

I dug a little and be'siyata di'Shmaya managed to find a source for this connection, the "Saba of Slobodka", R' Natan Tzvi Finkel zt"l (ספר אור הצפון,) (שמות – כח הבחירה, א). It is a profound idea that sheds a completely different light on Sefer Yonah, which I would like to share with you here.

Yonah lived during the reign of ירבעם בן יואש, the king of the kingdom of Israel (following its split from the kingdom of Yehuda). The Tanach looks on him unfavorably (מלכים ב' יד, כד) saying that he followed in the footsteps of his ancestor ירבעם בן נבט and served idols. HKB"H gave him every opportunity to do teshuva and heaped prosperity on him - his reign was the longest of all the kings of Israel (41 years) and during his reign his kingdom underwent massive expansion. Despite this, ירבעם בן יואש and Am Yisrael who followed him, were unrepentant. Their abundance was abused for corruption and idolatry, which set the stage for the Assyrian invasion (אשור) in the 8th century BCE and the exile of the Ten Tribes. This is the backdrop for the "story" in Sefer Yonah.

There is machloket in the Gemara (ה' הלכה א') regarding the lineage of Yonah ben Amitai. R' Levi says he was from the tribe of Asher (blessed with abundant olive groves and oil). R' Yochanan says he was from the Tribe of Zevulun (which perhaps explains the proximity to boats and the sea). R' Yehuda ben Nachman reconciles the two opinions, saying that Yonah's mother was from Asher and his father was from Zevulun. The same Gemara tells us that Yona was an עולה לרגל participating in שמחת בית השואבה in the Beit Hamikdash, and this heightened simcha led to his prophecy.

Sefer Yonah begins with HKB"H communicating a prophecy to Yonah (now Yonah HaNavi) - to go to the capital (largest) city of the Assyrian Empire, Ninveh (near Mosul in Iraq today), and to warn them to do teshuva - or perish.

The Midrash (ילקוט שמעוני, רמז תק"נ) says that Ninveh was a very evil and corrupt city. Pharaoh, prior king of Egypt, "imported" the depravity of Egypt to Ninveh. The Midrash describes the norms prevalent at the time in Ninveh. The inhabitants would forge documents to embezzle and steal land from one another and engage in sexual depravity (משכב זכר).

Instead of immediately heading out east, in the direction of Ninveh as commanded, Yonah boards a boat (in Yafo, one of the Zevulun ports) and heads out *west* toward Tarshish (Spain/Portugal of today). Yonah *defies* HKB"H - he attempts to flee from HKB"H. A prophet who is כובש את נבואתו, i.e. declines to fulfil the mission given to him by HKB"H, is חזק מיתה בידי שמים (משנה סנהדרין). Yonah knew that this was the price he would have to pay and he accepted it, which is why he didn't object to the captain of the ship throwing him overboard to stop the storm (Yonah actually *suggested* it).

Yonah's reasoning is *very difficult* to understand.

Yonah knows that the king of Ninveh is none other than Pharaoh, prior king of Egypt. We remember a previous rendezvous between a messenger of HKB"H (Moshe Rabbeinu) and the very same Pharaoh. What was the result of that encounter? Pharaoh responded (שמות ה, ב) *מי ה' אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלוֹ* (שמות ה, ב), he refused to listen to HKB"H's message.

Why would Yonah think that this time would be any different? He will reach Ninveh and deliver HKB"H's message and Pharaoh, being Pharaoh, will repeat his previous behavior, just like he imported his Egyptian depravity with him to Assyria. HKB"H will then destroy Ninveh and Yonah will be as happy as a lark.

Yonah *wants* Ninveh to be destroyed. We realize this only towards the end of the story when Ninveh does teshuva and Yonah wails *הָלוּא זֶה דְּבָרִי עַד הַיּוֹתִי* על אֲדָמָתִי עַל כֵּן קִדְמָתִי לְבָרַח תִּרְשִׁישָׁה כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֶתָּה אֶל-לִחְנוֹן וְרָחוּם (יונה ד, ב), "You see HKB"H? This is exactly what I didn't want to happen, which is why I tried to run away!" Yonah has no reason to think Pharaoh will do teshuva, so why run away? Go straight to Ninveh and finish what *you wanted* in the first place.

Yonah tries to flee, but you cannot flee HKB"H. If he is defying his prophecy, he is liable *מִיתָה בְּיָדֵי שְׁמַיִם*, not a normal death, like from an illness, but something bombastic, like a lightning bolt, or ... a category 5 hurricane.

But HKB"H doesn't want to kill Yonah straight off, He wants to give Yonah a second chance – after first teaching him a lesson. Yonah's "lesson" involves him being tossed into the tumultuous sea – exactly what happened with Pharaoh. Well not exactly like Pharaoh, who was first tossed about like straw, then sank like lead and was finally spat out onto the shore spluttering (the Midrash [שכל [טוב, שמות יד, כח says that HKB"H sent an angel to pluck Pharaoh out of the sea and transport him to Ninveh).

