Class # 43–The Burden of Yonah: the desire to run away from your Judaism

Advanced Fellowship Parsha Class - Sponsored in memory of Alice Toby Barbanel Z”l

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The Book of Yonah – it is read as the Haftorah of Yom Kippur afternoon.

Ch. 1

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

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

Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from the LORD’s service. He went down to Jaffa 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.

Rashi’s comments:

**to flee to Tarshish**: I.e, to a sea named Tarshish, which is outside the Holy Land. He said, “I will flee to the sea, for the Shechinah does not rest outside the Holy Land.”

Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him, “By your life, I have messengers like you to send after you and fetch you from there.”

This is illustrated by an allegory of a priest’s slave who fled from his master and entered a cemetery [making it impossible for his master to retrieve him]. His master said to him, “I have slaves like you to send after you and fetch you from there.” Now what did Jonah see that he did not wish to go to Nineveh?

He said, “The gentiles are quick to repent. Should I prophesy to them and they repent, I will be found condemning Israel, who do not heed the words of the prophets.” [from Mechilta, [Exodus 12:1](https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.12.1)]

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This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved.

He prayed to the LORD, saying, “O LORD! Isn’t this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment.

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

The LORD replied, “Are you that deeply grieved?”

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.

The LORD God provided a ricinus plant, which grew up over Jonah, to provide shade for his head and save him from discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant.

But the next day at dawn God provided a worm, which attacked the plant so that it withered.

And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah’s head, and he became faint. He begged for death, saying, “I would rather die than live.”

Then God said to Jonah, “Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?” “Yes,” he replied, “so deeply that I want to die.”

Then the LORD said: “You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight.

And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!

Talmud, Rosh Hashana, 17b

ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא א"ר יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומרו מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה אמר לו כל זמן שישראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני מוחל להם

§ The verse states: **“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed”** ([Exodus 34:6](https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.34.6)). **Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Were it not** explicitly **written in the verse, it would be impossible to say this,** as it would be insulting to God’s honor in its extreme anthropomorphism. The verse **teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wrapped Himself** in a prayer shawl **like a prayer leader and showed Moses** the structure of the **order of** the **prayer. He said to him: Whenever the Jewish people sin, let them act before Me in accordance with this order.** Let the prayer leader wrap himself in a prayer shawl and publicly recite the thirteen attributes of mercy, **and I will forgive them.**