures

Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik

The Rambam in *Hilkhot T'shuvah* (Perek I, Halakhah 2) deals with the atonement achieved by the *Sa'ir Hamishtalai'ach*. He prefaces the discussion of the particular laws with a seemingly superfluous prologue: "The *Sa'ir Hamishtalai'ach*, since it is an atonement for all of Israel, the high priest recites *viduy* (confession) over it in the name of all of Israel." Since this law is an explicit verse in the Torah (Lev. Chap. 16, Verse 21), the question arises: Why does the Rambam quote this rather obvious law in this context? It would seem that in this law we can find the key to the efficacy of the *Sa'ir* whose particulars are described in the remainder of the *Halakhah*.

To resolve these difficulties, the concept of "*tzibbur*," of "*Klal Yisrael*," must first be analyzed. A *tzibbur* is more than just a large conglomeration of individuals. It is a collective whole, a mysterious, invisible unit to which every Jew belongs. This is not only a Kabalistic and Chassidic truism, but it has clear *halakhic* interpretations as well. The Ramban in *Berakhot* (Chap. 3) says that even if all Jews get together and donate a sacrifice, it has the laws of a sacrifice of partners (e.g. it requires *semikha*. See *Menachot* 92a). Only if it comes from "*T'rumat Halishkah*," the collective fund belonging to the *tzibbur* as a whole, can a sacrifice be considered one of *Klal Yisrael* as a unit, rather than one of many individuals.

In light of this distinction, the Rambam's introduction in *Halakhah* 2 becomes meaningful. Since the *Sa'ir* is a *"korban tzibbur,"* the atonement which it attains is a collective one. Thus, an individual is not forgiven directly, but the atonement is granted to the *tzibbur* as a whole, and

each individual partakes of this atonement as a member of the collective *klal*. The reason the Rambam mentions this idea here is that in it relies the uniqueness of the *Sa'ir*. All other means of atonement are directed to the individual, and as such are totally ineffectively without *T'shuvah*. The *Sa'ir*, however, atones for the *tzibbur* as a whole, and therefore is not dependent upon *T'shuvah* of the individual.

This collective atonement, however, applies only to an individual who belongs to the *klal*. If one's connection to the *klal* is severed, then he cannot be granted the atonement which the *Sa'ir* achieves for the *klal*. Therefore, if one is deserving of *karet*, and is thereby excluded from the Jewish nation *(V'nikhrat mai'amo),* or if one is guilty of *mitat bet din*, which is a physical expulsion from the klal, he is denied the atonement of the *klal*. The apparent contradiction between Halakhah 2 and Halakhah 4 is now resolved. Immediate forgiveness based on *T'shuvah* alone depends on the severity of the sin, and all violations of negative commandments are considered severe. The ineffectiveness of the *Sa'ir*, however, does not depend on the severity of the sin per se, but on the destruction of the link between the sinner and *Klal Yisrael*, and this only applies to *karet* and *mitat bet din*.

Having resolved the question regarding the *Sa'ir*, the problem of Yom Kippur may be analyzed. Is atonement on Yom Kippur granted to each Jew individually, or does God forgive the *klal* and each individual is forgiven as a member of the *klal*? The answer is found in the *brakhah* recited on Yom Kippur*: melekh mochail solai'ach la'avonotainu,* God Who forgives our sins – as individuals*; va'avonot amo bait Yisrael*, and the sins of the house of Israel, as a collective unit. The duality of the atonement of Yom Kippur is expressed in the Rambam as well *(Hilkhot T'shuvah, Perek 2 Halakhah 7*): Yom Kippur is a time of *T'shuvah* for the

individual and the large group, and it is the culmination of forgiveness for Israel. Thus each Jew is granted direct atonement as an individual, and indirect atonement through the channel of the general *kaparah* granted to the *klal*.

It has already been mentioned that the Rambam considers *T'shuvah* to be indispensable for the atonement of Yom Kippur. According to Rebbe (Yoma 85b), however, Yom Kippur itself atones without *T'shuvah* as well. It seems inconceivable, though, that the institution of Yom Kippur can exist without *T'shuvah*. A restatement of this problem is found in *Tosafot Yeshanim (Yoma 85b)*: According to Rebbe, that Yom Kippur atones without *T'shuvah*, why was the temple destroyed? Weren't all our sins forgiven every year, notwithstanding the wickedness of the people? The answer given by *Tosafot* is that Yom Kippur without *T'shuvah* provides only an incomplete atonement. The meaning of this answer can be defined along the lines mentioned earlier. Rebbe agrees that the individual *kaparah* granted on Yom Kippur depends on *T'shuvah*, like all other individual *kaparot*. Thus *T'shuvah* is an essential element of Yom Kippur even according to Rebbe. But an incomplete *kaparah* is attained without *T'shuvah* because Yom Kippur also has a collective *kaparah*; one who spurns this *kaparah* by not repenting is denied even the collective *kaparah*, whereas the *Sa'ir*, which is exclusively a collective *kaparah*, does not depend upon *T'shuvah* at all.

We have spoken of a *kaparat haklal*, in which case an individual achieves forgiveness merely by association with the *klal*. The only exceptions are those guilty of *karet* or *mitat bet din* in the case of the *Sa'ir*, and atheists, those who scoff at the Torah, and those who remain uncircumcised in the case of Yom Kippur according to Rebbe (Yoma 85b). Yet though every Jew, except in these instances, belongs to

the *klal*, an individual should strengthen his link to the *klal*, and this can be accomplished in two ways.

The first is faith in the *klal*. We all have perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. Yet the Rambam *(T'shuvah: VII, 5)* says that the redemption is contingent upon *T'shuvah*. It logically follows, then, that one's faith in the Messiah can be no stronger than one's faith in the eventual *T'shuvah* of *Klal Yisrael*, so that the latter also becomes a cardinal principle of faith. Thus the Rambam concludes that halakhah: The Torah has promised that *Yisrael* will eventually do *T'shuvah*. And one way aligning oneself with the *klal* is by believing, despite the many physical and spiritual difficulties, in the future of the *klal*.

The second way takes into account the fact that *Klal Yisrael* is not limited to those alive at given time, but includes all Jews from *Avraham* until the end of days. Thus on Yom Kippur we ask forgiveness through the medium of *Yizkor*, as well as by confessing our ancestor's sins *(anachnu va'avoteinu chatanu)*. For even though a dead person cannot be granted individual *Kaparah*, the *kaparat haklal* includes all Jews in all generations. In view of this fact, one strengthens his link with the *klal* by joining the past and future of the Jews. And the best way of doing this is by observing and conveying the Jewish tradition, particularly the very Torah *Shebe'al Peh*, which was given on Yom Kippur.

The T'shuvah Process

How does the process of atonement (*Kapparah)* vis-à-vis repentance (*T'shuvah*) differ today from the process of atonement during the existence of the Holy Temple? For an answer to this question, we must examine the text of the Rambam (Hilkhot T'shuvah 1:4). In Halakhah 1, the Rambam describes the appropriate sacrifices for particular

sins and adds that those who are required to offer their particular sacrifices cannot receive atonement through their sacrifices until they repent. Similarly, in the description of the atonement brought about through the Biblical scapegoat, the Rambam stresses the atonement is only under the condition that the sinner repents. It is clear that repentance during the time of the Holy Temple was necessary in the atonement process, but it was not the agent that brought about the atonement. Rather, the appropriate sacrifices were agents, while repentance was only a condition necessary for atonement.

In Halakha 3, the Rambam explains the nature of repentance today. "Today, since we don't have a holy Temple nor the Altar of Atonement, there is (there remains) only repentance." The explanation of this Rambam and of what follows in the rest of Halakhot 2 and 4 is that repentance is no longer a condition in the atonement but rather the agent itself. Repentance with the essence of Yom Kippur (*Etzomo Shel Yom Kippur*) grants us our *Kapparah.*

In light of the above analysis, a puzzling statement of Rabbi Akiva (Yuma 86b) can be understood. Rabbi Akiva said, "Fortunate are you O Israel. Before whom do you purify yourself, before the one who purifies you, before your Father in Heaven." What was Rabbi Akiva teaching us? The answer lies in realizing that Rabbi Akiva was addressing himself to the period after the destruction of the Temple. The Jewish people, who had identified the atonement process of Yom Kippur with the atonement process of its particular sacrifices and the service of the High Priest, could not understand how they would achieve purity and forgiveness without the Temple.

Rabbi Akiva explained that atonement could be accomplished without the sacrifices and service of the High

Priest. Indeed the Torah does mention and require all the sacrifices for atonement. However, this is a requirement only during the existence of the Temple. Today though, without the Temple, atonement is realized through repentance and the essence of Yom Kippur. We can further understand why Rabbi Akiva referred to God as, "Your Father in Heaven." While the Temple was standing, a Jew could not approach God alone and achieve atonement. He needed to follow a strict set of operations, performed through an intermediary – a High Priest. God stood at a distance from man as a king who could not be reached by individuals. However, today, after the destruction of the Temple, man is able to approach God directly, and God without intermediates purifies and forgives man. Hence, God is referred to as "Your Father in Heaven!"

The process of redemption during the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as explained in Mishneh Torah (Hilkhot T'shuvah XII: 7, 8 and III: 3, 4) requires the repenter first (from Rosh Hashanah) to increase in his performance of commandments and good deeds until Yom Kippur, and then to emerge in soul-searching repentance. Upon reflection, it would deem that the order should be reversed, first repentance and then good deeds. Why is it that we are told to start with the increase in performance of commandments and good deeds?