Yonah's undersea escapade was more "luxurious". HKB"H created a fish which swallowed him up, a miraculous fish with a see-through skin so that Yonah could see what was going on in the sea around him – like a glass bottomed boat. The Midrash (תנחומא, ויקרא ח, א) says that the fish took Yonah on a three-day "sightseeing tour" of all the underwater wonders, from the time of creation, including – the lanes on the bottom of Yam Suf, through which the Tribes of Israel walked when they crossed over, (יונה ב, ו) *שְׁנֵאֶמֶר – "סוּף תְּבוֹשׁ לְרֹאשֵׁי" (יונה ב, ו)*.

Why does the lesson involve Yam Suf? Why does Yonah need to see specifically that? Why not rather take him to the Mariana Trench? That is much more impressive than some footprints in the sea sand!

Anyway, after Yonah's three-day underwater "frolic", he prays to HKB"H *אֲשֶׁר נִדְרָתִי אֲשַׁלֶּמָּה (יונה ב, י)*, "I have learned the lesson, I will fulfil my mission!"

HKB"H commands the fish to spit Yonah out onto the shore. Yonah finally does HKB"H's bidding, heads to Ninveh and delivers the prophecy.

Wonder of wonder, miracle of miracles ... when the king of Ninveh (Pharaoh) hears it, instead of throwing Yonah out of the palace, he takes the message to heart, rouses his people, they do teshuva and the city and all its inhabitants are saved.

Yonah is crestfallen. He had tried to prevent Ninveh repenting all along and he failed. He hangs around on the outskirts of the city, hoping that Ninveh's teshuva was not sincere and they would be destroyed after all. And they were. A short forty days later (ילקוט שמעוני יונה, תק"נ) Ninveh returned to its evil ways and was destroyed.

In the interim, while Yonah is waiting, HKB"H gives him a *second* and final lesson, with the vine that provides shade. HKB"H creates a vine, whose leaves shade Yonah from the sweltering Iraqi sun. The next day HKB"H sends a worm to bore away at the vine which withers and dies. Yonah is terribly distressed. HKB"H asks him "Are you truly distressed over that vine in which you had no part whatsoever? that was here one day and gone the next? Should I (HKB"H) then not also be distressed over *My own creations*, who do not know their left from their right, 120,000 of them, including women, children and livestock?" Thus ends Sefer Yonah.

Let us now try to piece the whole puzzle together.

Pharaoh was a phenomenon – a prototype of rebellion against G-d. Despite what his eyes and ears told him, he repeatedly refused to bow to HKB"H's will, at the expense of his own people and country. Pharaoh remained defiant until the gory end. HKB"H said "This is a prize, I cannot simply dispose of him, I need him for the purposes of good!" HKB"H therefore sent an angel to pluck him out of Yam Suf and deliver him to Ninveh where he became king.

HKB"H decides that what He is doing with Am Yisrael in the reign of יִרְבֵּעַם בֶּן יִזְבָּבֶל is not working. All the abundance He has heaped on them is being abused and they refuse to repent and relinquish their idolatrous ways. They need a *serious* wakeup call.

Remember Yitro? Why was a whole parsha named after Yitro who was a goy? ... and not any old parsha but the parsha of *Matan Torah*? Because Yitro was also a phenomenon, a prototype. The high priest of every idolatry known to man! He had done it all, voodoo, black magic, etc. One morning the world wakes up to the headline – "Pope Yitro converts to Judaism!" It is earth shattering and mind altering.

HKB"H wants Am Yisrael to do teshuva, He needs the same kind of earth-shattering experience to get them to wake up. He sends Yonah to the arch-villain and HKB"H-defier - Pharaoh, to tell him to repent. Everyone, *besides Yonah*, is expecting Pharaoh to throw Yonah out, but Yonah is the only one who knows HKB"H's plan, because HKB"H *told it to him*. Yonah knows there is going to be a surprise twist – Pharaoh, against all expectations IS going to do teshuva. This is the reason for which HKB"H plucked him out of the sea and put him in Ninveh in the first place.

Yonah also knows that although this earth-shattering event will cataclysmically shake the world, it will *not* result in Am Yisrael doing teshuva. Yonah has already seen Hoshea, Amos and Micha fail and is convinced that he too will fail in his mission. That the totally counterintuitive paradox of Pharaoh doing teshuva and Am Yisrael *refusing* to do teshuva, instead will result in a cataclysmic chilul Hashem rather than in the earth-shattering kiddush Hashem that HKB"H had planned.

Yonah preferred to *sacrifice his life* rather than participate in a chilul Hashem on a grand scale. So, he fled, knowing he could die as a result.

