

## Indeling hoofdstukken

- 1 Jona t.o.v. de Eeuwige, Jona weigert
- 2 Jona met zichzelf en zijn verhouding tot de Eeuwige bezig
- 3 Jona met de uitvoering van zijn opdracht van de Eeuwige bezig
- 4 Jona t.o.v. de Eeuwige, kritiek op de opdracht

## Indeling hoofdstuk 1.

1 En het woord van de Eeuwige komt tot Jona:

- A 2 Waar Jona heen moest;
- B 3 De profeet keert zich af van de Eeuwige;
- C 4 Een zware storm;
- D 5a Goederen uit het schip geworpen; וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֵּלִים
- E 5b Jona slaapt als was hij een onschuldig persoon;
- F 6 De schipper vraagt Jona mee te werken aan een oplossing;
- G 7 Door loting wordt de schuldige gezocht; וַגִּדְעָה בְּשִׁלְמִי
- H 8 Vraag om informatie aan Jona;
- I 9 Erkenning van de Eeuwige als schepper ook van de zee;
- I' 10 Door hun angst te tonen erkennen de zeelieden ook de macht van God;
- H' 11 Vraag om informatie aan Jona;
- G' 12 Jona erkent zijn schuld; יֹדַע אָנִי כִּי בְּשָׁלִי
- F' 13 De zeelieden proberen ondanks alles zelf een oplossing te vinden;
- E' 14 De zeelieden erkennen de mogelijkheid van Jona's onschuld;
- D' 15a Jona in zee geworpen; וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־יֹנָה וַיִּטְלֵהוּ
- C' 15b De storm beëindigd;
- B' 16 De vreemdelingen, zeelieden, wenden zich tot de Eeuwige;
- A' 17 (= 2:1) Waar Jona terecht kwam.

<p>וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בְּנֶאֱמַתִּי לֵאמֹר:</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>קוֹם לְךָ אֶל־גִּיּוֹנָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא עֲלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה רַעְתָּם לִפְנֵי:</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה לְבָרַח תְּרִשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֹנִיָּה   בָּאָה תְרִשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ לְבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תְּרִשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה:</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>וַיְהִי הַטֵּיִל רוֹחַ־גְּדוֹלָה אֶל־הַיָּם וַיְהִי סַעַר־גְּדוֹל בַּיָּם וְהָאֹנִיָּה חֹשֶׁבֶת לְהִשָּׁבֵר:</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>וַיִּירָאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים וַיִּזְעַקוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֱלֹהָיו וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֵּלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאֹנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וַיּוֹנָה יָרַד אֶל־יַרְכְּתֵי הַסְּפִינָה וַיִּשְׁכַּב וַיִּרְדָּם:</p>	<p>5a 5b</p>
<p>וַיִּקְרַב אֵלָיו רַב הַחֲבֵל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מִה־לָּךְ נִרְדָּם קוֹם קְרָא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוּלַי יִתַּעֲשֶׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ וְלֹא נֵאבֵד:</p>	<p>6</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לְכוּ וְנִפְלֵה גּוֹרְלוֹת וְנִדְעָה בְּשִׁלְמֵי הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ וַיִּפְלוּ גּוֹרְלוֹת וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל עַל־יוֹנָה:</p>	<p>7</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידֵה־נָא לָנוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר לְמִי־הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מִה־מְלֹאכְתְּךָ וּמֵאֵיזוֹ תְבוֹא מָה אֶרְצֶךָ וְאִי־מִזֶּה עִם אֶתָּה:</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם עֲבָרִי אֲנִי וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יָרָא אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־הַיַּבֵּשֶׁת:</p>	<p>9</p>
<p>וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יִרְאָה גְדוֹלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מִה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ כִּי־יָדְעוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי־מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה הוּא בָרַח כִּי הִגִּיד לָהֶם:</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מִה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵינוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסַעַר:</p>	<p>11</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵיכֶם כִּי יוֹדַע אֲנִי כִּי בְּשִׁלְי הַסַּעַר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה עֲלֵיכֶם:</p>	<p>12</p>
<p>וַיַּחֲתְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֵּשֶׁת וְלֹא יָכְלוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסַעַר עֲלֵיהֶם:</p>	<p>13</p>
<p>וַיִּקְרָאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אָנָּה יְהוָה אֵל־נָא נִאבְדָה בְּנַפְשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאַל־תִּתֵּן עֲלֵינוּ דָם נָקִיא כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר חָפַצְתָּ עָשִׂיתָ:</p>	<p>14</p>
<p>וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיִּטְלוּ אֶל־הַיָּם וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם מִזְעָפוֹ:</p>	<p>15a 15b</p>
<p>וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יִרְאָה גְדוֹלָה אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־זָבַח לַיהוָה וַיִּדְרוּ נְדָרִים:</p>	<p>16</p>
<p>וַיִּמְן יְהוָה דָּג גְּדוֹל לְבַלְעַ אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בְּמִעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלוֹת:</p>	<p>2:1</p>

פרק א

א וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בְּנֹאֲמָתִי לֵאמֹר:

ב קוּם לֶךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה רַעַתָּם לִפְנֵי:

ג וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה לְבָרַח תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֹנִיָּה | בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָה וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה:

ד וַיְהִי הַטִּיל רֹחַ־גְּדוֹלָה אֶל־הַיָּם וַיְהִי סַעַר־גְּדוֹל בַּיָּם וְהָאֹנִיָּה חֹשְׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר:

ה וַיִּירָאוּ הַמַּלְחִים וַיִּזְעְקוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֱלֹהָיו וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכִּלִּים

אֲשֶׁר בָּאֹנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם

וַיִּזְנֶה יָרֵד אֶל־יַרְכַּתִּי הַסְּפִינָה וַיִּשְׁכַּב וַיִּרְדָּם:

ו וַיִּקְרַב אֵלָיו רֵב הַחִבְלִל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַה־לָּךְ נִרְדָּם קוּם קְרָא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוּלַי יִתְעַשֶׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ וְלֹא נֶאֱבֹד:

ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לְכוּ וְנַפִּילָה גּוֹרְלוֹת וְנִדְעָה בְּשִׁלְמֵי הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ גּוֹרְלוֹת וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל עַל־יוֹנָה:

ח וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידֵה־נָא לָנוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר לְמִי־הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מִה־מְלֹאכְתְּךָ וּמֵאַיִן תָּבוֹא מִה אֲרָצְךָ וְאִי־מִזֶּה עִם אֶתָּה:

ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם עַבְרֵי אֲנִי וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יָרָא אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה:

י וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרָאָה גְּדוֹלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ כִּי־יָדְעוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי־מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה הוּא בָרַח כִּי הִגִּיד לָהֶם:

יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵינוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר:

יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׂאוּנִי וְהַטִּילְנִי אֶל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵיכֶם כִּי יוֹדַע אֲנִי כִּי בְשָׁלִי הַסֹּעֵר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה עָלֵיכֶם:

יג וַיַּחֲתְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר עָלֵיהֶם:

יד וַיִּקְרָאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אַנְּהָ יְהוָה אֶל־נָא נֶאֱבֹדָה בְּנַפְשׁ

הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאַל־תִּתֵּן עָלֵינוּ דָם נִקְיָא כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר חִפְצָתָ עָשִׂיתָ:

טו וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיִּטְלֵהוּ אֶל־הַיָּם וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם מִזְעָפוֹ:

טז וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרָאָה גְּדוֹלָה אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־זָבַח לַיהוָה וַיִּדְרוּ נְדָרִים:

# Jonah – 4 – The 13 Attributes Of God

## The 13 Attributes of God י"ג מידות ה'

Jonah says to God:

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֵל חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסְדֵּךְ וְנָחָם עַל הָרָעָה:

I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repentest Thee of the evil.