Actually, both of these approaches of repentance are correct, but are applicable to different types of people. The sinner (referred to in the prayer book as *Rishei Aretz*) whose cause of sin lies in his arrogance and unwillingness to bend his will before the Almighty cannot start his return to God with good deeds. He must first reorient his thinking and humble himself before God. On the other hand, a sinner (referred to in the prayer book as *Bnei Bassar*), who sins because he is spineless and has no self control, who serves

God and not only God, but anyone or anything that leads him, may start his repentance with good deeds. He is aware of God's superiority but finds it difficult to follow God's ways. The good deeds purify him in readiness for his complete *T'shuvah* on Yom Kippur.

In our repentance process God looks upon us all as "spineless sinners" rather than as "arrogant sinners" and requires us to start our repentance with good deeds and the performance of commandments.

Yom Kippur, then, expresses itself as a day of soul-searching repentance in contrast to Rosh Hashanah which requires us to immerse ourselves in performing God's commandments and good deeds. Moreover, according to the Rambam, it seems that Yom Kippur today is effective in granting us atonement only if we are entirely repentant, rather than repentant of particular sins. The Rambam says (Hilkhot T'shuvah I:3): "The essence of the day (Yom Kippur) atones for all repenters." A person must be a repenter in total. This, too, does not distinguish Yom Kippur today from the Yom Kippur during the time of the Temple. In the time of the Temple, forgiveness could be granted for sins without necessitating forgiveness for others, since different sacrifices were offered for different sins.

To complete the concept of the Repentance-Atonement process we must investigate Hilkhot T'shuvah VII:4, 5, 6. In Hilkhot 4 and 6 the Rambam describes the great purifying power of repentance. A person who, before repenting, was detestable in the eyes of God, is, after repenting, beloved and cherished by God. Halakhah 5 seemingly interrupts the idea of Halakhot 4 and 6 by expressing the link between Repentance and Redemption. The question arises of itself: Why did the Rambam insert the halakhah of repentance-redemption between the

Halakhot which describe the cathartic powers of repentance? To find the link between these two ideas, we must understand the nature of redemption itself.

The redemption mentioned by the Rambam is the redemption of the third and final Temple. How does this redemption distinguish itself from the redemption experienced during the building of the second Temple? The Rambam in Mishneh Torah (Hilkhot Melakhim XI:1) states that the future redemption will bring us back to the state of being that existed during the first Temple.

During the first Temple the consuming fire for the sacrifices was sent from heaven; there existed the *Urim V'Tumim* and the majesty of God was manifest. So will the situation be in the time of the third Temple. The second Temple, however, did not mark a complete reconstruction of the original Temple. The *Urim V'Tumim* was gone. An imprint of exile remained.

The repentance process also has two types, one more complete than the other. In one type, the repenter still remains with an imprint of his sin. As a healthy man who has been made lame and finds his way back to health may still walk with a limp, so to does the repenter remain tarnished by his sin.

There exists, however, a second type of repentance that leads the repenter not to the level of the second Temple but to the level of the third. After the hard battle of returning to God, the repenter stands erect without the slightest trace of sin; he is closer to God than ever before.

Now the order of the Halakhot in the Rambam becomes clear. Indeed, at the very point where the Rambam describes the great cathartic powers of repentance, the

Rambam includes the redemption-repentance link, the reason being to indicate that the higher level of repentance is indeed accessible. This is the repentance that Yom Kippur affords and requires of us all to repent in total and be restored close to God as in days of old.

Return O Israel!

(The Haftarah of Shabbat Shuvah)

Nehama Leibowitz

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The Scapegoat

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

At the heart of the service of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement was a ritual that has added a key word to the vocabulary of the West: the *scapegoat*. On the most solemn day of the year, the High Priest – after confessing his own sins and those of his household – undertook a ritual to achieve expiation for the most serious sins of the community. He took two goats, identical in appearance, and cast lots over them. One was sacrificed to God as a sin offering. Over the other, he made confession for the sins of the people. It was then sent into the wilderness, to 'Azazel':

> The goat will thus carry all the sins away to a desolate area when it is sent to the desert. (Lev. 16: 22).

Maimonides' explanation, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, is compelling:

> There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress people with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent – as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible. (Guide III: 46)

Expiation requires some ritual, a dramatic representation of the removal of guilt and impurity from the congregation. The rite was a cathartic experience for the community. Maimonides, the rationalist, is here forced to recognize the affective, emotional dimension of the collective experience of atonement, the need for a physical act to symbolize a metaphysical process. The two goats - one dedicated to God as an offering in the Sanctuary, the other sent out into the

wilderness - symbolized the stark alternatives of order and chaos, Divine service on the one hand, sin and anarchy on the other.

Though the ritual has not been performed for 2000 years, it is significant that two substitutes eventually made their way back into Jewish custom: *tashlikh*, the 'casting away' of sins on Rosh Hashanah, and *kapparot*, 'atonements', on the eve of Yom Kippur. Both are symbolic gestures, physical enactments of relinquishing guilt. It seems that for many people, the abstract idea of forgiveness is made real only when given some tangible expression in dramatic action.

The idea of the scapegoat has reappeared in contemporary thought through the work of René Girard, one of the pioneering theorists of the connection between religion and violence. Girard's thesis is that violence is at the heart of religious ritual. The primary ritual is sacrifice, and the most fundamental form of sacrifice is the scapegoat.

Religion, he argues, is born in the attempt to escape from the deadly circle of retaliation in societies that lack a judicial system and the impartial process of the law:

> Vengeance professes to be an act of reprisal, and every reprisal calls for another reprisal… Vengeance, then, is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body. There is the risk that the act of vengeance will initiate a chain reaction whose consequences will quickly prove fatal to any society of modest size. The multiplication of reprisals instantaneously puts the very existence of the society in jeopardy, and that is why it is universally proscribed. (Girard, Violence and the Sacred, pp. 14-15)

The solution is to deflect internal violence by directing it outward against a victim - someone who stands outside the community and its protection, and can therefore be killed without fear of reprisal (ancient Athens kept alive a number of people to be available to be sacrificed to avert impending threat to the city: the victim was known as the pharmakos). By charging his death with sanctity, a combination of awe and exaltation, the violent emotions of the community are purged. Catharsis takes place. Peace returns. Order is restored. The victim has been made the scapegoat.

The death of the individual has something of the quality of tribute levied for the continued existence of the collectivity. A human being dies, and the solidarity of the survivors is enhanced by his death. The surrendered victim dies so that the entire community, threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order. (Violence and the Sacred, p. 255)

This, of course, calls for myth. Some story has to be told, in which the outsider - ritually sacrificed - is held to be responsible for all the evils that have befallen the group.

Ultimately, the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of society…. There is only one person responsible for everything, one who is absolutely responsible, and he will be responsible for the cure because he is already responsible for the sickness. (Girard, The Scapegoat, pp. 15,43)

Once we grasp the significance of the scapegoat as a solution to crisis within the group, we begin to understand why it is not just an ancient phenomenon, but one that has continued throughout history to the present. Faced with

problems that it cannot solve, a group ensures its psychic survival by projecting its inner conflicts onto an external cause, held to be responsible for the plight of the community. Hence the demonization that has time and again led to pogroms, massacres, and attempted genocides. Societies find it easier to blame a scapegoat than to face their own problems honestly and openly.

Only against this background can we fully understand the institution of the scapegoat in biblical Israel. It was a protest against human sacrifice, widespread in the ancient world and still, in quite different forms, alive today in the form of conspiracy theories, terror, suicide bombings and ethnic conflict. Two features of the high priest's ritual were crucial: [1] that the sacrifice was an animal, not a person, and [2] that it was not an occasion for denying responsibility by blaming the victim, but to the contrary an acceptance of responsibility in the context of repentance and atonement. The second point was fundamental to the concept of *teshubah* as it developed in post-biblical Israel. Thus Jews were able to survive the loss of the Temple and the service of the High Priest. In place of sacrifice and the scapegoat came the idea that by acknowledging our sins, expressing our remorse, and committing ourselves to act differently in the future, we are able – through Divine forgiveness – to free ourselves from the burden of guilt and begin again.

The irony is that the ritual designed to *eliminate* scapegoating in the modern sense has become, in the Western imagination, the source of the idea of the scapegoat itself. That is an error. The biblical scapegoat was precisely not a scapegoat in Girard's sense. Projecting violence within the group onto an innocent outsider, who is held guilty and killed to preserve the group itself, is one of the most vicious ideas ever to disfigure the human mind.

Against this, Judaism held forth the alternative – a penitential culture in which we are able to accept responsibility for our own failings, because of Divine forgiveness and the human capacity to change.

Aikido, Yom Kippur and Sukkot

Rabbi Francis Nataf

Perhaps I am the only one, but I could not help but reflect on what we were actually doing when we invested many hours in Elul and Tishrei asking G-d to forgive us. Between the *avinu malkenu*s (our Father, our King), the selichot (penitential prayers) and the vidduim (confessions), it was amazing just how many times we said various permutations of the same basic request.

As with the purpose of prayer in general, begging G-d to forgive us does not seem to make a lot of sense: He knows exactly what to do, and certainly does not need our requests in order to do it. In fact, much has been written on the paradoxical nature of prayer, even leaving one seemingly exasperated Jewish philosopher, the great R. Yosef Albo (Ikarim 4:16) to conclude with the very philosophical rejoinder of "What can I tell you, it works" (my paraphrase).

