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AUTHOR: Jason Nevarez

TITLE: USING THE JONAH NARRATIVE TO SHAPE
A JEWISH GUIDE OF HEALING AND WHOLENESS
IN THE TWELVE-STEP MODEL

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USING THE JONAH NARRATIVE TO SHAPE
A JEWISH GUIDE OF HEALING AND WHOLENESS
IN THE TWELVE-STEP MODEL

JASON NEVAREZ

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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Advisor: Dr. Carol Ochs

Thesis Summary

Title: Using The Jonah Narrative To Shape A Jewish Guide Of Healing And Wholeness In The Twelve-Step Model

Contribution: This work is a specifically-Jewish text that brings the insights of Twelve-Step programs in line with Jewish holidays and tradition.

Goal of the Thesis: To closely examine the Book of Jonah, a narrative which illustrates a spiritual journey, and helps set the stage for further recovery, and a model for physical and spiritual healing and wholeness. Ultimately, the journey taken demonstrates that recovery can continue. Jonah is seen here as our Biblical model for individual wrestling, struggle, *teshuvah*, and ultimate recovery. To date, there has been a fair amount of popular material written about models of Jewish Twelve-Step. However, the goal here is too heavily utilize Jewish text as the primary context in understanding the relationship between this narrative and the Twelve-Step model.

Number of Chapters and Appendices: Four Chapters and Two Appendices

Chapter 1: Twelve Step and Judaism -- A Necessary Fusion

Chapter 2: Self-Deception

Chapter 3: God's Mercy and Grace

Chapter 4: *Teshuvah* (Repentance) in Recovery

Appendix 1: Hebrew Text of *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 10*

Appendix 2: Translation of *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 10*

Materials: Primary and secondary texts, as well as interactions with people who have been in Twelve-Step programs, specifically JACS (Jewish Alcohol and Chemical Abuses and Significant Others)

Introduction

Jewish tradition can be best experienced by reliving Jewish holy days and Passover, all of which help us, its followers, concretize our own values, understand collective history, and use our struggles, pain and growth as a vehicle for applying these spiritual lessons into daily life.

For addicted Jews in recovery, these ideas have the familiar ring of tradition - not just our Jewish tradition, but a twelve-step tradition. It is often this tradition that liberates an addict or a family member from the slavery of habit, as well as from a life of obsessive-compulsive or other self-destructive behavior.

It is within the framework of the fellowship that renewal and new beginnings become possible. As Jews in recovery take moral inventory, we more clearly understand that last year's *matzah* becomes this year's *chametz*. The task of looking inward is never-ending.

Our heritage is filled with Biblical images of our forefathers and mothers and their spiritual tests. When properly understood and interpreted, their experience can provide strength, hope and encouragement to the Jews of today. In general, the majority of Biblical personalities of the past serve as role models, but it is here that we turn to the Book of Jonah in order to find a man who runs from, but ultimately learns to trust and follow his Higher Power.

On the surface, the book may provide unsettled retorts, especially during its most read time (*Yom Kippur*). However, once you scratch the surface, you begin to explore the complex meta-layers of this intense narrative, looking at the questions of humanity's relationship with God, as well as the moral/ethical ethos behind the narrative, specifically

Jonah's journey. Some may question why God chased Jonah? Does God, in turn, chase each of us?

The Book of Jonah examines both the heights and depths of the individual's spiritual crisis and conflict. Its messages are deep and profound, permeating the human soul. It is the quintessential Jewish resource, illustrating for its readers problematic and conflicting elements of life.

The subjugation behind Jonah's running represents the lowest level to which, we as Jews, can sink. In the belly of the *dag gadol* (big fish), Jonah "bottomed out". I believe that it is in this process of self-exile that redemption and recovery can be attained. Just as Jonah became alienated from his "Jewishness" and then getting trapped in the belly of the *dag* because of it, so too is the nature of addiction. At first, it alienates and then, it ultimately enslaves its victims. It is in the belly of the *dag gadol* that we learn how to find light in the darkness in our own *mishigahas*. We do this by sharing, by telling the story and by carrying the message.

Often, Jews are referred to as the "people of the Book." Twelve-Step tradition also has a book: "The Big Book." In both traditions, the Books speak to us, each in its own way. Regardless of where we begin our spiritual practice, we must take personal action in order to stimulate these promises. We must "work our program."

As you will see in the upcoming chapters, the process of redemption includes the acts of surrender and acceptance. These are the ingredients which lead to healing and wholeness, to a complete integration of mind, body, and spirit.

Today, we Jews are challenged, as were our ancestors, to struggle with the forces which keep us captive in our personal lives. Recovery is the process in which we embark

on a journey (much like Jonah did) of personal redemption. Although people can be spiritually awakened in an instant as a result of a life situation or deep experience, most change comes about little by little, with the reinforcement of positive experience, the warmth of a shared experience, the support and understanding of generations of like-minded people.

Jonah's journey is one of self-reflection and *teshuvah*, gleanings we receive from this narrative which are both powerful and difficult to comprehend. The many questions that surface in the narrative may leave us more in the dark than in the light. It is this very image that will serve as the keyhole through which we can glimpse the secrets of this narrative, coupled with twelve-step language, as a guide toward healing and wholeness.

In Chapter One, we will explore the wedding of Twelve-Step and Judaism. The Twelve-Step model advocates that individuals in recovery take a moral inventory of past deeds and make amends for any wrongdoings, which is analogous to the Jewish process of self-examination, a literal "*cheshbon hanefesh*" (accounting of the soul). The Steps provide a gradual process in which a person, who is in the depths of their own darkness, can "work their program" toward healing and wholeness. And it is through these Steps that we create connections to further Jewish life and living.

Chapter Two will provide a context for accepting our own deception. Self-deceptive thought can undermine our own esteem, and threaten the sobriety of a recovering individual. It is through acknowledgement of our self-deception, as well as the surrender of what we cannot control, that will offer the help and hope we need in seeking a healthy and rewarding life in recovery.

The power of God's mercy and grace (Chapter Three) can be found only after the surrender of those things that cannot be controlled. We will explore that in those moments of total surrender, God's mercy and grace provide relief so that we do not receive punishment. Rather, we receive gifts and acts of grace (recovery), even though we feel we may not necessarily have earned them. It is here that we realize these gifts of grace are bestowed upon us by the provider of mercy and grace - God.

Chapter Four will look at the intersection of *Teshuvah* (repentance) and recovery. The Torah proclaims that in a time of repentance, our natural morality is not sufficient, and repentance is the time in which the spiritual aspect becomes central; we cannot do it by will alone. However, the spiritual aspect does not eliminate the natural character of existence; not everything that is natural is good, beautiful, and healthy.

The Jonah narrative communicates the complexity of the human condition, symbolizing the integration between the natural and spiritual realms. Although each one of us may not preserve this synthesis in our everyday lives, God is not willing to remove God's self from the equation. "You do the 'footwork', which is the action, the natural, and you leave the result up to God - the spiritual."

Teshuvah is an act of human consciousness, awareness, and our readiness to take sides and responsibility for the future. Though we cannot change our past, we are all given the power to shape [or turn from the past and embrace] our future.

Jonah is meant to provide us insight in our own process of "turning", and how it is relevant to our personal experience. As *Yom Kippur* is our time in the stormy sea, with our own fearful sense of life hanging in the balance, we ask the question, "Can our turning change us?"

The lesson of Jonah is neither written nor sealed. Even though punishment has been prescribed, there is always the potential to annul; every human being is granted one more chance, one more opportunity to start their life all over again. Just as God has the power to begin, man has the power to continue by beginning again – and again.

Chapter 1: Twelve-Step and Judaism - A Necessary Fusion

The philosophy of Twelve Step originates from the A.A. (Alcoholic's Anonymous) Big Book, created by Bill W. Much confusion about connecting Judaism and Twelve Step can be eliminated if we look at the compatibility of the steps with Jewish theology. As you will see, the program recommends that individuals in recovery conduct a thorough moral inventory of past deeds and make amends for any wrongdoings. This is strikingly akin to the Jewish tradition of self-examination for which we set aside a time at the Jewish New Year for a literal "*cheshbon hanefesh*" (accounting of the soul) followed by doing *teshuvah* (literally "turning"; making amends on *Yom Kippur*) not "simply to repudiate the evil we have done" stresses Lawrence Kushner¹, but rather to "receive whatever evils we have intended as our own deliberate creations. We cherish them as long-banished children finally taken home again." And thereby transform them and ourselves. When we say the *vidui* (confession), we don't hit ourselves: we hold ourselves."

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable.

This step lays the groundwork for recovery since it identifies the problem. One must accept that a problem exists, and also recognize that they themselves cannot do something about the problem alone.

Many followers of Twelve Step note that the first step is by far the most difficult to accept and follow. Characteristically, the addict will deny the problem even when the

¹ Larry Kushner, God Was in This Place And I, I Did Not Know, Jewish Lights Publishing, 98.

evidence is apparent and irrefutable. The loss of control over his/her addiction, whether it is dependency or the inability to stop, is usually recognized by everyone except the addict. As well, the addict tends to be self-centered and self-absorbed, and most likely believes that society, in some way, has wronged him/her. The physical, emotional, social or occupational deterioration of life may be quite evident to family, friends, employers or physicians, but the addict often has the delusion that things are just fine, or that his/her difficulties are due to the actions of others.

To an addict who is in his/her addiction, Step One is terrifying because it implies that the use of their substance must be totally abandoned. It is also complicated by the fact that the person may perceive admission of powerlessness as a weakness or yet another flaw. As well, addicts invariably lack self-esteem, and this admission can also be extremely threatening to the ego. For that reason, any disciplinary or punitive behavior toward the addict may only serve to complicate matters further, making acceptance more difficult. Spiritual guidance, in this, the fostering of Jewish identity, may guide one at improving his/her sense of worth, and thus be helpful in facilitating the first step and initiating recovery. Such direction can serve to help bolster the fragile ego of the addict and will make acceptance of one's powerlessness easier. Given enough experiences of breaks in self-defining, we have the potential to come up with a partial solution. With our solutions come memory of experience, and with this memory can connect an image. We can give the image a name, like God, an associate this representation with our previous images of God and self and begin to build a framework of spiritual understanding around it.

Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

The second step is the essence of Twelve Step recovery, Step 2 is a step of hope, faith and realization. It is a big step towards God. In spite of all of the failures in life - all of the broken promises, hard feelings, disappointments, failures, destructive behavior, hatred, anxiety, depression or guilt in my life - there is still hope. There is hope because there is a Power greater than ourselves. And this Power has the ability to restore life to a life where there is freedom from the insanity of addictive behaviors. Realization begins to set in that such a Power exists and this Power is able to set us on the road to recovery and freedom.

One of the biggest struggles with an addiction/self-destructive behavior is the tendency to "fall back" into the addiction after a period of being clean. What the founders of AA discovered was that willpower was not enough to keep a true alcoholic from drinking. Eventually something would happen that would trigger another binge, often an even worse one than ever before.

There are those who question the success of twelve step programs by noting that without having a Judeo-Christian belief system, one cannot really move past the second step. And though there may be some groups that focus on a particular "style" of spirituality, you can almost always find some others that do not do this. Of course, those suffering from an addiction will look for almost any reason to keep them from recovery. Recovery means no more substance, no more self-destructive behavior, something someone active in their addiction cannot imagine and often finds incomprehensible. Life

without a fix to take the edge off? To relax? To get in the groove at a party? How is it possible?

Some of us may wander in and out of program, and claim that it's because of the 'God stuff.' But is that the real reason? Perhaps we go in and out because of the addiction. We want to drink, get high, remove the pain, lose ourselves.....once again.

In fact, the only requirement for following in a 12 step program is the desire to stop using one's substance, or stop from doing whatever the addictive behavior is. We do not need to embrace the second step until we are ready for it rather than letting it keep us from the hope of recovery. If we are open and willing to listen to other recovering people and how they created better lives for themselves, we are off to a good start!

The Talmud states "A person's temptations becomes more intense each day, and were it not that God helps him/her, it would be impossible for him to resist." (*Sukkah*, 52b). We see this request for help as Jonah calls out to God: "In my trouble I called to the Lord, and God answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried out, and You heard my voice." (Jonah 2:3).

Step Two is, in essence, a fundamental Jewish belief. This statement is universal, recognizing that even though giving in to destructive impulses may be foolish and detrimental, no one would be able to resist these urges without the help of God. Our own resources (mind and body), regardless of how great they may seem, are simply inadequate and unequal to a power greater than ourselves.

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

The phrase "God as we understand Him" allows the reader to connect with their personal understanding of God, regardless of any particular religious denomination or affiliation.

Step Three is the result of Steps One and Two. If one has lost control of their life, and there's a greater power that can restore their sanity, then it follows that one must be ready to turn their life over to that higher power. However, this step, for many individuals, is almost as difficult to accept as Step One. If one has acknowledged their loss of control, but the success of maintaining control in early recovery is required, this can all too often be seen as the contradiction behind Step Three.

Though this Step may be incredibly anxiety-provoking, this does not mean that the addict can relinquish their personal responsibility. Although the quoted principle of the Talmud indicates that unaided man is helpless, it does not imply that an individual should make no personal effort and place total responsibility on God. Rather, the Talmud's phrase, "God's assistance", implies that one is taking some action, but will need help. A person must do everything within his or her power to make life constructive and productive. God's help, if sought after, will be forthcoming only when one does his/her share of the work.

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

For some, this step can be a terrifying undertaking. The mere thought of self-examination makes us want to automatically protect ourselves. But, just like a business, if

we do not take regular inventory, we can “go broke”. For a commercial business, it is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. If the owner of the business is to be successful, one cannot fool themselves about values.² We must do the same with our lives.

Step Four is our opportunity to create a sacred space and time for introspection, to make a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves. We ask ourselves the tough questions: What has caused me to act out behaviors that hinder the positive experiences in my life? What faults that I most dislike in others do I find within myself? Have I failed to accomplish anything I know I should be doing because of fear? Can I face that fear? Am I avoiding dealing with important conflicts with colleagues, friends or family?

Once the questions are raised, we can begin to answer them and get a handle on our achievements and areas of pride and contentment, as well as the areas that need improvement, so we can better understand what actions we need to take as we progress in our lives. In addition, knowing our limitations— what we do not like or know we do not know —may give us clues as to what we are missing in order to accomplish our goals. Our challenge is to bring the light of clarity into ourselves from self-inventory work. Once we are able to better identify our capacities, we have the potential to straighten out both morally and spiritually.

Self-examination is an important part of Jewish tradition. We set aside time each Jewish year, at the beginning and in the middle for self-reflection, for making amends. At the beginning of the Jewish calendar (*Nisan* is no longer the beginning of the Jewish calendar, *Elul* is—that’s why it’s called *Rosh HaShanah*—the top, head or beginning of the year), we relive, rejoice, and celebrate the birth of the Jewish people. After our

² Bill W., A.A. Big Book, 64.

commemoration, we reflect for a period of 40 days (*Omer*) on our actions, as well as on our ability to receive the word of God (*Torah*). On the first day of the seventh month in the Jewish calendar, *Tirshrei*, we celebrate the birth of the world, and are afforded a 56-day period of penitence, a time dedicated to personal reflections and *teshuvah* (repentance and turning - amending our wrongs).

Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

When speaking to others, we are more easily able to hear ourselves more clearly and loudly. And though God is always present and ready to listen, God will not do the work for us. However, when we confront the depths of our souls and the people we have chased away, God walks with us when we say, "I'm sorry".

Many feelings may arise when we admit to someone, other than ourselves, the wrongs we have committed, such as guilty, isolation, and alienation. By sharing these wrongs with another person, who accepts us despite our misdeeds, and who respects us for our courage in sharing them, we transform these wrongs into a sacred bond, binding us as individuals, neighbors, and friends, and family – God included!

Perhaps the greatest difficulty here is admitting to oneself. Many times in life, individuals make verbal confessions from which they are completely detached. Such confessions not accompanied by a sincere regret for the wrong deed can be seen as worse than worthless.

Even in times when it appears as though the misdeed is acknowledged and forgiven, there are those of us who seem unable to forgive themselves. These individuals

carry a heavy load of guilt, and this remains a hindrance to all. For the addict, this unalleviated guilt is a frequent cause of relapse.

A sincere admission of a mistake should not only elicit forgiveness to God or to another person, it should also bring forth forgiveness to oneself. Many Jewish works are replete with the need for *cheshbon hanefesh* (a detailed personal accounting of one's soul). Chasidic teaching would agree with our need to confide in another person, as it states: "one must repeatedly confide in another person, whether spiritual counselor or trusted friend, all improper thoughts and impulses which come to one's heart and mind, whether these occur during meditation, while lying idle awaiting onset of sleep, or at any time during the day, and one should not withhold anything because of the shame of embarrassment."³

Step Six: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

At this point, we have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. We are now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable – we let God take them all. However, if we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.

Before we can turn our lives over to a higher power, we must first "come to believe" in that higher power. Before giving up our defects of character, we become "entirely ready" to have God remove these defects.

Many of us are used to being a victim, being self-absorbed. Our addictions/self-destructive behaviors are like that favorite old shirt you keep wearing even when it

³ Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., "Spirituality, Prayer, The Twelve Steps and Judaism". The JACS Journal Vol: 3, 1.

becomes an eyesore. Not only are we addicted to the shirt, but we are addicted to feeling sorry for ourselves, addicted to blaming others for our problems. The sixth step may take a while for us. We may have to try a few times to see what it is like to face a problem head on without relying on our usual behaviors of guilt, victimization, and blame. It may be scary at first, but there is great potential for feeling a new-found sense of empowerment. If we can trust in our higher power to give us the tools to deal with life, we don't have to fall back on those self-defeating behaviors. "I am ready to have those defects removed."

This might be considered a period of self-reflection. We have recently finished our searching and fearless moral inventory. We are getting honest about our role in our problems. We are recognizing life patterns and habits of mind that we know cannot work for us as responsible individuals in recovery.

Jewish mystics teach us that the Israelites had to go down to Egypt and experience slavery before they could taste freedom in Canaan. One reflects on their experience over *Yom Tov*: "On *Yom Kippur*, I would sit there with a terrible hangover, a part of me praying that God would let me live another year, a part of me hoping that God would let me die."⁴

According to the rabbis, when we change our character, our old characters cease to exist. Yet, there is a middle stage when our characters are neither old nor new; we move from our old character to nothing.

Changing our characters can be a terrifying challenge, mainly because we see ourselves as someone else without being sure how we became revived souls with new

⁴ Kerry Olitzky, Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery, *Jewish Lights Publishing*, 56-58.

characteristics. Helping maintain some continuity in the way we see ourselves is one important reason why Step Six is essential as a prelude to Step Seven.

Step Seven: Humbly asked Him to remove all these defects of character.

The seventh step signifies our readiness to change our patterns of behavior with a fresh vision. By the time we get to the seventh step, we are ready to have our shortcomings removed. We are tired of struggling, always having to justify our behavior, always having to be right and have other people know it. What a relief it will be to not have to be right all the time, and to know that it is okay to be a human being.

With this new approach to life, we do not need to hang on to our character defects as we would the "old shirt". Rather, we realize there is a better way to live life, and we are now ready to try new behaviors to live more positively. We have become willing and are ready to move forward. Throughout the previous six steps, we have come to the realization that our lives were mismanaged as we were self-destructive, blaming, and hostile to change. We have now reached the midpoint of the Twelve Steps, and are on the threshold of a new way of living.

When we are ready, perhaps we can say something like this: "my creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from there, to do your bidding. Amen."

This step reflects an understanding of human behavior, which is well-recognized in Jewish ethics. But still, for Jews, this step can be challenging. Each time we think we have "it", we need to think it through again. The tradition says it best: "Pray as if

everything depends on God, but act as if everything depends on you.”⁵ Jewish tradition holds that we can always depend on God and be received, but we also acknowledge that God does not just remove our shortcomings.

As previously stated in Step Five, shortcomings must be worked through and transcended – all with God’s help. They remind us that they are still out there, waiting to subvert our good intentions at any time, without warning, if we let them.

Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

The Eighth Step prepares us to right the wrongs, the injustices that have come from what we have or have not done. Our Jewish calendar provides for specific times throughout the year when we specifically consider what we have done, or whom we have wronged.