### The first and full listing of the attributes:

שמות פרק לד

(1) וַיַּעֲבֹר יְקֹוֹק עַל פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא יְקֹוֹק יְקֹוֹק אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסְדֵּךְ וְנָחָם:

(2) נֹצֵר חַסְדֵּךְ לְאַלְפֵי־יָמַי נֹשֵׂא עוֹן וְכַשְׁעֵךְ וְחַטָּאתֶיךָ לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנֵי עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רַבְעִים:

## Exodus 34

6 And the LORD passed by before him, *and proclaimed: 'The LORD, the LORD, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; 7 keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation.'*

The section marked in orange is unclear. It is also possible to read the Hebrew to mean: The Lord proclaimed

The attributes are mentioned in other places in the Tanakh. The chart below brings several biblical sections that make use of some of the attributes. (There are more locations. You may use a concordance to track down other locations if you wish to study this further.)

How do other biblical passages compare to Jonah in the way the attributes are used?

Selihot:

These attributes, especially the way they are used in the 2 Torah passages (following the Golden Calf and following the Sin of the Spies,) are the basis for Selihot (also in the Tefilla of Yom Kippur)

<p>שמות פרק לד</p> <p>יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהֵי רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֲרָדָה אֲפִים וְרַב חֶסֶד וְאֵמֶת: (ז) נִצַּר חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים נִשְׂא עֵז וְפִשֵׁעַ וְחִטָּאָה וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה פְקֹד עֵז אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנֵים עַל שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל רְבַעִים:</p>	<p>במדבר פרק יד</p> <p>(יח) יְקֹנֶה אֲרָדָה אֲפִים וְרַב חֶסֶד נִשְׂא עֵז וְפִשֵׁעַ וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה פְקֹד עֵז אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים עַל שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל רְבַעִים:</p>	<p>יואל פרק ב</p> <p>(יג) וְקִרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם וְאֵל בְּגֵדֵיכֶם וְשׁוּבוּ אֵל יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כִּי חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֲרָדָה אֲפִים וְרַב חֶסֶד וְנִחָם עַל הָרָעָה:</p>	<p>תהלים פרק קמה</p> <p>(ח) חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם יְקֹנֶה אֲרָדָה אֲפִים וְגִדְל חֶסֶד:</p>	<p>נחמיה פרק ט</p> <p>(ז) ...וְאֵתָה אֱלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אֲרָדָה אֲפִים וְרַב חֶסֶד חֶסֶד וְלֹא עֲזַבְתָּם:</p>
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<p><b>Exodus 34</b></p> <p>the LORD, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; 7 keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation.'</p>	<p><b>Numbers 14</b></p> <p>18 The LORD is slow to anger, and plenteous in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.</p>	<p><b>Joel 2</b></p> <p>13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God; for He is gracious and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil.</p>	<p><b>Psalms 145</b></p> <p>8 The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.</p>	<p><b>Nehemiah 9</b></p> <p>but Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and forsook them not.</p>
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## Why Do We Read the Story of Jonah on Yom Kippur?

### A Yom Kippur Teaching

The Hebrew Bible is an anthology of writings. It not only includes the Five Books of Moses, which are contained in our Torah scroll, but also the many books of the *Nevi'im*, the Prophets, and the collection known as *Ketuvim*, or Writings. The Writings contain the Psalms, the Book of Proverbs, Job, Esther, Ruth, and numerous other titles. Taken together, all the books of the Bible are known as the TaNaKh, an acronym for Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim.

One might have the impression that the Bible is a single narrative and a consistent theological discourse. One would be mistaken! The Tanakh is in fact a marvelously diverse anthology of sacred history, poetry, law, moral instruction, farce, fable, and inquiry into the meaning of life and the nature of the cosmos. The Tanakh explores all of the big questions that we humans face: why are we here? Is there cosmic justice? How are we to fulfill our potential? What is our responsibility to one another? This exploration is not systematic, in the way a modern book of philosophy might undertake. The Tanakh, rather, is in dialogue with itself, one story or discourse actively taking issue with the implications or declarations of another. The Tanakh in fact sets the tone for one of the most grand and enduring quality of Jewish culture: holy argument. That is, Judaism elevates dialogue, passionate debate, to a spiritual path. Where do we find God? Yes, in sunsets, in the miracles of nature, in the ecstasy of prayer... but also in the exchange of ideas. One finds God not at the end of the discussion, but in the very act of searching.

While we traditionally read and study the Five Books of Moses on a weekly basis throughout the year, the later books of the Tanakh do not get weekly attention. Our sages therefore strategically associate many of these books with certain holidays, so that we encounter them at least once during the year. These lesser-read books often offer a counterpoint to the primary narrative of the holiday. The book that the sages assigned to Yom Kippur is the story of Jonah. I would like to explore with you this evening the radical and timeless message of this tale.

One of the names of Yom Kippur is Yom Hadin, the Day of Judgment. We traditionally imagine God sitting on the Judgment seat, the damning ledger of our deeds open before him, as we plead for mercy and forgiveness. In this venerable image, the purpose of our fervent prayers and confession, our fasting and self-denial, is to influence God to move from the Judgment Seat to the Mercy Seat, and, undeserving though we are, grant us another year in the Book of Life. But what if it is not God who needs to move from harsh judgment to compassion, but we ourselves? What if it is we ourselves who are stuck on the Judgment seat, and it is God who is pleading with us to have mercy on each other and on creation? This is the surprising message of the Book of Jonah.

I gleaned these insights from Judy Klitsner in her brilliant book “Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other” – thank you, Bob Messing, for introducing me to it – and I am pleased to expand on them here with you tonight.

Klitsner shows how the story of Jonah is an intra-biblical response to the story of Noah – a subversive sequel, as she calls it. Numerous linguistic and literary parallels link the two tales, but the thrust of the Book of Jonah’s message is diametrically opposed to the moral of the Flood story. The rabbis pick up on those distinctions, and on Yom Kippur choose to amplify the message of Jonah, to our great benefit, as I will explain.

In the popular imagination, pretty much the only thing we know about Jonah is that he is the guy who gets swallowed by a whale. When I was a kid, I remember I got him mixed up with Pinocchio, who also gets swallowed by a whale, if you recall. In the actual story of Jonah, the whale episode (and it is in fact a giant fish that swallows Jonah, not a whale) is only a prelude to the real climax of the tale.

The book, which reads as a kind of fable, contains only four short chapters. Jonah ben Amittai is a prophet of God in the land of Israel. The story opens as God calls to him and tells him to travel east to the city of Nineveh, the capitol of Babylonia and the greatest city in the world, and tell them to repent of their evil ways. Instead, Jonah flees in the opposite direction. He runs to Jaffa and boards a ship headed west to Tarshish, far across the Great Sea, the Mediterranean. He falls asleep in the hold of the ship, and a great storm arises. The sailors pray to their gods to no avail. Finally Jonah awakes and, understanding that his flight from God has caused this turbulence, insists that the sailors toss him overboard. The sailors, having exhausted every other option to save their ship, beg for forgiveness and reluctantly toss Jonah overboard. The sea immediately calms, and Jonah is swallowed by the fish.

Chapter 2: Jonah is in the fish's belly for three days and three nights. He finally prays to God and affirms that he will heed his calling and perform his mission. The fish spews Jonah back onto dry land. Chapter 3: God once again calls to Jonah and tells him to go to Nineveh, and this time Jonah obeys the call. He reaches Nineveh and proclaims that in 40 days Nineveh will fall if the people do not repent of their evil ways. The people of Nineveh, led by their king, believe the message, actively repent, pray for forgiveness, and change their ways. God renounces the punishment, and Nineveh is saved.

