

The Profound Lesson Learned from Yonah and the Whale

All Parts of Creation Are Recruited to Help a Person Fulfill His Mission in Olam HaZeh

The holiest day of the year approaches auspiciously—Yom Kippur. It is fitting, therefore, that we consider why our blessed sages instituted the reading of sefer Yonah at Minchah on this holiest of days. The source for this practice is found in the Gemara (Megillah 31a). This haftarah describes how HKB”H enlisted the prophet Yonah to go to the city of Nineveh to chastise its populace and encourage them to perform teshuvah. Refusing to accept this mission, HKB”H elected to force his hand; Yonah was thrown into the turbulent sea and swallowed by a whale. In the belly of the whale, he pondered, poured out his heart to Hashem in tefilah, performed complete teshuvah and resolved to complete his assignment—to go to Nineveh and convince its inhabitants to perform teshuvah.

The Beis Yosef explains the rationale for reading this haftarah (O.C. 622): “ומפטר ביונה לפי שיש בה גודל כח התשובה”—Yonah is read for the haftarah, because it highlights the tremendous power of teshuvah. In the merit of performing teshuvah, the people of Nineveh, who had been sentenced to death, were spared. The Orchos Chaim (Hilchos Krias Sefer Torah 57) provides us with another explanation: “והשלישי מפטר ביונה בן אמותי, והטעם כדי ללמד לבני אדם, שאין יכולת לברוח לפני השם אם עבר עבירות, כמו שכתוב (תהלים קלט-ז) אנה מפניך אברח. ועוד לעורר התשובה כמו שעשו אנשי נינוה, ובה נושעו בראות אדם, שאין יכולת לברוח לפני השם אם עבר עבירות, כמו שכתוב (תהלים קלט-ז) אנה מפניך אברח. ועוד לעורר התשובה כמו שעשו אנשי נינוה, ובה נושעו בראות אדם, שאין יכולת לברוח לפני השם אם עבר עבירות, כמו שכתוב (תהלים קלט-ז) אנה מפניך אברח.” Sefer Yonah is read to teach people that it is impossible to flee or hide from Hashem if one has committed aveirot. Additionally, it is meant to inspire us to perform teshuvah, as the inhabitants of Nineveh did. They were spared when Hashem witnessed their teshuvah and good deeds.

The Ten Days of Repentance Correspond to the Ten Utterances

I would like to propose a novel idea regarding the choice of sefer Yonah for Maftir at Minchah on Yom Kippur. We will

refer to the illuminating words of the incredible Sefas Emes (Shabbas Teshuvah 5662). He provides us with an invaluable principle concerning our service of Hashem during the Ten Days of Repentance—Aseres Yimei Teshuvah--based on a teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 5,1):

”בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם, ומה תלמוד לומר, והלא במאמר אחד יכול להבראות, אלא להיפרע מן הרשעים שמאבדין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות, וליתן שכר טוב לצדיקים שמקיימין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות.”

“The world was created with ten utterances (‘asarah maamaros’). What lesson does this come to teach? After all, it could have been created with one utterance. The reason, though, is to exact punishment from the wicked, who destroy the world that was created with ten utterances, and to bestow a good reward upon the righteous, who sustain the world that was created with ten utterances.”

The Sefas Emes explains that just as HKB”H created the world with ten utterances, so, too, must we perpetuate this process. By means of the ten utterances, it is our task to renew creation on an annual basis. In reality, the tzaddikim of this world sustain creation with their Torah-study and good deeds; whereas, the wicked destroy this world that was created with ten utterances through their transgressions and evil ways.

It was for this purpose that HKB”H, in His abundant mercy and kindness, gave us the Ten Days of Repentance, extending from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur. The Aseres Yimei Teshuvah afford each and every Jew the opportunity to correct his violations of the ten utterances by means of teshuvah and the performance of good deeds. As a consequence, he, too, will join the ranks of the tzaddikim that sustain the world. In the merit of correcting the violations of the “asarah maamaros,” HKB”H will renew creation by utilizing the letters of these utterances.