So too it is with repentance. We know what we need to do, and no doubt G-d will forgive us if we do it. However if we do not do it, as our Sages (Ta'anit 16) beautifully illustrate, our calls to G-d are as if we are holding on to an impure animal while purifying ourselves in a mikveh - such purification obviously does not work. If we have no intention of repenting, our cries to G-d are empty and of little effect. But then, why do we cry and plead in shul as if G-d's decision should depend on how loud or how often we have cried out for forgiveness?

While R. Albo's answer is not the only one and many other fascinating approaches to prayer have been put forward, I would like to suggest a possible insight from the East.

I know very little about the East, but in college I briefly studied what seemed to be the most philosophical of martial arts, Aikido. With the risk of doing to Aikido what Rabbi Wein once said could be done to physics, by summarizing it all under the song "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", I was able to cull some very profound wisdom from the teachings of this martial art, that has stayed with me until today. The underlying principle of Aikido is to go with someone else's force as opposed to trying to use one's own force, defensively or offensively. In other words, rather than striking one's opponent, one should neutralize him, by pulling him towards the direction of their own blows, thereby going with the preexisting flow of power.

Similar ideas actually exist in Rav Kook's explanation of what he calls "natural Teshuva" and also in the Maharal's explanation of the law of false witnesses (edim zomemim). Yet, I find the idea most graphically and simply explained in the practice of Aikido.

It would appear that our repentance creates the Divine energy to forgive us, and somehow that energy is further brought down by our prayers. Somehow, our prayers take the energy that is already in motion and pull it forward into its most complete form. As with Aikido, prayer allows us to maximize the benefit of a preexisting force outside of ourselves. As in Aikido, without the preexisting force nothing exists. If we are not worthy of forgiveness, there is nothing for prayer to pull out.

We are forgiven either way, but when we add prayer to our repentance, it gives us a partnership into the actual Divine forgiveness, going beyond our participation through the repentance that elicits it. Through our partial ownership of our own forgiveness, we are able to internalize it and appreciate it better. (The Sages allude to this concept, when

they say that a person would rather have much less of his own produce than the produce of someone else.)

Allowing us to have a share in G-d's actions is how He creates partnership with the Jewish people. What is true of prayer is even truer of Torah study: The Torah could have been given as a closed book. Instead, it was created as an open book, requiring interpretation. He did this in order to invite us into a holy partnership with Him. As least as much a paradox as prayer, the creation of partnership between man and G-d is a central motif in Judaism.

The Sukkah is G-d's dwelling. We can only live in it when we have gone through an intense process of partnership with G-d. Otherwise we can only be His guests. Only after the prayer of a Yom Kippur can we have the audacity to be at home in G-d's dwelling. The true test of our repentance then may well be how we feel at home in the Sukkah.

Yom Kippur and the Book of Jonah

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

One of the highlights of the Yom Kippur liturgy is the reading of the Book of Jonah, a small book of four chapters that contains a world of philosophy. Undoubtedly the major message of Jonah is likewise the major message of Yom Kippur, so that the proper understanding of the former will most certainly illuminate the latter.

G-d comes to Jonah, son of Amitai, sending him to call the people of Ninveh to repentance. Jonah refuses to do so, and believes he can escape the G-d of the heavens of the earth by sailing to the sea. The central issue of the Book of Jonah is why the prophet should have found a mission to Ninveh so objectionable. We must remember that Ninveh is the capital city of Assyria and Assyria was then the archenemy of Israel. Indeed, Assyria defeated the ten tribes and banished them into exile in the 8th century B.C.E. Jonah cannot understand why G-d is interested in Assyria's repentance. After all, as long as the Jews have more merits than the Assyrians, the chances of an Israeli victory in battle are far greater. Hence Jonah seeks to escape G-d by boarding a ship bound for Tarshish.

A raging storm develops at sea, and a drawing of lots makes it clear that Jonah is responsible for the storm. It is fascinating to note that water is both the major symbol of the Book of Jonah as well as the major symbol of the Tishrei period of festivals. Water is both the symbol of life as well as of destruction. The Bible opens "and the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters" and no life can grow without the presence of water. At the same time the Bible tells us right before its description of the life giving waters that "there was darkness on the face of the tehom",

usually translated as the depth of the tavernous waters of the netherworld. It was after all the waters of the flood, which threatened to destroy the world.

At the same time, the Mishnah tells us that the Festival of Sukkot is when G-d judges our merit for the life giving rain, which enables fruit and vegetation to provide sustenance for the coming year. Rain is therefore a symbol of G-d's gracious bounty, His purification of His children on the Day of Forgiveness. As the prophet Yezekiel says in words, which we repeat again and again during the Yom Kippur penitential prayers, "And I shall sprinkle upon you the waters of purification and you shall become pure." Hence the festival of Shemini Asseret, in which we thank G-d for rain, has a double meaning: G-d's waters bring physical sustenance as well as spiritual purity, the combination of the two bringing to redemption. It goes even one step deeper. We begin giving G-d praise as the One whom "causes the winds to blow and the rains to flow" on Shemini Asseret – and these words of praise are incorporated in the Amidah blessing of the G-d "Who causes the dead to live again." G-d's purifying waters can even revive us from death and bring us eternal life.

Jonah is cast overboard into the raging waters. Has challenged G-d, endeavored to escape the Divine mission, and is therefore worthy of death. G-d, however, in His infinite compassion provides a whale - a creature of the water - to follow Jonah and bring him back to life. In Jonah's own words "I called, in my distress, to G-d and He answered me from the belly of the grave I cried out. You heard my voice. You cast me into the depth of the heart of the sea….your waves passed over me….yet You lifted my life from the pit O Lord my G-d" (Jonah 2:3-7).

The waters almost destroyed Jonah and the waters in the form of a water-creature sent by G-d saved his life. G-d is trying to teach the crucial lesson that Assyria, who has been so evil and destructive, can and must make a complete turnaround if the world is to be redeemed. And G-d is also teaching that He, G-d, is willing to overlook the evil Assyria has committed if she will indeed repent. Jonah refuses to accept this. He is after all the son of Amitai, a name that is derived from *emet*, truth. Truth demands that evil never be overlooked; evil must be punished. This is precisely how Jonah explains why he refused G-d's mission "…This is why I hastened to flee to Tarshish; I knew that you are a gracious and merciful G-d slow to anger abundant in loving kindness and forgiving of evil." (Jonah 4: 2) This is not the G-d in whom I want to believe, the G-d who described Himself earlier to Moses as the G-d who is "abundant in loving kindness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). But Jonah has forgotten that his first name means dove, and that just as the dove was saved from the flood so was he, Jonah, undeservedly saved from the raging waters. G-d is trying to teach him that the G-d of compassion will bestow His life giving purity even upon those who have sinned.

On Yom Kippur each of us descend into the "waters of death". We wear the white reminiscent of shrouds, we remove ourselves from all physical necessities and pleasures such as food, drink, and sex, and we wear non-leather shoes of the mourner. For whom are we mourning? We are mourning for ourselves who have died because of our sins.

However G-d in his compassion returns us to life on Yom Kippur, reborn and purified. G-d sprinkles upon us His life giving waters "because on this day you shall be forgiven of all your sins; before G-d shall you stand pure." All of us experience the death and the rebirth of Jonah. As the final

mishnah in Yoma says, “how fortunate are you O Israel! Before whom are you purified, and who purifies you? Our Father in Heaven.”

Reflections on the Book of Jonah

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

1. Backdrop

The Book of Jonah – a short and concise work of forty-eight verses – addresses a major theological issue and contains several sub-themes and messages of great import. As human personality, particularly as concerns one's relationship with G-d and His ways, is immensely complex and dynamic, comprehending it as regards a particular individual is greatly dependent on life context. Accordingly, the Bible does not generally transmit its views on such matters through rigid assertions. It rather does so by way of narrative and conversation, leaving room for subtle distinctions and nuances. *Sefer Yonah* is unsurpassed in this respect.

Hashem instructs Yonah ben Amitai to go to Nineveh and call out regarding it [that it will soon be destroyed] "for their evil has risen before Me" (Jon. 1:2). Nineveh was one of the foremost cities of the ancient Near East, at one point the capital of Assyria, a nation that had been a major world power for centuries. G-d decided to punish this leading city for its extreme wrongdoing and Yonah was selected to inform its populace of the impending disaster, thus providing them an opportunity to repent from their evil ways and avert destruction.

Surely it is significant to our understanding of this work that Yonah is the prophet mentioned in the Book of Kings in conjunction with the extraordinary military successes of the expansionist king Yarob`am ben Yoash (ca. 785-745 B.C.E.). Yarob`am was the king "who restored Israel's borders from Lebo-Hamat (about fifty miles north of Damascus) to the sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea), in

accordance with the words of Hashem, G-d of Israel, spoken through His servant Yonah ben Amitai the prophet" (II Kings 14:25). Yarob`am was an evil-doer in Hashem's eyes, one who "did not depart from all the sins of Yarob`am ben Nabat, who had caused Israel to sin" (v. 24). The tremendous success of this great evildoer was because "Hashem saw the affliction of Israel, that it was extremely bitter, וְאֶפֶס עָצוּר וְאֶפֶס עָזוּב (without a supporter or sustainer), and there were none to help Israel; And Hashem had not declared to blot out Israel's name from under heaven, so He saved them through Yarob`am ben Yoash" (vv. 26-27).