Chapter 4: You might think that Jonah is pleased with this outcome, his mission a complete success, millions of lives saved. But no, Jonah is angry with God. He cannot believe that God is going to forgive these people, who deserved to be punished. God says to Jonah, "Why are you so angry?" Jonah quotes the Thirteen Attributes that we chant during these Holy Days, and retorts, "I knew that you are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment, and that you would forgive these people. That makes me so angry! That is why I fled your call in the first place. Where is justice? I would rather die." And God says, "Is anger better for you, Jonah? Why should I not have compassion for Nineveh, that great city, and all of its inhabitants, human and beast, who do not know their right from their left, and are simply doing the best that they can?"

And with that question, the story ends.

Judy Klitsner points out that God's attitude is markedly different in the earlier story of Noah. In that episode, human society has degenerated and polluted the world with *Hamah*, which means injustice, violence, or lawlessness. "*Vayinachem* – and God regretted making human beings...and said 'I will erase humans from the earth, along with all other creatures that I created.'" (Genesis 6:6-7) But God cannot bear to destroy it all, and singles out Noah as worthy of redemption. God instructs Noah to build the ark.

In Jonah, the King of Nineveh declares, "Let all turn back from the *hamah* of which they are guilty...God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. *Vayinachem* – and God regretted the evil God had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out." (Jonah 3:7,8,10)

In both tales, the human condition is the same – we fill the world with *hamas*. We're a mess. But God's regrets change. In Noah, God simply regrets creating humanity, and decides to wipe clean God's creation. In Jonah, God has come to know and trust humanity's capacity for change, and regrets God's own harsh judgment against them. Has God changed and grown?

Another literary clue supports this thesis. In Noah, God brings rains for forty days and forty nights; the people do not have a chance to repent. In Jonah, God tells Jonah to proclaim, "In forty days Nineveh will be overthrown!" The forty days of blanket condemnation in Noah become forty days of opportunity in Jonah.

Noah and Jonah also compare. Noah never speaks. He simply accepts God's decree. He does not attempt to debate with God or challenge God's judgment. As I have taught in the past, our tradition considers Noah inferior in this regard. When God tells Abraham that God is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham argues passionately against God's judgment. Noah is silent, incomplete in his humanity, unable or unwilling to stand up for his fellow humans. Jonah, presented with the opportunity to save others, runs away, and then only begrudgingly fulfills his mission. Both of these prophets are found wanting. But whereas in Noah, God regrets making humanity and asks nothing more of Noah than to follow instructions and build the ark, in Jonah God regrets God's own harshness, and then tries to educate Jonah to soften himself.

Most interesting to me is Jonah's name. Jonah in Hebrew is *yonah*, and means "dove". The same *yonah* that Noah sends out from the ark. After the rains have ceased and the waters have begun to recede, that dove returns to Noah with an *aleh zayit*– a sprig of an olive branch – in its beak. This is the sign that the earth is habitable once more, and that humanity has a second chance. The Book of Jonah – the book of the dove – elevates not the God of strict judgment portrayed at the outset of Noah, but the God of second chances, the olive branch, the symbol of new beginnings. The Book of Jonah portrays a God who believes that humans, despite our weakness, are capable of *teshuvah*, and deserve the opportunity to attempt sincere change. No wonder our sages chose Jonah to be read on Yom Kippur, the day of second chances.

If God, as it were, can move from harsh judgment to compassion, then can we? Jonah is each of us, sitting on the judgment seat. The Judgment throne is not evil, it is in fact essential to our humanness. A sense of justice, an appreciation for fairness and truth, is an exalted human attribute. But Judaism insists that the world can only be sustained in the tension of polarities. Justice and compassion must exist in a dynamic balance. The rabbis often state that if the world were only based on strict justice, humanity would be condemned. It is compassion that allows us to continue to try to overcome our many flaws. And here, Jonah's full name becomes very instructive, and a key to understanding his parable. His name is *Jonah ben Amittai*, Jonah, son of truth. Jonah is a zealot for truth – and the truth that he perceives in human affairs is that we fail miserably to live up to our highest nature. We fail. Why should we not be punished?

Who here has not felt the zealot for truth pacing within, demanding justice, furious for payback? But God says to us, "Jonah, is anger better for you?" Is anger better than compassion? One might say that as the Tanach unfolds, even God has matured, from judgmental of us and disappointed in us, his flawed creation, to compassionate and forgiving. In the Book of Jonah, God wants us to learn that hard-earned lesson, too.

As I mentioned, Yom Kippur's other name is *Yom HaDin*, the Day of Judgment. But a better name for this day might be *Yom HaDin v'HaRachamim*, the Day of Compassionate Judgment. For, while

we certainly must be clear-eyed judges of ourselves on this day, honestly acknowledging how we have missed the mark, our tradition invokes a God of forgiveness, who knows our faults, and still believes in us, and in our ability to grow. The future is not determined; it is always open to new possibility, especially if, like the people of Nineveh, we are open to acknowledging our failures and open to making amends, open to the difficult work of changing ourselves.

The choice is before us: will we be zealots like Jonah, angrily demanding judgment, or will we, like God, move from the Judgment seat to the Mercy seat, and let compassion reign? Will we be like the angry prophet Jonah, or can we perhaps be like the Yonah after which he is named, the dove bearing the olive branch in our grasp, carrying a message of hope, peace, second chances and new beginnings for ourselves and the world?

I wish for us all the possibilities of forgiveness and compassion. So may it be.

## The Book of Jonah and the Days of Awe

Jeffrey H. Tigay

A leitmotif in the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is the recitation of God's thirteen attributes:

The Lord! The Lord! A merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and pardoning....

This list of God's merciful qualities is highly reassuring to the Jew facing the Heavenly Court in the season of judgment; but to anyone who knows his Bible, the list must appear puzzling, if not downright scandalous. It is a blatant example of a quotation lifted out of context, interrupting a sentence in the middle of a phrase for the sake of omitting the inconvenient sequel. For the last word in the list, "pardoning" (*venaqqeh*),<sup>1</sup> is actually part of a phrase which reads in full, "but He surely does riot pardon" (*venaqqeh lo yenaqqeh*). The passage in question comes from Exodus 34:6-7 where Moses, who is trying to win God's pardon for Israel after the scandal of the golden calf, has succeeded in convincing God to reveal His qualities. After listing the twelve merciful attributes just quoted, God continues: "however, He surely does not pardon, but visits the iniquity of the fathers upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations." In sum, God never entirely cancels guilt; it must always be paid for sooner or later, in one generation or another.<sup>2</sup> Thus the passage as a whole conveys a balanced picture of God as both merciful and just. Yet whenever the passage is quoted in the prayerbook, as during the Days of Awe, we find, as it were, a distorted version in which all aspects of strict justice have been violently removed. How are we to account for this textual outrage within a religion which so venerates the written text of the Torah? By what strange path has the list of divine attributes come to include only merciful qualities?

The Book of Jonah represents a milestone along this path. Because of its helpfulness in answering our question, as well as its inherent fascination in many other respects, it is appropriate to review the findings of modern scholarship about the book.<sup>3</sup> Although we may stray into colorful bypaths now and then, we shall not forget to return to our central question in the end.

Let us begin by summarizing the book's plot. Jonah is commanded by God to go to Nineveh (the capital of Assyria, which would later exile the northern Kingdom of Israel) and proclaim judgment upon it because of the Ninevites' wickedness. But Jonah boards a ship and flees westward to Tarshish, in the opposite direction. However, God thwarts his escape by whipping up a violent storm which threatens the boat. When the passengers cast lots to discover on whose account the storm has arisen, Jonah owns up that he is fleeing from the service of the God of Heaven who made both sea and land, and suggests that they throw him overboard in order to quiet the storm. Reluctant to do so, the sailors try again to row back to shore, and only after further failure do they finally comply with Jonah's suggestion.

