

## The Book of Jonah, Part 2: Second Chances

### A second chance for Jonah

#### 1. Jonah 3:1-3

א ויהי דבר-ה' אל-יונה שנית לאמר. ב קום לך אל-נינוה, העיר הגדולה; וקרא אליה את-הקריאה אשר אנכי דבר אליה. ג ויקם יונה, וילך אל-נינוה--בדבר ה'; ונינוה, הייתה עיר-גדולה לאלקים--מהלך שלשת ימים.

And the word of Hashem came to Jonah a second time, saying: Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and proclaim upon it the proclamation that I speak to you. And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of Hashem. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city [lit. a city great to G-d], a walk of three days.

#### 2. Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah 2:1

אי זו היא תשובה גמורה? זה שפא לידו דבר שעבר בו ואפשר בידו לעשותו, ופרש ולא עשה, מפני התשובה. לא מיראה ולא מפשולו כח. כיצד? הרי שפא על אשה בעברה, ולאחר זמן נתחמד עמה, והוא עומד באהבתו בה, ובכח גופו, ובמדינה שעבר בה, ופרש ולא עבר - זהו בעל תשובה גמורה. הוא ששלמה אמר (קהלת יב א) "וזכר את בוראיו בימי בחורתיך".

[Who has reached] complete Teshuvah? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned when he has the potential to commit [the sin again], and, nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his Teshuvah alone and not because of fear or a lack of strength. For example, a person engaged in illicit sexual relations with a woman. Afterwards, they met in privacy, in the same country, while his love for her and physical power still persisted, and nevertheless, he abstained and did not transgress. This is a complete *Baal-Teshuvah*. This was implied by King Solomon in his statement [Ecclesiastes 12:1] "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, [before the bad days come and the years draw near when you will say: 'I have no desire for them.'"]

#### 3. Ibn Ezra to Jonah 3:2

"קום" - הוא יורה כי לא הלך דרך שתרחק נינוה, אם ישלחהו שנית, ילך.

קום, *arise*, implies that Jonah strategically stationed himself in the closest approach to Nineveh, so that when [G-d] would send him a second time, he would [merely have to *rise up* and] proceed.

### Can a prophecy be overturned?

#### 4. Jonah 3:4

ויחל יונה לבוא בעיר, מהלך יום אחד; ויקרא ויאמר: "עוד ארבעים יום, ונינוה נהפכת!"

And Jonah commenced to come into the city, one day's walk, and he proclaimed and said, "In another forty days Nineveh shall be overturned!"

#### 5. Amos 3:7

כי לא יעשה ה' [אלקים] דבר כי אם-גלה סודו אל-עבדיו הנביאים.

For Hashem does nothing unless He has revealed His secret to His servants, the prophets.

#### 6. Talmud, Sanhedrin 89b (Koren translation)

והא יונה, דהדרי ביה ולא אודעוהו! יונה מעיקרא נינוה נהפכת אמרי ליה. איהו לא ידע אי לטובה אי לרעה.

But in the case of **Jonah**, they reconsidered it and did not inform them that the people of Nineveh had repented for their sins and were therefore spared the foretold destruction. In the case of **Jonah**, from the outset, the heavenly court **told him** to say: "**Nineveh will be overturned**" (Jonah 3:4). Still, **he did not know if** the sentence would be **for the good**, as their corruption would be overturned through repentance, **or** if it would be **for the bad**, as the city would be overturned through destruction. Therefore, the prophecy was never revoked, but simply fulfilled in accordance with one of its possible interpretations.

## Nineveh listens to Jonah

### 7. Jonah 3:5-7

ה וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ אֲנָשֵׁי נִינְוָה בְּאֱלֹקִים; וַיִּקְרְאוּ צוֹם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שָׂקִים, מִגְדּוֹלָם וְעַד-קִטְנֵם. וַיִּזְעַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-מַלְאֲכָיו נִינְוָה, וַיִּקָּם מִכִּסְאוֹ, וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־תּוֹ מַעְלָיו; וַיֵּכֶס שָׂק, וַיָּשָׁב עַל-הָאָפֶר. ז וַיִּזְעַק, וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִינְוָה מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלָיו, לֵאמֹר: "הֲאֵדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבֹּקֶר וְהָצֶאֱנָן, אֵל-יִטְעֲמוּ מֵאִמָּה; אֵל-יִרְעוּ, וּמִים אֵל-יִשְׁתּוּ."

And the people of Nineveh believed in G-d, and they proclaimed a fast and donned sackcloth, from their greatest to their smallest. And the word reached the king of Nineveh, whereupon he rose from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh: By the counsel of the king and his nobles, saying: "Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep shall taste anything; they shall not graze, neither shall they drink water."