This Divine intervention on behalf of a sinful Israel provided Yonah a first-hand experience of undeserved Divine compassion on an unrepentant nation. (Such undeserved Divine compassion, when the alternative might have been destruction of the nation, was predicted in *Parashat Ha'azinu* in the statement that describes Hashem manifesting His merciful nature toward Israel when it actually deserved the worst (Deut. 32:27 ff). Some key similar terminology is employed in both passages.) Yonah, described in the account of Yarob`am ben Yoash as Hashem's "servant," undoubtedly had tried to reform the king and the nation from their evil ways with frustrating results, his rebukes rejected and his warnings scoffed at.

Yonah's contemporaries Amos and Hoshea relate specific details about the corruption of the king, the wealthy classes and the priests that accompanied the expansion and prosperity of Yarob`am ben Yoash's reign, their exploitation of the poor and their debauchery. We will cite a number of excerpts from Amos that illustrate the point:

> For three transgressions of Israel, for four, I will not reverse it, because they sell out the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes….the way of the humble they pervert, a man and his father go to the

> same maiden….you ordered the prophets 'Do not prophesy' (Amos 2:6-12). They know not how to do right, declares Hashem, they store corruption and plunder in their palaces (3:10).…who defraud the poor, crush the needy (4:1).…who turn justice to wormwood (5:7)….They hate him who rebukes at the gate, and abhor him who speaks with integrity.…you impose a tax burden upon the poor and take a [hefty] portion of grain from him….enemies of the righteous, takers of bribes that turn aside the needy in the gate (5:10-12)…Who lie on ivory beds, stretched on their couches, eating the choicest of the flock…they sing along with the harp, like David they consider their musical instruments; who drink from wine bowls… but they are not grieved for the destruction of Joseph…(6:4-6) ….[the priest told him] "at Bethel do not prophesy again" (7:13).…to make the ephah small (while selling) and the sheqel large (in receiving payment), perverting scales of deceit (8:5).

Utterly detesting such practices, G-d issued many warnings of coming doom if the nation did not repent. Eventually, regarding the unrepentant kingdom, He declared, "I will destroy it from upon the face of the earth, but I will not totally wipe out the House of Jacob" (Amos 9:8), depicting restoration and rebuilding of the nation for the remnant that will be saved.

One can imagine how difficult it must have been for Yonah, Hashem's servant, to receive prophecies from Him and transmit them to the thoroughly sinful king, informing him that if he proceeded on one or another campaign he would be victorious. And yet, the prophet had to witness the enormous prosperity and consequent pride engendered by Yarob'am's many conquests. One wonders: as the prophet who conveyed the optimistic messages, was Yonah required

to participate in victory celebrations – celebrations, after all, of the fulfillment of Hashem's prophecy and favorable intervention – and extend blessings for the king, the royal family and the court, despite the fact that he cannot have had anything but utter contempt for their behavior? Did they maintain a facade of appropriate commitment, superficially accommodating their heritage as well as Yonah? And Yarob`am ben Yoash reigned for forty-one years!

Yonah may very well have been extremely troubled in observing the remarkable degree of mercy G-d extended to the wicked, affording a sinful kingdom an undeserved yet prosperous reprieve from its destruction.

2. Chapter 1 - Independence of the Prophet

Given this background, we have some insight into why Yonah was totally unreceptive to Hashem's charge to go to Nineveh and attempted to evade it. (*Sefer Yonah* does not provide any explanation as to his reason until he opens a window into his thinking in the early part of Chapter 4. We will discuss that passage in due course.) But it is clear that Yonah is a man of integrity, deeply committed to his principles, and he does not believe in the appropriateness of the assignment G-d is asking from of him. He decides to flee from remaining in the Divine presence rather than be forced to comply with an order he does not believe in. He goes to Jaffa, a city that possibly was not then under Israel's hegemony, perhaps intending to escape Hashem's more pronounced sphere of attention, based on His Covenant with Israel, and boards a ship to Tarshish, a destination in the opposite direction of Assyria.

The fact that Yonah struggled mightily against accepting the mission Hashem chose to send him on did not affect his concurrent recognition of Hashem's sovereignty and

omnipotence. He remained steadily committed to Him in all spheres other than the specific area connected to the assignment he was resisting.

G-d subjected the ship to a prodigious, life-threatening storm from which the sailors could not extricate themselves. When all aboard were praying, Yonah descended to the hull and fell into a deep sleep, for he had no doubt as to what was happening. He was determined not to yield to the pressure. Somehow, irrationally, he was hoping to escape his predicament, taking refuge in "hibernation."

After praying to their gods and discarding cargo to no avail, the sailors cast lots hoping to discover who might be the cause of the crisis. Yonah was singled out. Upon being questioned by the fearful sailors he told them his story. He relished the opportunity to inspire these polytheistic believers with his declaration of commitment to Hashem, G-d of the heavens, creator of the sea and dry land, who brought about the storm because of him. He told them they should cast him overboard and the sea would calm down. His explanation and the extraordinary events they witnessed resulted in their conversion to the service of Hashem.

Despite Yonah's refusal to accept His command, G-d recognized the qualities of His conflicted servant and had a deep, abiding interest in educating him to more fully appreciate His ways of governance. The storm represents an aspect of His nurturing in Yonah a deeper apprehension of His sovereignty; the wind and sea proclaim that there is no escape from He who is master of all the forces of nature. The giant fish that swallowed Yonah, saving his life, continued the process; it compelled him to confront and contend with the logic of his philosophy as well as with his situation.

How are we to understand that a prophet, a man who has risen to great spiritual heights and received G-d's communication, would resist His command? The answer appears to include the consideration that a prophet must personally, and genuinely, relate to his task. We learn from other instances in Tanakh that true prophecy is not an ecstasy that overwhelms an individual, stifling his free will and imposing upon him goals that were not his own. Rather, while the prophetic experience inspires a prophet and deepens his insight, he retains his personal independence and his need to comprehend his mission in the context of his other insights and values. Within the realm of the prophet's belief in G-d and dedication to Him, there is the possibility for the presentation of a human perspective.

Moshe, at the burning bush, expressed his reservations about his capabilities and the mission he was being asked to undertake, and he did so at great length (Ex. 3-4). As G-d carries on a dialogue with him, it becomes clear that He acknowledges the legitimacy of Moshe's questions and concerns; He obviously supports the principle that a prophet is only expected to accept a mission that he can comprehend and relate to. Of course, when the questions are adequately answered the human being is expected to acquiesce to G-d's will. In the series of back-and-forth arguments with Moshe, Hashem endeavored to educate and persuade him. When all questions were answered, however, and Moshe continued his resistance, Hashem became angry with him and insisted that he accept the mission.

At a later point in his career, Moshe complained that he could not proceed according to the Divine guidelines for leadership that were then in place; he requested death if an expansion of the leadership corps was not made, as he deemed it impossible for him to succeed. G-d acceded to his request (Num. 11).

At a certain crisis point, Jeremiah expressed his previous acquiescence to accept G-d's mission as פִּתִּיתַנִי ה' וָאֶפָּת חֲזַקְתַּנִי וַתּוּכָל, "You enticed me, Hashem, and I was enticed, You overpowered me and You prevailed" (Jer. 20:7). That appears to have been a case of overpowering with persuasion. The prophet then admitted to having considered abandoning his mission (not necessarily merely for a short time) apparently because the unmitigated suffering he was enduring did not make sense to him (v. 9). In a related vein, in Psalm 73 we read about the author's wrenching inner conflict regarding his commitment to certain critical details of his service of G-d, essentially because of his suffering and the theodicy question. Job also articulated such thoughts. A somewhat similar situation obtains in the case of Yonah.

3. Chapters 2-3

After three days in the fish's belly, having had time to reflect upon his situation and while still in the fish, Yonah prays to Hashem. He recites a hymn in which he acknowledges Hashem's miraculous intervention in saving his life, declares his thanksgiving to Him and expresses hope for the future (Jon. 2:2-10)*. (It is noteworthy that virtually all the imagery and phraseology of his hymn have counterparts in the Psalms, sometimes nearly identical**.) Significantly, Yonah did not directly touch on the pressing issue of his mission. However, he surely must have learned something regarding Divine compassion from his harrowing experience.

Hashem has the fish spew Yonah onto dry land and the prophet has a second chance. Sure enough, we see a partially reformed prophet. He accepts the renewed call to go to Nineveh and does fulfill his mission. However, as we

are subsequently informed, he did so without agreeing with its purpose. He resolutely maintains his argument with G-d.

Yonah's warning quickly succeeds in prompting the people of Nineveh to repent from their evil ways. An amazing scene is described. After he walks one day into the city declaring his message – a city that requires three days to traverse – a public fast is proclaimed. The fast is accompanied by the donning of sackcloth by king, nobility, common people and animals. The king removes his robe, sits in ashes and decrees the fasting and sackcloth rituals upon man and animal. He calls for fervent prayers and repentance and everyone complies. With the use of humor and caricature, the point is made; perhaps they are not religiously sophisticated, but they responded to the prophet's call. Surely there is irony here in that an unspoken comparison is made with Israel, the nation covenanted with G-d, which does not respond so readily and sometimes hardly at all to the calls of the prophets.

4. Chapter 4 – Denouement

Yonah is greatly distressed by what transpired. He also is angry. He again prays to Hashem, this time referring to what he terms was his original argument, which had not previously been mentioned in the text. "Is this not my point while I was still on my own land, because of which I fled beforehand to Tarshish? For I know that You are a compassionate and merciful G-d, patient, abounding in kindness and who renounces punishment" (Jon. 4:2). In light of Nineveh's repentance, which will now spare it from destruction, he requests (v. 3): "please take my life from me, for my death is preferable than my life (כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מֵחַיָּי)." He still believes he is right and is upset for having played a role in averting the retribution. He feels strongly about his position: he does not want to live under the

existing conditions in which his deeply held view is not part of the Divine design of earthly governance.

