

Jonah, Pharaoh and Second Chances

Source Sheet by Taylor Barudhel
As taught by and with thanks to Dr. Candice Levy

Jonah 1:8-9

(8) They said to him, “Tell us, you who have brought this misfortune upon us, what is your business? Where have you come from? What is your country, and of what people are you?” (9) “I am a Hebrew,” he replied. “I worship the ETERNAL, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and **land**.”

יונה א':ח'-ט'

(ח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידָה נָא לָנוּ
בְּאִשֶּׁר לָמִי הִרְעָה הַזָּאת לָנוּ
מֵהַמָּלְאכָתָךְ וּמֵאַיִן תָּבוֹא מָה אֶרְצֶךָ
וְאִי־מֵזֶה עִם אָתָּה: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלֵיהֶם עַבְרִי אֲנִי וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יְרֵא אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה אֶת־הַיָּם
וְאֶת־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת:

Jonah 1:13-15

(13) Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to regain the shore, but they could not, for the sea was growing more and more stormy about them. (14) Then they cried out to the ETERNAL: “Oh, please, ETERNAL, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life. Do not hold us guilty of killing an innocent person! For You, O ETERNAL, by Your will, have brought this about.” (15) And they heaved Jonah overboard, and the sea stopped raging.

יונה א':י"ג-ט"ו

(יג) וַיִּחַתְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהִשָּׁיֵב
אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת וְלֹא יָכְלוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ
וּסְעָר עֲלֵיהֶם: (יד) וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אָנָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִאֲבָדָה
בְּנַפְשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאֶל־תַּתֵּן עָלֵינוּ
דָּם נִקִּיא כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר
חִפְצָתָ עָשִׂיתָ: (טו) וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־יוֹנָה
וַיַּטְלֵהוּ אֶל־הַיָּם וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם מִזְעָפוֹ:

יונה ב':י"א

Jonah 2:11

(11) The ETERNAL commanded the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon dry land.

(יא) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג וַיִּקְנֵא אֶת־יוֹנָה
אֶל־הַיַּבְשָׁה: {ס}

What exactly is happening here?

What's the whole point of the episode of Jonah on the boat to Tarshish?

Exodus 4:9

(9) And if they are not convinced by both these signs and still do not heed you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the **dry ground**, and it—the water that you take from the Nile—will turn to blood on the **dry ground**.”

שמות ד':ט

(ט) וְהָיָה אִם־לֹא יֵאֱמְלִינוּ גַם לְשִׁנִּי
הָאֵתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּן לְקוֹלִי
וְלָקַחְתָּ מִמִּימֵי הַיָּאֵר וְשָׁפַכְתָּ
הַיַּבְשָׁה וְהָיוּ הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר תִּקַּח
מִן־הַיָּאֵר וְהָיוּ לְדָם בַּיַּבֶּשֶׁת:

Exodus 14:16

(16) And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on **dry ground**.

שמות י"ד:ט"ז

(טז) וְאִתָּוָה הָרַם אֶת־מִטְּוֶה וְנִטְוָה
אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם וּבָקַעְתָּהוּ וַיִּבָּאוּ
בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֶּשֶׁה:

Exodus 14:29-31

(29) But the Israelites had marched through the sea on **dry ground**, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. (30)

שמות י"ד:כ"ט-ל"א

(כט) וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַּיַּבֶּשֶׁה
בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֲמָה מִיְמִינֵם
וּמִשְׂמָאלָם: (ל) וַיֹּשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם

Thus the ETERNAL delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. (31) And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the ETERNAL had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the ETERNAL; they had faith in the ETERNAL and His servant Moses.

הָהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא
 יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת עַל־שֹׁפֶת
 הַיָּם: (לא) וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד
 הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם
 וַיִּירְאוּ הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ
 בַּיהוָה וּבַמֶּשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ: {פ}

Exodus 15:19

(19) For the horses of Pharaoh, with his chariots and horsemen, went into the sea; and the ETERNAL turned back on them the waters of the sea; but the Israelites marched on **dry ground** in the midst of the sea.

