

Why Yonah Runs: A Close Reading of Sefer Yonah

Perek 2: Yonah vs. Noah: A Tale of Two Escapes

1. Sefer Yonah 2:1 The LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah remained in the fish's belly three days and three nights.	1. ספר יונה ב:א וַיִּמְנֶה ה' דָּג גָּדוֹל לִבְלַע אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בִּמְעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלֹת:
2. Sefer Yonah, 4:6-7 (6) The LORD God provided a ricinus plant, which grew up over Jonah, to provide shade for his head and save him from discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant. (7) But the next day at dawn God provided a worm, which attacked the plant so that it withered.	2. ספר יונה ד: ו-ז (ו) וַיִּמְנֶה ה' -אֱלֹדִקִּים קִיקְיֹון וַיַּעַל מֵעַל לְיוֹנָה לְהַיֹּת צֶלַעַל עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרְעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקְיֹון שֶׁמָּחָה גְדוּלָּה: (ז) וַיִּמְנֶה ה'אֱלֹדִקִּים תוֹלַעַת בַּעֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר לְמַחֲרֹת וַתֵּךְ אֶת־הַקִּיקְיֹון וַיִּבֹּשׁ:

I. Textual parallels between Yonah and Noah

Noah	Yonah
3. Bereishit 6:7 וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אִמְחָה אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחֲמָתִי כִּי עָשִׂיתִם: The LORD said, 'I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created... for I regret (nichamti) that I made them.'	Yonah 3:10 וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹדִקִּים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶכָם הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחֶם הָאֱלֹדִקִּים עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־דָּבַר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה: God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God relented (vayinachem) concerning the <u>punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.</u>

4. Bereishit 6:13 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַץ כָּל-בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי-מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ: God said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness (chamas) because of them...'	Yonah 3:7-8 וַיִּתְכַּסּוּ שָׂקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל-אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה וַיָּשֻׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדְּרָכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן-הַחָמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם: They shall be covered with sackcloth... Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice (chamas) of which he is guilty.
5. Bereishit 7:17, 23 וַיְהִי הַמָּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל-הָאָרֶץ... וַיִּמָּח אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּקוּם... וַיִּשָּׂאֵר אֶת-נֹחַ וְאִשְׁרֵי אֵתוֹ בַּתֵּבָה: The Flood continued forty days on the earth... All existence on earth was blotted out... Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.	Yonah 3:4 וַיֵּחָל יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בְּעִיר מֶהֱלָךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת: Jonah started out... and proclaimed: 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'
6. Bereishit 9:20-21 וַיֵּחָל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כָּרֶם: וַיִּשְׁתֵּה מִן-הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכָּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ אֹהֶלָה: Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent.	Yonah 4:6 וַיִּמְנוּ ה' - אֱלֹהִים קִיקְיֹון וַיַּעַל מֵעַל לַיּוֹנָה לְהַיּוֹת צֶלַעַל עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרָעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל-הַקִּיקְיֹון שֶׁמָּחָה גְדוּלָּה: The LORD God provided a ricinus plant, which grew up over Jonah, to provide shade for his head... Jonah was very happy about the plant.
7. Bereishit 10:4, 10:11-12 וּבְנֵי יוֹן אֵלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ כְּתִים וְדֹדָנִים: "The descendants of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kittim and the Dodanim." מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא יָצָא אֲשׁוּר וַיְבַן אֶת-נִינְוָה... "From that land Asshur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah..."	Yonah 1:2-3 קוּם לָךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרָא עָלֶיהָ... Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it... וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה לִבְרֹךְ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי ה'

	Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from the LORD's service...
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II. Thematic parallels between Yonah and Noah

- Destructive water, storms
- Boat stories
- A dove is sent to see if the storm is over; Yonah is thrown overboard to make the storm abate
- Both protected from danger by the boat and the fish
- Noah saves others from danger on the boat, while Yonah puts the sailors in danger on the boat
- Welfare of animals
- Forced out of protective spaces (the ark, the fish)
- Command reissued when leave space; repopulate world, פרו ורבו, or to return to Nineveh.
- Noah – passivity/drunkenness; Yonah – goes to sleep, wants to die
- End of stories: Noah – a tent; Yonah – a sukkah
- Both characters at the heart of the Yamim Noraim

8. Mussaf of Rosh Hashana

וגם את נח באהבה זכרת, ותפקדהו בדבר ישועה ורחמים בהביאך את מי המבול לשחת כל
 בשר מפני רע מעלליהם על כן זכרונו בא לפניך ה' אלוקינו להרבות זרעו כעפרות תבל,
 וצאצאיו כחול הים

And Noah also, You remembered with love, And You came to him with words of salvation,
 compassion When You brought on the waters of the great flood, To destroy all creatures
 of flesh whose practices were corrupt. And so let Noah's memory come to You, Hashem
 our God, That You multiply his children like the dust of the earth. And his descendants
 like the sand of the sea.

