

Yonah 2019 Carol Booth

Technical Disclaimer: I am going to relate the three things in the Yonah story that share a Hebrew verb (tet, vav, lamed) which means cast out or throw down. The English translation won't completely reflect this but please trust that it works in the original Hebrew text.

Are you sleeping in the belly of the ship as the storm rages all around you? Or are you awake but lost at sea, not knowing what to cast off or how to save yourself?

Three things in the Yonah story are cast down or thrown out: the storm, the ship's cargo, and Yonah himself. Gd casts down the storm on the sea, surrounding the fleeing Yonah and the sailors on the ship with danger and chaos. Yonah's actions bring the storm upon them all, yet Yonah sleeps while the storm rages on.

Are you sleeping as the storm rages on? Are you hiding in the depths and turning a blind eye to the hurt and chaos you are creating with your actions? Most of us don't like to think about the results of our poor decisions. We blame others and say they are the ones who are acting badly, or who aren't supporting us, or who don't understand. We blame our bad luck or poor circumstances. We believe our hardships are uniquely difficult and other people just have to understand and deal with it. We convince ourselves that our name calling and finger waving is justified because we are seeking justice. We rarely face the fact that we are creating the storm and must take responsibility before we are able to make a change and calm the sea.

The Captain wakens Yonah with an urgent "Get up and call to your Gd!" So too we hope that Yom Kippur will awaken us, allowing us to see the storm and to realize that we are at the center of it. Yonah looks around and realizes that his actions have caused the storm to descend on them all. Today we wake up and realize that our actions are bringing hurt and confusion to those around us.

But Yom Kippur is not the end of this process, my friends, it is only the beginning. The storm that Gd casts down as a warning must be met by our own personal casting off of the thoughts, habits, and actions that drive our own problematic behavior. The sailors, in an effort to save themselves and the ship, start by casting the cargo into the sea.

Now, the cargo in and of itself is not bad. It contains useful and valuable items. But in the midst of the storm it weighs down the ship.

Sometimes the things we need to cast off are valuable. We have too many commitments and desires and they weigh us down. We fail to make the difficult choices and short change everything and everyone.

Here is a list of things that I know are good for me that I would like to do "in the morning," say before 9 AM, upon awaking: basic hygiene, pray, study, meditate, stretch, exercise, shower, get

in an hour of work since I work best early in the day, and relax with the morning paper. I have learned through experience that in order to do all these things before 9 AM, I need to wake up at 4. And that is really not happening.

So what do I do instead? Mostly lie in bed feeling bad that I won't get to everything until about 8 AM when it becomes too late to do much of anything.

We all fail to prioritize and make hard choices. That is why we are all frazzled and too busy. We want a body that is the result of hours at the gym and we also want time to socialize with friends and keep up with facebook and be politically involved in our community and pursue a hobby or two and volunteer to give back and excel at work in a prestigious and high earning job and have time for our family members, especially the ones who are struggling and need us most. We try to do it all and then feel bad when we can't. We fear accepting our finiteness and human limits, and we create chaos in ourselves and all around us.

So once we are awake, the first thing we need to do is take a long hard look at everything we have taken on and honestly evaluate how this balancing act is going for us and for those around us. It is scary, sad, and disappointing to let go of valuable and enjoyable experiences, but I promise you, if you make some of these hard choices, you will leave behind the storm you are caught in every day and find yourself sailing in smoother, deeper, and more meaningful waters.

But often, it is the damaging and hurtful behaviors we have the hardest time letting go. The sailors throw out the cargo, but to no avail. Yonah realizes he has caused the storm. He tells the sailors to throw him overboard. At first they resist and then realize they have no choice. They cast Yonah the cause of the storm into the sea.

I learn two things from this. First, Sometimes we cast off the wrong things. The sailors cast out the cargo when what they really need to cast out is Yonah. Are you having difficulties with your friends, or boss, or co workers? Maybe you need to find the courage to cast away your job or develop new friends. Or maybe you need to look deep inside and cast out your own attitudes and expectations and behaviors that are contributing to the problem.

I tend to run just a little late to everything. I have this habit of trying to get "just one more thing done" before I leave for an appointment.

So I tell myself that what I need to cast away is this habit of trying to get just one more thing done. But if I am honest, the problem is much bigger. I overschedule and overcommit which creates the pressure to do one more thing. I also have this problem with wishful thinking. I would like to think I can sleep in and still get everything done in the morning, and I tell myself, well, it won't take that long. But of course it does. Every time. If I am really going to change, I need to dig deeper and be more honest about what is really driving my behavior, and what I really need to change to make a difference.

Second, the sailors resist casting out Yonah until they realize they have no choice. We also resist casting out our worst behaviors that create the greatest storms. We are deeply attached to them. As much as they create chaos and pain, we cling to them and can't bring ourselves to throw them away. Because they help us sleep through the storms we create. Because it is painful to admit our deepest failings, limit our desires, exercise self control, change our ingrained responses, and develop new coping mechanisms.

But if we really want to make progress, if we really want to calm the sea around us and stop endangering others, that is what we need to do. Yom Kippur shakes us awake and lets us see the storm. It is up to us to examine our cargo, it is up to us to stop running away, and it is time to throw our deepest and most problematic desires into the sea.