God provides a huge fish to swallow Jonah and thus prevent him from drowning. Jonah spends three days and nights in the fish's belly and prays to God in gratitude for his deliverance. At God's command the fish spews Jonah out onto dry land.

Act I of the drama, comprising chapters one and two of the book, thus ends with Jonah beaten into submission to God's will. Act II, comprising chapters three and four of the book, now begins on a note nearly identical to the opening of Act I, one of a series of details in which Act II was

foreshadowed by Act I. God orders Jonah once again, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it..." (3:2; compare 1:2), but this time He adds, "proclaim against it what I tell you," as if He now seeks to ensure Jonah's punctilious compliance. This time Jonah, instead of running "away from the Lord's service" (1:3) heads at once for Nineveh "in accordance with the Lord's command" (3:3). Arriving in the city he begins proclaiming, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overturned!" (3:4). When Jonah was no more than a third of the way through the city, the people believed God's word and went into mourning. The king himself proclaimed comprehensive rites of penitence which would include even the animals, and commanded all to turn back from their evil ways and the injustice of which they were guilty. Just as the ship's passengers in Act I had cried out to their gods, and the captain urged Jonah to cry out to his on the grounds that "perhaps He will be kind to us and we will not perish" (1:5,6), now in Act II the king commands all to cry mightily to God, since "who knows but that God may turn and relent (*veniham*)? He may turn back from his wrath, so that we do not perish" (3:7-9). The Ninevites' reform works: the human turning produces a divine turning. When God sees that they have abandoned their evil ways, he renounces (*vayyinahem*) their punishment (3: 10).

This distresses Jonah greatly, and he now explains himself: This is why I ran away the first time, "For I know that you are a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in kindness, and renouncing (*veniham*) punishment" (4:2). Note for further discussion how this list of God's qualities – it sounds like an accusation in Jonah's mouth – resembles the thirteen attributes.

Jonah now sits outside the city to see what will happen to it. God provides-note the same verb as used with the fish-a huge plant to grow over Jonah's head and "save him from his distress" (*lehatsil lo meraato*; 4:6); in view of the context this phrase means to save him from the physical distress which the burning sun would cause him; but one cannot miss the double entendre provided by a second, equally possible translation: to save Jonah from his distress over God's mercy. In other words, the giant plant is an educative device used by God to teach Jonah the value of mercy. After the plant has shaded Jonah for a day, God provides (that word again!) a worm to attack it and cause it to wither, and then He provides a hot east wind to add to the heat of the sun to which Jonah was now exposed. Jonah grows faint and wishes to die. Just as the educative turning point of Act I came when Jonah was faint and near death (2:18), in Act II the lesson is driven home at a similar juncture. "Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?" God asks Jonah. "You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. Should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!" (4:10-11).

Thus the second act ends like the first, with a divinely "provided" miracle designed to teach Jonah a lesson.<sup>4</sup> The book's theme is thus the education of a prophet. Did Jonah learn from these miracles? That he finally went to Nineveh shows that the first miracle produced the desired effect: God was able to beat Jonah into submission by showing him that he could not escape the divine call. But the book gives no hint as to the effect of the second lesson on Jonah. It seems that at this point, now that God has explained himself, Jonah's response is no longer important to the narrator; it is the reader, as much as Jonah, who is left to ponder God's words.

In the Jewish liturgical calendar that pondering is supposed to take place on Yom Kippur. The Book of Jonah has been assigned a climactic role in the liturgy of the Days of Awe by being selected as the *haftarah* for the afternoon service of Yom Kippur, in other words, the final Biblical reading of the Ten Days of Penitence. Such an honored position would by itself lead us to ask how this choice came to be made, but our curiosity is compounded by the fact that the image which the name of Jonah calls to mind is one of prophetic pettiness and a miraculous fish story which seems too frivolous for such a solemn setting.

Jonah's three-day sojourn in the fish's belly is not, in fact, an essential feature of the book's message, but its colorful and fantastic nature leaves us unsurprised at the fact that lovers and haters of the Bible alike have been arrested by it. Who can forget the claim of Sportin' Life, the archskeptical in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, that "It ain't necessarily so...that [Jonah] made his home in / that fish's abdomen?" Since as early as the second century pagan critics of Judaism and Christianity have pointed to the episode in order to mock the Bible. How, they ask, could Jonah have been swallowed whole when a whale's gullet is not large enough to accommodate a human being? Or how did he avoid poisoning by the fish's gastric juices, or suffocation in the fish's belly?<sup>5</sup> Embarrassed champions of the Bible were not unresourceful in its defense. Already in the twelfth century Abraham ibn Ezra hinted that Jonah's flight and stay inside the fish took place only in a vision. Others offered bolder explanations. In the fifteenth century Abarbanel held that the event was no less credible than the fact that fetuses live nine months in their mothers' wombs.<sup>6</sup> More recently it has been claimed that the "Big Fish" was simply the name of a ship which rescued Jonah, or even the name of a hotel in which he stayed!<sup>7</sup>

All this feverish concern to rationalize the miracle stems from excessive preoccupation with its historical plausibility rather than its function within the narrative. In its context the fish episode is merely a device whereby Jonah's final attempt to escape his mission-by drowning-is thwarted.<sup>8</sup>

Why did Jonah flee from that mission in the first place? Jonah says he knew God would forgive the Ninevites and cancel their punishment (4:2). But what objection could Jonah possibly have to the forgiveness of the truly penitent? Since ancient times various answers have been suggested. One theory which has been expressed frequently goes back to the early days of the struggle between Judaism and Christianity, when commentators unsympathetic to Jews lost no opportunity to portray them as narrow minded bigots. According to this theory, Jonah wanted to exclude gentiles, such as the Ninevites, from God's compassion. The book was allegedly written to teach the intolerant Jews, whom Jonah represented, that God's mercy applies to all mankind. Another version of this interpretation holds that the Jews were why God had not yet punished the nations which had dealt them so much harm; the book was written to show them that these nations, too, deserved mercy. The fallacy of this line of interpretation is obvious, for nothing is further from the author's mind than the sins of Nineveh against Israel. The text makes it clear that the sins of which the Ninevites repent are "each man's evil ways" and "the injustice which is in their hands" (Jonah 3:8), not the oppression of Israel, not even idolatry, which the Ninevites are not asked to abandon. The Ninevites' sins apparently are those committed against each other.

The fact that the Ninevites are gentiles is thus not an issue in the story, but the very mention of the "sectarian" interpretation gives us an opportunity to take note of the sympathetic way the book portrays gentiles. At almost every turn they are shown as admirable, decent people. It is true that the Ninevites are guilty of capital crimes, but the speed with which they acknowledge their guilt and heed Jonah's call for repentance is practically unparalleled among the Israelites themselves. In fact some Jewish commentators found in this circumstance the explanation for Jonah's flight: suspecting that the Ninevites would repent quickly, Jonah feared their alacrity would make Israel's stubbornness all the more apparent and increase its punishment. Not only the Ninevites, but the idolatrous passengers on Jonah's boat are portrayed favorably. Their first impulse is to reject throwing Jonah overboard and to try again to row to shore, and when they finally yield they pray to God not to hold them guilty of murder, since He has left them no other choice. The Rabbis were aware of the passengers' reluctance, and in their own midrashic way they magnified it. They stated that even after their final prayer to God the passengers could not resolve to let Jonah drown. So they first immersed him to his knees in the ocean; the storm then ceased, so they pulled him back into the

boat, but the storm immediately began to rage again; then they lowered him to his navel, and when the sea calmed they drew him up again; when the storm began once more they lowered him to his neck, and when it calmed they lifted him up once more. But when the storm began a fourth time, they knew that Jonah was the cause of their danger and they abandoned him to the sea.<sup>9</sup> These details have scant basis in the Biblical text, but in stressing the gentile passengers' moral sensitivity the Rabbis were surely acting in the spirit of the text. For the Book of Jonah makes clear that the Bible recognized the morality and decency of non-Israelites.