Memory is central to being a Jew. One way to help us remember is by creating lists. They imply order; some people think that there is too much order in Judaism, too many details for living life. Some of us are taught that following something in a specific way could perhaps enable us to have a better chance of reaching our goal(s) – for the sake of argument, recovery, or becoming closer to God. Jewish tradition also teaches us that it is our responsibility to restore order and goodness to the world, which depends on correcting other people’s wrongdoings, like fighting injustice, to right what is wrong.

We ask ourselves the most challenging questions: What has caused me to act out behaviors that hinder the positive experiences in my life? What faults that I most dislike in others do I find within myself? Have I failed to accomplish anything I know I should be doing because of fear? Can I face that fear? Am I avoiding dealing with important

⁵ Ibid, 64.

conflicts with colleagues, friends or family?

Once the questions are raised, we can begin to answer them and get a handle on our defects, areas that need improvement, so we can better understand what actions we need to take as we progress in our lives. Knowing our limitations— what we do not like or know we do not know —may give us clues as to what we are missing in order to become *klei kodesh*, holy vessels. The challenge is to bring the light of clarity into ourselves from this assessment work. Once we are able to better identify our capacities, we have the potential to straighten out both morally and spiritually.

Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Although reparations take numerous forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding: reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask for strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but are willing to do so. We have to be – we must not shrink from anything.⁶

One makes amends to those that have been harmed. Debts are paid back, apologies are made, and letters are written. And one can find time to do and say things that would help heal the damage that they have done. It takes insight, courage and dedication to make such amends, but now, with belief in God, we can know what to do and how to do it. A person in recovery can learn with sincerity, to seek the right way to go about this process from God, and start to live the kind of life that God has meant for us to live.

⁶ Bill W., 79.

Today, *hayom*, is the most important time to act. To truly be a *tzaddik*, a righteous person, our deeds equal who we are as individuals. It is through our actions that we bring to *l'taken et haolam* (repair the world), and in turn, ourselves. Carpe diem (seize the day).

Making amends can be an incredibly challenging task. However, each time you approach and say to someone, "I'm sorry", the approach becomes that much easier. Emotions will begin to flutter, and fear may grip the soul. But just as denying one's addiction did not make it go away, so too, one's failure to make amends magnifies one's sense of emptiness, imperfection, even being fatally flawed.⁷

For one to enter on the road to recovery, the pain of addiction must be faced. In order to correct character defects, one must share fourth step recovery with someone else.

In our codes, the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) teaches us that atonement is only effective if forgiveness from the victim has been sought. If the wrong action resulted in financial loss, then adequate restitution is required. If the offended party refuses to grant forgiveness, s/he is to be approached three times. If s/he remains obstinate in refusing forgiveness, and the offender sincerely regrets his/her behavior, Divine forgiveness is assured. If the victim has died, Jewish law requires that one take a *minyan* (a quorum of ten people) and visit the burial place to publicly ask forgiveness.

After making a list of people we have harmed, have reflected carefully upon each instance, and have tried to possess the right attitude in which to proceed, the making of direct amends divides those who should approach into several classes. There will be those who ought to be dealt immediately, those to whom only partial restitution can be made, lest complete disclosures do them or others more harm than good. There will be other

⁷ Olitsky, 78.

cases where action ought to be deferred, and still others in which by the very nature of the situation shall never be able to make direct personal contact at all.

Making amends enables us to fully participate in *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and by contributing to such repair, we embark on personal recovery, unity and wholeness in a world, where it is very much needed.

Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Step Ten begins with, what are often referred to as the "maintenance" steps, where those in recovery lay the foundation for the future. As well, life-long practices begin that are meant to help avoid complacency or falling back into old behavior and thinking patterns that could lead to using a substance or partaking in a destructive behavior. It is a pledge to continually monitor life with honesty and humility. Taking a personal inventory on a daily basis enables us to catch ourselves right away, rather than rebuild a negative pattern until it becomes a way of life again.

As well, this step requires vigilance against trigger and actions of addictive behavior. It requires humility before God, as well as to deal with defects promptly when they arise and not to let them linger.

"I used to think it was shameful to admit being wrong, but I later discovered that the humility necessary for admitting a mistake was anything but shameful. It was freedom - pure and simple. I was free to be fallible, and not have to torture myself over it. I no longer had to wonder when everyone was going to figure out what a fraud I was. The interesting thing is, that being so willing to admit when you are wrong really throws

other people off. It seems it is such a rare characteristic, that people find it refreshing and it really diffuses even the toughest of situations." James L.⁸

Step Ten does not require constant "*al chets*" (pounding of our chests to ask for forgiveness). Rather, it is a way to keep life simple, without seething resentments or tensions over petty arguments and misunderstandings. It is a step that allows the freedom to take responsibility for actions on a daily business, and own up to mistakes quickly and without fanfare. It gives the freedom of a clear conscience, and a sense of living a good life with good intentions toward others.

Taking a personal inventory on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* is not sufficient. This must be an ongoing process. The need for recognizing a wrong and promptly admitting it is stressed by the Talmud. The longer one delays in admitting a sin, the more apt he is to explain away and justify his behavior, until the sin may even appear as the right course of action.⁹

Step Eleven: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step Eleven is a continual reality check and compass, grounded in the reality of being brought out of addictive behaviors. A safe place is established by keeping conscious contact with God. Conscious contact is maintained with God through prayer and meditation. In that path, sanity, serenity and joy can be found.

⁸ Personal interview with James L. (original name omitted) on discussions of recovery and God's grace – 10.26.05.

⁹ Twerski, 3.

We can look at this another way: Step Eleven allows for a daily commitment to Step Three. Many recovering alcoholics and addicts find meditation a welcome relief from stress and tension in their daily lives. It allows those in recovery to reach a natural calm that was attempted to be reached via addictive behaviors. Whether we are suffering from an addictive behavior, if we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, our emotions and our intuitions of vitally needed support. As the body can fail its purpose for lack of nourishment, so can the soul. We all need the light of God's reality, which can serve for each of us as the nourishment of His strength, and the atmosphere of His grace. To an amazing extent the facts of A.A. life confirm this ageless truth.

Prayer keeps us in touch with the guidance of our HP (Higher Power). One of the first prayers upon rising asks for Divine guidance and the strength to do God's will. In *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), the Talmud states, "Make His will be your will, and negate your will before His".¹⁰

Understanding that we are all God's people, we can better understand God's will, and can never again claim ignorance of our actions. Of course we all have the potential to stray from the *derech eretz* (the true path) – after all, we are all imperfect creatures. But our will from God is simple: "Just do the right thing."¹¹

As Jews, God asks us to show our love, and God gives each and every one of us opportunities to prove that love.

¹⁰ Pirke Avot 2:4.

¹¹ Olitsky, 92.

Step Twelve: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Step Twelve is the culmination of the system because only the radical self consciousness of the first eleven steps frees one of self in order to practice these principles in all affairs. The purity of action that arises because we are *klei kodesh*, holy vessels, fountains of goodness that move through God, who trickle into the world. It is not about us at all. Rather, it is about the absence of us, something I call humility.

The burden of self is the single greatest hindrance to recovery. Most of us are so stuck on who we are that we never come to the holy place of purity, like a vessel. Our doors remain closed until we roll up our sleeves and get to work. The dirty-work, the radical self realization, found in the Steps, teach us. Sponsors teach us, addicts teach us with their stories. There is a responsibility to achieve recovery like a newborn, tentatively feeling the way through the most basic of human behaviors; learning to talk, to walk, risking vulnerability, learning the basics, and finally, humility - the humility of knowing one's place, the humility of being *klei kodesh*.

We come to learn the paradox that the less (self) we are, the more we are. The less I am me, the more I am today, tomorrow, and the next. The more I am a vessel, the greater I am. The lesser I am, the greater I am. We get there by being something. At first, the mountain stands tall, then it becomes plateau. But wouldn't you know it, the mountain reappears. This is the journey. The spiritual reality of this journey is documented with our Judaism.

There is yet another incredibly important learning we take from the Twelve Steps - there is no room for God in a person too full of self. The greatest self delusion we live

by is that we sit at the center of the universe. Through step work, we learn that this just isn't true.

Everywhere in Jewish ethics there is a great emphasis on mutual responsibility for one another's actions. No man is an island. Just as some diseases are contagious, so is spiritual and moral deterioration. Dr. Abraham Twerski states, "Those who are fortunate enough to achieve a measure of spirituality do not have the right to keep this enlightenment to themselves. The Yiddish phrase, *He is a tzaddik in pelz* refers to the pious one who keeps warm by wrapping himself in furs. In other words, he maintains a selfish piety. Warmth should be obtained by building a fire so that others can benefit from the heat as well."

Chapter 2: Self-Deception

The message of the Jonah narrative can, at times, appear simple and commonplace to its readers, despite its extraordinary elements. On the surface, the book may provide unsatisfying answers and seem a bit superficial, especially during its most read time (*Yom Kippur*). However, once you scratch the surface, you begin to explore the complex meta-layers of this intense narrative, looking at the questions of humanity's relationship with God, as well as at the moral/ethical ethos behind the narrative, specifically Jonah's journey. Some may question why God chased Jonah? Does God, in turn, chase each of us? And if so, in what way is Jonah (are we) guilty of self-deception? What does the narrative teach us about our own addictions, self-destructive behaviors, as well as our return to God?

Though it can appear to read as a fairy-tale like genre with characters which are good and bad, Jonah examines both the heights and depths of the individual's spiritual crisis and conflict. Its messages are deep and profound, permeating the human soul. Moreover, it is the quintessential Jewish resource, illustrating for us, its readers, the problematic and conflicting elements of life.

Defining 'self-deception' is no easy feat. However, it should be no secret that self-deception poses significant challenges to our lives. Plato tells us that there is nothing worse than self-deception. When the deceiver is at home and always with you, and not know that our thinking is poor, we will have no choice but to believe it. The questions must be asked: How do we deceive ourselves? Why do we deceive ourselves? What is it to deceive oneself? Is self-deception even possible? To what extent are our beliefs subject

to our control? These questions help guide our discussion in this work of understanding the interplay between Jonah and 12-Step philosophy.