שמות ט"ו:י"ט

(יט) כִּי בָא סוּס פְּרָעָה בְּרִכְבּוֹ
 וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו בַּיָּם {ס} וַיָּשָׁב יְהוָה
 עֲלֵהֶם אֶת־מַי הַיָּם {ס} וּבָגַי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בַיַּבֵּשֶׁת בְּתוֹךְ
 הַיָּם: {פ}

Exodus 14:28

(28) The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen—Pharaoh's entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

שמות י"ד:כ"ח

(כח) וַיָּשָׁבו הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת־הַרְכָּב
 וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל־חֵיֶל פְּרָעָה
 הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לְא־נִשְׂאָר
 בָּהֶם עַד־אַחַד:

What does the verbal connection here suggest?

What's the thematic connection between Jonah and Egypt?

Did you know that Pharaoh survived the Red Sea, according to rabbinic tradition?

Da'at Zekenim on Exodus 14:28

(France/Germany 12th-14th cent.)

- *not a single one of them remained.*" [The word עד is sometimes used as inclusive statement whereas other times it is used as exclusion, i.e. in this instance the meaning is that only a single Egyptian survived this drowning.] However there was a survivor and it was Pharaoh. But we read in Psalms 106,11: נותר לא מהם אחד, "not one of them was left." The Torah is referring to Pharaoh's army - thus, not one of Pharaoh's soldiers survived at the Sea. But he survived.

Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer 43

(Israel/Palestine 8th-9th CE)

Rabbi Nechunia, son of Haqkanah, said: You should know the power of repentance. Come and learn it from Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who rebelled most grievously against the Rock, the Most High, as it is said, "Who is God, that I should listen to his voice?" (Ex. 5:2) The Holy One, blessed be God, delivered him from amongst the dead.

לא נשאר בהם עד אחד. אבל אחד
נשאר והוא פרעה והא דכתיב
בספר תהלים אחד מהם לא נותר
היינו מכל עמו:

ר' נחוניא בן הקנה אומר, תדע לך
כח התשובה בא וראה מפרעה מלך
מצרים שמרד בצור עליון הרבה
מאד שנ' "מי ה' אשר אשמע
בקולו" ... והצילו הקב"ה בין
המתים ... מניין שלא מת? שנ' כי
עתה שלחתי את ידי ואך אותך
ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתיך וכו'
והלך ומלך בננוה ... וכששלח
הקב"ה ליונה להנבא עליה

From where do we know that he did not die? Because it is said, "I could have stretched forth My hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth. Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose..." (Ex. 9:15-16). [Pharaoh] went and ruled in Nineveh... When the Holy One, blessed be God, sent for Jonah to prophesy against (the city) for its destruction, Pharaoh heard and arose from his throne, rent his garments and clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes, and had a proclamation made to all his people, that all the people should fast for two days, and all who who would not do so should be burnt by fire.

להחריבה, שמע פרעה ועמד
מכסאו וקרע בגדיו ולבש שק ואפר
והכריז בכל עמו שיצומו כל העם
שני ימים וכל מי שיעשה את
הדברים הללו ישרף באש.

*Why do you suppose that the rabbis imagine that Pharaoh left Egypt for Nineveh?
If the king of Nineveh was indeed Pharaoh, how does his response to Jonah's proclamation shift his story?*

Nineveh as Pharaoh's Swan Song

Exodus 14:5

(5) When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his courtiers had a change of heart about the people and said, "What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?"

שמות י"ד:ה'

(ה) וַיִּגְדַּל לְמַלְכֵי מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם
וַיִּהְיוּ לְלִבְ פַּרְעֹה וְעַבְדָּיו אֶל־הָעָם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִה־זֹּאת עָשִׂינוּ כִּי־נִשְׁלַחְנוּ
אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַבְדָּנוּ:

Jonah 3:3-10

(3) Jonah went at once to Nineveh in accordance with the ETERNAL's command.