## Why did Nineveh listen?

### 8. Radak to Jonah 3:5

ויאמינו - כי אנשי האניה היו בעיר והעידו עליו כי הטילוהו אל הים וכל ענינו כמו שהיה לפיכך האמינו בנבואתו ושבנו בתשובה שלמה.  
The people of the boat were in the city, and they testified that they had thrown him into the sea, and that all of his affairs were as they had been. Therefore the people believed his prophecy, and repented fully.

### 9. Talmud, Sotah 9b (Koren translation)

"וַתֵּרָא דְלִילָה כִּי־הִגִּיד לָהּ אֶת־כָּל־לִבּוֹ. מֵנָּה יָדְעָה? א"ר חֲנִין א"ר: נִכְרִין דְּבָרֵי אֱמֶת.  
"And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart" (Judges 16:18). From where did she know that this time he had told her the truth about the source of his strength, as he had lied about it previously? Rabbi Ḥanin says that Rav says: Words of truth are recognizable, and she felt that this time he was telling the truth.

### 10. Bereishit 40:16

וַיֵּרָא שָׂר־הָאֹפִים כִּי טוֹב פָּתַר; וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יוֹסֵף: "אִף־אֲנִי! בְּחֻלּוֹמִי, וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה סִלֵּי חֲרִי עַל־רִאשִׁי.  
Now the chief baker saw that he had interpreted well. So he said to Joseph, "Me too! In my dream, behold, there were three wicker baskets on my head."

### 11. Rashbam to Bereishit 40:16

כי טוב פתר - ניכרין דברי אמת.  
"That he interpreted well" - Words of truth are recognizable.

## [Extreme] National Repentance

### 12. Jonah 3:8

"וַיִּתְכַּסּוּ שָׂקִים, הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה, וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-אֱלֹקִים בְּחֻזָּקָה; וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדֶּרֶכוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם."  
"And they shall cover themselves with sackcloth, both man and beast, and they shall call mightily to G-d, and everyone shall repent of his evil way and of the dishonest gain which is in their hands."

### 13. Talmud, Taanit 16a

מאי "וּמִן־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם?" אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: אֶפִּילוּ גִזַּל מְרִישׁ וּבִנְיָא בְּבִירָה, מְקַעֲקַע כָּל הַבִּירָה פּוֹלָה וּמַחְזִיר מְרִישׁ לְבָעָלָיו.  
"And from the theft in their hands" – Shmuel explained: Even one who had stolen a beam and had built it into his building would demolish the entire building and return the beam to its owners.

## G-d Saw Their Deeds

### 14. Jonah 3:10

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶכָם הָרָעָה; וַיִּנָּחֶם הָאֱלֹקִים עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם--וְלֹא עָשָׂה.  
And G-d saw their deeds, that they had repented of their evil way, and Hashem relented concerning the evil that He had spoken to do to them, and He did not do it.

## 15. Talmud, Taanit 16a

"אחינו, לא שק ותענית גורמים, אלא תשובה ומעשים טובים גורמים." שכן מצונו באנשי נינוה שלא נאמר בהם "וירא האלקים את שקם ואת תעניתם" אלא "וירא האלקים את מעשיהם כי שבו מדרכם הרעה."

[What does he say?] Our brothers, it is not sackcloth and fasting that cause [atonement for our sins]. Rather, repentance and good deeds will cause [our atonement. This is] as we find with regard to the people of Nineveh, that it is not stated about them: And G-d saw their sackcloth and their fasting. Rather, [the verse states:] "And G-d saw their deeds, that they had turned from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10).

## 16. Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 16b

וא"ר יצחק: ד' דברים מקרעין גזר דינו של אדם, אלו הן: צדקה, צעקה, שינוי השם, ושינוי מעשה... שינוי מעשה דכתיב "וירא האלקים את מעשיהם."

And Rabbi Yitzchak said: A person's sentence is torn up on [account of] four actions. These are: Charity, crying out [in prayer], a change of name, and a change of deeds... Changing one's deeds, as it is written, "And G-d saw their deeds."

## A person is judged "where he is"

### 17. Midrash, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 43

ארבעים שנה האריך אפו עמהם כנגד ארבעים יום ששלח את יונה ולאחר ארבעים שנה שבו למעשיהם הרעים הרבה מן הראשונים ונבלעו כמתים בשאול תחתיה שנ' "מִיָּעִיר מֵתִים | יִנָּאֱקוּ."

For forty years was the Holy One, blessed be He, slow to anger with them, corresponding to the forty days during which He had sent Jonah. After forty years they returned to their many evil deeds, more so than their former ones, and they were swallowed up like the dead, in the lowest Sheol, as it is said, "Out of the city of the dead they groan" (Job 24:12).