III. Approach #1: Yonah as a subversive sequel to Noah

Can a community change? Can G-d change? Can Yonah change?

9. Bereishit, 6:9 This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with G-d.	9. בראשית ו:ט אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדֹתָ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ:
10. Rashi on Bereishit 6:9 There are those among our Rabbis who interpret this as praise—how much more so, had he been in a generation of righteous people, would he have been more righteous; <u>and there are those who interpret this as an insult—in his generation he was righteous, but had he been in the generation of Abraham, he would have been considered as nothing.</u>	10. רש"י, בראשית ו:ט יֵשׁ מְרֻבּוֹתֵינוּ דּוֹרָשִׁים אוֹתוֹ לְשִׁבַּח, כָּל שָׂכֵן אִלּוּ הָיָה בְּדוֹר צַדִּיקִים הָיָה צַדִּיק יוֹתֵר; וְיֵשׁ שְׂדוֹרָשִׁים אוֹתוֹ לַגְּנָאִי, לְפִי דוֹרוֹ הָיָה צַדִּיק וְאִלּוּ הָיָה בְּדוֹרוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם לֹא הָיָה נֶחֱשָׁב לְכָלוּם
11. Breishit 18: 23-32 Perhaps (ulai) there are fifty righteous people in the city... Perhaps (ulai) the innocent fifty should lack five... 'Perhaps (ulai) there are to be found forty... And he said, "Let my Master not be angry and I will speak, perhaps (ulai) there are thirty to be found... And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord, perhaps (ulai) there are to be found twenty... Perhaps (ulai) there are to be found ten," and he said, "I will not destroy, for the sake of ten."	11. בראשית יח: כג-לב ...אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר... אוּלַי יִחְסְרוּן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִים חֲמִשָּׁה... וַיִּסָּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים... וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־נָא יַחַר לִאֲדֹנִי וְאִדְבָּרָה אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים... וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאֵלֹתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים... אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם עֶשְׂרֶה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרֶה:
12. Captain of the sailors וַיִּקְרָב אֵלָיו רֵב הַחִיָּל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה־לְךָ נִרְדָּם קוֹם קְרָא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוּלַי יִתְעַשֶּׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ וְלֹא נֶאֱבַד:	King of Nineveh מִי־יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֶאֱבַד: Who knows but that God may turn and

The captain went over to him and cried out, "How can you be sleeping so soundly! Up, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will be kind to us and we will not perish." (Yonah 1:6)

relent? [God] may turn back from wrathfulness, so that we do not perish." (Yonah 3:9)

13. Bereishit 6:7

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵמְחָה אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל
פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאֲדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ
וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחֲמָתִי כִּי עָשִׂיתֶם:

The LORD said, 'I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created... for I **regret (nichamti)** that I made them.'

Yonah 3:10

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרְכָּם
הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר
לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God **relented (vayinachem)** concerning the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.

14. Yechezkel 18:31-32

(31) Cast away all the transgressions by which you have offended, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, that you may not die, O House of Israel.
(32) For it is not My desire that anyone shall die—declares the Lord G-d. Repent, therefore, and live!

14. יחזקאל י"ח:ל"א-ל"ב

(לא) הֲשִׁלִּיכוּ מֵעַלְיִכֶם אֶת־כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר
פָּשַׁעְתֶּם בָּם וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה
וְלִמָּה תִמָּתוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:
(לב) כִּי לֹא אֲחַפֵּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת נָאִם אֲדֹנָי ה'
וְהִשִּׁיבוּ וְחִיּוּ:

15. Sefer Yonah, 3:4

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!'

