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August 2022

Yonah: Lonely Man of Faith?



וַיִּקַּם יוֹנָה לְבָרַח מִתְּרִשְׁיָה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּרָד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה | בָּאָה תְּרִשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרָד בָּהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תְּרִשִׁישָׁה
מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה:

Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from the LORD's service. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to sail with the others to Tarshish, away from the service of the LORD.

From the beginning of Yona, the picture that emerges is of a runaway prophet—a man off on his own path. But what were his reasons?

וַיִּרְאוּ הַמַּלְחִים וַיִּזְעְקוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֱלֹהָיו וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֶּלִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּאֲנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וַיּוֹנָה יָרַד אֶל־יַרְכְּתֵי הַסְּפִינָה
וַיִּשְׁבַּב וַיִּרְדָּם:

In their fright, the sailors cried out, each to his own god; and they flung the ship's cargo overboard to make it lighter for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the vessel where he lay down and fell asleep.

Throughout the story of Yona we see him time and time again off by himself—separated from others—Hashem, the sailors, the city of Nineveh, humanity in general and at the end of Yona—almost separated from himself. What picture starts to emerge of Yona’s mindset?

וַיִּמַן יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לַבָּלַע אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בְּמִעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלוֹת:

The LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah remained in the fish’s belly three days and three nights. What did Yona’s faith look like at this point?

And finally...

עֲתָה יְהוָה קַח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מַחְיֵי: {פ}

Please, LORD, take my life, for I would rather die than live.”

וַיֵּצֵא יוֹנָה מִן־הַעִיר וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לְעִיר וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ שָׂם סֹכָה וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחְתֶּיהָ בְּצֹל עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה מֵהַיְהוּדָה בְּעִיר:

Now Jonah had left the city and found a place east of the city. He made a booth there and sat under it in the shade, until he should see what happened to the city.

How do these pesukim show that Yona was lonely or had issues with his faith of what was being asked of him?

How do the pesukim tell us that Yona dealt with his loneliness and disappointment?

Why did Yona question Hashem and His direct command to him on more than one occasion? How could he protest what Hashem told him explicitly?

Break up into groups of three (3) students and discuss the following citations of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z”l, who in many of his works discusses the meaning of Faith, Doubt and Protest:

“Faith is not a form of ‘knowing’ in the sense in which that word is used in science and philosophy. It is, in the Bible, a mode of listening.” (*The Great Partnership* p. 74)

What do you think is meant by listening as a form of faith? How does this play into what Yona was going through?

“Creation testifies not merely to God’s power but also, as it were, to His belief in mankind. At the heart of religion is not just the faith we have in God. No less significant is the faith God has in us.” (*Faith in the Future* p. 73)

How do you perceive God’s faith in humankind? How did Yona?

Faith does not mean certainty. It means the courage to live with uncertainty. It does not mean having the answers, it means having the courage to ask the questions and not let go of God, as he does not let go of us. It means realizing that God creates divine justice but only we, acting in accord with his word, can create human justice — and our very existence means that this is what God wants us to do. For one who sets a hard challenge does not do so to punish, but because he believes in the one to whom he sets the challenge. At the heart of his call to responsibility — and *this* is the meaning of Job — is God's unshakable faith in humankind.” (*To Heal a Fractured World* p.197-9)

“In Judaism, faith is not acceptance but protest, against the world that is, in the name of the world that is not yet but ought to be. Faith lies not in the answer but the question – and the greater the human being, the more intense the question.” (*To Heal a Fractured World* p. 27)