In *Addictive Thinking*, author Dr. Abraham Twerski reveals how self-deceptive thought can undermine self-esteem and threaten the sobriety of a recovering individual. My goal in this thesis is to build upon Dr. Twerski's understanding of self-deception, in order to offer hope to those seeking a healthy and rewarding life in recovery.

Jonah Runs from His Responsibility

"Jonah, however, arose to flee to *Tarshish* from the presence of the Lord." (1:3)

At the beginning of the narrative, we witness God's command to Jonah: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." (Jonah 1:2). However, Jonah "arose to flee to *Tarshish* from the presence of the Lord." (1:3) Perhaps it is the intensity of the Divine injunction that keeps Jonah from ignoring the command God gave him. Jonah is a smart man, and although he is aware that there is no respite from God's command, he hopes to escape it by running away. The rebellion embodied by his diametrically contrary action is expressed by the partial coincidence between the phrasing of the Divine injunction, "Arise and go to Nineveh," and that of its anti-fulfillment, "Jonah....arose to flee to *Tarshish*." The earlier prophets utter that obedience, which is expressed by full linguistic coincidence. Jonah, by contrast, does indeed arise and set out – but in the opposite direction.¹²

¹² "Jonah", The JPS Bible Commentary, 5.

Jonah is not unique among the prophets in his accepting of the Divine command, but he is unique as the only prophet who flees from God out of discontent of being a vehicle to bring about *Teshuvah*.¹³

We learn in *TB Sanhedrin* 89a, that one who is a lying prophet is put to death by the hand of man. However, we also learn from the *Mishnah* that a person who hides his prophecy is subject to death only at the hands of heaven.¹⁴ When God tells Jonah right at the beginning of the narrative, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me", he gives the impression that he would rather face the questionable chance of death by God, as opposed to the seemingly surety of death at the hands of man. This raises a significant question for me: Does Jonah really want to die, and if so, why does he choose the former route? Our Rabbis note that Jonah worries more about his own wellbeing, if he delivers the message to the Ninevites, and should they repent and be saved. The reason for this, they note, is Jonah's concern over the Gentiles' repentance; God will transfer the anger onto Israel.¹⁵ I would challenge this assumption, positing that Jonah will go to the ends of the earth from his responsibility, and his worry isn't over God turning on Israel. Rather, Jonah is running away from his responsibility, his God, and himself.

The first evidence of this theory is illustrated in Jonah's choosing to run away to one of the farthestmost destination spot: *Tarshish*. In his book, Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus identified *Tarshish* with Thrassos in Cilicia (a port city in southeastern Asia Minor), based upon the phonetic resemblance of the biblical and Greek names. However,

¹³ God's choosing of him as prophet comes into question when compared to other prophets who were reluctant to accept God's call and command (Jer. 1:6, 20:9).

¹⁴ *TB Sanhedrin* 89a.

¹⁵ *Tanhuma Vayikra* 8.

in three different Biblical passages¹⁶, the full geological extent of the known world is delimited by *Tarshish* at one end and Sheba at the other. If we follow this model of *Tarshish* in the far west (and not north of Israel, as noted by Josephus), these Biblical references strike an accord with the thrice-mentioned *Tarshish* in this verse; the first denotes Jonah's destination; the second when he finds a ship that is sailing there; a third when he actually boards the vessel. The overstating of his destination indicates that Jonah was not merely seeking to leave the land of Israel by sea and flee to whatever destination the first ship might carry him, but in fact Jonah was trying to sail to the farthest possible point from his assigned destination.

In addition to this seemingly deliberate move to the farthest most point from life and commitment, we are able to note deliberate choice in the Hebrew for "flight", *mi-penei*, which denotes a distancing motivated by fear, and "flight", *mi-lifnei*, the form used here, which implies a break in actual contact and the literal "turning of one's back", similar to Genesis 4:16, which states that "Cain left the presence, *mi-lifnei*, of the Lord.

Fleeing Ourselves

It is reasonable to assume great challenge in accessing this narrative as a human genre; after all, Jonah is a prophet. The spiritual states described in it are beyond the reader. The recorded experiences of a prophet are remote from one's own life experience. Prophets are superhumans. How can we possibly approach their level or identify with the product of their *métier*, considering its remoteness from our spiritual level?

Jewish tradition relates the prophet on two levels: the historic human being who was a prophet, and the prophet's legacy that has reached our era. Jonah, who was born,

¹⁶ Isaiah 60:6-9; Ezekiel 38:13; Psalms 72:10.

lived, and died centuries ago, can be accessible to us. We can identify with his subjective experience, as well as his prophecy. Though nearly a millennia has passed, the world still reads the story of Jonah. "Thousands of prophets and prophetesses rose in Israel, but none of their prophecies were written except those intended for all generations, for all times. It was recorded in order that we may have access to it; it is meant to speak to us.

It may not speak to us as it spoke to our parent's generation. Every generation speaks a different language. We must understand it in the language of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We can analyze the Book of Jonah on every level that may relate to our lives. Its communicative power is limited only by the spiritual limitations of our own age. If a prophecy has reached an era, it is meant to serve that era. We are intended to delve into it and to extract all that we need from it, every shade of meaning that is applicable to our souls.

On the most sacred day of the year, *Yom Kippur*, Jews are reminded of significant sins to refrain from, emphasizing how severe human deterioration could become, to the point of losing elemental humanity, if man should cut himself off from the higher spiritual dimensions that protect him from being eroded by the survival mechanism.

The Torah proclaims, in this time of repentance, that natural morality without the lofty spiritual aspect cannot stand on its own. It cannot guard against being swept away by the physical materialistic experience. It is the spiritual aspect that gives moral values their objective power. The spiritual aspect does not eliminate the natural character of existence; not everything that is natural is good, beautiful, and healthy. Just as separation from values does not necessarily guarantee the naturalness of life, it also does not

guarantee the preservation of these values. A spiritual dimension that ignores existence and its need is useless.¹⁷

Jonah symbolizes the integration between these two principles – the natural and the spiritual. Although we may not preserve this synthesis in our everyday lives, God is not willing to remove God self from the equation.

Recalling the prohibition of sins on *Yom Kippur* serves to point to a solution to the conflict of existence that revolves around the parallel tendencies of materialism and spiritualism. This way, no one can deny that such a conflict does indeed exist, and its constructive goal is to nourish creative tension that will prevent man from divorcing him/herself from either one or the other value.¹⁸ However, preventing a separation does not mean that challenges will not occur. On the contrary, it is Jonah's journey that helps us to see that struggle can lead us into the depths of being, and it is in those depths that we seek newness – a freshness of mind, body, and spirit. The question we must ask ourselves is: how do we recognize our own depths?

Hitting Rock Bottom: From Self-Deception to Submission (Jonah 2:1-11)

For three days and three nights, Jonah was trapped and imprisoned, resolutely silent in the belly of the *dag gadol* (the big fish), similar to the way he remained mute in the hold of the ship. At first, he dupes himself, thinking that the *dag* had been sent not only to save him from drowning, but also to return him onto dry land, with the hope that his preferring death to performing the mission God set upon him to relieve him of the task. But as time slowly passed in the lonely, dark abyss of the belly of the great fish, of

¹⁷ "He whose wisdom exceeds his actions, his wisdom will not endure (*Avot* 3:9).

¹⁸ Lifshitz, 36.

which the worlds of life and death were closed to him, he realizes that his way out was one of acknowledgment, of something much greater than himself; the only way in which he can reach beyond the cavern of solitude, for which he has been placed, is to pray.

The mark of emptiness, of hitting rock bottom, in the bowels and depths of darkness, is only through renewed contact with God. The threatening waves do not lead him here. Rather, it is the closed belly of the fish; his mouth is not opened by the fear of death, but by his admission to the powerlessness of his situation¹⁹, which for Jonah, is neither life nor death.

The same can be said for us. Hitting rock bottom can reach us through a myriad of experiences: the depths of an addiction or destructive behavior; depression that seems to have no end; a co-dependent relationship that spirals in an unhealthy way; extreme financial hardships – the list goes on. I believe that it is the admission to higher power over the powerlessness of our situation²⁰ that will ultimately redeem us from the depths in which we are situated.

From Deception to Revelation: A Reflection on the *Shema*

In order for us to being this process, we must be able to HEAR – hear ourselves, as well as our admission of powerlessness. Judaism's pinnacle affirmation is the *Shema* – affirming God's oneness: "HEAR, O ISRAEL!" But what does it really mean to hear? Does Jonah really HEAR God? Do we truly HEAR our Higher Power, our God?

¹⁹ Step 1: "I have come to recognize that I am powerless over my substance and that my life has become unmanageable."

²⁰ Step 1's program of recovery, according to Bill W's *A.A.: The Big Book*, states, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (for purposes of this topic, alcohol can be substituted with any addiction, destructive behavior, self-made action that we feel powerless over...) – that our lives have become unmanageable."

God said to Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD." (Jonah 1:2-3)

SHEMA: Only the person who is present in their contributions HEARS.

At the beginning, Jonah hears only what he wants to hear. He is a rebel, a doer who has yet to face the obligation of knowing, serving, or hearing God. He is a practical person, busy with trivialities, and his reality is pressed like a dry flower between the pages of a book, lost among endless details.²¹ Even if Jonah prayed before his prayer in the belly of the *dag gadol*, it surely did not rise above his actual recitation. If commands or instructions were demanded of him, he escaped from them to obsessive doing, because he was at war with himself. His obsessive-ness was the product of his powerlessness over fear – fear of himself. In time, without God's intervention, Jonah might have become lifeless – doing without being. Jonah did not only close his ears by turning away from God and Nineveh, he turned away from himself. Jonah believed that he knew all there was to know about the situation – heard only what he wanted to hear.

"Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." (Jonah 1:5)

SHEMA: The one who listens to the words of friends, family, partner, children, parent, and does not catch the note of urgency. S/he hears, but does not really HEAR.

Jonah listens to God's command, but thinks only of how it will affect him personally:

"...I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and You heard my voice." (Jonah 2:2)

²¹ Lifshitz, 191.

SHEMA: The person who joins in prayer and feels that is but a duty to be performed mechanically, may hear those around him/her hears, but does not really HEAR.