יונה ג:ד

וַיֵּחָל יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בְּעִיר מִהֶלֶךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא
וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת:

IV. Approach #2: The Rebirth of Yonah and Noach

16. Rashi on Bereishit 7:7 Forty days: corresponding to the formation of a child (in the womb).	רש"י על בראשית ז:ז אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם. כְּנֶגֶד יִצְרֵת הַזֶּלֶד
17. Otzar HaMidrashim (Eisenstein), Yonah, p. 219 Rabbi Hanina said... 'Yonah was in the belly of the fish (dag) for three days' (Yonah 2:1) and did not pray. G-d said, 'I made for him this place in the belly of the fish so that he would be comfortable and he doesn't pray to Me? I will appoint another fish (daga – feminine) pregnant with 365,000 little fish so that he will be uncomfortable and pray to Me – for I desire the prayers of the righteous.	17. אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין), יונה, עמ' 219 ר' חנינא אומר ... והיה יונה שלשה ימים במעי הדג ולא התפלל, אמר הקב"ה אני הרחבתי לו מקום במעי הדג כדי שלא יצטער והוא אינו מתפלל לפני, אני מזמין לו דגה מעוברת בשלש מאות וששים וחמשה אלפים דגים קטנים כדי שיצטער ויתפלל לפני, שאני מתאוה לתפילתו של צדיקים.

V. Approach #3: Framing and Understanding Yonah's Tefilah

18. Four ways to read Yonah's prayer • The prayer comes from after the fish spits him out • He knows G-d will save him in the future (Ibn Ezra) • Saving him from drowning – G-d doesn't want him to die (Rashi) • Gratitude for G-d wanting a relationship with him	
19. Sefer 2:2-10 (2) Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish.	19. יונה ב:ב-י (ב) וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי מִמְעֵי הַדָּגָה: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר קִרְאֵתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֱלֹהֵי וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן שָׁאוֹל שְׁמַעְתִּי שְׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי:

(3) In my trouble I called to the LORD, and He answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried out, You heard my voice. (4) You cast me into the depths, into the heart of the sea, the floods engulfed me; all Your breakers and billows swept over me. (5) I thought I was driven away out of Your sight: would I ever gaze again upon Your holy Temple? (6) The waters closed in over me, the deep engulfed me. Weeds twined around my head. (7) I sank to the base of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed upon me forever. <u>Yet You brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God!</u> (8) When my life was ebbing away, I called the LORD to mind; and my prayer came before You, into Your holy Temple. (9) They who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare. (10) But I, with loud thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will perform. Deliverance is the LORD's!	(ד) וּתְשַׁלִּיכֵנִי מִצּוֹלָה בְּלִבִּי יָמִים וְנָהָר יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל־מִשְׁבְּרֶיךָ וְגִלְיֶךָ עָלַי עֲבְרוּ: (ה) וְאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ אֲךָ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הֵיכַל קִדְשְׁךָ: (ו) אֶפְפוּנִי מֵיָם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ תִּהְיוּם יִסְבְּבֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי: (ז) לְקַצְבֵּי הַרִים יִרְדְּתִי הָאָרֶץ בְּרוּחֶיהָ בְּעַדִּי לְעוֹלָם וּתְעַל מִשְׁחַת חַיִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ: (ח) בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי נֶפְשִׁי אֶת־ה' זָכַרְתִּי וּתְבֹא אֵלֶיךָ תִּפְלְתִּי אֶל־הֵיכַל קִדְשְׁךָ: (ט) מִשְׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי־שׁוֹא חֲסִדָּם יַעֲזֹבוּ: (י) וְאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֲזַבְּחָה־לָּךְ אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֲשַׁלֶּמָּה יְשׁוּעָתָה לָּהּ:
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20. Likutei Moharan II:112 If you believe you can destroy, believe you can repair.	20. ליקוטי מוהר"ן תנינא, קי"ב אם אתה מאמין שיכולין לקלקל, תאמין שיכולין לתקן
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VI. Further learning:

- Judy Klitsner, Subversive Sequels in the Bible: The Wings of the Dove – Noah and Jonah in Flight from Self

- Rabbi Joe Wolfson, "THINK: The Parallels of Noach & Yonah – Two Takes on Their Centrality to the Yamim Noraim," [THINK podcast](#)

- באר מרים - יום הכיפורים - ספר יונה

- [ספר יונה - רב יונתן גרוסמן](#)