Hashem replies with a question: הַהֵיטֵב חָרָה לְךָ, often translated, as by the NJPS, "Are you that deeply grieved?" However, חָרָה appears to refer to "anger" (as rendered by the Old JPS) more than to "grief." And הַהֵיטֵב, which immediately follows Yonah's statement that included that root (טוֹב מוֹתִי מֵחָיָי), probably should be understood as meaning, "do you have good reason," that is, "are you justifiably angry?" Hashem demands introspection. Yonah has committed himself to a principle, but he has not thoroughly thought it through. He does not respond. Obviously, these statements are critical to understanding Yonah's reason for choosing to evade his mission.

Yonah leaves the city, fashions a booth to sit in and waits to see what will happen. Although the repentance was widespread and Hashem surely accepted it, Yonah apparently still harbors a doubt, perhaps wondering if the people will maintain their newfound uprightness. He retains the hope that after forty days the retribution will materialize. Meanwhile, Hashem has a gourd plant grow over Yonah's head to provide him shade and "save him from his suffering." Receiving this benefit, he is extremely happy about the gourd. At dawn, Hashem has a worm attack the gourd, causing it to wither. When the sun rose, He appoints an oppressively hot east wind so that when the sun beat down on Yonah's unprotected head he became faint. Without the gourd, he once again asks for death, repeating טוֹב מוֹתִי מֵחָיָי.

This time Hashem asks him, הַהֵיטֵב חָרָה לְךָ עַל הַקִּיקָיוֹן (are you justified to be angry over the gourd?), to which Yonah responds, "I am justifiably angry, unto death." He had become deeply attached to a simple plant that provided him some benefit. Hashem draws the lesson for him: "You

pitied the gourd for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which existed for one night and perished after one night; shall I not have pity on Nineveh, the large city, that contains more than twelve myriad people who do not know between right and left, and many animals" (4:10-11).

5. Concerning the Theme

How does the knowledge that Hashem is quick to accept repentance even from the very wicked and cancel the scheduled destruction relate to Yonah's principled resistance to his mission?

Saadia, Rashi and Radaq have understood or cited the view that Yonah feared that he would be ridiculed as a false prophet when and if the destruction did not come about. Of course – as Ibn Ezra objected – the Nineveh inhabitants (and all observers) necessarily realized that if the sinners changed their ways the prophet's prediction would be canceled, having fulfilled its purpose. But Yonah might have thought that they would not make a full repentance, continuing many of their evil ways, while G-d would accept whatever little improvement they made, as He is merciful. Thus, the absence of destruction might not be explained as due to repentance and the final result might be that Yonah would be viewed as a false prophet.

But another of Ibn Ezra's objections appears compelling. It is inconceivable that a true prophet, a servant of G-d, would be so concerned with a relatively trivial matter such as his reputation. A high caliber individual, especially a prophet and a servant of G-d, must be above that. Some add that Yonah's concern was for the integrity of legitimate prophecy (see *Olam Hatanakh*), but that does not seem to be a strong enough motivation to explain his willingness to die for his cause.

Some Sages – followed by Ibn Ezra, Rashi and Radaq – understood Yonah's motivation to be to protect Israel (*Mekhilta Parashat Bo* 1:4). He feared that if Nineveh would repent it would shed unfavorable light on Israel, who had prophets that warned them regularly and still continued in their stubborn ways. G-d would then have no choice but to severely punish Israel. Such love of Israel to the point of self-sacrifice in rejecting G-d's will is somewhat reminiscent of Moshe's plea in his striving to have Hashem forgive Israel for the golden calf sin: מְחֵנִי נָא מִסִּפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתָבְתָּ (Ex. 32:32). However, with Moshe, it was merely a request; and it was a request that was not at the expense of anyone else whereas in Yonah's case, such a ploy would have been seeking benefit for Israel at the expense of another nation's welfare. Such a course of action must also be considered unbecoming a true prophet.

Abarbanel was of the opinion that Yonah had a nationalistic motive of a different nature. He knew Assyria would be a major enemy of Israel – our story is deemed to have taken place not long before 722 B.C.E., when Assyria conquered and exiled the Northern Kingdom – and he hoped that by refusing his mission he could precipitate its destruction, saving Israel.

But is it acceptable to assume that a prophet could think that the Deity could be manipulated as the pagans did their gods? And would a prophet not realize that if he refused to fulfill the mission requested of him the Deity has other messengers?

Some have maintained that the story is a parable, which may include impossible and improbable happenings and motivations designed to more fully focus attention on its main points. Just as a man remaining conscious inside a big fish for three days is improbable or impossible, as is the repentance scene, having animals dressed in sackcloth

fasting and praying, a story may contain truly inexplicable details. Consider the cases of Eve conversing with the serpent and Balaam with his ass. However, although acceptable from a literary point of view, to impute to a servant of G-d superficial and frivolous beliefs is undoubtedly not in the spirit of Biblical writing.

Sefer Yonah does bring out monumental principles – the impossibility of escaping from G-d, His readiness to accept repentance from even the most wicked of people and renounce His right of retribution, His desire for a universalistic interpretation of religion, manifest through his concern for a heathen city, the recognition of fallibility even on the part of a true prophet and G-d's patient educative process. But as the focus is constantly and singularly on Yonah's tenacious insistence on his personal desire not to provide Nineveh opportunity to repent, it appears that the primary theme lies with an aspect of that particular feature.

Accordingly, others posit that Yonah did not want the city that was the cultural center of the wicked Assyrian empire rescued from destruction for the theological reason of realizing true justice. He believed that at a certain point evildoing should be punished and repentance should not be acceptable. On principle, he did not want to participate in an enterprise that he considered inherently inappropriate and wrong.

Assyria was well known as brutally cruel and wicked. Nineveh was the paradigm of evil, described in Sefer Nahum as follows: "Ah, city of crime, utterly treacherous, full of violence, where killing never stops" (Nah. 3:1, NJPS). A modern historian described Assyria's behavior upon capturing a city as follows:

> The king's throne would be set up before the gates of the city and the prisoners would be paraded before him,

> led by the monarch of the captured town who would undergo the most agonizing torture, such as having his eyes put out or confinement in a cage... Sargon had the defeated king of Damascus burned alive before his eyes…Meanwhile the soldiery had been massacring the population, and brought the heads of their victims into the king's presence, where they were counted up by the scribes...
>
> (G. Contenau, *Everyday Life In Babylon and Assyria*, quoted by Heschel, *The Prophets*, v. 1 p.163)

Such long-time centers of evil, the cause of so much suffering, as was the case with Sodom and `Amora, should be eliminated from the face of the earth. If evildoers could repent for years of iniquity in a moment and be spared from punishment, are not the great principles of truth and justice violated? Where is the equity toward the innocent victims who are dead or maimed, and their families, suffering their painful fates? Where is fairness to those who struggled and sacrificed dearly to live their lives in accordance with rightful standards?

We may also assume that Yonah considered punishment for the truly wicked to be a practical necessity for a better world. Compassion on sinners, providing them the opportunity to repent in a moment and avoid retribution, would diminish people's motivation to comport properly with the result that evil will abound. As Uriel Simon put it: "Divine compassion is perceived [by Yonah] not only as unnecessary but as actually harmful, because mercy undermines the force of justice by detracting from the certainty of punishment and obscures the clarity of judgment by adding a factor that cannot be calculated in advance" (JPS Commentary on Jonah, p. 35).

Yonah's full name – יוֹנָה בֶן אֲמִתַּי, "the dove, son of truth" – seems to indicate that he represents and champions the category of אֱמֶת (truth, a word that includes faithfulness and justice), particularly when that quality has arisen in a setting of dove-like gentle obedience. In his lament to G-d after the people of Nineveh repented, in essence citing the Divine attributes in accordance with their classical expression in Exodus 34:6-7, he virtually quoted from that verse: קֵל חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד (Jon. 4:2). Significantly, he ceased invoking further particulars of that Exodus formulation, avoiding the next word "וֶאֱמֶת" (truth). He added, instead, וְנִחָם עַל הָרָעָה ("who repents from the punishment [that He was planning to mete out])," paraphrasing the narrative description of Hashem's relenting from the punishment He had in mind for Israel, וַיִּנָּחֶם ה' עַל הָרָעָה (Ex. 32:14). This was a verse that the Yonah narrative had just previously employed in a very precise application (Jon. 3:10). Yonah did not fully relate to G-d's characteristic of truth, considering it unduly eclipsed by His mercy, patience and kindness.

But G-d's way of thinking is different from Yonah's and He worked toward educating His prophet that compassion for all His creatures is a higher value than punishment of sinners and is still consistent with truth.

It is thus eminently understandable why the Sages selected *Sefer Yonah* for the *haftarah* reading of *minha* on Yom Kippur (BT Meg. 31a).

Endnotes

* After an introduction (v. 2), he cites the fact of his prayer and Hashem's response (v. 3). He defines his having been cast into the heart of the sea as Hashem's doing (v. 4) – ignoring the blameless sailors' act that was merely His vehicle – and declares that at first he had thought he was

driven from His sight (v. 5a), an apt description of his imminent death, considering he had tried to escape Hashem's presence. However, he is now hopeful (v. 5b). He had almost drowned, but Hashem raised him from the pit (vv. 6-7). On the verge of fainting (and expiring) he prayed for salvation and was answered (v. 8). Those who rely on vanities (false gods) will abandon hope of being recipients of ḥesed (v. 9). He is confident that with proclamations of thanksgiving he will sacrifice to Hashem that which he vowed, acknowledging "salvation is to Hashem" (v. 10). It appears noteworthy that his prayer is comprised of eighty-one words. Although sublime, it specifically is not eighty words, as at that point he was not fully committed to all the details of the Covenant with G-d.