Rosh HaShanah Corresponds to the First Utterance--"בראשית"

It now behooves us to address several obvious questions. Each of these ten days is associated with a corresponding utterance that needs to be repaired. Notwithstanding, HKB"H has clearly designated the first and tenth days, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, as unique days of awe distinct from the other days. We can deduce, therefore, that the service we must perform on these two special days is also distinct and invaluable. Therefore, we must endeavor to understand the significance of the corresponding first and tenth utterances. Similarly, what services are we obliged to perform on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur in order to correct these two essential utterances?

First of all, we must identify the first and tenth utterances. Concerning the first utterance, let us recall the Mishnah (R.H. 32.). We learned that ten pesukim must be recited in association with "malchiyot," they correspond to the ten utterances with which the world was created. The Gemara points out that we only find nine utterances (the use of the language "ויאמר" in the narrative of the creation. The Gemara resolves this difficulty as follows: "בראשית נמי מאמר הוא, דכתיב (תהלים לג ו) בדבר ה' שמים נעשו". In other words, the very first utterance that initiated the process of creation is the passuk (Bereishis 1,1): "בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ". "בראשית" is the first utterance, even though the formula "ויאמר" is not employed.

Accordingly, Rosh HaShanah, the first of the Aseres Yimei Teshuvah, corresponds to the first utterance: "בראשית ברא אלקים". Furthermore, we can suggest that HKB"H is alluding to us here that the Torah sages were destined to institute a second day of Rosh HaShanah in the future. For, the word "בראשית" can be broken down into "ב"—meaning two—and "ראשית"—meaning first or beginning. In other words, the word "בראשית" alludes to the fact that there are two firsts at the beginning of the year—namely the two days of Rosh HaShanah.

This ties in beautifully with the commentary of the Baal HaTurim regarding the passuk (Bereishis 1,1): "בראשית ברא אלקים". He points out that the word "בראשית" is an anagram for 'א בתשרי. Thus, we find a clear cut association between the first utterance, "בראשית" and the first day of Tishrei, the first day of Rosh HaShanah.

Yom Kippur Correspond to the Utterance of "נעשה אדם"

Now let us focus on Yom Kippur, the tenth day of the Aseres Yimei Teshuvah. To which utterance does it correspond? To begin with, it is necessary to point out that there are several different opinions concerning the list of ten utterances which were employed to create the world. Here is the opinion found in the Midrash (B.R. 17, 1):

"תנינן בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם, ואלו הן, בראשית, ורוח אלקים מרחפת, ויאמר אלקים יהי אור, ויאמר אלקים יהי רקיע, ויאמר אלקים יקוו המים, ויאמר אלקים תדשא הארץ, ויאמר אלקים יהי מאורות, ויאמר אלקים ישרצו המים, ויאמר אלקים תוצא הארץ, ויאמר אלקים נעשה אדם".

This Midrash clearly identifies the tenth utterance as (Bereishis 1,26): "ויאמר אלקים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו"—**And G-d said, "Let us make man in Our image and Our likeness."** It turns out, according to this opinion, that our task on Yom Kippur is to rectify the tenth utterance: "נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו"—**"Let us make man in Our image and Our likeness."** Seeing as each person's decrees concerning his life in the year to come are sealed on Yom Kippur, it is appropriate to rectify the utterance of **"let us make man"** on this day. By doing so, we renew the contract, as it were, to create man for another year.