In Ze'ev Haim Lifshitz's The Paradox of Human Existence: A Commentary on the Book of Jonah, he speaks passionately about the modern analyses of human behavior which see the natural instinct for self-preservation as a factor contributing to proper behavior. However, it tends to be seen as a destructive behavior through a Jewish lens, as it does not necessarily represent the personal inner quality of the human being. Lifshitz posits that the inner quality uses the mechanical system as raw materials – a system which belongs to the material world. As such, man's existential place is not in the material, mechanistic world but in the creative world. If man conforms to the dictates coming from the self-preservation mechanism (belonging to the material world), he then becomes one of the many creatures that lack awareness of the Divine Presence they represent.²²

We are not supposed to spend most of our time preserving ourselves. Indeed, if we give our troubles, concerns, and gratitude to God, our Higher Power, we are in effect, serving God. And if we see this as our task and goal in life, God will provide us with whatever we need in order to survive.²³ The test of a "properly led life" is passed with flying colors when there is a constant improvement in one's character and the development of one's personality, therefore becoming a greater goal to improve in our efforts of serving God and bringing God into our lives. The outer stimulants in life aide to

²² "All the nations that forget God." (Psalm 9:18).

²³ "He who takes upon himself the yoke of Torah, from him the yoke of the government and the yoke of secular life will be removed." (*Pirke Avot* 3:5). "Cast your burden upon Adonai and God will sustain you. God shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:23).

cease the flow of our own inner quality, causing many of us to neglect the aim of improvement of own character. Jonah saw his own goal in striving for mending his character defects in the carrying out of his task, in obeying God, and in feeling remorse for having initially refused the task.

Once Jonah succeeded in this goal, he realized that he had done nothing to further his personal goals – he was lonely and alienated, and lacked the Divine Presence within himself.

Revelation as a Means Toward Redemption and Recovery

As previously stated in Chapter 1, Twelve-Step is intended as a guide for leading people on a path toward recovery, which consists of conducting a thorough, moral inventory of past deeds, as well as making amends for any wrongdoings. We know that this is remarkably akin to the Jewish tradition of self-examination for which we set aside a time at the Jewish New Year for a literal "*cheshbon hanefesh*" (accounting of the soul) followed by a process of *teshuvah* (literally "turning"; making amends on *Yom Kippur* - see Chapter 4) not "simply to repudiate the evil we have done" stresses Lawrence Kushner, but rather to "receive whatever evils we have intended as our own deliberate creations."

It must be noted, however, that recovery is not a goal. It is a process that begins from the time one is has self-diagnosed until the time s/he takes their last breath on earth. Like *teshuvah*, we consider recovery a life-long process. Some even postulate that we begin our recovery in the womb (like Jonah)²⁴; we are taught the entire Torah, only to be

²⁴ "Midrash Jonah", *Pirke Rabi Eliezer 10:16-17*, 10:16-17. "Rabbi Tarfon says: The fish was designated to swallow Jonah from the six days of creation, as it says: "God provided a big fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 2:1)." He entered its mouth like a person who enters the Great Synagogue, and stood (inside).

born and lose our Torah knowledge. It becomes a memory, a lost love to which we yearn to return. If the Torah provides a spiritual blueprint for healing, the moment we begin experiencing it, we are in recovery, and the process of healing begins. Because healing is something that presents us with a new prism through which to evaluate our lives, recovery is the process that affords us the opportunity to make changes. This process of recovery can actually improve our quality of life. Acknowledging the prospect of death is a transformative experience that can potentially get us on the road to recovery.

There is a whole range of chemical addictions and self-destructive behaviors with which people struggle. Their journey to recovery includes battling the abuse of a particular substance or behavior. What often leads people to seek help in battling their addictions is what is known as "bottoming out," an often near-death experience (Jonah in the belly of the *dag gadol* in the depths of the ocean)²⁵, in which a person realizes that he or she can get no lower. Although a twelve-step recovery starts with self-realization, it may take an intervention (a "team") that includes family members and/or close friends to help the person realize that s/he has hit bottom.

Recovery is not a straight line from one place to another. Relapses are part of the path of recovery for most people. In a chemical addiction, this process begins with cleansing the body of its poisons. Next, a change in the pattern of behaviors associated with the addiction, or which provide the context for the self-destructive/compulsive behavior. Along the way, those in the process of recovery are asked to explore the depths

²⁴ The two eyes of the fish were like windows giving light for Jonah. Rabbi Meir says: One pearl was hanging in the belly of the fish, gave light to Jonah, like this sun which shines at noon, and showed him (to Jonah) all that is in the sea and in the depths, and concerning it, Scripture says: "Light is sown for the righteous (Ps. 97:11)."

²⁵ "The deep was all around me." (Jonah 2:6)

of their souls in order to understand why they “used” in the first place. This therapeutic process of introspection can be tied to issues of self-esteem. By taking a look inside, we are able to examine the whole inside of ourselves that we try to fill up with chemicals, food, or destructive behaviors (i.e. cutting). Above all, we want to explore the depths, finding the place where we feel alone. As part of the recovery process, we are guided in entering into a covenantal relationship with a Higher Power (in our Jewish context, God) so that we come to understand that we are, in fact, never alone.

Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, in his book, Jewish Paths Toward Healing and Wholeness, describes an experience in which he had been changed through a process of recovery: “When I visited Joshua, a former congregant, in his hospital room, his wife was sitting by his bed. She was fighting a drug addiction and Josh was very worried about her, terrified about what would become of her if he were to die. I took his hand in mine. He, in turn, took his wife’s hand. And we prayed. A certain presence swept over us. I felt certain that Joshua would return to health, but he died. However, after that moment in the hospital room, his wife fought her addiction from a new direction and with a resolve that I had never before witnessed. In the midst of our prayers, she was healed.”²⁶

We must set forth, like Jonah, on a journey. Not one in which we run in the opposite direction, but one in which we face, head-on, the challenges of our compulsions, our addictions, our self-destructive behaviors. And we need not go it alone. The *shechinah* (God’s Divine presence) is with us on this continual journey – we must HEAR and embrace this covenantal partner in order to move forth on our journey toward recovery.

²⁶ Olitzky, 97.

Chapter 3: God's Mercy and Grace

"Mercy" and "Grace" are two words and two subjects commonly used today, yet their meanings are often misunderstood, under-appreciated, and under-utilized in a Jewish context. Mercy and grace are really twins, not identical twins, but very close, nevertheless. They are often found together, and if one is encountered alone, you can be sure the other isn't far away.

As a basic definition, grace means "unmerited favor." According to the Webster dictionary, grace is: "compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power." I would define it as a blessing that is an act of Divine favor or helpfulness, compassionate treatment of those in distress. Grace tells us that we cannot earn such a favor; it is something we don't deserve. In fact, the one who awards true grace upon another does not expect anything in return for his/her gift and/or gracious acts.

A further understanding of this concept distinguishes it from that of "mercy". In its basic definition, mercy can be defined as us not getting something that we do deserve (e.g. if we deserve punishment for something that we did, an act of mercy would pardon us and we no longer receive punishment). Therefore mercy takes care of the consequences of negative actions, while grace on top of an act of mercy provides us with additional benefits. To illustrate, when we rightly deserve punishment, mercy provides relief for us so that we do not receive punishment, and on top of it aside from the act of mercy we receive gifts and acts of grace which we haven't necessarily earned, but such were bestowed upon us by the provider of grace – that provider being God.

*Yalkut Shimoni*²⁷, the most encyclopedic of all *Midrashim* gives us deep insight into the most profound recognition of Jonah's life:

At that moment he fell on his face and said, "Rule your world according to the attribute of mercy" as it is written "to You, God, is mercy and forgiveness."

The message of Jonah's prophecy is one for each one of us. The *Vilna Gaon* tells us that Jonah's journey is one that we all make. We are born with a subconscious realization of the fact that we have a mission. We seek escape, because our mission is often one that we are afraid to attempt.

In the text of the Jonah story we are told that the places that he sought were *Yaffo* and *Tarshish*. While these places actually exist and are known as Jaffa and Tarshish, the literal meanings of the names of these cities are "beauty" and "wealth."

We comfort ourselves externally, by escaping from our inner knowledge of our mission through the pursuit of wealth, and by surrounding ourselves with beauty. Our bodies are compared to Jonah's ship. We face moments in life in which the fragility of our bodies is inescapable, as in when we face illness, or confront moments of danger that seem to last an eternity until they are resolved.

The sailors on the ship are the talents and capacities that work for us. They too cannot save us from our futile desire to escape ourselves. The whale is the symbol of ultimate confrontation of the recognition that our ultimate fate is the grave. For some, that recognition almost feels like a welcome refuge. For others, facing death forces them at last into pursuing life!

We can suffer the vicissitudes of life, and recognize that we ourselves have caused the storms to toss us back and forth. We can move forward to fulfill our purpose,

²⁷ Written by Rav Shimon Hadarshan in the thirteenth century.

but we are still not free of conflict and anxiety until we finally recognize that every step along the way, we are embraced by Divine compassion.

It is then that we are ready to return to God. While for each of us the path is our own, and never yet explored by any other person, Jonah lives the example of the beginning and the end of the journey we all make, while told through this personal experiences.

Beginning with Exodus 34:6-7, we see examples of how mercy and grace are a very part of God's nature:

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, 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 to the fourth generation."

In Deuteronomy 4:31, we can see that mercy and grace are an integral part of God's character. They are what God is and how God behaves:

"For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; God will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them."

Even Moses, while crying out to God on the behalf of guilty Israel, appealed time and again to God's great mercy, as we read in Numbers 14:17-19:

(17) "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, (18) The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. (19) Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

For the purposes of our study, we can see the concepts of mercy and grace play out in Jonah's personal prayer and appeal to God for forgiveness:

"They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD." – Jonah 2:8-9

The Hebrew, even within the above verses, adds a layer of complexity to the English interpretation of these two words (and terms). The Hebrew word most often translated "mercy" in the Torah is רַחֲמִים (*rachamim*), meaning compassion; by extension, it is the womb (as cherishing the fetus); by implication, it is a maiden. The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew Lexicon defines רָחַם (*racham*) as: to love, to love deeply, to have mercy, to be compassionate, to have tender affection, to have compassion. It is from רֶחֶם (*rechem*), which is defined by the New American Standard Dictionary as: the womb.