The oldest Jewish interpretation of the book holds that Jonah fled because he wished to protect his credibility. Since the Ninevites were sure to be forgiven, Jonah, who was to predict their doom, would look like a false prophet.<sup>10</sup> A variation on this view holds that it was God's credibility that Jonah sought to protect. God's willingness to forgive and forget would destroy the fear of God; His word would become a mockery and men's trust in Him would be shaken if His threats were so easily evaded.<sup>11</sup> The book does raise this problem. The divine threat is phrased in absolute terms; even a date is set. Yet after forty days Nineveh remains standing. One commentator cleverly sought to circumvent the problem by arguing that in Jonah's prediction of the overturning of Nineveh, the word "overturned" had been equivocal, meaning either "overthrown" or "transformed," and because of Nineveh's repentance the latter meaning came true.<sup>12</sup> But such self-serving ambiguity offers the listener no direction; it is worthy of the Delphic Oracle,<sup>13</sup> but foreign to the spirit of Biblical prophecy, and the problem of nonfulfillment cannot be glibly evaded. It is not clear from the book itself whether Jonah is really concerned about credibility, but it is clear that God is not. God is willing to risk humiliation, to allow His word to be discredited, for the sake of compassion. Seen from this perspective the Book of Jonah teaches that God is able and willing and even desirous of annulling His own threatening word.<sup>14</sup>

This supreme expression of divine sovereignty is not something which we should take for granted. In the ancient Near East the immutability of gods' and kings' words was proverbial. When the Mesopotamian gods made Marduk their king in the creation myth *Enuma Elish*, they declared to him:<sup>15</sup>

From this day unchangeable shall be your pronouncement. Your utterance shall be true, your command shall be impeachable.

A divine decree, once uttered, could not be canceled, but at best postponed or somehow redirected. When Sennacherib destroyed Babylon, we read in an inscription of Esarhaddon, Marduk wrote down seventy years as the term of the city's desolation; later, when he was appeased, the merciful god turned the tablet over which, given the form of cuneiform numerals, made the "70" look like an "11," and Marduk then ordered Babylon's restoration after eleven years.<sup>16</sup> Note how even in his mercy the god's freedom of action is limited by his previous decree; he must resort to a trick to circumvent his own words! In this Marduk's sovereignty over his own words is no greater than that of King Ahasuerus who, in Esther 8:8 found that his decree permitting the slaughter of the Jews could not be simply revoked even though he wished it.

While the Bible nowhere considers God to be constrained by His decrees, several passages declare His consistency in executing them. As Bilaam told Balak:

God is not man to be capricious, or mortal to renounce His plans (*lehinnahem*). Would He speak and not act, Promise and not fulfill?<sup>17</sup>

(Numbers 23:19)

More than one repentant sinner in the Bible suffered at least partial punishment because his repentance had come after the divine decree. Indeed, when Saul sought to nullify God's rejec-

tion of him by repenting of his sin, Samuel responded that "the Eternal of Israel neither lies nor renounces His plans (*yinnahem*), for He is not a man that he should renounce His plans (*lehinnahem*)" (I Samuel 15:29).<sup>18</sup> Yet here is the Book of Jonah proclaiming with the very same Hebrew word (*hinnahem*) that God does indeed renounce His threats! In this the Book of Jonah appears to follow a new idea, expressed most succinctly by the prophet Jeremiah, who quotes God as saying:

If any time I declare concerning a nation or kingdom that I shall pluck up and break down and destroy it, and that nation...turns away from its evil, I shall renounce (*venihamti*) the evil I planned against it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation that I shall build and plant it, and it does evil in My sight, not listening to My voice, then I shall renounce (*venihamti*) the good which I planned for it. (Jeremiah 18:7-10)<sup>19</sup>

This new idea means that God's threats as well as promises are contingent; prophecy is conditional. Even categorical divine decrees are subject to modification in light of human behavior. This leads to a radical and paradoxical change in the role of the prophet: his greatest success comes in the obviation of his threat! For the prophet is no longer conceived as merely a herald announcing the coming doom, but as a watchman warning of the doom in an effort to avert it.<sup>20</sup>

This is a view of prophecy that Jonah apparently did not share. He was a member of the old school. The Book of Deuteronomy had defined a simple test for the truth of a prophet:

If the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously.... (Deuteronomy 18:22)

Under this conception the job of prophecy seems simple: Speak what God tells you and you will always be proved right. History is intelligible, God's word always comes to pass, and the prophet is a celebrity. But how tragic is the new conception! Speak what God tells you, but speak it so effectively that the people will be moved to change their ways and thus obviate your dire prediction (cf. Jer. 26:18-19). If your reputation suffers in the process-that's a small price to pay for what you will have accomplished!

We cannot be sure that Jonah is aware of this issue. What we discern in the mind of the author may not have been imputed by him to Jonah. Jonah's explicit words raise a different, though related, issue. If we wish to entirely avoid reading into Jonah's words, we must conclude that he is simply opposed to mercy. He is angry because God relents. Here, too, Jonah appears as the representative of an older point of view. To understand this view we must see the Book of Jonah in the context of a series of other Biblical narratives to which it is related. These stories belong to a category known as moral narratives.<sup>21</sup> They include the story of Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham's dialogue with God, the story of Job, Noah and the flood, the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, and the Tower of Babel. All of these stories, which deal with universal human moral problems, are essentially about non-Israelites. When Israelites, such as Abraham and Jonah, appear in them, their role is only incidental; the main protagonists, such as Job and Noah, are not Israelites. This is because the themes of these stories are universal, not peculiar to Israel.

Among these moral narratives, only the Book of Jonah gives a place to the concept of repentance. In the others the concept of strict justice reigns supreme: guilt must be paid for. To some extent these stories preserve an earlier conception of guilt which views it as an objective, almost physical force, somewhat comparable to disease. This concept of sin and guilt is well known from the ancient world. In Greece,

certain acts we find, such as murder, for example, were supposed to infect as with a stain not only the original offender but his descendants from generation to generation. Yet even so, the stain, it appears, was conceived to be rather physical than moral, analogous to disease both in its character and in the methods of its cure. Aeschylus tells us of the earth breeding monsters as a result of the corruption infused by the shedding of blood; and similarly a purely physical infection tainted the man or the race that had been guilty of crime. And as was the evil, so was the remedy. External acts and observations might cleanse and purge away what was regarded as an external affection of the soul.<sup>22</sup>

Just as no one would think that a disease could be cured by turning one's back on it, so it was incompatible with this ancient conception to think that guilt could be eradicated by repentance, by simply turning away from sin. Sin must be ritually or magically expiated, or expunged by punishment. The consequence of this conception in Mesopotamian religion was described by Henri Frankfort:

The Mesopotamians, while they knew themselves to be subject to the decrees of the gods, had no reason to believe that these decrees were necessarily just. Hence their penitential psalms abound in confessions of guilt but ignore the sense of sin; they are vibrant with despair, but not with contrition-with regret but not with repentance. The Mesopotamian recognized guilt by its consequences: when he suffered, he assumed that he had transgressed a divine decree. He confessed, in such a case, to be guilty, although he declared:

I do not know the offense against the god,  
I do not know the transgression against the goddess.

When a fault had been committed, through whatever cause, the gods struck automatically. Hence the desire to expiate "the offense which I know and the offense which I do not know; which I have committed in negligence, as a crime, in carelessness or in contempt."

