

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

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The word of Hashem comes to Yonah.

וַיְהִי דְבַר־ה' אֶל־יוֹנָה בֶן־אֲמִתַּי לֵאמֹר:

“And it was that the word of Hashem was to Yonah, son of Amitai, saying.” (Yonah 1:1).

The pasuk does not state that Hashem spoke to Yonah. It says that the word was to him, it came to him. Did Hashem not speak to Yonah directly (or through a dream or vision)? Why not? Further, unlike so much in Navi, it does not say “so said Hashem.” The pasuk ends with “saying” meaning someone or something was saying the word of Hashem. If so, what was the message?

The “word” that came to Yonah is קוּם לךְ אֶל־נִינְוֶה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לְפָנָי: “Arise! Go to Nineveh the great city and call onto her. Because the wickedness has come up before Me.” (Ibid 1:2). This pasuk merely states that Yonah is to call out the wickedness in the great city of Nineveh. However, the pasuk does not state what Yonah should say. The “word” of Hashem seems to be, ‘Go to Nineveh and decry their evil.’ Interestingly, the Navi gives a reason for the excursion. “Because their wickedness has come up before Me.” (Ibid). This is a poetic way of saying that they have done evil.

The Navi likes to consolidate words in order for us to learn a lot by saying little. Therefore, this Navi does not introduce the subject in any way, specifically. It does not introduce who Yonah was (though we know he served during the reign of King Yeravam ben Yoash, King of Israel). It does not introduce the bad deeds and the evil that Nineveh was perpetrating. Further, the Navi does not explain or introduce why Hashem would want to save an evil city of gentiles. This is especially puzzling since Nineveh was the capital of Assyria – the same nation that would conquer the kingdom of Israel. This we explain in the fourth perek (and was already published in the Yom Kippur edition 5784). It is beyond the scope of this work to delve into it again, here.

Contrast this introduction to Yonah with “The visions of Yeshayahu ben Amotz” (Yishaiah 1:1), “I was in exile...and I saw the visions of the Lord” (Yechezkel 1:1), and “The words of Amos...who saw visions of Yisroel” (Amos 1:1). We can also contrast that with “And Hashem called out to Shmuel.” (Shmuel I 3:4). These are very direct visions and words from Hashem. Even if in sleep or trance, it is a more direct statement of prophecy. However, what we have with Yonah is not unique to him. “That it was the words of Hashem came upon me” (Yeremiah 1:2), “The words of Hashem happened to Hoshea...” (Hoshea 1:1), and “The word of Hashem was to Yoel.” (Yoel 1:1). The Navi states different versions of prophesy. What is the difference? How does the word of Hashem get to a Navi indirectly?

A simple explanation can be that each book of Na”ch was written by a different author. While each book was divinely inspired, the author wrote with his own

personality and education. An example is that Yishaiah is written very flowery while Yermiah is written more simply. The former was rich, the other wrote from prison. Therefore, perhaps some wrote "Hashem spoke to this person" while others wrote "it happened to me" in a more modest tone about themselves. However, there is further explanation for this.

While the word of Hashem to Yonah was "Arise! Go to Nineveh," Yonah did "rise" but he escaped to Tarshish." (Yonah 1:3). The word *וַיִּפְּחֵ* means to flee from danger. Hagar was forced out of the house by Sarai's antagonizing. (Bereishis 16:6). Rivkeh tells Yaakov to flee from Eisav's and his father's anger to Lavan. (Ibid 27:43). Moshe heard of a plot to kill him so he fled from Egypt. (Shmos 2:15). Three days after Bnei Yisroel left Mitzrayim to serve their Lord in the wilderness it was told to Pharaoh that the people "have absconded." (Ibid 14:5). All of these instances means that the person fled without notice or permission. A danger presented itself, and before it could become imminent, the person ran away to avoid confrontation. Balak, too, lambasted Balaam for failing in his duties to curse Klal Yisroel and Balak told his hired prophet *וְעַתָּה בְּרַח-לְךָ אֶל-מְקוֹמְךָ* "And now, abscond for yourself back to your place!" (Bamidbar 24:11). He warned Balaam to flee before Balak killed him.

With this Yonah is understood. No malakh or vision appeared to him. Instead, the word of Hashem came to him. He thought he was, perhaps, one of many to receive this word of Hashem. Like an epiphany or a thought, the idea that Nineveh was evil and the evil went up to Hashem came into Yonah's mind. He knew the next step. A prophesy will follow. Therefore, he fled. He figured, if he was elsewhere, then Hashem would send someone else. One of the other prophets that this word came to could deliver the message. However, this message was meant only for him. It was a tough message to hear so it came passively, so as not to shock Yonah, too much.

Yonah, though, miscalculated. After fleeing in a ship and then being swallowed by a large sea animal, *וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-יוֹנָה שְׁנִיית לְאַמֵּר:* "And it was that the word of Hashem was to Yonah a second time, saying." (Yonah 3:1). The consistency of the word coming to him made him realize that it was meant for him. Further, "And you will call upon her a proclamation that Anochi will speak to you." (Ibid 3:2). Initially, the Navi merely said the reason for him to go. Now it says that Hashem would give him further instruction. He got up and on his three-day journey toward Nineveh he received the rest of the message: Nineveh had forty-days to repent. (Ibid 3:4). The second time he did not flee. He went directly to Nineveh and proclaimed the message.

The lesson in this is clear. Messages get to a person but the receiver may not always know what the message is or what it means. Sometimes a person does not even know if the message is meant for him or her. Often times in life a person is stuck or seeking inspiration. Sometimes an answer comes at that time and other times the inspiration comes when the person is not seeking it. It's an inspirational story heard, article read, or anecdote told to him. It could come from a pasuk learned or gemara discussed. When the word of Hashem comes to a person, one should not dismiss it or fear that more duties accompany it. Change takes effort. Instead, may we answer the call and see much blessing and yeshuos.