

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

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D. Mordechai Schlachter

Hashem calls upon Yonah.

קוֹם לְךָ אֶל-נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרְא עָלֶיהָ כִּי-עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לְפָנָי:

“Rise! Go to Nineveh the great city, and call upon them, because their evil has come up before Me.” (Yonah 1:2).

Where did Yonah rise from? It cannot simply mean direction – go up – because it then says “go.” Why did Yonah flee this request as all he had to do was call out the evil that Nineveh was doing. There was no promise here that Hashem would save Nineveh, so what was Yonah objecting to? Why did he have to flee? Why not just stay put and not go? Did Hashem send a navi to every great city that was sinning? If not, why Nineveh?

To understand this, a simple understanding of Yonah’s history is important. Yonah is mentioned previously in Tanach. He was a prophet for the king Yeravom ben Yoash. (Melachim II 14:23). This Yerovam was king for forty-one years and based on Yonah’s prophecy, he restored large territories to Eretz Yisroel. (Ibid 14:25). Yerovam was an evil king of the Kingdom of Yisroel. Like Eliyahu, Yonah was a prophet for the northern kingdom. This episode took place just about a century prior to the Assyrian assault on the northern kingdom and the exile of the Kingdom of Yisroel.

Yonah had two immediate concerns. The first issue was that the prophecy was for Nineveh. (Yonah 1:2). Nineveh is a major city in Assyria. (Bereishis 10:11 and Kings II 19:36). That means that Yonah may be helping a city that would one day come to exile his own people. The second issue he had was the position he was in as Yerovam’s navi. As the navi he helped the Kingdom of Yisroel prosper and expand. כִּי-רָאָה ה' אֶת-עֲנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְרָה. “Because Hashem saw that Yisroel was poor and greatly bitter, and it had nothing to help it and nothing to lose and there was no helper for Yisroel.” (Kings II 14:26). Hashem decided not to destroy Yisroel so He delivered them through the wicked Yerovam. (Ibid 14:27). Yonah saw that Yisroel was poor in deed and poor in conduct. They abandoned the Good ways of Hashem. They were now in a state of such poverty and want that despite their evil king and their own misguided ways, Hashem helped them. Hashem did not want to forsake His children.

Yonah saw his position that on one hand he is helping his own people prosper and expand, but Hashem did not ask him to make Yerovam repent. Perhaps Yerovam was too far gone to return. Yet, Hashem was asking Yonah to now bring prophecy to Yisroel’s enemies in a chance that they will turn from their own evil ways.

Nineveh was special, though. “Yonah got up and went to Nineveh according to Hashem’s word. Nineveh was a great city to the Lord, a walk of three days.” (Yonah 3:3). Here, the Torah calls it a great city to the Lord. It was a large city but it had special significance to Hashem. Its significance was in its position in regards to Yisroel’s future

as Assyria would capture the Kingdom of Yisroel. (Kings II 18:10). Yonah feared this and did not want to be the catalyst. Therefore, he had a plan.

Yonah's prophecy was that Nineveh had forty days before it was to be destroyed. (Yonah 3:4). Yonah's plan was to abscond so that he could not possibly reach Nineveh in forty-days' time. "He fled to Tarshish from before Hashem." (Ibid 1:3). Tarshish is unknown but it very likely is Tunis, on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea from Eretz Yisroel. The Berbers settled and lived in Tunis at this time and they spoke the language Tachelit or Tashlit (which sounds like Tarshish and could be Hebracized that way). Tunis was the name the Arabs gave the city later.

Yonah knew he could not outrun Hashem. However, he also knew a prophecy of forty days would be useless to a prophet who was more than a forty-day travel to Nineveh. "He went down to Yaffa." (Ibid). Yaffa is a port in the southern Mediterranean border of the Kingdom of Yisroel. "And he found a ship." (Ibid). He picked out a specific ship. Yaffa is a busy port and there must have been many ships. However, he picked out a ship where he can abscond anonymously. "He descended to go among them to Tarshish, from before Hashem." (Ibid). He went down to their level, assimilated like a gentile, and went to Tarshish. "From before Hashem" is from before the prophecy.

Yonah did try to stay put in Eretz Yisroel. However, staying there caused two issues. One was that he would still be within a forty-day journey to Nineveh. Second was that he would be among Yisroel that was saved through his prophesies to King Yerovam. How can he be a prophet of Hashem when it came to expanding the kingdom but could not be a prophet when it meant dealing with the outside world? Therefore, he had to assimilate into the world, perhaps not be a prophet altogether.

It doesn't seem correct to say that he was running from prophecy itself. This is to opine that if he was among gentiles outside of Eretz Yisroel he would not get prophecy. However, Moshe received prophecy among gentiles in Midyan, far south of Eretz Yisroel and again in Eretz Mitzrayim – far from Goshen and far from Eretz Yisroel. Avraham received prophecy while in Aaram. Hashem can clearly send prophecy anywhere.

Yonah did not know what the end result with Nineveh would be. Perhaps they do not repent. Perhaps they repent and then never come to conquer the Shomron. However, Hashem can send anyone to punish Bnei Yisroel. His prophecy was not the foregone conclusion of Yisroel's fate. Further, he may not have known about the exile. He only saw what Hashem wanted to show him and it was only visions and illusions. He had to make his own sense out of it. He had to rise from his own predicaments and do Hashem's will.

Where he erred was the time. When he gave the prophecy to Nineveh, he says עֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּקֶת: "In another forty days." It was not necessarily forty days from when he received the prophecy but forty days from when he arrived in Nineveh. Regardless of him running, eventually, he would have to give the word and it would be forty days from then. Hashem told him to "rise and go" and give the prophecy.

When Hashem talks to a person he or she should respond. His or her worry should not be the future or how those interactions with the world – in a Torah and middos way – will affect any outcomes. Hashem controls the outcomes; it is upon a person to listen to Hashem. In this way, let Yom Kippur inspire. Gmar Chasima Tova.