** Some of the prominent correspondences between Yonah's prayer and the Psalms:

יונה 2:3	וַיֹּאמֶר קָרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֶל ה' וַיַּעֲנֵנִי … שִׁוַּעְתִּי שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי:
תהלים 118:5	מִן הַמֵּצַר קָרָאתִי יָ-הּ עָנָנִי בַמֶּרְחָב יָ-הּ:
תהלים 18:7	בַּצַּר לִי אֶקְרָא ה' וְאֶל אֱלֹקַי אֲשַׁוֵּעַ יִשְׁמַע מֵהֵיכָלוֹ קוֹלִי וְשַׁוְעָתִי....
יונה 2:4	וַתַּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מְצוּלָה בִּלְבַב יַמִּים וְנָהָר יְסֹבְבֵנִי כָּל מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ וְגַלֶּיךָ עָלַי עָבָרוּ:
תהלים 42:8	כָּל מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ וְגַלֶּיךָ עָלַי עָבָרוּ:
תהלים 88:7	שַׁתַּנִי בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת בְּמַחֲשַׁכִּים בִּמְצֹלוֹת:
תהלים 88:18	סַבּוּנִי כַמַּיִם כָּל הַיּוֹם הִקִּיפוּ עָלַי יָחַד:
יונה 2:5	וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ אַךְ אוֹסִיף לְהַבִּיט אֶל הֵיכַל קָדְשֶׁךָ:
תהלים 31:23	וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי בְחָפְזִי נִגְרַזְתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ אָכֵן שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹל תַּחֲנוּנַי בְּשַׁוְּעִי אֵלֶיךָ:
תהלים 5:8	אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶל הֵיכַל קָדְשְׁךָ בְּיִרְאָתֶךָ:

יונה 2:6 אֲפָפוּנִי מַיִם עַד נָפֶשׁ תְּהוֹם יְסֹבְבֵנִי סוּף חָבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי׃
תהלים 18:5 אֲפָפוּנִי חֶבְלֵי מָוֶת וְנַחֲלֵי בְלִיַּעַל יְבַעֲתוּנִי׃
Also 2Sam. 22:5
תהלים 116:3 אֲפָפוּנִי חֶבְלֵי מָוֶת וּמְצָרֵי שְׁאוֹל מְצָאוּנִי׃
תהלים 69:2 כִּי בָאוּ מַיִם עַד נָפֶשׁ׃

יונה 2:7 וַתַּעַל מִשַּׁחַת חַיַּי ה' אֱלֹקָי
תהלים 103:4 הַגּוֹאֵל מִשַּׁחַת חַיָּיְכִי

יונה 2:8 בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי נַפְשִׁי אֶת ה' זָכָרְתִּי וַתָּבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי אֶל הֵיכַל קָדְשֶׁךָ
תהלים 142:4 בְּהִתְעָטֵף עָלַי רוּחִי
תהלים 88:3 תָּבוֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי

יונה 2:9 מְשַׁמְּרִים הַבְלֵי שָׁוְא חַסְדָּם יַעֲזֹבוּ׃
תהלים 31:7 שָׂנֵאתִי הַשֹּׁמְרִים הַבְלֵי שָׁוְא׃

יונה 2:10 וַאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחָה לָךְ אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֲשַׁלֵּמָה יְשׁוּעָתָה לַה'׃
תהלים 56:13 עָלַי אֱלֹקִים נְדָרֶיךָ אֲשַׁלֵּם תּוֹדֹת לָךְ׃

A number of usages are unique to *Sefer Yonah* and the Psalms.

Insights on the Book of Jonah

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

1. Care Enough to Forgive and Educate

Twice a year the prophetic portion (haftarah) read in the synagogue is comprised of a whole book of the Bible. The haftarah of parashat *Vayishlah* is the book of Obadiah, and the haftarah read following the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) afternoon Torah reading is the book of Yonah. This practice is ancient. A *baraita* in *masekhet Megilla* (31a) that lists the Torah and prophetic readings for the holidays states, "for minhah (the afternoon service of the Day of Atonement) the Torah portion is prohibited sexual relations and the haftarah is the book of Yonah."

Neither the *baraita* nor the talmud explain the Haftarah choice. Later scholars have proposed several explanations. Since the book describes the repentance (teshubah) of the city of Nineveh, it is an appropriate choice for the Day of Atonement, which culminates the Ten Days of Repentance. [A similar explanation is given by the 11th century student of Rashi – R. Simha ben Shemuel (Mahzor Vitri)]. Abudirham gave another reason: "To teach man that there is no escaping God." In his sermon for Yom Kippur, R. Yehoshua Ibn Shu'eb explained the choice.

> The prophecy of Yonah ben Amitai comes to teach that God's mercy is upon all His creations, even on the nations of the world, and more so on Israel. That is why we read this haftarah on this day in the afternoon service as it is a most propitious time. (Berachot 6b)

While these explanations all contain true aspects of the book that might suffice as to the haftarah choice, none fully explains the message of the book. If the point of the book is

to teach the efficacy of teshubah, or that there is no escaping God's will, the book could have ended at the third chapter—after Yonah's unsuccessful flight and after the successful teshubah of Nineveh. True, "God's mercy" is depicted in the story, yet that term does not precisely identify the book's full message. God's compassionate nature takes a specific form in this work; that of the tolerant, patient but persistent educator. This is seen primarily through God's relationship with Yonah. Recognizing this is essential to comprehending the book's message. A more complete appreciation of that message deepens our understanding of the haftarah choice.

2. Care enough to teach – and teach again.

This is the behavior which God models with Nineveh and Yonah. God attempts to teach this perspective to Yonah. Yonah himself has a different attitude. He "knows the truth" about God and morality. He is unconcerned with those who have yet to learn and who sin in their ignorance.[1] Truth demands punishment of immorality. That is why Yonah, son of Truth ("ben ammitai" means "son of my truth"), refuses God's bidding. Although this is not apparent from the story's beginning,[2] it is the only valid explanation of

[1] Yonah's lack of concern for the suffering of sinners is seen not only in his refusal to help Nineveh repent, but also in his behavior on the floundering ship. He knows why the sea is stormy and instead of using his knowledge to save the idolatrous sailors, he retires to a deep sleep in the hold of the ship. Ironically, the sailors show more concern for Yonah's life than he shows for theirs. After knowing that Yonah was the cause of their difficult situation, and after being told that the way out is to throw him overboard, they still "rowed hard to regain the shore," only throwing him over as a last resort.

[2] This literary device of only revealing the reason for Yonah's flight as a flashback teaches the reader to reserve judgement of a situation until

Yonah's flight. It is the one which Yonah himself gives as he prays for death after successfully completing God's mission. Careful attention to what Yonah says (and omits) in that prayer illuminates his ideology.

> This displeased Yonah greatly, and he was grieved. He prayed to YHWH saying, "O, YHWH! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please, YHWH, take my life, for I would rather die than live." (Jonah 4:1-3; NJPS)

Yonah knows God's nature. He partially quotes God's attributes (see Exodus 34:6-7)--significantly stopping before the attribute of Truth! He could not bring himself to mention that attribute because he speaks the truth, and in truth, God is not "true." Instead, God is "renouncing punishment." In Yonah's view, truth demands retributive punishment. Yonah enumerates the divine attributes derisively.[3] You, God, are not as true as I, Yonah son of truth! Therefore kill me.

This is Yonah's second prayer of the book. The first prayer, for salvation – following Yonah's refusal to heed God's

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one has some distance. One should reevaluate retrospectively in light of newly revealed information.

[3] God's attribute of truth is also found in Psalms 86:15. Moshe and Yoel also omit this attribute. Moshe omits it when he is praying to fend off Israel's annihilation following the spies' report (Numbers 14:18). Yoel omits it when he is encouraging Israel's repentance to stave off God's advancing horde (2:13--Yoel actually substitutes "renouncing punishment"). Both these prophets omit the divine attribute of truth in situations where it is better left unsaid. Yonah omits it when he is describing what he knows about God.

command, was fulfilled by God. The second prayer, following Yonah's successful performance of God's command, was refused by God. Instead, God responds enigmatically in a taunting way, "Are you good and angry?" God now has Yonah's attention. Yonah is no longer silently rejecting, as after the first command to go to Nineveh. Nor is he silently submitting, as after the second command to go to that city. Although Yonah is contentious, he is finally speaking sincerely. God can now patiently proceed to teach His "know-it-all" student. God shows more patience with Yonah than Yonah shows himself. Yonah's philosophy, applied to himself, demands that he should be killed. Also, Yonah refuses to live in a world so untrue.

God does not give up on Yonah. God attempts to teach Yonah, again. Since experience is the best teacher, God creates an experience that would serve as an analogy for Yonah – the sprouting and the wilting of the "gourd" (or some other plant). Yonah's extreme happiness about the gourd contrasts with his extreme displeasure about the salvation of Nineveh. In fact, he is more distressed about his own discomfort than he is about the salvation of the city. Yonah does not learn from the event directly. He has to be prodded by God to draw the lesson.

