

Subject: Speech about Yonah
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Many times people come to me desperately unhappy. They feel that things are getting away from them, that things are either too much for them or that they just do not fit in. Each of us, at times, feels that life is passing us by or overwhelming us. We cannot seem to get our bearings. Yom Kippur speaks to us about this problem. It begins with the famous Kol Nidre which addresses itself to broken promises. All of us know that to some extent we have failed to live up to our capabilities. So we do teshuvah. Teshuvah is not just being sorry for the sins that we have done. It has a much deeper meaning – that we are sorry for not living up to our potential. Each of us has promise. Each of us must rise to higher levels. The rabbis tell us that the soul has five aspects. They are called hayah, nefesh, yehidah, neshamah, and ru'ah. Each of us has a drive for security which is sought by hayah. Each of us is filled with the desire to enlarge our minds through beauty and learning. This is sought by nefesh. We also have a need for love which is sought by yehidah. We have a need for breathing space, for freedom, which is sought by neshamah, and we also have a desire for mastery which is sought by ru'ah. The difficult problem is balancing our need for security with our need for freedom, our need for love with our need for mastery. The High Holy Days give us an opportunity for finding the key to living a happy life. This key is found in the Book of Jonah which we read on Yom Kippur afternoon. Maftir Yonah, as it is known, tells us the story of Jonah who was commanded to go to Nineveh to urge the people to repent. Instead, he tried to flee. He tried to evade his responsibility. He knew what was the right thing but he thought he could avoid his responsibilities to his fellow man, to himself, and to G-d by running away.

Jonah first ran to Jaffa. In Hebrew the word yafah means beauty. Jonah tried to evade his moral responsibilities by expressing an interest in beauty and devoting his life to it. That did not work. Then he decided that he would go to Tarsus. In Hebrew this word means "precious jewel." He thought that he could immerse himself in making money. He would become a rich man. That did not help either. He then decided to go aboard ship, the word for which is, in Hebrew, oniyah. This word can also be read as ani yah and translated as "I am G-d." Jonah tried to delude himself into thinking that all morality was subjective. He was G-d. He could determine what was right and what was wrong. He could live any way he wanted to. When the storm came up Jonah realized how powerless he really was. So he went down into a corner of the ship. Here another Hebrew word for ship is used, sefinah, which also means "to hide." Jonah decided that he would find meaning in meditation, he would spend his life in solitude. When the captain of this ship came and asked Jonah what he was doing, why he was not praying, Jonah answered that he wanted nothing to do with religion. The captain had him thrown into the sea. Sea, in Hebrew, yam, can stand for the words yeah matirim, "everything is permitted." Jonah first thought he could find happiness in beauty, in money, in self-actualization, in solitude. Now he thought he could find it in complete self-indulgence, in sexual excesses and other forms of decadence. This, too, did not work. He was swallowed by a big fish which, in Hebrew, is called dag. This word can also be read so as to mean "worry," ^{daas} ~~daas~~. Complete self-indulgence only caused him to be overcome with dread, with anguish. It was drowning him. Jonah finally realized that he could not escape. He knew now that he had

to be committed with all aspects of his soul in order to do that which was right and expected of him if he were ever to win happiness.

In our prayers on Yom Kippur we speak about teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. Repentance, of course, means that we have to commit ourselves to fulfill our potential and not run away from any aspect of life. Tefillah means that we declare Judaism true and worthy of commitment, and tzedakah means we are willing to sacrifice for our religion even if it means ridicule and the carrying of additional burdens.

Abraham, in Judaism, stands for charity and deeds of kindness. Isaac stands for the inner religious life, the striving to accomplish inner potential. Jacob stands for truth. In order to have commitment you must believe that what you are committed to is true and you must be willing to sacrifice for it. Jacob's children all remained true to Judaism because Jacob was able to convince them that Judaism was true and, because it was true, it was worth sacrificing for. Jonah fled from his task because he did not want to sacrifice for the truth.

What is lacking in America today is a sense of commitment. People do not want to sacrifice for what they believe in. They are afraid of trouble, the anguish, and the burden that this will bring. However, as Jonah learned, a greater dread and anguish awaits them if they fail to make a commitment. Only responsibility will ultimately make us happy. Without commitments we haven't got a change. So many young people today are afraid of commitments. By failing to make commitments they are harming themselves. They are dooming themselves to a life of unhappiness.

On Yom Kippur, the story of Jonah teaches us what is required to integrate all aspects of our soul: commitment to moral and righteous living; commitment to the best that is within us; commitment to the religion of our father; commitment to doing what we know potentially we can do and what G-d wants us to do. May we in the coming year have all these commitments so that we will be insured of a year of happiness.