

Doubting Hashem: יונה

ספר יונה, פרק א', פסוקים א'-ג'

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

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, son of Amittai:

If יונה is receiving נבואה right now, what can we assume about his character? What type of person is he?

קוּם לֶךְ אֶל-נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי-עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי:

Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness has come before Me.

וַיִּקַּם יוֹנָה לִבְרוֹחַ תַּרְשִׁישׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַיֵּרֵד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה | בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרֵד בָּהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תַרְשִׁישׁ מִלִּפְנֵי הָהוּא:

Jonah started out to flee to Tarshish from the LORD's service. He went down to Yafo 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.

Why does יונה run away instead of following ה' command?

"Jonah has been asked by God to convey a warning to the people of Nineveh. Their ways are corrupt; the city will be destroyed unless they repent. Jonah flees from his mission, and in the course of the book we learn why. He knew, he says, that the people of Nineveh, hearing the words of the prophet, would repent and be forgiven. For Jonah, this was unjust. When people do wrong, they should suffer the consequences and be punished. **This was particularly so in the case of Nineveh, a city of the Assyrians who were to be the cause of so much suffering to Israel.** God's forgiveness conflicted with Jonah's sense of retributive justice."

"The Unasked Question," The Jonathan Sacks Hagadda, April 2014

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/archive/unasked-question-taken-koren-sacks-haggada/>

Can you understand where יונה is coming from?
Do you agree with his reasoning?

Is he the first נביא to disagree with ה' instructions?

בראשית פרק י"ח, פסוק כ"ה

חַלְלָה לְךָ מַעֲשֵׂת | כַּדְבַר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם-רָשָׁע וְהִיָּה כְצִדִיק כְּרָשָׁע חַלְלָה לְךָ הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט:
Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

שמות פרק ה', פסוקים כ"ב-כ"ג

וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל-ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לְעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זָה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי:

Then Moses returned to ה' and said, "O my lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me?"

שמות פרק ל"ה, פסוקים ל"א-ל"ב

וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל-ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי חַטָּא הָעָם הַזֶּה חֲטָא גְדוֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב:

Moses went back to יהוה and said, "Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold.

וְעַתָּה אִם-תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם-אֵין מַחְנֵי נָא מִסִּפְרָךְ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ:

Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!"

ירמיהו פרק י"ב, פסוק א'

צִדִּיק אַתָּה ה' כִּי אֶרִיב אֵלֶיךָ אֶךְ מִשְׁפָּטִים אֲדַבֵּר אֵתְךָ מִדוּעַ דָּרַךְ רָשָׁעִים צִלְחָה שְׁלוֹ כָל-בְּגֵדֵי בָגָד:

You will win, O LORD, if I make claim against You, Yet I shall present charges against You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?

Are you surprised to read about all of these great נביאים questioning ה' and His way of running the world?

ספר יונה, פרק א', פסוק ד'

וְה' הִטִּיל רוּחַ-גְּדוֹלָה אֶל-הַיָּם וַיְהִי סַעַר-גְּדוֹל בַּיָּם וְהָאֲנִיָּה חֲשֹׁבָה לִהְשָׁבֵר:

But the LORD cast a mighty wind upon the sea, and such a great tempest came upon the sea that the ship was in danger of breaking up.

When יונה questions ה', he is sent a storm. We don't see this type of response to any of the other נביאים.
Why do you think ה' responds to יונה differently than He does to the other נביאים who question Him?

"In the cognitive areas of faith, doubt may play a positive role; not a frozen doubt, but a liquid doubt, one which melts in the encounter with emunah and is absorbed by it and strengthens it in return. Cognitive faith is not an abstract, static acknowledgement of truth; it is a violent struggle in the attainment of emet. I begin by believing despite doubt; I end by believing all the more firmly because of doubt. Emunah is thus a dialectical process, not an established fact. Faith and doubt are not in essential contradiction to each other. Faith, as Tillich puts it, "is the continuous tension between itself and the doubt within itself."...This is, of course, a dangerous and risky kind of faith. But, you cannot open your mind to truth without risking the entrance of falsehood; and you cannot close your mind to falsehood without risking the exclusion of truth...

However, this grant of legitimacy to doubt must be limited to cognitive faith, and must not affect functional faith. Once we violate halakha on the basis of a cognitive doubt, we have in effect ceased to function as believers and begun to act as deniers- not even as doubters.”
“Faith and Doubt”, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

Do you agree with Rabbi Dr. Lamm’s distinction between doubt in cognitive and functional faith?
Could this explain the difference between יונה’s protest and the protests of the other נביאים?
Do you believe there is a place for doubt in the faith of a religious Jew?

“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.”

“To Heal a Fractured World”, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, p. 197

“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 in the question - and the greater the human being, the more intense the question.”

“To Heal a Fractured World” Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, p. 27

Questions for Reflection:

Can you distinguish between cognitive and functional doubts you may have had in your own life?

How do you think a person can separate between the two?

Do you agree that doubts in cognitive faith strengthen a person’s faith? Why or why not?