

Jonah: More Than a Fish Story, Week 1: Why Did He Return?

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1. Wikipedia, *Romantic Comedy*

The basic plot of a romantic comedy is that two characters meet, part ways due to an argument or other obstacle, then ultimately realize their love for one another and reunite. Sometimes the two leads meet and become involved initially, then must confront challenges to their union. Sometimes they are hesitant to become romantically involved because they believe that they do not like each other, because one of them already has a partner, or because of social pressures. However, the screenwriters leave clues that suggest that the characters are, in fact, attracted to each other and that they would be a good love match. The protagonists often separate or seek time apart to sort out their feelings or deal with the external obstacles to their being together, only to later come back together.

While the two protagonists are separated, one or both of them usually realizes that they love the other person. Then, one party makes some extravagant effort (sometimes called a *grand gesture*) to find the other person and declare their love. This is not always the case as sometimes there is an astonishing coincidental encounter where the two meet again. Or one plans a sweet romantic gesture to show that they still care. Then, perhaps with some comic friction or awkwardness, they declare their love for each other and the film ends on a happy note.

2. Kings II 14:24-25

And [the king] did that which was wicked in Gd's eyes. He did not veer from any of the sins of Yeravam son of Nevat, who caused Israel to sin. He restored the boundary of Israel, from nearing Chamat to the Sea of the Aravah, as the Gd of Israel had declared via His servant, Jonah son of Amitai the prophet, from Gat haChefer.

A Story Built for Pedagogy

3. Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed 2:46

Just as a person envisions in a dream that he travels to a foreign land, marries a woman, lives there for a while and has a son whom he names Ploni, and he has such-and-such involvements, so are these prophetic parables. Any time the parable mentions an act or a conversation of the prophet, that's all in the prophetic vision...When a prophet says, 'And Gd said to me,' there is no need to clarify that this is in a dream... Doubtless, this applies to Ezekiel's vision...Isaiah... Jeremiah...Hosea... And from what I have mentioned you may take proof for that which I have not mentioned; it is all along one path in prophetic visions...

4. "Home of the Fish"

5. Talmud, Taanit 15a

On the sixth blessing he says: May the One who answered Jonah in the innards of the fish answer you, and hear the sound of your cries on this day. Blessed is the Gd who answers in a time of trouble!

6. Midrash Tanchuma, Leviticus 8

What did they do? They picked up Jonah and stood on the sides of the boat and declared, "Master of the Universe, Gd, do not place upon us innocent blood. We do not know the nature of this man, and he states explicitly, 'This trouble befalls you because of me.'" They submerged him to his thighs and the sea calmed from its rage. They brought him back in to them and the sea stormed against them. They submerged him to his navel and the sea calmed from its rage. They brought him back in to them and the sea stormed against them. They submerged him entirely, and the sea immediately calmed from its rage, as it is written, 'And they picked up Jonah and they put him in, etc.'

Why Return?

7. Midrash, Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael Bo 1

You know that the Shechinah is not revealed outside Israel, as it is written, 'And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before G-d.' Was he truly fleeing from before G-d? It is already written, 'Where can I flee from Your spirit' ... Rather, Jonah said, 'I will leave Israel, to a place where the Shechinah is not revealed.'

8. Midrash, Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael Bo 1

Rabbi Natan said: Jonah went only to destroy himself in the sea, as it is written, 'He said to them: Pick me up and throw me into the sea.' And so you will find with the ancestors and prophets, who gave their lives for Israel. Regarding Moses it says, 'Now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, erase me from Your book, which You have written.'... Regarding David it says, 'I have sinned and I have been corrupt; what have these sheep done? May Your hand be against me and against the house of my father.' Everywhere, the ancestors and prophets gave their lives for Israel.

9. Jonah 4:1-3

And this was very bad to Jonah, and it angered him. And he prayed to G-d and said, "Please, G-d, has this not been my word, since I was on my land? This is why I fled to Tarsus first, for I knew that You are gracious and merciful, patient and very generous, and you repent of causing harm."

10. Jonah 2:1-11

¹And G-d assigned a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the innards of the fish for three days and three nights. ²And Jonah prayed to Hashem, his G-d, from within the innards of the fish.

³ And he said: I called to G-d in my trouble, and He answered me. From the belly of the depths I cried out, and You heard my voice.

⁴And You cast me into the depths, the heart of the seas, and the river surrounded me; all of Your breakers and waves passed over me. ⁵And I said, 'I have been exiled from before Your eyes,' still, I would look toward Your holy sanctuary. ⁶Water surrounded me, to the point of my life; the depths surrounded me, the reeds enwrapped my head.

⁷To the ends of the mountains I descended; the land's bars upon me forever; and You elevated my life from the pit, Hashem, my G-d. ⁸When my soul fainted upon me, I remembered G-d, and my prayer came to You, to Your holy sanctuary.

⁹Those who guard empty vanity abandon their generosity. ¹⁰And I, with a voice of thanks I will sacrifice to You. That which I have vowed, I will fulfill. Salvation is G-d's!

¹¹And G-d spoke to the fish, and it spat Jonah on to the land.

11. Jonah 1:9

And he told them: I am a Hebrew, and I fear Hashem, G-d of Heaven, who made the sea and the land.

12. Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Purim, Liminality and Communitas*,

<http://hebrewjudaic.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/2597/PurimLiminality.pdf>

Normally social structure is hierarchical and characterized by differences in status, while social relationships are mediated by power and statute. At certain times, however, the web of normal social relationships, the structural elements, appear to dissolve. Society enters what [Victor] Turner calls a "liminal" time - a "betwixt and between" or threshold period. No longer do power and privilege, status and role, law and institution determine social inter-relatedness. Society enters a "time outside of time" where alternative modalities of social relatedness appear...

Rituals of status reversal remind society of the excesses perpetrated by those normally in positions of power over their inferiors. Yet they also reaffirm the usual social structure when the period of liminality ends and the normal structure sets in again. By temporarily "playing" the extraordinary, the ordinary is strengthened.