"נעשה אדם"—"Let us make man" All of Creation Participated in the Creation of Man

In this manner, we can explain what is demanded of us on Yom Kippur in order to rectify the tenth utterance: "נעשה אדם". Let us begin our endeavor to resolve these issues with an incredible introduction concerning the creation of man from the sacred teachings of the Arizal in Likutei Torah (Ki Tisa). He addresses the passuk (Bereishis 1, 26): "ויאמר אלקים נעשה אדם"—**and Elokim said, "Let us make man."** Our blessed sages analyze at length the significance of the word "נעשה"—**let us make**—in the plural tense. After all, HKB"H is the one and only sole power responsible for creation; the passuk should have read: "אעשה"—**I will make man**. We find a fascinating explanation in the Zohar hakadosh (Pinchas 238b):

"ויאמר אלקים נעשה אדם. אחרי שהשלימו עבודתם כל אומן ואומן, אמר להם הקב"ה, אומנות אחת יש לי לעשות שיהא שותף של כולם, התחברו כולכם יחד לעשות בו כל אחד ואחד מחלק שלו, ואני אשתתף עמכם לתת לו מחלק שלי, והיינו נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו, ופירושו רבנו (יבמות סא). שאין אדם אלא ישראל, זהו שאמר הכתוב (יחזקאל לר-לא) ואתן צאני צאן מרעייתי אדם אתם, אתם אדם ולא גוים, ולכן (תהלים קמט-ב) ישמח ישראל בעושי".

“And G-d said, ‘Let us make man.’” After each and every craftsman completed his work, HKB”H said to them: “I have one act of creation to perform, which everyone should be a part of. Join together, all of you — each one of you giving it a part of you; and I will join you — giving it a part of Me.” This is the meaning of the words: “Let us make man in our image, as our likeness.” And the Rabbis explain (Yevamos 61a) that the term “adam” (man) applies only to Yisrael. This is the implication of the passuk (Yechezkel 34, 31): “Now you My sheep, sheep of My pasture — you are ‘adam.’” You are “adam,” and not the goyim. Therefore (Tehillim 149, 2): “Let Yisrael rejoice in its Maker.”

The Arizal explains the meaning of the Zohar. Man is a microcosm, made up of all of the universes and all of the heavenly angels. When he rectifies himself through Torah-study and good deeds, he essentially rectifies every element of creation contained within his being, as well. If, however, he goes astray, chas v’shalom, he damages all the elements of creation contained within his being. By including them in his creation, it behooves them to pray on his behalf — that he should succeed in his service of Hashem. For if he succeeds, he will also rectify all of the elements of creation contained within him.

Only concerning the creation of man is the plural form employed. The rest of creation is beyond the comprehension of creation’s constituents. Yet, the Almighty wanted all of creation involved in the creation of man. The Almighty wanted all of creation to contribute to man’s creation, so that they would all have mercy on him. Should he transgress, they would all be affected and beg for mercy on his behalf. Conversely, should he prove meritorious, they would all rejoice and be pleased with him. This is why the plural form “נעשה” is employed. The Almighty consulted with all of creation — both in the heavens and on earth — so that they should all have an interest in the creation and well-being of man.

Based on this explanation, we can better understand a statement in the Midrash (Koheles Rabbah) apropos the passuk (ibid. 7, 13):

“ראה את מעשה האלקים כי מי יוכל לתקן את אשר עוותו. בשעה שברא הקב”ה את אדם הראשון, נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו, ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן, וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.”

After creating Adam HaRishon, HKB”H took him and showed him each and every tree in Gan Eden. He said to

him, “See how pleasing and wonderful my handiwork is?! Everything I created was created for you. Beware not to transgress and destroy My world. For if you cause harm, there is no one to make amends for you.”

Based on what we have learned; we can understand the Midrash as follows. HKB”H revealed to Adam that he was an amalgamation of all of creation. Therefore, he bore a responsibility for creation. He had to take care not to transgress so as not to harm and destroy creation. Yet, the truth of the matter is that after he sinned by partaking of the Eitz HaDa’at, he caused irreparable damage affecting everything in creation.

This fact is reflected by the following passuk (Bereishis 3, 17): “ולאדם אמר כי שמעת לקול אשתך ותאכל מן העץ אשר צויתך לאמר לא תאכל ממנו, ארורה האדמה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חיך, וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך — to Adam He said, “Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree about which I commanded you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ accursed is the ground because of you; through suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.”

