

Yom Kippur Mincha 5770

[As the congregation enters ...]

Louis Armstrong – Jonah and the Whale

Jonah was a man who got a word from the Lord
"Go and preach the Gospel to the sinful land"
But he got on a ship and he tried to get away
And he ran into a storm in the middle of the sea

Now the Lord, He made the waves just roll so high
The ship begin to sink and they all begin to cry
So they pulled ole Jonah out of the hole
And they jumped him in the water just to lighten up the load

Now the Lord made a whale, long and wide Lord,
Lord waddnat a fish
And he swallowed up Jonah, hair and hide Lord,
Lord waddnat a fish,
Mmm, Lord, mmm, Lord

Now Jonah started to pray in the belly of the whale
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
He repented of his sins like a man in jail
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
Mmm, Lord, mmm, Lord

Now Jonah must o' been a bad man, he must o' been a sinner
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
Cos when the whale got him down, he didn't like his dinner
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
Mmm, Lord, mmm, Lord

Well he swum around the ocean, sick as he could be
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
And after three days, whoops! he had to set him free
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish, mmm

So the whale spit Jonah out onto dry land
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
And went on to preaching like a righteous man
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish

Then the people quit their sins when they heard him the town
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish
So when you hear the call, don't you turn the Gospel down
Lord, Lord waddnat a fish, mmm?

Rabbi's Introduction

Welcome to Mincha, the afternoon service. For those who spent the morning elsewhere, welcome. To those of you who are fasting, or for those of us who have been here since 9:30, the day is already long, and it's barely half over. We may already be tired. Overwhelmed. Bored. Distracted. Hot. My hope is that in these next few minutes you will experience some times of connectedness, of engagement, and of joy. Yes, on Yom Kippur it is appropriate to experience joy!

Centuries ago, the rabbis instituted the Afternoon Service to substitute for the daily afternoon Temple offering. As Jews in the 21st century, most of us have little connection with Temple Times. But living in California, many of us *are* familiar with self-examination, a major theme of Yom Kippur. We come here to be in community, or see friends, or perhaps even commune with G~d.

I don't typically talk about fantasies from the bimah, but here I am, on what many consider the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, having my fantasy fulfilled. I asked a group of our members to help craft a new Mincha service. They grappled with how best to make the service relevant and meaningful, and decided to focus on the story of Yonah – but with a focus on alternative media – allowing us to experience the story. This service -- like all services, really -- is an experience – an invitation for each of us to get our heart and our head into a new place. Our creative team deeply studied the story of Yonah, then looked to other sources to illustrate and expound on the themes found in the text. We will hear voices from our new Siddur, words from our Machzor as well as from psalms and the prophets (and some modern prophets as well).

Prayer is not limited to words --- more than tefillah: the rabbi's also call it avodah b'halev, a service of the heart. What we'll be experiencing together this afternoon is just that, a service of (and from) the heart. It's not a show, although the creative team was relieved to learn that "bema" actually does mean "stage" in Hebrew. Though you may be moved, please no applause.

I invite you to daven as you need, and oh so highly encourage you to let down your barriers, and join us as we go on this journey together, with Jonah, with each other, with the commitment to think about how we can become better people, and how we can better the world.

Yonah: The Call

א וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בֶן־אֲמִתַּי לֵאמֹר: בְּקוֹם לְךָ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא
עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עֲלֹתָהּ רָעַתְּם לְפָנָי:

One day, Jonah, the son of Amittai, heard G~d tell him to get up and go to the big city of Nineveh, and tell everyone who lived there to shape up, to improve themselves; that their wickedness, their harmful ways, were against G~d.

[Phone rings ...]

The Call

What is all this talk about “The Call”? A voice inside my head? Look, even if I did hear a voice, do you think I’d tell you? I just don’t think I should talk about it.

But maybe I should. It’s not like that voice is someone else -- now that would be nuts. The voice I hear is me ... or maybe it’s the me I want to be.

When do I hear it? I hear the voice at the oddest of times ... when I’m listening to the news on the radio. I’ll hear NPR talk about the people in New Orleans that are still living in FEMA trailers, four years after getting flooded out of their homes --- and the voice says “that’s not right.”

I hear the voice when I’m walking down Market Street, and I see a homeless mother and her child, begging for food ... and that voice says “Feed them”. Is this the voice of my better self? Is this the voice of love and compassion, or just the nagging my guilt? Sure, I’m hungry today – but this fast of choice is not the same as the daily hunger of need. Bob Marley says “a hungry man is an angry man”, but mostly a hungry man is depressed, beat down, and tired. A hungry child – now that should make us weep.

And I hear the voice when the election returns come in, and 52% of the voters choose to deny my friends the right to marry, and the voice screams “Are you kidding me?” When I’m in some random airport, and they’ve got the TV set on Fox News (I know, it’s bad for my blood pressure) ... but the talking heads talk their trash and talk their hate ... and it’s all I can do to keep the voice in my head from yelling out loud. The voice calls to me: “Stand up. Your silence is agreement”.

The call comes, but then I am still again. Did I really hear it?
Will I ignore it ... or will I act?