So HKB"H taught Yonah his first lesson – a crash "101 Pharaoh for Dummies" course. He *turned Yonah into Pharaoh*. HKB"H caused Yonah to be swallowed up by the sea. He was in the belly of the fish for three days, the same number of days as the Plague of Darkness in Egypt. Yonah saw the lanes through which the Twelve Tribes passed through Yam Suf, just as Pharaoh saw the *actual Tribes* walking in those lanes. Just like after that experience, Pharaoh in Ninveh was a changed man – he immediately stood at attention at Yonah's prophecy and roused his people to do teshuva – after that abject lesson, Yonah was also a changed man. Not an ounce of rebellion remained in him and he followed through with the prophecy HKB"H originally commanded him to deliver.

This was lesson one. **Never say never to teshuva**. Even the most hard-of-heart, rebellious defier of HKB"H, פְּרַעֲהָ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, can be brought to do teshuva. Perhaps Am Yisrael will not do teshuva *in this* generation of יָרֵבְעָם בֶּן יֹאָזָבָד, but they will (and they eventually did) after being cast into exile in Babylon and returning 70 years later to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash.

Lesson one is the modus operandi – *how* teshuva works. Nothing is ever hopeless, there is *always* a chance, despite all odds and reason.

Then we have lesson two – *why* teshuva works. Teshuva works because HKB"H loves His creations and He wants us to do teshuva and reap the rewards. HKB"H is so *heavily invested* in mankind, He will never rest and never tire of giving us another chance and another and another. We may disappoint for thousands of years, year in, year out, but HKB"H has patience. He never tires of us saying "This time I am going to do teshuva" and we do, but a short time later

we revert to our old ways. Most people after hearing it ten times, twenty, will throw in the towel, but not HKB"H.

This is what we say each time in Shmoneh Esrei גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים וְקוֹנֶה הַכֹּל. What does וְקוֹנֶה הַכֹּל mean? It means that HKB"H "buys everything". If you hear a "used car" salesman pitch the same phony pitch a hundred times, you eventually switch off. HKB"H never "switches off", He continues ad-infinity to "buy" our teshuva pitch, in the hope that one day, one day ... it will be *for real*, because He has faith in us that we will eventually succeed. We just need to have the same faith in ourselves and keep trying relentlessly until we do.

This is what Yom Kippur is all about. This is the reason for the proximity between Yom Kippur and Haazinu. Haazinu is a "song" of everything that can go wrong ... going wrong. It is not the "starry eyed" שִׁירַת הַיָּם, it is the song of the *real world* and it's more realistic outcome. The same eventual outcome as שִׁירַת הַיָּם, but more authentic and based on the reality of human nature.

Yonah HaNavi is in certain respects very much like Eliyahu HaNavi who lacked faith in Am Yisrael and who HKB"H had to keep sending back over and over again to fulfil his mission. This is why HKB"H sends Eliyahu HaNavi to every brit milah, to show him how misplaced his lack of faith in Am Yisrael truly was. This is why HKB"H sends Yonah HaNavi to us *every Yom Kippur*, also to show how misplaced his lack of faith in his own nation was. Our job on Yom Kippur is to prove Yonah wrong and do teshuva for real ... for good.

The vast majority of Am Yisrael, even today, is not evil (despite what the UN would have everyone believe). The *majority* of our nation is uncannily like the people of Ninveh, who don't know their "right from their left", just like Am Yisrael at this very moment prior to national elections. The true heart of Am Yisrael is a heart of *flesh*, not a heart of stone. Sefer Yonah teaches us that even a heart of stone, like Pharaoh, can be turned into a heart of flesh. If פְּרָעָה מִלֶּךְ מִצְרַיִם can do teshuva, what does that say about people who, like it or not, are *part of Am Yisrael*, like Neturei Karta, like the far-left anarchists who align with our enemies, like many self-hating Jews in the Diaspora ...

All we need is a trigger, an earth-shattering wakeup call, to melt our hearts of stone. Some say October 7th was that wakeup call. I believe that it is still to come (fact is - many hearts remain stoney, even post October 7th). This is the job of Eliyahu HaNavi, to precede the Mashiach, to melt the hearts of stone of Am Yisrael so that we will do teshuva. This is also the job of Yonah Hanavi on Yom Kippur, who teaches us – "never say never to teshuva".

As we stand before HKB"H on Yom Kippur, let us make an extra special effort to melt our hearts of stone. We are sooooo close to the Geulah, all it needs is that final push, one little bit of extra effort. Let's give it the final push this Yom Kippur and b"H we will all be sealed in the Book of Life and will be zocheh to all

the things we ask for in the tefilot - health, wealth, nachat from our family, nachat from *ourselves*, nachat from our nation, and may we merit the Geulah this coming "golden" year תשפ"ז (rashei teivot שְׁנַת פָּז). The gematria of תשפ"ז is וְשִׂמְחַת בְּחֻגָּה, so let us make an extra special effort this year to celebrate our chagim and hopefully merit some unexpected, extra chagim this year.

בבי"א.

Shabbat Shalom and גִּמְרַח הַתִּימָה טוֹבָה

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