With this in mind, we can better appreciate the words of the Mishnah (Avos 6, 11): “כל מה שברא הקב”ה בעולמו לא בראו אלא לכבודו, — שנאמר (ישעיה מג-ז) כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתי יצאתי אף עשיתי — **everything HKB”H created in His world, He created solely for His glory, as it is said: “All that is called by My name and whom I created for My glory, whom I have fashioned, even perfected.”** This is seemingly difficult to comprehend. All elements of creation, excluding mankind, lack the capacity to choose between good and bad, right and wrong. That being the case, how can the glory of Hashem be revealed through them. Yet, according to what we have learned, man’s being incorporates all of the elements of creation. Thus, he acts as the spokesperson and representative for all of creation; the glory of Hashem is revealed through his holy service—Torah and mitzvot.

This enlightens us as to the tikun and atonement we aim to achieve on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the tenth day of Aseres Yimei Teshuvah—corresponding to the utterance of “נעשה אדם”. As we have learned, this utterance indicates that HKB”H asked all of creation to contribute to the creation of man; since they are all part of his makeup, his transgressions affect them, as well. Hence, it is man’s task on Yom Kippur to seek atonement for himself and all of the elements of creation contained in his being that have been damaged due to his sins and misdeeds.

All of Creation Was Recruited to Compel Yonah HaNavi to Complete His Mission

Following this line of reasoning, we shall proceed to explain the vital lesson that we are supposed to learn from the story of Yonah. All four categories of creation—inanimate objects, plant life, animal life and mankind, characterized by the capacity of speech (דומם, צומח, חי, מדבר)—stood by HKB”H’s side, in order to force the prophet Yonah to complete his mission in Nineveh. When Yonah fled from Hashem, while refusing to fulfill his mission, he damaged all of the elements of creation that made up his being. As a prophet of Hashem—a notable personage—he contained within him large, significant parts of creation. Therefore, they all joined together to help him overcome the tremendous challenge before him.

Now, if we analyze the story of the prophet, Yonah ben Amitai, we find that it can be broken down into three parts. Part one consists of the mission HKB”H, King of the Universe, assigned Yonah HaNavi. This is described in two short pesukim at the beginning of the sefer (Yonah 1, 1): **”ויהי דבר ה' אל יונה בן אמתי לאמר:—”and the word of Hashem came to Yonah, the son of Amitai, saying: “Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against her; for their wickedness has ascended before Me.”**

In part two, Yonah refuses the mission and attempts to flee from HKB”H. This is described in one long passuk (ibid. 3): **”ויקם יונה לברוח תרשישה מלפני ה', וירד יפו וימצא אניה באה תרשיש ויתן שכרה, וירד בה לבוא עמהם תרשישה מלפני ה'—but Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish, away from Hashem’s Presence. He went down to Yaffo and found a Tarshish-bound ship; he paid its fare, and boarded it to travel with them to Tarshish, away from Hashem’s Presence.** According to Rashi, he wished to avoid the mission for the good of Yisrael:

”לברוח תרשישה, ים ששמו תרשיש והוא בחוצה לארץ, אמר אברח לי הים שאין השכינה שורה בחוץ לארץ. אמר לו הקב”ה, חייך יש לי שלוחים כיוצא בך לשלוח אחרוך ולהביאך משם. משל לעבד כהן שברח מן רבו ונכנס לבית הקברות, אמר לו רבו, יש לי עבדים כיוצא בך לשלוח אחרוך ולהביאך משם. ומה ראה יונה שלא רצה לילך אל נינוה, אמר העכו”ם קרובי תשובה הם, אם אומר להם ויעשו תשובה, נמצאתי מחייב את ישראל שאין שומעים לדברי הנביאים.”