> Then YHWH said: You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well! (4:10-11; NJPS)

The lesson, although expressed in terms of the gourd, is really about Yonah. Yonah is not really concerned with the gourd, but with himself. (The gourd is an analogy for

Yonah himself, who, like any mortal, "appears overnight and perishes overnight." See Veha`areb Na p. 242). The lesson is that God cares about the development of man; collectively, as in the city of Nineveh, or individually, as in the repeated attempts at educating Yonah (and saving him).[4]

Yonah, who had definite ideas about how God should run His world, was the most difficult character to educate. The idolatrous sailors and the corrupt and thieving Ninevehites repent relatively quickly; the sailors- responding to the obvious hand of God in their salvation, and the Ninevehites- reacting to the warning of the prophet. Yonah, so closed-mindedly certain of the correctness of his outlook, has to be taught and shown time and time again. God patiently persists in teaching Yonah to be more tolerant and caring of people, and also more aware of their ability to develop. We do not know if Yonah got the message, but we can see how God's belief in the potential of His creations, including Yonah, caused Him to care enough to teach them, repeatedly if necessary.

This message is particularly encouraging on the Day of Atonement. Suffering is not retribution, but education. God wants us to be educated and not necessarily punished. It is sufficient to learn without the punishment. But more

[4] The beasts are mentioned because they typify the not yet developed. Yonah was unconcerned with the advancement of the people of Nineveh, just as beasts are considered beyond development. Yet the people of Nineveh consider the beasts, as they also participated in the mourning practices associated with their repentance. (Although this appears strange to contemporary ears, the book of Yehudit 4:9-10 describes how, "... Every man of Israel cried out very strongly to God, and they afflicted themselves with a great fast, them and their wives and children and animals." Also Herodotus 9:24 describes how the Persians in mourning would: "shear the hair of their heads, also of their horses and pack animals." *Olam Hatanakh* p. 229)

important than the encouragement is the lesson that we should be more forgiving of those that wronged us in the past year – seeking not their punishment but their growth. Thirdly, we should be more patient with ourselves and the mistakes that we have made, patiently realizing that growth implies previous deficiency, and forgiving ourselves while vowing to learn from our mistakes.

'I Am a Hebrew'

Jonah's Conflict with God's Mercy Toward Even the Most Worthy of Pagans*

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

The Book of Jonah's 48 verses continue to be scoured for their fundamental messages. Readers encounter great difficulty in finding a comprehensive theory to explain the purpose of the Book, or why Jonah fled from his mission.

One midrash suggests that unrepentant Israel would look bad were non-Israelites to repent.[1] Another proposes that Jonah was worried about being called a false prophet once his prediction of Nineveh's destruction went unfulfilled.[2]

Abarbanel [preface to his commentary on Jonah, Second Question] does not find either answer persuasive. Perhaps Israel would be inspired to repent in light of Nineveh's repentance; Israel would not look bad in contrast. Moreover, since the Ninevites did repent, they obviously believed Jonah to be a true prophet. Nowhere in the Book is there evidence of Jonah's being upset about his or Israel's reputation. It is unlikely that Jonah would have violated God's commandment for the reasons given by these midrashim.

Abarbanel (followed by Malbim) submits that Jonah feared the future destruction of Israel by Assyria. Rather than obey

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[1] For this note and all subsequent notes, please see page 69.

God's directive, Jonah elected to martyr himself on behalf of his people. However, the Book of Jonah portrays Nineveh as a typological Sodom-like city-state, not as the historical capital of Assyria. Jonah's name appears 18 times in the Book, but nobody else – not even the king of Nineveh – is named. Additionally, there is no mention of Israel or its king in the story. Like the Book of Job, the Book of Jonah appears to have a self-contained message that transcends its historical context.[3]

Seeking another approach, Yehoshua Bachrach,[4] Elyakim Ben-Menahem,[5] and Uriel Simon[6] cite a passage from the Jerusalem Talmud:

> It was asked of wisdom: what is the punishment for a sinner? She replied, *Misfortune pursues sinners* (Prov. 13:21). It was asked of prophecy: what is the punishment for a sinner? She replied, *The person who sins, only he shall die* (Ezek. 18:4, 20). It was asked of God: what is the punishment for a sinner? He replied, let him repent and gain atonement (J.T. *Makkot* 2:6 [31d]).

From this point of view, there is a fundamental struggle between God and prophecy. Jonah the prophet protested the very existence of repentance, preferring instead that God mete out immediate punishment for sinners.

While this approach is more comprehensive in interpreting the Book of Jonah than the earlier interpretations, it remains incomplete. Much of the Book has little to do with repentance or God's mercy – particularly Jonah's lengthy encounter with the sailors in Chapter 1 who never needed to repent, and his prayer in Chapter 2 where Jonah likely did not repent. Aside from downplaying the role of the sailors in Chapter 1, Simon sidesteps Jonah's prayer by contending that the psalm was not an original part of the story.[7] Regardless of its origins, however, Jonah's psalm appears

integral to the Book, and actually contains one of the keys to unlocking the overall purposes of the narrative.[8] Finally, most prophets appear to have accepted the ideas of repentance and God's mercy. Why should Jonah alone have fled from his mission in so dramatic and rebellious a manner?

While these interpreters are correct in stressing Jonah's protest against God's attribute of mercy in 4:2, Jonah also appears to have disapproved of that attribute particularly when God applies it to pagans. It appears that this theme lies at the heart of the Book, creating a painful conflict between Jonah and God. Jonah was unwilling to accept God's mercy even to the most ethically perfected pagans because that manifestation of mercy was antithetical to Jonah's desired conception of God.

Chapter 1

Although they were pagans, the sailors in Chapter 1 were superior people. They prayed to their deities during the storm, treated Jonah with respect even after he had been selected by the lottery, and went to remarkable lengths to avoid throwing him overboard even after he confessed. They implored God for forgiveness. When they finally did throw Jonah into the sea, they made vows to God.

Jonah, on the other hand, actively rebelled against God by fleeing. He slept while the terrified sailors prayed to their deities. Remarkably, the captain sounds like a prophet when addressing Jonah – '*How can you be sleeping so soundly! Up, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will be kind to us and we will not perish*' (1:6) – while Jonah sounds like the inattentive audience a prophet typically must rebuke. When Jonah finally does speak in the text, the narrator divides the prophet's words between a direct quotation and narrative:

> *'I am a Hebrew! [Ivri anokhi],' he replied. 'I worship the Lord, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land.' The men were greatly terrified, and they asked him, 'What have you done?' And when the men learned that he was fleeing from the service of the Lord – for so he told them . . . (1:9-10).*

Although Jonah told the sailors what they wanted to know, i.e., that his flight from God had caused the storm, the narrator related those crucial words himself rather than placing them into Jonah's direct speech. Moreover, Jonah's statement, that he was a Hebrew who worshipped the true God, appears tangential to the terrified sailors' concerns. Why would the narrator frame Jonah's statement this way?

The term "*Ivri* [Hebrew]" often is used when contrasting Israelites with non-Israelites.[9] In this vein, Elyakim Ben-Menahem notes that Jonah's usage of *Ivri* in 1:9 is expected, since he was contrasting himself with pagans. Jonah's perceived dissimilarity to the pagan sailors is the main emphasis of Chapter 1. Ben-Menahem further suggests that the text does not report Jonah's response to the captain so that his dramatic proclamation in 1:9 could appear as his first words recorded in the Book.[10] This contrast with the sailors was most important to Jonah; therefore, the narrator placed only these words in his direct quotation. Attempting to explain the bifurcation of Jonah's statement, Abarbanel advances a midrashic-style comment: "The intent [of the word '*Ivri*'] is not only that he was from the Land of the Hebrews; rather, he was a sinner [*avaryan*] who was transgressing God's commandment."

Abarbanel surmises that the sailors deduced from this wordplay on "*Ivri*" that Jonah was fleeing! For Abarbanel's suggestion to work as the primary meaning of the text, of course, the sailors would have to have known Hebrew and

to have been as ingenious as Abarbanel to have caught that wordplay. Though not a *peshat*-oriented comment, however, Abarbanel's insight is conceptually illuminating regarding the overall purpose of Chapter 1. Jonah emphatically contrasted himself with the pagan sailors, but the narrator has contrasted Jonah with God. In Chapter 1, Jonah was indeed Abarbanel's *Ivri* – a prophetic hero of true faith contrasting himself with pagans, and an *avaryan* – a sinner against God.

Chapter 2

After waiting three days inside the fish, Jonah finally prayed to God. Some (for example, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel and Malbim) conclude that Jonah must have repented, since God ordered the fish to spew Jonah out, and Jonah subsequently went to Nineveh. However, there is no indication of repentance in Jonah's prayer.[11] One might argue further that God's decision to enjoin Jonah to return to Nineveh in 3:1-2 indicates that Jonah had indeed not repented.[12] In his prayer, Jonah was more concerned with being saved and serving God in the Temple (2:5, 8).

Jonah concluded his prayer with two triumphant verses: *They who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare, but I, with loud thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will perform. Deliverance is the Lord's!* (2:9-10). Ibn Ezra and Radak believe that Jonah was contrasting himself with the sailors who had made vows in 1:16. Unlike their insincere (in Jonah's opinion) vows, Jonah intended to keep his faithfully. Abarbanel and Malbim, however, do not think that Jonah would allude to the sailors, who are only tangential to their understanding of the story. Instead, they maintain that Jonah was forecasting the insincere (in Jonah's opinion) repentance of the Ninevites.