Another word sometimes translated as "mercy" but more often "loving-kindness" is חֶסֶד (*chesed*), which is defined as goodness or kindness. It is חָסַד (*chasad*), to be good or kind.

When referring to the word "grace", we see that it is never far away from "mercy". In the KJV translation of the Torah, the English word "grace" is translated thirty-nine times. In the New American Standard Version of the Torah, the English word "grace" is only translated eight times. Virtually all other thirty-one times, the Hebrew word is translated "favor." Why the difference? Let's look at the meaning.

The Hebrew word most often translated "grace" in the KJV is חֵן (*chen*); graciousness, kindness, favor. In the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, its meaning is given as "favor, grace, charm." In the New American Standard Dictionary, the Hebrew word חֵן (*chen*) is defined as coming from the root חָנַן (*chanan*), which is to show favor,

or to be gracious. In most cases in the Torah, the context shows us it is used in a manner implying the showing of favor.

The Concepts of Spirituality, Mercy, and Grace as Components of Recovery

Such favor, as presented above, many researchers and practitioners believe could be lived through a "spiritual awakening", a cognitive renewal of thinking and approach to life; it is required for long term recovery. A 1998 study conducted by Patricia Borman and David Dixon of Ball State University compared 12-step and non-12-step programs to assess the impact of spirituality. They did not find that either program was more "spiritual" than the other, but they did find that the spirituality of ALL of the participants increased significantly²⁸ leading the researchers to believe that addressing spirituality in treatment is appropriate and necessary.

From a reflection on how the Oxford Group's principles and fellowship helped him remain sober, Bill W., co-founder of AA, originated "the 12 steps" designed to not only help an individual abstain from alcohol consumption; but to also create a "spiritual awakening", which is the twelfth and final step. Bill W., along with other members of the Oxford Group, began to realize that a strong spiritual life offered the reinforcement and fellowship they needed to remain sober over a long period of time²⁹.

"Alcoholics Anonymous is a spiritual program and a spiritual way of life, and the process of recovery begins when the alcoholic cries out for help or when an addict

²⁸ P.D. Borman & D.N. Dixon, "Spirituality and the 12 Steps of Substance Abuse Recovery." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 3, 26.

²⁹ T. Webb, Tree of renewed life: Spiritual Renewal of the Church through the Twelve Step Program, G.O.A.L. Project, 2.

recognizes that he or she is not God"³⁰. Once we, as new believers or recovering addicts surrender to the power and "grace" of God, our lives start to resemble what God intended.

To deny that God is at work in the recovery process of addict-related disorders would be on par with denying general revelation. Even those who do not know God or have a personal relationship with God are moved when they see a beautiful sunset over the ocean, the sun glistening on a pristine snow covered mountain peak, or in light of the devastation of 9/11. They understand that there is a greater force at work. "When general principles are discovered through science of nature which apply to all people, then that is a demonstration of God working through naturalistic laws, which are a part of God's general revelation."³¹

What kind of emphasis do Jews place on God's presence within the lives of those battling with addictions or self-destructive behaviors? Perhaps it is not enough to know that God is at work in the life of the unbelieving addict, or the one who is hurting themselves and others on a daily basis? How do we know this person will not discover God through their trial and be reclaimed by God? All of life, in essence, is evidence of God's caring concern.

In Abraham J. Heschel's *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*, he offers views on how man can capture God. Jewish tradition views God as being radically different than man, so Heschel explores the ways that Jewish teaching demonstrates the ways in which a person may have an encounter with the ineffable. A recurring theme in this work is the radical amazement that man experiences when experiencing the presence

³⁰ Webb, 3.

³¹ L.P. Bridgeman & W.M. McQueen, "The success of Alcohol Anonymous: Locus of control and God's revelation." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 2, 15.

of the Divine and yearns for spirituality. He notes, "Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy."

Many attempts to express some qualities of grace have been entirely made of images. Poets and artists most likely do better than I at finding representations for grace, but even with the best of all our attempts, grace remains amazing. No words, parables, metaphors, or artistic creations can do justice to its glory; grace is only truly appreciated and expressed in the actual, immediate experience of real life situations.

In order for one to live into the mystery of grace, one must encounter grace as a real gift. Some would say that an early childhood experience with our parents is important in determining how we come to accept grace later in life. If we had loving, trustworthy parents rather than rejecting and unreliable ones, we would grow up more willing to accept God's grace as a gift. But I do not believe this is true. I feel that all of us, in some way, are challenged in accepting the radical giftedness of God's grace, no matter what our childhood experience. God's grace, as Jews, is simply not part of our conditioning. Even our attempts to make it so will be challenged because, like God, grace will not become an object for our attachment. God, as our giver of grace, deserves a straightforward request:

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto You, into Your holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." (Jonah 2:7-9)

Like Jonah, our recognition of our own vulnerability can bring us to finally transcend our ego, surrendering our desire to control events, and beginning at last to accept our mission in life, no matter what it is. As children of God, we all have the right to make our recognition reality. There are many places where our search for grace will

lead us, and we can look in both the obvious and hidden places. The obvious places are those which we tend to avoid or embrace (depending on our religious conditioning), which can include [but are not limited to] text and scripture, prayer, meditation, as well as our communities.

Looking in the hidden places, especially when battling an addiction or destructive behavior, can be just as challenging. Such places include encounters with people we dislike, boredom, times of turmoil and failure.

I am aware that this is a tall order, especially as we try to relax our minds and souls in order to receive grace as a gift. Whether in times of peace or strife, BREATHE – look around for God’s embrace, and if you can’t feel it, try to envision it.

However, it is not enough to merely accept it. One must make an attempt to live life in God’s grace, even in those moments when we do not sense them directly. I am aware, however, that whenever I try to live within God’s grace, I am taking a personal risk; if I try to live in accordance with grace, then I am, in effect, relinquishing the gods I have made of my attachments. Grace serves as a threat to the regularities in my life, and I become vulnerable to distorting what I know about God’s grace and forget entirely. Thus, my will must be in the conscious mode; I must be prepared to do some internal God-wrestling. “Living into grace”, in essence, requires taking risks of faith:

Jonah 2:6 - אֶפְפוֹנִי מִיָּם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ הָהוּם יִסְבְּבֵנִי סוּף תְּבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי - “I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet you brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.”

Our freedom becomes most pure when our addictions have so confused and defeated us that we sense no choice left at all. Our admission of our powerlessness (Step 1) is, in fact, when we have the most potential in choosing. Nothing is left in us to force

us one way or another. Our choice, then, is a true act of faith. We may put our faith in ourselves or in our attachments or in God.

Our faith, here, has little to do with our previous conditioning. Though our beliefs influence our choices, at this point, we are as free from our prior conditioning as we are from our immediate attachments.

In the Jonah narrative, God reaches out to the Ninevites and to others. In the closing words of the narrative, God speaks to Jonah saying, "Should I not pity that great city of Nineveh which has more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hands from their left, and also much cattle?" God loves and accepts not only those who believe that they deserve God's love and acceptance; God loves and accepts (gives grace) those who do not even know that they need it.

To assume that God is not at work in working the twelve steps is a bit presumptuous on our part - God does in fact have the potential to save a non-believer through these venues.

The Role of Mercy and Grace: Clergy as Pastoral Caregivers

"It is possible that a pastor will be contacted about spiritual concerns by the addict who is in treatment because they have questions about God?"³² Many people who battle addictive disorders have either experienced the synagogue as a negative place or are afraid that they cannot come home after sinning. A Rabbi, Cantor, Educator, or Youth Worker can be central figures in helping an addict heal their image of God while guiding him/her in making sense out of the overwhelming experiences of grace in recovery. After the connection is made, help can be provided them to healthy constructs - albeit

³² S.V. Jackson, "Pastoral counseling of recovering alcoholics after treatment", Pastoral Counseling, 127.

"synagogue-lingo" - such as we do not have to be perfect or free of unhealthy actions to be accepted by God. God invites us into God's *sukkah shlomecha* (God's peaceful dwelling place) no matter what we have done.

Clergy as pastoral caregivers have the potential to affirm the addict's experience of grace and bridge the division often made between "twelve step spirituality" and Jewish tradition. Further, a clergy person can be an encouraging person who supports the addict in seeking the answers to his/her questions. Though we may not know exactly what to say, our presence is often all the response the individual is looking for.

In an attempt to make a stronger *kesher* (connection) with those in our communities, a holistic approach can be offered to individuals who are looking for spiritual growth. "The central characteristic of the spiritual healing process is to focus on the integrative character of all dimensions of human life in a relationship to God."³³ Those suffering from addiction or self-destructive behaviors seek wholeness or personhood rooted in false gods, such as liquor, pills, even kitchen utensils. But these false gods are not the "real" false gods the individual worships. People who are in this place in life play god with God. Almost invariably, we are unaware of what we are doing [because of our] incredible amount of genuine naiveté"³⁴.

For the individual who battles with these disorders, their addiction gives them the sensation or the feeling that they are god or god-like. For a person addicted to a substance, the god-like ability to remove pain (albeit for only a short period of time) is a powerful drawing influence and reinforcing behavior. The spiritual awakening only arises in the surrendering of the role of "Self-God." For Jews who battle these disorders, the

³³ A.J. Hoogewind, "Holistic ministry to addiction", *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 70.

³⁴ Ibid, 73.

realization that they have become powerless over their addiction, that their lives have become unmanageable, and that their actions have severe consequences, is the first step in their spiritual awakening; they no longer have to carry the load alone.

For the Ninevites, their spiritual response cannot be attributed to Jonah's charismatic personality or his style of delivery; he makes no effort to arouse the people beyond the few words that God required him to communicate: "Another forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." (Jonah 3:4). Rather, we see a program of self-betterment of the most difficult type: a rejection of their habituated lifestyle of corruption and evil, of pleasures and amusements, of "playing god."