Such a desire was not sufficient to alleviate the punishment; it was necessary to know which specific rule one had transgressed, since specific penances had been prescribed by the gods for each of them. We have met an instance of this belief in the correspondence of an Assyrian king: "Ea made (the earthquake), Ea will release (us from it). (For) whoever made the earthquake has also provided the lustral incantation against it." Thus everything pertaining to human guilt was likely to assume a mechanistic and gloomy aspect.<sup>23</sup>

The moral narratives in the Bible give no place to ritual-magical expiation, but apart from the Book of Jonah they are united in demanding punishment. No prophet is sent to warn the flood generation. Abraham pleads -- unsuccessfully -- for the sparing of the Sodomites, but that they might earn a pardon by repentance is never contemplated. Cain's punishment is mitigated by a sign protecting him from death, but he must still undergo banishment. To this series of moral narratives the Book of Jonah brings a revolutionary concept: repentance is efficacious. The victory of good over evil within the penitent heart is the most powerful expiation of all.

This message, too, is lost on Jonah. He is the advocate of strict justice. There is no suggestion in the book that Jonah is worried about setting a precedent which will be harmful to law and order. It is no long-range effect that he fears. He wants sin to be punished. He advocates a rigid and objective administration of justice in the universe. Jonah, in short, stands for that version of God's attributes which is found in the Torah, the list which states "but He surely does not pardon..." But although he favors this older conception, Jonah knows that it is no longer true, or at least not entirely. What angers him is that God "renounces punishment," as he charges in chapter four.

This new conception, opposed by Jonah but advocated by his biographer gained a foothold in Judaism. "God wants not the death of the sinner, but that he turn away from evil and live," as Ezekiel (18:23), followed by the High Holiday Mahzor, puts it. God explains his feelings to Jonah by means of the withering plant: God cares for man, whom He created and cultivated. Men fall into sin out of moral ignorance. Shall he not spare them if He can?

This new conception never entirely pushed aside the older one of strict justice. The two have lived side by side, in creative tension within Judaism ever since. The Book of Jonah, following Jeremiah and others, proved that at times God does pardon. What, now, was to be done with the list of divine attributes, enshrined in the Torah, which declared that God *naqqeh lo yennaqqeh*, surely does not pardon? Just as the evolving standards of society have demanded reinterpretation of the United States Constitution, so it now became necessary to reinterpret the crucial attribute "He surely does not pardon." The Hebrew phrase means literally "pardoning He does not pardon." The rabbis solved the problem by reading the phrase literally and dividing it into two parts: "pardoning" applies to the penitent, "He does not pardon" to the unrepentant. But the latter quality, and the other attributes of strict justice which follow it in the Torah, have no place in the prayers of the repentant, and so they were omitted from the liturgy. Those who wish to transform their lives want only to recall that such a transformation is possible and acceptable. The Book of Jonah, recited on Yom Kippur afternoon when the verdict of the Heavenly Court is drawing near, encourages that effort with the assurance that success is possible.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. "Pardon" is used in the sense "release from punishment" or "leave unpunished," a meaning clear from such passages as 1 Kings 2:9; in the *nif'al*, *niqqah* often means "remain unpunished," as in Exod. 21:19, 1 Sam. 26:9.

2. On the concept of deferred punishment see Jacob Milgrom, "Vertical Retribution: Ruminations on Parashat Shelah," *Conservative Judaism* 34/3 (January/February, 1981):11-16.

3. These observations are based primarily on the following studies: E. J. Bickerman *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1967), pp. 3-49; H. L. Ginsberg, ed. *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), pp. 114-16; S. D. Goitein, *Iyyunim Bamiqra*, 2d edition (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1963), pp. 80-87 (= "Some Observations on Jonah," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 17 [1937]:63-77); A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 286-87; Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot Ha'emunah Hayisre'elit* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Bialik Institute and Dvir, 1955), 2:279-87 (= *The Religion of Israel*, trans. M. Greenberg [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960], pp. 282-86); Ellen J. Rank, *The Book of Jonah in Modern Scholarship* (M.A. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1981).

4. Cf. Bickerman, p. 3; T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 655.

6. Cf. Ginsberg.

7. Cited by Bickerman and Gaster.

8. This is pointed out by Ibn Ezra in his commentary at Jonah 1:12, and discussed in greater detail by the Karaite commentator Daniel al-Qumisi (I.D. Markon, ed., *Commentarius in Librum Duodecim Prophetarum quem composuit Daniel al-Kumissi* [Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1957], p.41).

9. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1954), 4:248.

10. Ibid., p. 247.

11. Ibid., p. 252; cf. Heschel and Bickerman.

12. Quoted by Rashi at Jonah 3:4.

13. The Delphic oracle told Croesus that if he attacked the Persians he would destroy a mighty empire. When he was defeated and complained to the oracle, he was told that if he had been wise he would have inquired whether the Persian empire or his own was meant; he therefore had only himself to blame for the result (Herodotus *The Persian Wars*, trans. G. Rawlinson (New York: Modern Library, 1942), Book 1:52, 91); cf. Bickerman, p. 111.

14. Bickerman, p. 47; Heschel, p. 286; Goitein, p. 86.

15. Tablet IV, Lines 7, 10; translated by E. A. Speiser in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 66.

16. D. D. Luckenbill, in *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 41 (1925): 166-67.

17. Exceptions to this are cases where God is persuaded by intercessors to forgive. Still, it is noteworthy that in the archtypical cases the punishments God is persuaded to renounce (*hinnahem*, Exod. 32: 12, 14) had never actually been proclaimed as decrees. In both Exod. 32:10 and Num. 14:12 God had indicated an intention to wipe out the Israelites. By asking Moses to "let Me be" so that he might carry out his intention, God in effect indicated that the proposal was negotiable (Rash). The difference between these proposals and a divine decree is apparent in the contrasting language of Num. 14:12 and 21.

18. Bickerman, p. 36.

19. Bickerman, pp. 38, 43. On the efficacy of repentance in eradicating sin as a prophetic innovation, not found in the Torah, see J. Milgrom, "Vertical Retribution," p. 12 and, at much greater length, "Repentance," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. Supplementary Volume*, ed. K. Crim et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 736-38.

20. Bickerman, pp. 40 ff.

21. See Kaufmann, *Religion*, p. 283.

22. G. Lowes Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), pp. 22-23. One may compare Biblical references to the pollution of the ground by sin, as in Lev. 18:24-28; Num. 35:33-34; and perhaps Gen. 4:11. See also Gaster, pp. 71-72, and M. Greenberg, "Bloodguilt," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:449-50.

23. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 278-79.

24. This essay was originally published in slightly different form in the Friday Forum of the Philadelphia *Jewish Exponent*, October 5, 1973, and is published here with the editor's permission.

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The **Thirteen Attributes of Mercy** or *Shelosh-'Esreh Middot HaRakhamim* (transliterated from the [Hebrew](#): [שְׁלוֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה מִדּוֹת הַרַחֲמִים](#)) as enumerated in the [Book of Exodus](#) ([Exodus 34:6–7](#)) are the Divine Attributes with which, according to [Judaism](#), [God](#) governs the world.

According to the explanation of [Maimonides](#) these attributes must not be regarded as qualities inherent in God, but as the method of His activity, by which the divine governance appears to the human observer to be controlled.<sup>[1]</sup> In the [Sifre](#), however, these attributes are not called "middot", which may mean "quality" as well as "rule" and "measure", but "derakim" (ways), since they are the ways of God which Moses prayed to know and which God proclaimed to him.