One may combine the foregoing opinions: the sailors and Ninevites both are central to the Book of Jonah, each receiving a chapter of coverage. They were superior people – the sailors all along, and the Ninevites after their repentance, but Jonah despised them because they were pagans. Thus, Jonah's prayer ties the episodes with the sailors and Ninevites together, creating a unified theme for the Book.

It seems that Rashi has the smoothest reading: *They who cling to empty folly*: those who worship idols; *forsake their own welfare*: their fear of God, from whom all kindness emanates. *But I*, in contrast, am not like this; *I, with loud thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You* (Rashi on Jon. 2:9-10).

As in Chapter 1, Jonah's contrasting himself with pagans is the climactic theme of his prayer in Chapter 2. To paraphrase the prayer in Chapter 2, Jonah was saying "*Ivri anokhi* [I am a Hebrew]" (1:9)! I am sincere in my worship in contrast to all pagans – illustrated by the sailors, and later by the Ninevites. At the same time, Jonah still remained in his rebellion against God; he still was an *avaryan* [sinner]. God allowed Jonah out of the fish to teach him a lesson, not because he had repented.

Chapter 3

Did Jonah obey God when he went to Nineveh? Radak assumes that he did. Malbim, in contrast, believes that Jonah rebelled even as he walked through the wicked city – he should have offered repentance as an option, instead of proclaiming the unqualified doom of the Ninevites. At any rate, Jonah's outburst in Chapter 4 demonstrates his continued disagreement with God over Nineveh's salvation.

The Ninevites, on the other hand, effected one of the greatest repentance movements in biblical history. The

king of Nineveh even said what one might have expected Jonah to say: '*...let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. Who knows but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from His wrath, so that we do not perish*' (3:8-9). We noted above that the same contrast may be said of the captain of the ship, who sounded like a prophet while Jonah rebelled against God.

Nineveh's repentance amazes the reader, but it did not impress Jonah. Abarbanel and Malbim (on 4:1-2) suggest that Jonah was outraged that God spared the Ninevites after their repentance of social crimes, since they remained pagans. This interpretation seems to lie close to the heart of our Book: Jonah did not care about the outstandingly ethical behavior of the sailors nor the impressively penitent Ninevites. Thus, Jonah still was the *Ivri* he proclaimed himself to be in 1:9, sharply contrasting himself with the pagans of he encountered, and remaining distanced from the God he knew would have compassion on them.[13]

Chapter 4

> *This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. He prayed to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please, Lord, take my life, for I would rather die than live' (4:1-3).*

Outraged by God's sparing of Nineveh, Jonah revealed that he had fled initially because he knew that God would not punish the Ninevites. In his protest, Jonah appealed to God's attributes of mercy, but with a significant deviation

from the classical formula in the aftermath of the Golden Calf:

> *The Lord! The Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness . . . (Ex. 34:6).*
>
> *For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment (Jon. 4:2).*[14]

Jonah substituted "renouncing punishment [*ve-niham al ha-ra'ah*]" for "faithfulness [*ve-emet*]." Jonah's God of truth would not spare pagans, yet God Himself had charged Jonah with a mission to save pagans! Thus, God's prophecy at the outset of the narrative challenged Jonah's very conception of God. He was so tortured by this conflict that he wanted to die. Ironically, then, Jonah's profound fear and love of God are what caused him to flee initially, and to demand that God take his life.

In his discussion of the literary significance of the sailors and Ninevites being pagan, Uriel Simon contends that this prominent element of the narrative simply casts an additional layer of embarrassment onto the Hebrew hero who is fleeing from God.[15] From what we have seen, however, it is evident that the pagan identity of the characters is far more central to the theme of the Book.[16]

God demonstrated Jonah's willingness to die not only from idealistic motives, but also from causes stemming from discomfort:

> *'O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish . . . . Please, Lord, take my life, for I would rather die than live.' The Lord replied, 'Are you that deeply grieved?' (4:1-4).*

> *And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he became faint. He begged for death, saying, 'I would rather die than live.' Then God said to Jonah, 'Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'so deeply that I want to die' (4:8-9).*

God added a surprising variable when explaining His sparing of the Ninevites. While it had seemed from Chapter 3 that the Ninevites had saved themselves with their repentance, God suddenly offered a different reason:

> Then the Lord said: 'You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!' (4:10-11).

Addressing this discrepancy, Uriel Simon suggests that only some of Nineveh's inhabitants could not tell their right from their left, probably referring to the children of Nineveh.[17] However, the smooth reading of the text – that God referred to the entire city of Nineveh – points to a different resolution: God had been willing to destroy the Ninevites for their immorality, but forgave them once they repented. Although the Ninevites had misguided beliefs, God had compassion on them without requiring that they become monotheists. After all, they could not distinguish their right from their left. Jonah, however, echoed Abraham's belief: *'Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?'* (Gen. 18:25). For Jonah, true justice required punishing even the penitent Ninevites, because they still were pagans.

To paraphrase God's response in Chapter 4: You, Jonah, wanted to die for the highest of ideals. However, you also

were willing to die rather than face heat. Your human limitations are now fully exposed. How, then, can you expect to understand God's attributes?[18] In the Book of Jonah, God shows that He has little patience for human immorality, but He can tolerate moral people with misguided beliefs. Jonah's stark silence at the end of the Book reflects his apprehension of the gulf between God and himself. He remained an "*Ivri*" to the very end.

Conclusion

The story of Jonah is about prophecy, the pinnacle of love of God, and the highest human spiritual achievement. But prophecy also causes increased anguish, as the prophet apprehends the infinite gap between God and humanity more intensely than anyone else. Jonah's spiritual attainments obviously still were far superior to those of the sailors or the people of Nineveh – he most certainly could tell his right hand from his left. The closer he came to God, the more he simultaneously gained clarity and recognition of how little he truly knew of God's ways. This realization tortured him to the point of death.

God taught Jonah that he did not need to wish for death. He had influenced others for the better, and attained a deeper level of understanding of God and of his own place in this world. Despite his passionate commitment to God, Jonah had to learn to appreciate moral people and to bring them guidance. He had a vital role to play in allowing God's mercy to be manifest.

Thus, the Book of Jonah is a larger-than-life story of every God-fearing individual who seeks closeness with the Infinite God. There is a paradoxical recognition that the closer one comes to God, the more one becomes conscious of the infinite gap separating God's wisdom from our own. There is a further paradox in being absolutely committed to

God and Truth, while still respecting moral people of different beliefs. A midrash places one final line in Jonah's mouth: "Conduct Your world according to the attribute of mercy!"[19] This midrash pinpoints the humbling lesson Jonah should have learned from this remarkable episode, and that every reader must learn.

Endnotes

[1] See, for example, *Mekhilta Bo*, J.T. *Sanhedrin* 11:5, *Pesahim* 87b, cited by Rashi, Kara, Ibn Ezra, and Radak.

[2] *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 9, cited by R. Saadyah (*Emunot ve-De'ot* 3:5), Rashi, Kara, Radak, and R. Isaiah of Trani.

[3] See further discussion and critique of the aforementioned views in Uriel Simon, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Jonah* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999) introduction to commentary, pp. 7-12.

[4] Yehoshua Bachrach, *Jonah son of Amitai and Elijah: Teaching the Book of Jonah According to Traditional Sources* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Religious Department of the Youth and Pioneering Division of the Zionist Organization, 1967) p. 51.

[5] Elyakim Ben-Menahem, *Da'at Mikra, Trei Asar vol. 1* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973), Jonah, introduction to commentary, pp. 7-9.

[6] Simon, introduction to commentary, pp. 12-13.

[7] Ibid., introduction to commentary. pp. 33-35; commentary pp. 15-17.

[8] See further elaboration of this critique in David Henshke, "The Meaning of the Book of Jonah and Its Relationship to Yom Kippur" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 29 (1998) pp. 77-78.

[9] See, e.g., Genesis 39:14, 17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32; Exodus 1:15, 16, 19; 2:7, 11, 13; 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3. Cf. *Gen. Rabbah* 42:13: R. Judah said: [*ha-Ivri* signifies that] the whole world was on one side (*ever*) while [Abraham] was on the other side (*ever*).

[10] Ben-Menahem, pp. 6-7. In his introduction to the commentary, pp. 3-4, Ben-Menahem adds that Chapter 1 is arranged chiastically, and Jonah's proclamation in v. 9 lies at the center of that structure, further highlighting its centrality to the chapter.

[11] Cf. Rashi, Kara, and R. Eliezer of Beaugency. Even Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, and Malbim, who assert that Jonah had agreed to go to Nineveh, agree that Jonah was unhappy about this concession.

[12] Ibn Ezra counters that Jonah specifically stayed near Nineveh, so that he would be ready to go with a second command. Alternatively, Ben-Menahem, p. 13, suggests that Jonah might have thought that God had sent someone else.
[13] The Book of Job achieves the same philosophical purpose by portraying Job as absolutely perfect and blameless in every regard. Cf. Simon, introduction to commentary, p. 19.
[14] For an elaborate analysis of the interrelationship between Joel, Jonah, and Exodus 34, see Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner Biblical Interpretation of Y-H-W-H's Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* 108 (1989) pp. 207-223.
[15] Simon, introduction to commentary, p. 33.
[16] Henshke, pp. 75-90, critiques Simon's view as well, but draws a different conclusion: Jonah objected to repentance from fear, rather than a more sincere repentance. According to Henshke, both the sailors and Ninevites prayed and repented merely as a survival tactic.
[17] Simon, commentary, p. 47.
[18] See further discussion in Bachrach, pp. 66-68.
[19] *Midrash Jonah*, ed. Jellinek, p. 102, quoted in Simon, introduction to commentary, p. 12.