Our Father Abraham heard the call. The voice asked him to reject all that he knew – Lech Lecha – Go forth, and become the father of a great nation as numerous as the stars in heaven. Luckily for us he listened. But, I wonder, how long did he think about it first?

Moses heard the call. His voice called from the bush that burned but was not consumed by the fire. A call ... and visuals to go with it. I wonder, did he tell Tzipora about it?

But the call was real; our slavery and the oppression of Egypt were real. G~d called to Moses by name, and he answered “Heneni”, “Here I am”. But you know the rest of that story – Moses was not ready to listen. He said, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?”

Isaiah calls to us in this morning’s Haftarah:

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen?
To loose the bands of wickedness,
To lift the burdens from each other’s shoulders,
To lead the oppressed to freedom,
To break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
And to bring the poor to your own house?
When you see the tattered, to clothe them,
And never to hide from each other’s needs?”

Shema, Israel ... Listen, you people of Israel.
Our g~d is calling, every day.
Do you hear her? Are you listening?

But of course, that’s the point: the call is not easy to hear.
And accepting the call – that’s not so easy either.

Michael Schaffer, 2009

Yonah Runs Away

ג וַיִּקַּם יוֹנָה לְבָרֶחַת תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלְפָּנָיִם יְהוָה וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה | בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישִׁי: ד וַיְהִי הַטִּיל רוּחַ-גְּדוֹלָה אֶל-הַיָּם וַיְהִי סַעַר-גָּדוֹל בַּיָּם וְהָאֲנִיָּה חֲשָׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר: ה וַיִּירָאוּ הַמִּלְחָמִים: ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ לְכוּ וְנַפִּילָה גּוֹרְלוֹת וְנִדְעָה בְּשִׁלְמֵי הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ וַיַּפְּלוּ גּוֹרְלוֹת וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל עַל-יוֹנָה: יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מִה-נַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵינוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר: יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל-הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵיכֶם:

Jonah tried run from G~d's sight, and went down to the seaside town of Jaffa and found a ship leaving for Tarshish. But once the ship was on its way, G~d sent out an enormous wind and a terrible storm onto the sea, a storm so strong that it seemed as if the ship was going to break apart. This made the sailors very frightened. They said to each other, "Let's cast lots to see whose fault this storm is." And so they did, and the lot fell on Jonah. When the sailors saw the reason for the storm was Jonah, they said to him, "What can we do to you to make the sea calm down?" "Meanwhile, the sea grew more and more turbulent. And Jonah said to them, "Lift me up and throw me into the sea, then the water will calm down for you."

[Dance ... to Pluto in Capricorn, by Marc Ream, Choreography by Anne Bluethenthal]

[As the dance ends ...]

When Jonah was thrown into the water, G~d instructed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Jonah was inside the belly of the fish for three long days and three long nights. And from inside the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed . . .

In the belly

These readings were gathered and compiled by
Anne Bluethenthal, Andrea Guerra, Deborah Levy, and Howard Steierman
The script as read on Yom Kippur follows.

At the end of the full service, you will find the complete readings from which these excerpts were taken, with author credits.

The deep enfolds me, the waters engulf me.

Creator, I have been in such dark places a flashlight was useless
I have felt fear no words could comfort me I seemed lost . . .

Jonah fainted, and wished to die, saying, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

>> Cantor sings

I am having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, I told everybody. No one even answered.

>> Cantor sings

Adonai, from the belly of the underworld
I am calling you.
Do you not hear my voice?
You hurled me into the deep,
into the heart of the sea.

I am falling, falling

I am having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, I told everybody. No one even answered.

>> Cantor sings

Jonah found himself a corner near one of the ribs, and settled down there on some huge organ (it was springy as a waterbed). With nothing to do now until the next installment, he leaned back against the rib and let his mind rock back and forth. ...

**All-Compassionate One, my eye seeks you
Throughout the wide realms of creation.
My soul searches for you, ...
my heart is full of grief.**

>> Cantor sings

You hurled me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, the unhealed miles in my body.

The deep enfolds me, the waters engulf me.

... and Yonah, from the belly of the whale says: Therefore now, O G~d, I beg You, take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live.

>> Cantor sings

I am falling, falling

>> Cantor sings

He leaned back against the rib and let his mind rock back and forth.

I have been in such dark places...

Very bad day...

Adonai...

Falling, falling...

Terrible, horrible, very bad...

Back and forth...

All compassionate one

Heart of the sea...

Enfold me...

Falling...

Adonai, I am calling you.

Blessed are You

the Guardian of all

who carries me

to a safe place.

Do you hear my voice?

[Youth Dance, accompanied by Karen Segal]

Call Again & Acceptance

א וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-יוֹנָה שֵׁנִית לֵאמֹר: בִּקּוּם לְךָ אֶל-נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא אֵלֶיהָ
אֶת-הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ: ג וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה כַּדְּבַר יְהוָה:

For a second time, G~d spoke to Jonah, saying: Get up, Jonah! Go to that big city of Nineveh, and announce to the people there the message I instructed you. And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, as G~d had asked him.