”To flee to Tarshish”: This refers to a sea outside of Eretz Yisrael called Tarshish. He thought that by fleeing to “chutz la’aretz,” he could escape from the Shechinah. HKB”H informed him that He has a variety of agents at His disposal that can be sent

after him to retrieve him from there. It is analogous to the slave of a kohen who attempted to flee from his master by entering a graveyard. His master informed him that he has slaves and the like that can be sent into the graveyard to bring him back. Why did Yonah not want to go to Nineveh? He believed that the goyim in Nineveh were predisposed to teshuvah. Therefore, if he went there and instructed them to perform teshuvah, and they did so, he felt that he would be acting to the detriment of Yisrael—who were reluctant to obey the words of their prophets.

Part three of the story begins after that. The narrative depicts in great detail how HKB”H, the master orchestrator, sent His messengers, from the various parts of creation, to persuade Yonah to complete the mission HKB”H had assigned him. It is worthwhile for every individual to scrutinize this amazing story as it is chronicled in Scriptures and the midrashim of Chazal in order to understand how every part of creation—under HKB”H’s supervision—played its respective role in convincing Yonah to fulfill his mission.

“And the spirit of G-d hovered above the surface of the waters”

So, let us examine the first passuk of the third part of this saga. It describes how HKB”H initiated this process of persuasion (ibid. 4): **”וה' הטיל רוח גדולה אל הים, ויהי סער גדול בים והאניה חישבה—then Hashem cast a mighty wind toward the sea; there was a great tempest in the sea and the ship threatened to be broken.** This passuk teaches us that HKB”H employed the elements of wind and water to stir up a storm that agitated the water to the degree that the ship’s survival was endangered. The purpose of the storm was to unsettle Yonah and convince him to return to his mission.

It appears that we can explain HKB”H’s choice of these two elements for this task based on a passuk related to the creation. HKB”H began the process of creation with wind and water, as it is written (Bereishis 1, 1): **”בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ, —in the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and the earth—when the world was chaos and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of G-d was hovering above the surface of the waters.** The Chizkuni explains that HKB”H passed the wind over the surface of the water in order to accomplish the following desired result (ibid. 9): **”יקוו המים אל—let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area, and let the dry land appear.**

Thus, we can begin to comprehend the wondrous ways of Hashem. He employed the wind and the water to return Yonah to the proper path, just as He utilized these two elements at the beginning of creation. At the beginning of creation, they facilitated the appearance of dry land, so that mankind could walk the face of the earth in order to serve Hashem and fulfill their roles in Olam HaZeh.

In this instance, HKB”H sent Yonah HaNavi to prevail upon the inhabitants of Nineveh to perform teshuvah. Instead of proceeding by dry land to Nineveh—land that HKB”H had provided for man to make his life easier—Yonah chose to abandon the land and board a ship on the sea. He intended to flee from Hashem and to circumvent the mission. HKB”H countered by immediately sending the wind and water as His emissaries: **וזה הטיל רוח גדולה**—“**אל הים**—their job was to agitate the sea in order to prevent Yonah from fleeing successfully.

The Ship Participated in the Process by Threatening to Break

If we analyze the narrative further, we find that HKB”H also enlisted other elements of creation in order to persuade and force Yonah back onto the proper path. For instance, the passuk states: **“There was a great tempest in the sea and the ship threatened to be broken.”** Clearly, a ship is an inanimate object; so how can the passuk suggest that the ship threatened to come apart? A ship cannot entertain such thoughts. Nevertheless, in keeping with our current discussion, let us suggest an explanation. According to the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra 8), the storm only affected the area of the sea where the ship Yonah was in was travelling.

As we learned above: **“Everything HKB”H created in His world, He created solely for His glory.”** This dictum applies to the wood from which the ship was constructed, as well. So, when the ship perceived that the prophet Yonah was using it to thwart the will of Hashem, it was agonized to the point that: **והאניה הישבה**—“**להישבר**—it figured that it was preferable to break apart than to participate in a rebellion against Hashem.