## 18. Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 16b

ואמר רבי יצחק: אין דנין את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו של אותה שעה שנאמר "כי ישמע אלקים אל קול הנער באשר הוא שם." And Rabbi Yitzchak said: A person is judged only according to his deeds at the time [of his judgment, and not according to his future deeds], as it is stated [with regard to Ishmael]: "For G-d has heard the voice of the lad where he is" (Genesis 21:17).

## Why was Jonah saddened by Ninevites teshuvah?

### 19. Jonah 4:1-3

א וירע אל-יונה רעה גדולה; ויחר לו. ב ויתפלל אל-ה' ויאמר: "אנה ה' הלא זה דברי עד-הייתי על-אדמתי? על-כן קדמתי לברח תרשישה כי ידעתי כי אתה קל-חנון ורחום, ארך אפים ורב-חסד, ונתם על-הרעה. ג ועתה ה', קח-נא את-נפשי ממני: כי טוב מותי מחי."

Now it was evil to Jonah a great evil, and he was grieved. And he prayed to Hashem and said, "Please, O L-rd, was this not my contention while I was still on my land? For this reason I had hastened to flee to Tarshish, for I know that You are a gracious and merciful G-d, slow to anger, with much kindness, and relenting of evil. And now, Hashem, take my soul from me now, for my death is better than my life."

## 20. Rashi to Jonah 4:1

"וירע אל-יונה" - אמר: "עכשיו יאמרו העכו"ם שאני נבי' השקר."

"Now it displeased Jonah" - He said, "Now the nations will say that I am a false prophet." [from Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer ch. 10]

## 21. Abarbanel to Jonah 4:1

וחלה חולי ורעה גדולה ובקש למות... כשישובו מדרכם הרעה באמונות ובמעשים, אבל כשראה שהחזיקו בע"ז שלהם, ולא עשו תשובה במה שבינם למקום...

...Jonah became depressed and wanted to die, because ... while they had repented from their evil ways in beliefs and deeds, he saw that they continued in their idolatry, and did not repent for their sins against G-d...

## 22. Ibn Ezra to Jonah 4:3

בעבור ראותו כי ישראל לא עשו תשובה יפחד שתבוא הרעה עליהם. על כן יתפלל "קח נא את נפשי" כדרך "מחני נא!"  
Because he saw that Israel had not repented, he became afraid that evil would come upon them.  
Therefore, he prayed, "Please take my soul," like, "Please erase me!" (Shemot 32:32)

## Why was Jonah observing Nineveh from afar?

### 23. Jonah 4:5

ה ויצא יונה מן-העיר, וישב מקדם לעיר; ויעש לו שם סכה, וישב תחתיה בצל, עד אשר יראה מה-יהיה בעיר.  
And Jonah had gone out of the city, and had stationed himself on the east of the city, and there he made himself a hut and sat under it in the shade until he would see what would happen in the city.

### 24. Radak to Jonah 4:5

"ויצא... מקדם לעיר." ישב לו במקום שהוא מזרח לעיר עד אשר יראה אולי לא יעמדו בתשובתם ותשוב הגזרה עליהם.  
"And Jonah had gone out... on the east of the city" - he sat in a place east of the city until he would see if perhaps they wouldn't stick with their repentance, and then the decree would be reinstated against them.

### 25. Abarbanel to Jonah 4:5

ויונה יצא מן העיר שלא להתחבר עם האשורים הרשעים, וישב מקדם למזרח העיר.  
Jonah went out from the city so that he would not befriend the evil Assyrians, and sat east of the city.

## The Kikayon: Why Did Jonah Care So Much About It?

### 26. Jonah 4:6

ו וימן ה'-אלקים קיקיון ויעל מעל ליונה להיות צל על-ראשו להציל לו מרעתו; וישמח יונה על-הקיקיון, שמחה גדולה.  
Now Hashem G-d appointed a kikayon, and it grew up over Jonah to be shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort, and Jonah was **overjoyed** with the kikayon.