Ninevah

Ninevah

Land of my own evasion

Land of risks not taken

of unspoken truths, unrealized dreams

Ninevah

Land of my reckless living

where I ravage my integrity, turning away from the pain of others.

Ninevah

Land of my careless speech

Where haste, greed and anxiety distract me from my truth

avoidance, addictions, and aggressions sever me from my family of spirit, my earth community.

We have heard the call of our highest self

and turned away in fatigue, hopelessness, despair

Turned away from the enormity of our collective problems

which loom large and overwhelming in our minds and hearts

We have turned away from our own inadequacies, unwilling to risk being less than perfect in our own eyes and foolish in the eyes of others

We have turned away seeing our flaws in the failings of others

We are afraid of not being up to the challenges of doing our best work, making our best art, being the best friend, spouse, parent, child, teacher, student

We have turned self doubt into contempt and judgment of others

We have rolled over in the morning, pulled up our covers, and tried to evade our sense of responsibility to ourselves and the world.

Afraid to fail, we have avoided trying.

Afraid of humiliation, we have avoided being our full selves.

Afraid of judgment, we have stayed silent.

Afraid of missteps, we have remained still

Now, in the belly of avoidance, of reflection, of our own depressed emotions and actions, we conjure the courage to choose action, to recognize our potential for being fully alive and awake, and to admit our shortfalls. We are able to see each other, knowing that everyone we meet is our teacher, reflecting ourselves back to us in all our imperfections. We understand that our failures are the visible sign of our earnest attempts to become more skilled, more mindful, more whole, and more compassionate.

Now, the gifts of meditation, of silence, of community, of insight have given us more clarity, strength and a renewed desire to answer the call, which we understand as our own heart beckoning us toward our highest vision—a vision we craft even as we act.

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Emmylou Harris – I Hear a Call

[Sung by Cantor Bernstein with Karen Segal]

I hear a call
Now will answer
Forsake my all
To serve another
Though darkness falls
Stay a believer
I hear a call
Now will answer

I see a light Now will I follow
Fill up this life
That grows more hollow
Make joy reside
Where there lives sorrow
I see a light
Now will follow

I hear a call
From out of nowhere
And from anywhere I go
I hear a call
Now will answer

I feel a touch
Now will I hold on
Be there with love
For those with no one
With a kindness such
It lives though I'm gone
I feel a touch
Now will I hold on

I hear a call
From out of nowhere
And from everywhere I go
I see a light
Now will I follow
I feel a touch
Now will I follow
I hear a call
Now will I answer

Rabbi's Closing Comments

Wow. We're just about done with Yom Kippur Mincha. We have told the story of Yonah, and hopefully, brought his experience here to San Francisco in 5770.

I hope you all feel that was a successful service – I look forward to hearing about it! For me, the success has already happened in two ways: first, we were open to experiencing the change that a newly fashioned Afternoon Service may bring us, individually as well as communally. Secondly, the process itself was a joy for all of us that participated. Thank you all for sharing this time with us, and making our vision a reality.

<some additional comments of the moment>

As you leave, please grab one of the blue “invitations” by the door: it contains web links to the materials used in this service, as well as an email address for you to send your feedback.

L'Shanna Tova

[As the congregation departs ...]

Bob Dylan – The times they are a-changin

Come gather round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone.
If your time to you - Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheels still in spin
And there's no tellin' who - That its namin'.
For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside - And it is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly agin.
Please get out of the new one
If you cant lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'.

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slow one now
Will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin'.
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'.

Complete versions of “Belly Readings,” with authors.

**Adonai, from the belly of the underworld
I am calling you.
I am calling to you from Sheol.
Do you not hear my voice?
You hurled me into the deep,
into the heart of the sea.
Billows sweep over me.
Waves crash above me.
Adonai! Shall I not see you again?
Shall I never again look at your holy Temple?**

**Adonai, as my life was leaving me,
I remembered you;**

**The deep enfolds me,
the waters engulf me.
Seaweed entangles my head;
I am falling, falling**

(Diane Wolkstein – translation of the Yonah text)

*Creator,
I have been in such dark places
a flashlight was useless
I have felt fear
no words could comfort me
I seemed lost
and yet
through Your compassion and lovingkindness
I am here, now.
Blessed are You
the Guardian of all
who carries me
to a safe place.*

(Kevin Johnson, Siddur Sha'ar Zahav)

I am having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, I told everybody. No one even answered.

Judith Viorst (Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day)

This place is as broken as I am, the scarred hills and acres of my ancestors so much like the unhealed miles in my body. Every wind is stirred by the still small voice, and everywhere soil cracked by unruly roots forcing themselves to the skies. (Jacqui Shine, Siddur Shaar Zahav)

Therefore now, O God, I beg You, take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live.

AND

Jonah fainted, and wished to die, saying, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

Various translations of the Jonah text

All-Compassionate One, my eye seeks you
Throughout the wide realms of creation.
My soul searches for you, to unburden her great woe,
To lament and pour out my sorrow.
Suffering and distress have come to me,
And my heart is full of grief.
Neuda