In similar fashion, not only did HKB”H enlist the wind, the sea and the ship to persuade Yonah to return to the proper path, but He also enlisted the people of the seventy nations of the world, as it is written (Yonah 1, 5):

“ויראו המלחים ויזעקו איש אל אלקיו, ויטלו את הכלים אשר באניה אל הים להקל מעליהם, ויונה ירד אל ירכתי הספינה וישכב וירדם. ויקרב אליו רב החובל ויאמר לו, מזה לך נרדם קום קרא אל אלקיך, אולי יתעשת האלקים לנו ולא נאבד. ויאמרו איש אל רעהו לכו ונפילה גורלות ונדעה בשלמי הרעה הזאת לנו, ויפילו גורלות ויפול הגורל על יונה.”

The sailors became frightened and they cried out, each to his own god; they cast the wares that were on the ship into the sea to lighten if for them. But Yonah had descended to the ship’s holds and he lay down and fell fast asleep. The ship’s captain approached him, and said to him, “How can you sleep so soundly? Arise! Call to your G-d! Perhaps G-d will think of us and we will not perish.” Then they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots that we may determine who brought this calamity upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Yonah.

Chazal elaborate on this passage in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra ibid.):

“רבי חנינא אמר משבעים לשונות היו באניה, וכל אחד ואחד אלקיו בידו. אמרו, האלקים שיענה ויציל אותנו מן הצרה הזאת הוא האלקים, ועמדו וקראו איש בשם אלקיו ולא הועילו. יונה בצרת נפשו נרדם וישן, ובא אליו רב החובל, אמר ליה הרי אנו עומדין בין מות לחיים ואתה נרדם, מאיזה עם אתה, אמר להם עברי אנכי, אמרו לו והלא שמענו כי האלקי העברים גדול הוא, קרא אל אלקיך, אולי יעשה לנו ככל נפלאותיו שעשה לכם בים סוף. אמר להם בשבילי הצרה הזאת באה עליכם, כי מלפניו אני בורח... שאוני והטילוני אל הים וישתוק הים מעליכם.”

Rabbi Chanina said: All seventy nations were represented on that ship. Each one had his own god. They agreed that the god that would answer them and save them from that calamity must be the true G-d. Each one stood up and called to his god; but to no avail. Yonah, in his state of unrest, fell asleep. The captain went to him and protested: “We are in a life and death situation, and you are sleeping?” They inquired as to which nation he belonged to. Yonah answered that he was a Hebrew. They said that they heard that the G-d of the Hebrews was great. They implored him to summon his G-d; perhaps He would perform a miracle on their behalf as He had performed for them at Yam Suf. Yonah explained that he was responsible for their precarious situation; because he was fleeing from Him. He instructed them to throw him into the sea, and assured them that the sea would settle down.

The Fish and the “Kikayon” Represent the Animal-life and the Plant-life

Thus far, we have demonstrated how HKB”H enlisted the “דומם” (inanimate elements) and the “מדבר” (human element) in

the process of returning Yonah HaNavi to the proper path. Now, we will demonstrate how HKB"H also enlisted the category of "חי" (animal-life) in this endeavor. Let us refer to the following pesukim (Yonah 2, 1):

"וימון ה' דג גדול לבלוע את יונה, ויהי יונה במעי הדג שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות. ויתפלל יונה אל ה' אלקיו ממעי הדגה. ויאמר קראתי מצרה לי אל ה' ויענני, מבטן שאול שועתי שמעת קולי... ויאמר ה' לדג ויקא את יונה אל היבשה."

Hashem sent a large fish to swallow Yonah, and Yonah remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Yonah prayed to Hashem, his G-d, from the belly of the fish, and said: "I called in my distress to Hashem, and He answered me; from the belly of the grave I cried out; You heard my voice" . . . Then Hashem spoke to the fish and it spewed Yonah out onto the dry land.