Mercy and grace, witnessed through the process of *teshuvah*, has become part of the human system. Natural human beings, 'the children of Noah,' can comprehend it. Every single person can be taught the need for a good purpose in life, without which life is bad. Jonah had only to show people the slightest step in the direction of truth. There is a human urge for truth, elemental in each person, which immediately elicits a heartfelt response.³⁵

Additional factors above the spiritual awakening or renewal so prominently discussed are medical (biological) elements aiding treatment. As science continues to advance with each passing day, clergy will not be able to avoid the psychopharmacological advances being made for individual with disorders who continue to work with therapists and counselors. Many reviews and studies suggest that medications can help relapse for individuals who suffer from not only chemical addiction, but those who are involved in self-destructive behaviors as well. Although there is great promise for the medications being developed to assist those on one side of

³⁵ Lifshitz, 70.

the severity scale, there is concern that the medications may also stunt long-term recovery due to a myriad of side effects.

However, some medications may be the perfect bridge for an addict on the ongoing emotional, physical, and spiritual recovery path. Helping the individual stop and prevent relapse long enough for the additional mind, body and spiritual treatment element to take hold may be all the person needs for a successful start on the road to recovery.

God's mercy and grace can come in many varieties of help and assistance!

Some scholars say that Jonah argues on behalf of strict justice - against the merciful God, who repents of God's sentence (upon the Ninevites). To the advocate of strict justice, it is clear that wickedness abounds not only because of the viciousness of evildoers, but also because the *shofet* (Judge) of all the earth does not treat them with the full severity of the law.

Jonah task, like ours, is to learn that we can exist only through the unfathomable amalgam of justice and mercy; fear of sin is produced not only by fear of punishment, but also by awe at the sublimity of salvation ("The men feared the LORD greatly" (Jonah 1:16)), and by fascination with mercy and grace.³⁶

Jonah foresaw both the submission of the evildoers of Nineveh, terrified by their impending destruction, and the acceptance of their repentance by the merciful God. Jonah was wrong to believe that he would be allowed to escape to Tarshish, just as there are those of us who believe that we can escape through our own addictions. Subsequent surprises undermine our pretense to knowledge. In Jonah's case, the fish that saves him

³⁶ "Yours is the power to forgive so that You may be held in awe", Psalm 130:41.

from death but imprisons him in its belly until he gives up his flight and begins to pray; and the plant that saves him from his distress but vanishes as suddenly as it appeared, so that he can feel the pain of loss and open his heart to understand the Creator's love for God's creatures.

Realizing Our Own Need for Mercy and Grace

Only when the proponent of strict justice realizes his/her own humanity can s/he understand the fundamental dependence of mortals on human and divine mercy. The midrashic sages had Jonah express this recognition, in body language and words, in the answer they report he gave to God's rhetorical question that concludes the book:

"Then he fell on his face and said: 'Conduct Your world according to the attribute of mercy, as it is written: 'To the LORD our God belong mercy and forgiveness' (Daniel 9:9)' (Midrash Jonah)."

By conducting our attributes (or utilizing the A.A. language of "character traits") in this way, the idea is compatible with the entire narrative from beginning to end and encompasses most of its elements. My interpretation, however, explains the plot, the characters, and the dialogue as embodying the primordial struggle between justice and mercy.

So, why do we need mercy? Who needs grace? We all need them. It is through the mercy of God that we are granted favor, forgiven of sin, and restored to a state of righteousness or justification in accordance with God's righteous standards. It is through God's grace that God will voluntarily give us the ultimate gift of life and salvation; not because we deserve it or because we have earned it. The freedom that comes from our undeserving condition does not mean, however, that we are free to act in just any old

manner that shows disregard or contempt for the standards of God's righteousness.

Indeed, we are to uphold the standards of God, a God who teaches and demonstrates the fundamental concepts of mercy and grace.

Chapter 4: Teshuvah (Repentance) in Recovery

From *Elul* to *Yom Kippur* I: Admitting Disappointments and Accepting Change

Jonah Admits His Failure (Steps 1-3) 1:8-16

Jonah knew God had caught up with him! So Jonah confessed that he was a Hebrew and a prophet of the God who made the heavens and the earth. He further explained he was running from God. Upon his explanation, one of the sailors asked a very sensible question, "Why hast thou done this?" Even the sailors saw it was a most foolish thing to do. He was being very open with them so they asked him the logical next question, "What shall we do?"

Up until this point, Jonah had acted in a cowardly manner: while they struggled to save the ship he slept below deck. It is noted in the A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book) that before entering Step 1 ("We were powerless over alcohol (our addiction, self-destructive behavior) – that our lives have become unmanageable"), one is hiding from their disease. But much like Jonah, when a person confronts the violent storms, like Jonah, one can honestly admit their guilt: "We admitted we were powerless over our disease/destructive behavior, and that our lives had become unmanageable (Step 1), further taking responsibility....". In the Jonah narrative, his response was to instruct the sailors to throw him over the side. God's actions had stopped him dead in his tracks.

The Torah proclaims that in a time of repentance, our natural morality without a spiritual aspect cannot stand on its own, an aspect which gives moral values its objective power. However, the spiritual aspect does not eliminate the natural character of existence; not everything that is natural is good, beautiful, and healthy.

This is evident in both the story of Jonah and that of the ten executed Sages, both of which are read on *Yom Kippur*. Both of these narratives communicate the complexity of the human condition. One tells of emotional human beings traumatized by existential problems, while the other tells of "God followers" immersed in the awe of God, as it states in Psalm 27:4, "One thing have I desired from the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in God's temple."

Often, a disconnect is found between these schools of thought, one school confronts the "Kingdom of Heaven" and its challenge on human life, while the other trembles in limbo of hazardous human life. Facing the problems of daily life does not leave one much time to find their "true spiritual selves". On the other hand, when one reaches new spiritual heights, s/he may have apathy for the mundane in their lives.

As a response to this argument, the Jonah narrative symbolizes the integration between these two principles – the natural and the spiritual, and although each one of us may not preserve this synthesis in our everyday lives, God is not willing to remove God's self from the equation. "You do the 'footwork', which is the action, the natural, and you leave the result up to God - the spiritual."³⁷

Torah takes us a step further, offering an organic solution to these seemingly unparallel dimensions, enabling Jews to draw encouragement and strength to build on these principles, as both serve to balance one another. It is through God's interaction in our lives that enables this linkage to occur.

In the narrative, God refuses to see the conflict as a problem without a solution. Rather, God pursues Jonah as an exemplar of an individual who is given the opportunity

³⁷ Bill W., 76.

to seek for his own purpose in life, preventing him from perpetually sinking into despair to an existential condition without hope. Rather, in the 12-Step model, despair is replaced by faith.

Jonah was a prophet, and he knew God. He had backslid and was "out of the loop", and still God pursued him, not willing for him to be a castaway. God was, in essence, chastening the child that would be brought to repentance and back to a place of fellowship³⁸ (covenant) and service.

In scripture, the term "chasten" is used to describe acts of discipline, correction, and corporeal punishment. According to the Bible, God's chastening is generally considered painful and unpleasant, intended as a "rebuke or reprimand" to change one's behavior. Throughout the *Tanakh*, the trials of *B'nai Yisrael* were often referred to as chastisement for sin and rebellion (Deut. 11:2). But the purpose of chastising is not to destroy. Rather, it is to lead to repentance, as it states in Psalms, "God has chastened me sore: but he has not give me over to death." (Psalms 118:18). As well, it is to restore God's blessing.³⁹

God wants what is best for us; we should have spiritual lives, not death. Certainly, not all our troubles are a result of God's chastisement. Some of our challenges may merely be trials of our faith, attacks from enemies, as well as our own actions and choices.. But if or when chastisement comes, it will be accompanied by our conviction of

³⁸ Commonly used Christian terminology for being in covenant with God.

³⁹ "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself *thus*; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed *to the yoke*: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. 19 Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon *my* thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." (Jeremiah 31:18) and "Blessed is the man whom You have chastened, O Lord, and teach him out of thy law". (Psalm 94:12)

our sin and rebellion⁴⁰. And as a loving parent who has found it necessary to scold his child, God's compassionate arms will be outstretched to us again, desiring us to come to God in repentance and humility, that God may restore God's blessing, for it states "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

God's pursuit of Jonah led Jonah to an understanding that death is not the solution to the debasement of one's life.⁴¹ Rather, Jonah was granted "life" for the purpose of mending and achieving spiritual nourishment.⁴²

It would be hard to speculate as to what would have happened if Jonah had not at this point turned back to God. God seeks to restore fellowship to all people that fall off the *derech eretz*,

The sailors on the boat to Tarshish were reluctant to take such a drastic action and throw Jonah overboard so they rowed hard trying to make land and safety. But the storm was too great and they made no head way at all. It was soon apparent they had no choice but to do what Jonah had told them and cast him into the sea.

Eli Wiesel, in his book Five Biblical Portraits, illustrates his empathy for the sailors, noting that sacrificing one for the sake of the rest is immoral. He states, "As for the sailors, we were too harsh on them also. They are actually polite and helpful. At the moment of danger, they do not jump into the water to save their own skins but remain together and begin to work – together – to save the ship and all its passengers....when

⁴⁰ "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:3)

⁴¹ "And let not your fancy give you hope that the grave will be a place of refuge for you", *Avot* 4:22.

⁴² One common sentiment among 12-Step recoveries is that the spiritual life found in the 12-Step program granted them "life", either by saving their lives literally, or reviving them from spiritual death.

they discover their troublesome passenger sound asleep below deck, they could cover him with angry insults, but they do not. They are not even angry. The captain himself takes the trouble to wake him, gently, softly, in a friendly manner. *Ma Lekha, nirdam?* he wants to know, "How come you feel asleep?" his voice is calm, courteous, almost poetic. They then ask him to pray to his God. When their prayers fail, they draw lots and Jonah emerges as suspect. Clearly, this is not the crew's doing, it is destiny's. Other sailors might have punished him for endangering their lives, but these do not. Even now, they are not against him, nor do they consider the possibility of getting rid of him. After his confession, they go back to work, trying to guide the ship out of the danger zone. The idea of throwing Jonah into the sea is not theirs, it is his.....the sailors try to dissuade him from seeking a solution in death." Wiesel concludes, "How can we not admire such generosity of spirit, such refinement in people who have a reputation of being tough guys?"⁴³

What a fearful experience it must have been for these sailors to throw a passenger over the side, at his word, in an attempt to save their own lives, and then to see God immediately calm the storm!