### 27. Jonah 4:7-9

ז וימן האלקים תולעת בעלות השחר למחרת, ותפ א-ת-הקיקיון, וייבש. ח ויהי פזרח השמש, וימן אלקים רוח קדים חרישית, ותפ השמש על-ראש יונה, ויתעלה, וישאל את-נפשו למות, ויאמר: "טוב מותי מחי." ט ויאמר אלקים אל-יונה: "ההיטב תרה-לך על-הקיקיון?" ויאמר: "היטב תרה-לי עד-מות."  
Now G-d appointed a worm at the rise of dawn on the morrow, and the worm attacked the kikayon, and it withered. Now it came to pass when the sun shone, that G-d appointed a stilling east wind, and the sun beat on Jonah's head, and he fainted, and he begged to die, and he said, "**My death is better than my life.**" And G-d said to Jonah; Are you very grieved about the kikayon? And he said, "**I am very grieved even to death.**"

### 28. Ibn Ezra to Jonah 4:6

"להציל לו מרעתו" - מרוב חום השמש. ויש אומרים: כי בעבור שעמד במעי הדג זמן ארוך, עור בשרו רך ולא יוכל לסבול החום.  
"To save him from his discomfort" - From the intense heat of the sun. There are those who say: Due to his sitting in the belly of the fish for a long time, his skin became tender, and he was unable to bear the heat.

### 29. Malbim to Jonah 4:6

"וישמח יונה על הקיקיון" - כי יונה דן מזה שרצון ה' שישב מקדם לעיר כי יתילד שם איזה דבר בעיר ומעכב אותו אשר שלומת רשעים יראה.

"and Jonah was overjoyed with the kikayon" - Since Jonah determined from this that it was G-d's will that he sat to the east of the city to see if anything happened in the city, and stopped to observe the fate of the wicked.

## Hashem's lesson to Jonah

### 30. Jonah 4:10-11

י וַיֹּאמֶר ה' "אַתָּה חֲסַת עַל-הַקִּיקַיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָמַלְתָּ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּ: שָׁבוֹן-לַיְלָה הָיָה, וּבֶן-לַיְלָה אָבָד. יֵא וְאֲנִי לֹא אָחוּס עַל-נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה--אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ-בָּהּ הֶרְבֵּה מִשָּׁמַיִם-עֹשֶׂה רַבּוֹ אָדָם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע בֵּין-יָמֵינוּ לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ, וּבִהְמָה רַבָּה?"

And Hashem said: You took pity on the kikayon, for which you did not toil nor did you make it grow, which one night came into being and the next night perished. Now should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are many more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?

### 31. Rashi to Jonah 4:11

"אשר לא ידע וגו'" - קטנים.

"Who do not know, etc." - [referring to] children.

"ובהמה רבה" - בני אדם גדולים ודעתן כבהמה. שאינם מכירים מי בראם.

"And many beasts" - Adults, whose minds are like those of beasts, who do not know their Creator.

### 32. Malbim to Jonah 4:11

"ואני לא אחוס על נינוה?" - שהם מעשה ידי, והוא דבר יקר שהיא "העיר הגדולה" והגם שרבים עובדים ע"ז שם.

"And should I not care about Nineveh?" - who are the work of My hands, which is precious, because it is "the great city," even though many practice idolatry there?

### 33. Talmud, Berachot 7a (Koren translation)

"וְחַנּוּנִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֶחָוִין" — אף על פי שְׁאִינוּ הַגּוֹן, "וְרַחֲמֵי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֶרְחֵם" — אף על פי שְׁאִינוּ הַגּוֹן.

"And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Exodus 33:19); in His mercy, G-d bestows His grace upon every person, **even though he is not worthy**. Similarly, G-d says: "**And I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy,**" **even though he is not worthy**. The way in which G-d conducts the world and bestows grace and mercy was not revealed even to Moses.

### 34. Jonah 4:2

...כִּי אַתָּה קַל-חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם, אַרְךָ אַפִּים וְרַב-חֶסֶד, וְנָחָם עַל-הָרָעָה

...You are a gracious and merciful G-d, slow to anger, with much kindness, and relenting of evil.

### 35. Rabbi Chaim and Binyamin Jachter, Depths of Yonah 4:5

...it is worth noting Rav David Fohrman's approach to the Kikayon. He notes that the Kikayon by right should never have come into existence. Its appearance is an indisputable example of *Middat HaRachamim*, Hashem's aspect of mercy. On the other hand, the removal of the Kikayon is a clear manifestation of *Middat HaDin*, pure justice, since the Kikayon by right should not exist.

Accordingly, we may add, Hashem was giving Yonah an intense dose of *Middat HaDin*. Yonah had been a stubborn advocate for Hashem adopting a stricter mode of justice. Hashem has tried every which way to direct Yonah away from this stance. Hashem's last resort (short of removing Yonah's ability to exercise his free will) is to administer to Yonah a very intense form of *Middat HaRachamim* followed very soon by an abrupt and raw confrontation with *Middat HaDin*.

By putting Yonah through this experience, Hashem teaches Yonah in a most visceral manner that *Middat HaDin* often causes intense pain and cannot stand as the sole value in judgement.