## Division

The number thirteen is adopted from Talmudic and rabbinic tradition. There are divergent opinions as to which word they begin and with which they conclude. According to some, the Thirteen Attributes begin with the first "Adonai", in verse 6, and end with the word "ve-nakeh" in verse 7.<sup>[2]</sup> The single attributes are contained in the verses as follows:

- ; [YHVH](#): compassion before a person sins יְהוָה.1
- ; [YHVH](#): *compassion after a person has sinned* יְהוָה.2
- ; [El](#): mighty in compassion to give all creatures according to their need אֱלֹ.3
- ; [Rachum](#): merciful, that humankind may not be distressed רַחֲוִים.4
- ; [VeChanun](#): and gracious if humankind is already in distress וְרַחֲוִין.5
- ; [Erech appayim](#): slow to anger אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם.6
- ; [VeRav chesed](#): and plenteous in kindness וְרַב-חֶסֶד.7
- ; [VeEmet](#): and truth וְאֱמֶת.8
- ; [Notzer chesed laalafim](#): keeping kindness unto thousands וְנֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים.9
- ; [Noseh avon](#): forgiving iniquity נוֹשֵׂא עֲוֹן.10
- ; [VaFeshah](#): and transgression וּפְשָׁע.11
- ; [VeChata'ah](#): and sin וְחַטָּאָה.12
- . [VeNakeh](#): and pardoning וְנִקְּה.13

According to others, the Thirteen Attributes begin only with the second "Adonai", since the first one is the subject of "va-yikra" (and He proclaimed).<sup>[3]</sup> To secure the number thirteen, some count "nozer ḥesed la-alafim" as two (Nissim in Tos. l.c.), while others divide "erek appayim" into two, since forbearance is shown both to the good and to the wicked (comp. the gloss on Tosafot, l.c. and Ibn Ezra, l.c.), and still others end the thirteenth middah with "lo yenaḥeh" (he does not pardon; Maimonides, "Pe'er ha-Dor", p. 19b), Lemberg, 1859), this being considered a good quality, since through punishment man is moved to repentance, after which he is pardoned and pure (comp. Yoma 86a; Aaron b. Elijah, l.c.; and "'Ez ha-Ḥayyim", ch. xcii.). Others term "ve-naḥeh lo yenaḥeh" a single middah, the thirteenth being, in their opinion, "poqed 'awon abot 'al-banim" (visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children), "this being regarded as compassionate since the transgressor is not punished immediately" (Maimonides, l.c.; Aaron b. Ḥayyim, l.c.; comp. also "Da'at Zeḳenim").

פרק א א ויהי דבר־יהוה אל־יונה בן־אמתי לאמר: ב קום לך אל־נינוה העיר הגדולה וקרא עליה כי־עלתה רעתם לפני: ג ויקם יונה לברח תרשישה מלפני יהוה וירד יפו וימצא אניה | באה תרשיש ויתן שכרה וירד בה לבוא עמהם תרשישה מלפני יהוה: ד ויהוה הטיל רוח־גדולה אלהים ויהי סער־גדול ביים והאניה חשבה להשבר: ה ויראו המלחים ויזעקו איש אל־אלהיו ויטלו את־הכלים אשר באניה אלהים להקל מעליהם ויונה ירד אל־ירכתי הספינה וישבב וירדם: ו ויקרב אליו רב החבל ויאמר לו מה־לך גרדם קום קרא אל־אלהיך אולי יתעשת האלהים לנו ולא נאבד: ז ויאמרו איש אל־רעהו לכו ונפילה גורלות ונדעה בשלמי הרעה הזאת לנו ויפלו גורלות ויפל הגורל על־יונה: ח ויאמרו אליו הגידה־נא לנו באשר למי־הרעה הזאת לנו מה־מלאכתך ומאין תבוא מה ארצך ואי־מזה עם אתה: ט ויאמר אליהם עברי אנכי ואת־יהוה אלהי השמים אני ירא אשר־עשה את־הים ואת־היבשה: י ויראו האנשים יראה גדולה ויאמרו אליו מה־זאת עשית כי־ידעו האנשים כי־מלפני יהוה הוא ברח כי הגיד להם: יא ויאמרו אליו מה־נעשה לך וישתק הים מעלינו כי הים הולך וסער: יב ויאמר אליהם שאוני והטילני אלהים וישתק הים מעליכם כי יודע אני כי בשלי הסער הגדול הזה עליכם: יג ויחתרו האנשים להשיב אל־היבשה ולא יכלו כי הים הולך וסער עליהם: יד ויקראו אל־יהוה ויאמרו אנה יהוה אל־נא נאבדה בנפש האיש הזה ואל־תתן עלינו דם נקיא כי־אתה יהוה כאשר חפצת עשית: טו וישאו את־יונה ויטלהו אל־הים ויעמד הים מזעפו: טז ויראו האנשים יראה גדולה את־יהוה ויזבחו־זבח ליהוה ויידרו נדרים:

פרק ב א וימן יהוה דג גדול לבלע את־יונה ויהי יונה במעי הדג שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות: ב ויתפלל יונה אל־יהוה אלהיו ממעי הדגה: ג ויאמר קראתי מצרה לי אל־יהוה ויענני מבטן שאול שועתי שמעת קולי: ד ותשליכני מצולה בלבב ימים ונהר יסבבני כל־משבריך וגליך עלי עברו: ה ואני אמרתי נגרשתי מנגד עיניך אך אוסיף להביט אל־היכל קדשך: ו אפפוני מים עד־נפש תהום יסבבני סוף חבוש לראשי: ז לקצבי הרים ירדתי הארץ ברחיה בעדי לעולם ותעל משחת חיי יהוה אלהי: ח בהתעטף עלי נפשי את־יהוה זכרתי ותבוא אליך תפילתי אל־היכל קדשך: ט משמרים הבלי־שוא חסדם יעזבו: י ואני בקול תודה אזבחה־לך אשר נדרתי אשלמה ישועתה ליהוה: יא ויאמר יהוה לדג ויקא את־יונה אל־היבשה:

פרק ג א ויהי דבר־יהוה אל־יונה שנית לאמר: ב קום לך אל־נינוה העיר הגדולה וקרא אליה את־הקריאה אשר אנכי דבר אליך: ג ויקם יונה וילך אל־נינוה בדבר יהוה ונינוה היתה עיר־גדולה לאלהים מהלך שלשת ימים: ד ויחל יונה לבוא בעיר מהלך יום אחד ויקרא ויאמר עוד ארבעים יום ונינוה נהפכת: ה ויאמינו אנשי נינוה באלהים ויקראו־צום וילבשו שקים מגדולם ועד־קטנם: ו ויגע הדבר אל־מלך נינוה ויקם מכסאו ויעבר אדרתו מעליו ויבס שק וישב על־האפר: ז ויזעק ויאמר בנינוה מטעם המלך וגדליו לאמר האדם והבהמה הבקר והצאן אל־יטעמו מאומה אל־ירעו ומים אל־ישתו: ח ויתכסו שקים האדם והבהמה ויקראו אל־אלהים בחזקה וישבו איש מדרכו הרעה ומן־החמס אשר בכפיהם: ט מי־יודע ישוב ונחם האלהים ושב מחרון אפו ולא נאבד: י וירא האלהים את־מעשיהם

כִּי־שׁוּבוּ מִדְרָכֵם הֲרַעְתֶּם וַיִּנְחָם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הֲרַעְתְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