Note that initially the fish is referred to in the masculine: "דג" "גדול"; subsequently, it is referred to in the feminine: "ממעי הדגה". Rashi provides us with an explanation: The large fish mentioned in the narrative was a male--"דג גדול"; in its belly, Yonah had room to spare and didn't consider praying to Hashem. HKB"H hinted this to the fish and it spewed Yonah out into the mouth of a female fish full of embryos. There he found himself in tight quarters and proceeded to pray. Hence, it states: "ויתפלל יונה... ממעי הדגה". We see that every detail was planned out from above—designed to encourage Yonah to reconsider and return to his mission.

Now, it only remains to demonstrate how HKB"H also enlisted the "צומח" (plant-life) in His endeavor. This occurred after the prophet Yonah completed his mission in Nineveh—arousing its people to perform teshuvah and save their lives. Having successfully completed his mission, he was overwhelmed with anguish. So, he complained to HKB"H (ibid. 4, 1):

"וירע אל יונה רעה גדולה ויחר לו, ויתפלל אל ה' ויאמר אנה ה', הלוא זה דברי עד היותי על אדמותי, על כן קדמתי לברוח תרשישה, כי ידעתי כי אתה אל חנון ורחום ארך אפים ורב חסד וניחם על הרעה, ועתה ה' קח נא את נפשי ממני כי טוב מותי מחיי."

And it displeased Yonah greatly and angered him. He prayed to Hashem, and said, "Please, Hashem, was this not my contention when I was still on my own soil? Because of this I had hastened to flee to Tarshish for I knew that You are a gracious and merciful G-d, slow to anger, abundant in kindness,

and relent from doing harm. So now, Hashem, please take my soul from me, for better is my death than my life."

To console him, HKB"H employed the category of "צומח" (ibid. 6):

"וימון ה' אלקים קיקיון ויעל מעל ליונה להיות צל על ראשו להציל לו מרעתו, וישמוח יונה על הקיקיון שמחה גדולה, וימון האלקים תולעת בעלות השחר למחרת ותך את הקיקיון וייבש. ויהי כזרוח השמש וימון אלקים רוח קדים חרישית ותך השמש על ראש יונה ויתעלף, וישאל את נפשו למות ויאמר טוב מותי מחיי. ויאמר אלקים אל יונה ההיטב חרה לך על הקיקיון, ויאמר היטב חרה לי עד מות."

ויאמר ה' אתה חסת על הקיקיון, אשר לא עמלת בו ולא גדלתו, שכן לילה היה ובן לילה אבד, ואני לא אחוס על ניגוה העיר הגדולה, אשר יש בה הרבה משתים עשרה רבו אדם אשר לא ידע בין ימינו לשמאלו ובהמה רבה."

Hashem, G-d, sent a "kikayon" (a shady, leafy plant), which rose up above Yonah to provide shade over his head, to relieve him of his discomfort. Yonah rejoiced over the "kikayon," a great joy. Then G-d sent a worm at dawn of the next day, and it attacked the "kikayon," so that it withered. And it was when the sun shone that G-d sent a stifling east wind; the sun beat down upon Yonah's head and he felt faint. He asked for his soul's death, and said, "Better is my death than my life!" And G-d said to Yonah, "Are you so deeply grieved over the "kikayon?" And he said, "I am enraged enough to die."

Hashem said, "You took pity on the 'kikayon' for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow. It lived one night and perished after one night. And I, shall I not take pity upon Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons, who do not know their right hand from their left, and many animals, as well?"

This then is the valuable lesson that each and every one of us should learn from the haftarah--sefer Yonah--that is read at Minchah on Yom Kippur. If a person is swayed by the yetzer hara not to act in accordance with the will of Hashem, all the elements of creation which are part of his being, will unite to combat him in a battle to the bitter end. The wind will stir up the water and they will wreak havoc in his world; the heavens and the earth will oppose him until he returns to Hashem. The opposite also holds true! If a person chooses to fulfill G-d's will, all the elements of creation will unite to assist him in his efforts.

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