Nineveh was an enormously large city^a a three days' walk across. (4)

Jonah started out and made his way into the city the distance of one day's walk, and proclaimed: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be

overthrown!" (5) The people of Nineveh believed God. They

proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth. (6) When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in

ashes. (7) And he had the word cried through Nineveh: "By decree of the king and his nobles: No man or beast—of flock or herd—shall taste anything! They shall not graze, and they shall not drink water! (8) They

shall be covered with sackcloth—man and beast—and shall cry mightily to God. Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. (9) Who knows but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from His wrath, so that we do not perish." (10) God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways.

יונה ג:ג-י

(ג) וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־נִיְנוּהַ כְּדַבַּר יְהוָה וַנִּיְנוּהַ הָיְתָה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה

לְאֱלֹהִים מְהֵלָה שְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים: (ד)

וַיַּחֲלֵ יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בְּעִיר מְהֵלָה יוֹם

אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבַּעַיִם יוֹם

וַנִּיְנוּהַ נִהְפָּכֶת: (ה) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אַנְשֵׁי

נִיְנוּהַ בְּאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרְאוּ צוּם וַיִּלְבָּשׁוּ

שָׂקִים מִגְּדוֹלָם וְעַד־קִטְנֵם: (ו) וַיִּגַע

הַדָּבָר אֶל־מֶלֶךְ נִיְנוּהַ וַיִּקָּם מִכֶּסֶּאֱוֹ

וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶדְרֵתוֹ מֵעֲלָיו וַיִּכֶס שֵׁק וַיֵּשֶׁב

עַל־הָאָפֶר: (ז) וַיִּזְעַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִיְנוּהַ

מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלְיוֹ לֵאמֹר הָאָדָם

וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבֹּקֵר וְהַצֹּאן אֶל־יִטְעֲמוּ

מֵאוֹמָה אֶל־יִרְעוּ וּמִיָּמִים אֶל־יִשָּׁתוּ:

(ח) וַיִּתְכַּסּוּ שָׂקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה

וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ

אִישׁ מִדַּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִזֶּה־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר

בְּכַפֵּיהֶם: (ט) מִי־יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם

הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא

נֶאֱבַד: (י) וַיִּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים

אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדַּרְכֵּם הָרָעָה

וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הָרָעָה

אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

And God renounced the punishment
He had planned to bring upon them,
and did not carry it out.

In chapter 4, Jonah cries out to God, his prophesy didn't come true, and the city was not overturned. But wasn't it? How else can we view Nineveh's fate?

Mishneh Torah, Repentance 2:1

(1)[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.

משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב'א'
אי זו היא תשובה גמורה? זה שבא
לידו דבר שעבר בו ואפשר בידו
לעשותו ופרש ולא עשה מפני
התשובה.

Mishneh Torah, Repentance 2:4

(4) Among the ways of repentance are, for the penitent to continue to cry out in tearful supplication before the Name, to bestow alms according to his means, and to distance himself exceedingly from the thing wherein he sinned, to have his identity changed, as if saying: "I am now another person, and not that person who perpetrated those misdeeds", to completely change his conduct for the good and straight path, and to exile himself from his place of residence, for exile atones iniquity, because it leads him to

משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב'ד'
(ד) מדרך התשובה להיות השב
צועק תמיד לפני השם בבכי
ובתחנונים ועושה צדקה כפי כחו
ומתרחק הרבה מן הדבר שחטא בו
ומשנה שמו כלומר אני אחר ואיני
אותו האיש שעשה אותן המעשים
ומשנה מעשיו כלן לטובה ולדרך
ישרה וגולה ממקומו. שגלות
מכפרת עון מפני שגורמת לו
להכנע ולהיות ענו ושפל רוח:

submissiveness and to be meek and
humble-spirited.

So Pharaoh's return to Nineveh is his path of repentance, and the upturning of Nineveh is the second chance that brings about his redemption.

Closing questions:

Can we look at this time (and even this crazy upturned world) as our Nineveh - as a second-chance, and an opportunity - to be a different people, or embrace new versions of ourselves and perhaps find some redemption?

How do we embark on a path of t'shuvah (Return)?

What/Where are we returning to/from?

What is your/our Nineveh?

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