פּרָק ד א וַיִּרַע אֱלֹהִים רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיַּחַר לּוֹ: ב וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֱלֹהֵי־הַזֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי יְהוָה הַלֹּא־זֶה דְבַר־יְהוָה עַל־אֲדַמְתִּי עַל־כֵּן קִדַּמְתִּי לְבָרַח תִּרְשָׁיִשָׁה כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי־חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנָחַם עַל־הֲרַעְתְּךָ: ג וַעֲתָה יְהוָה קַח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי: ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵיטֵב חָרָה לְךָ: ה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹנָה מִן־הָעִיר וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לָעִיר וַיַּעַשׂ לּוֹ שָׂם סֶפֶה וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחְתָּיהָ בַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה מֵהַיָּמִין בְּעִיר: ו וַיִּמַן יְהוָה־אֱלֹהִים קִיקִיּוֹן וַיַּעַל | מֵעַל לַיּוֹנָה לְהִיזֵת צֶלַע־רֵאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לּוֹ מִרְעַתּוֹ וַיִּשְׁמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה: ז וַיִּמַן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת בְּעֵלוֹת הַשַּׁחַר לְמַחֲרַת וַתֵּד אֶת־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן וַיִּיבֶשׁ: ח וַיְהִי | כַּזָּרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּמַן אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ קָדִים חַרִּישִׁית וַתֵּד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עַל־רֵאשׁ יוֹנָה וַיִּתְעַלֵּף וַיִּשְׂאֵל אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לְמוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי: ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי־יוֹנָה הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לְךָ עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לִּי עַד־מוֹת: י וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אַתָּה חָסַתְּ עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָמַלְתָּ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּו שְׁבוּ־לַיְלָה הִיא וּבִן־לַיְלָה אָבָד: יא וְאַנִּי לֹא אָחוּס עַל־גִּינוֹהַ הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּבָהּ הַרְבֵּה מִשְׁתִּים־עֹשֶׂרָה רַבּוֹ אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע בֵּין־יְמִינוֹ לְשִׂמְאֵלוֹ וּבִהְמָה רַבָּה:

פרק א

א ויהי דבר־יהוה אל־יונה בן־אמתי לאמר:

ב קום לך אל־גינה העיר הגדולה וקרא עליה כי־עלתה רעתם לפני:

ג ויקם יונה לברח לברח תרשישה מלפני יהוה וירד יפו וימצא אניה | באה תרשיש ויתן שכרה וירד בה לבוא עמם תרשישה מלפני יהוה:

ד ויהוה הטיל רוח־גדולה אל־הים ויהי סער־גדול ביים והאניה חשבה להשבר:

ה ויראו המלחים ויזעקו איש אל־אלהיו ויטלו את־הכלים אשר באניה אל־הים להקל

מעליהם ויונה ירד אל־ירכתי הספינה וישכב וירדם:

ו ויקרב אליו רב החבל ויאמר לו מה־לך נרדם קום קרא אל־אלהיך אולי יתעשת האלהים לנו ולא נאבד:

ז ויאמרו איש אל־רעהו לכו ונפילה גורלות ונדעה בשלמי הרעה הזאת לנו ויפלו גורלות ויפל הגורל על־יונה:

ח ויאמרו אליו הגידה־נא לנו באשר למי־הרעה הזאת לנו מה־מלאכתך ומאין תבוא מה ארצך ואי־מזה עם אתה:

ט ויאמר אליהם עברי אנכי ואת־יהוה אלהי השמים אני ירא אשר־עשה את־הים ואת־היבשה:

י ויראו האנשים יראה גדולה ויאמרו אליו מה־זאת עשית כי־ידעו האנשים כי־מלפני יהוה הוא ברח כי הגיד להם:

יא ויאמרו אליו מה־נעשה לך וישתק הים מעלינו כי הים הולך וסער:

יב ויאמר אליהם שאוני והטילני אל־הים וישתק הים מעליכם כי יודע אני כי בשלי הסער הגדול הזה עליכם:

יג ויחתרו האנשים להשיב אל־היבשה ולא יכלו כי הים הולך וסער עליהם:

יד ויקראו אל־יהוה ויאמרו אנה יהוה אל־נא נאבדה בנפש האיש הזה ואל־תתן עלינו דם נקיא כי־אתה יהוה כאשר חפצת עשית:

טו וישאו את־יונה ויטלוהו אל־הים ויעמד הים מזעפו:

טז ויראו האנשים יראה גדולה את־יהוה ויזבחו־זבח ליהוה וידרו נדרים:

1 En het woord des HEEREN geschiedde ten anderen male tot Jona, zeggende:  
2 Maak u op, ga naar de grote stad Nineve; en predik tegen haar de prediking, die Ik tot u spreek.  
3 Toen maakte zich Jona op, en ging naar Nineve, naar het woord des HEEREN. Nineve nu was een grote stad Gods, van drie dagreizen.  
4 En Jona begon in de stad te gaan, een dagreis; en hij predikte, en zeide: Nog veertig dagen, dan zal Nineve worden omgekeerd.  
5 En de lieden van Nineve geloofden aan God; en zij riepen een vasten uit, en bekleedden zich met zakken, van hun grootste af tot hun kleinste toe.  
6 Want dit woord geraakte tot den koning van Nineve, en hij stond op van zijn troon, en deed zijn heerlijk overkleed van zich; en hij bedekte zich met een zak, en zat neder in de as.  
7 En hij liet uitroepen, en men sprak te Nineve, uit bevel des konings en zijner groten, zeggende: Laat mens noch beest, rund noch schaap, iets smaken, laat ze niet weiden, noch water drinken.  
8 Maar mens en beest zullen met zakken bedekt zijn, en zullen sterk tot God roepen; en zij zullen zich bekeren, een iegelijk van zijn bozen weg, en van het geweld, dat in hun handen is.  
9 Wie weet, God mocht Zich wenden, en berouw hebben; en Hij mocht Zich wenden van de hittigheid Zijns toorns, dat wij niet vergingen!  
10 En God zag hun werken, dat zij zich bekeerden van hun bozen weg; en het berouwde God over het kwaad, dat Hij gesproken had hun te zullen doen, en Hij deed het niet.

1 Dit verdroot Jona met groot verdriet, en zijn toorn ontstak.

2 En hij bad tot den HEERE, en zeide: Och HEERE! was dit mijn woord niet, als ik nog in mijn land was? Daarom kwam ik het voor, vluchtende naar Tarsis; want ik wist, dat Gij een genadig en barmhartig God zijt, lankmoedig en groot van goedertierenheid, en berouw hebbende over het kwaad.

3 Nu dan, HEERE! neem toch mijn ziel van mij; want het is mij beter te sterven dan te leven.

4 En de HEERE zeide: Is uw toorn billijk ontstoken?

5 Jona nu ging ter stad uit, en zette zich tegen het oosten der stad; en hij maakte zich aldaar een verdek, en zat daaronder in de schaduw, totdat hij zag, wat van de stad zou worden.

6 En God, de HEERE, beschikte een wonderboom, en deed hem opschieten boven Jona, opdat er schaduw mocht zijn over zijn hoofd, om hem te redden van zijn verdriet. En Jona verblijdde zich over den wonderboom met grote blijdschap.

7 Maar God beschikte een worm des anderen daags in het opgaan van den dageraad; die stak den wonderboom, dat hij verdorde.

8 En het geschiedde, als de zon oprees, dat God een stillen oostenwind beschikte; en de zon stak op het hoofd van Jona, dat hij amechtig werd; en hij wenste zijner ziel te mogen sterven, en zeide: Het is mij beter te sterven dan te leven.

9 Toen zeide God tot Jona: Is uw toorn billijk ontstoken over den wonderboom? En hij zeide: Billijk is mijn toorn ontstoken ter dood toe.

10 En de HEERE zeide: Gij verschoont den wonderboom, aan welken gij niet hebt gearbeid, noch dien groot gemaakt; die in een nacht werd, en in een nacht verging;

11 En Ik zou die grote stad Nineve niet verschonen? waarin veel meer dan honderd en twintig duizend mensen zijn, die geen onderscheid weten tussen hun rechterhand, en hun linkerhand; daartoe veel vee?