Even though the sailors were able to witness God's power through the calming of the storm, the message here is not that of the sailors' disobedience. Wiesel makes a very important observation: this scene in the narrative is not meant to illustrate what happens when one disobeys (as we see that the sailors are kind and generous people). Rather, the lesson here is one of *teshuvah*, the sailors knew that Jonah's God, the God of the Israelites, was indeed the One who had created all things. Even prior to seeing God's power, they chose repentance as "the way" in which to show God reverence.

⁴³ Wiesel, 146-147.

A great truth is taught here in this verse that may not be apparent at first glance. People see themselves with a distorted vision. They see their accomplishments and are led to believe they are special and have great power. Yet, when faced with the reality of death, and human's frailty in the face of God and God's power, a person can not but see themselves as they really are. It is a shocking reality, the raw truth that humankind is nothing in comparison to God. Always, people will do two things when they finally catch a glimpse of God.

First they will bow to God and admit to God's greatness and second they will see themselves as the sinner they are and make promises to do better. We need to understand, that sin hardens our hearts and blinds our eyes to the truth.⁴⁴

The sin I speak of originates in *Bereshit* (the Book of Genesis) at the Garden of Eden, where man had to face his moral sin. In the Genesis narrative, God cautions and guides Cain, yet Cain kills Abel. This is the sin that begets its own, finite immunization – the process of perfecting man's character.⁴⁵

Many times, God has to take some drastic actions to shake us to get our attention and bring us to reality. God is a necessary and organic part of creation, allowing our human spirit to flow with God's embrace. Our willpower and intellectual attempts to shake our own selves up will not work independently of God. The alignment of our will with God's must occur at a heart level, through authentic choices of faith that are empowered by God. Without God, creation (which includes the creation of man) would not be natural, God's will is an open system that is sustained by grace, which enables

⁴⁴ Isaiah 6:1-9.

⁴⁵ Lifshitz, 210.

receptivity and responsiveness within us by empowering our growing trust, our willingness to take risks of faith, and respond via free will.

Man was granted the ability to unite the qualitative with the material factors, which is subject to man's free will. The sages say that the *tzadik* controls the world because of his fear of God. The *tzadik* controls creation as an active and initiating partner of God, as the rabbinic phrase suggests, "The *tzadik* decides and God implements [his decision]".⁴⁶

"Jonah is Swallowed by a Great Fish." (1:17)

We read in *Tanakh* that God prepared a great fish which swallowed Jonah.⁴⁷ Many scholars have questioned the authenticity of the above statement, as it is hard to believe a fish could swallow a man and the man live. However, for purposes of this study, we can look at the *dag gadol* (the big fish), and the *beten sheol* (the belly of hell) as a metaphoric or literal place (either good or bad) which God used to preserve Jonah.

The Hebrew for fish is "*dag*." In Numbers 11:22, the word is used to mean "all the fish in the sea." Thus it refers to all that live in the sea, which would include fish and mammals, such as whales. In other places in the Torah the word is used of eatable fish. Isaiah 19:10, refers to "fish" in ponds. Ezekiel 29:4, refers to "fish" in rivers or fresh water fish.

According to *Bereshit Rabbah* 5:5, God commands the *dag* on the sixth day of creation to swallow Jonah at this time in the future. According to the midrash, the belly of

⁴⁶ Lifshitz, 52.

⁴⁷ "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." (Jonah 1:17)

the *dag* is spacious, well lit, and includes windows through which Jonah can view the depths of the sea, including two extraordinary storms.

Along with this imagery, the story raises us to a new level of fantasy, when the *dag* speaks to Jonah. The *dag* is convinced that Jonah will be terribly upset, or his condition will be worsened, since the *dag*, himself, is going to be eaten by the Leviathan. In short, Jonah did not want to act to preserve his well-being after boarding the ship; Jonah asks the sailors to throw him overboard, and of course, Jonah sits in the belly of the *dag gadol*, staring out into the depths of the sea through the eyes of the *dag* as windows by the lights of a giant pearl, talking to the *dag*. From this, I raise a question: why does Jonah even care if the Leviathan eats the *dag gadol*? Jonah has already shown that he is not concerned whether he lives or dies, why should being in the *dag*, who is inside of the Leviathan, be any more life threatening than just being inside of the *dag*. Perhaps the worst that could happen is if the Leviathan swallows the *dag*, Leviathan's body will act as window blinds blocking his view of the depths of the sea.

Here, we find an incredible parallel between the midrash and the life of an addict active in his/her disease; s/he may use their substance merely to suppress and/or move away from the real depths of pain and responsibilities in life, but this does not necessarily mean that the addict wants to end it all. Jonah serves as an example of the addict, who does not want to end it all, or face the depths. If the Leviathan eats them, then the windows open to the turmoil of the waters (in our case, our lives) will be closed for good. In this way, we can look at the concern of the *dag* as a metaphor for God's concern for Jonah; God uses the *dag* to serve as a place of protection, refuge, and hope.

Though we can view the belly as a place of protection and hope, the KJV Bible gives us an opposing commentary, describing the belly as *sheol*, meaning "hell". In his book Jonah and Micah, Vernon, McGee says this concerning the use of this word in the phrase, "out of the belly of hell"⁴⁸:

"*Sheol* is sometimes translated in scripture as the word "grave" and in other places as "the unseen world", meaning where the dead go. This word any way you look at it has to do with death. It is a word that always goes to the cemetery, and you cannot take it anywhere else. Therefore, my interpretation of what Jonah is saying is that the belly of the fish was his grave, and grave is a place for the dead--you do not put a live man in a grave." (Jonah & Micah, J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Radio, 1979, pg36)

Sheol is a powerful word used throughout *Tanakh*. In this narrative, however, we know that Jonah remained alive, and in fact, prayed while in the *beten* (belly) *sheol* (of hell) in the *dag gadol*. It is held that the use of the word, "then" in 2:1, following 1:17, which states Jonah was in the fish's belly three days and three nights, would infer that his prayer followed in sequence and was prayed after the time spent in the great fish.

However, McGee, makes a very sensible response to that argument:

"It is characteristic of the Hebrew language to give the full account of something and then go back and emphasize that which is important. This same technique is used in Genesis concerning the creation. We are given the six days of creation, and then God goes back and gives a detailed account of the creation of man, adding a

⁴⁸ Jonah 2:2.

great deal. To attempt to build an assumption on the little word "then" is very fallacious. It simply means that now Jonah is going to tell us the story in detail; he is going to tell us what really happened inside the fish". (McGee, 35)

The belly of the fish is not an escape; the Bible and the midrash both teach us an important lesson about the existential unity between the existence of Divine reality, human reality, and the world's reality, which are usually viewed as separate. However, they are one reality, and Jonah recognizes this when he is both in the depths of the ship and wishes to die⁴⁹, and in the belly of the *dag*, where he negotiates with the Leviathan to eat not that (the *dag*) which is keeping him alive.

Essentially, there are two dimensions to the belly of the fish, one being terrifying and another which has a certain appeal: the human experiences of flight from God and flight from one's own potential, both of which possess danger and refuge in this blended imagery.

In one dimension, the belly can represent the entire world, a greater external environment. It is a huge destructive force, oblivious to the needs of the individuals (human being) trapped within. It is a black hole, a realm of nothingness, where the infinitesimal human being fears being lost forever.

In everyday life, this can be compared to an addict hitting "rock bottom", seemingly helpless and approaching their darkest time in the *beten sheol*.

An example of this is found in Chapter 7 of the AA Big Book, where a woman realized that when she enjoyed her drinking, she couldn't control it, and when she controlled it, she couldn't enjoy it. Woman X, as she shall be referred to hereon in, came

⁴⁹ Lifshitz, 54.

from a family of alcoholics. Even though she does not blame her parents for her addiction, alcohol became a significant and necessary part of her life. She excelled in college and work while increasing her use of alcohol. Woman X watched her father die a slow and painful death of alcoholism, with stomach sorely distended, swollen with fluids because his kidneys and liver were no longer functioning, but this did not put an end to her drinking. On the contrary, her addiction continued to increase: DWI's and trips to jail became common, yet it was not until a work event she attended that she was able to move from the depths of hell (her own denial), and took hold of her spiritual awakening. "Sitting near the ice, frustrated, and pondering the fact that two tall beers didn't give me any relief, something in my head -- and I know it wasn't me -- he said, 'so why bother?'"⁵⁰

She went to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous the next night, sitting in the cold metal chair she had for the past five months and read Step 1 (plastered on the wall): "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable." Rather, this time, she asked with all her heart for God to help her. She notes that something strange happened; a physical sensation took hold of her, like a wave of pure energy, and she felt the presence of God. Woman X went home that night for the first time that she did not have to open the cupboard with the half-gallon jug of vodka. God had restored her to sanity (Step 2), and she was able to reach this moment when she surrendered and accepted her powerlessness over alcohol and the unmanageability of her life.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Bill W., 328-333.

⁵¹ Ibid, 333-334.

Woman X, who hit “rock bottom” over and over again, gives us an illuminating example of how years of being in denial and darkness can help each of us to see the *beten sheol* similar to the midrash – a place of refuge, a place of healing and (re)birth.

In theory, a return to the womb is a return to an utterly blissful, paradisiacal existence in which all needs are met, but this is not a 100% guarantee. Fear has the potential to disturb the tranquil flow of experience. Jonah illustrates his concern in the midrash by fighting the potential darkness the Leviathan would bring by reasoning with him. Jonah is working his steps. He has applied a process, which gives him a sense of protection without knowing if there IS a definite solution. Nevertheless, hitting rock bottom gave him the capacity to work his first three steps, which are reflected in Jonah’s prayer to God:

Jonah's Psalm of Thanksgiving (Jonah 2:1-10)

2:2-5 ויאמר קראתי בקוֹלִי לַיהוָה וַתַּעֲנֵנִי מִבְּטֶן שְׁאוֹל... And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD... For You cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward thy Holy Temple. The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

v. 6 אֶפְתָּנִי מִן עֲרֵפֶשׁ הָהוּם וּמִבְּטֶן סֶדֶם תְּבוֹשׂ לִי אֱלֹהִים - I went down to the bottoms of the mountains: the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet you brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

vv. 7-8 לִקְצֵבֵי הָרִים יִבְדְּתִי הָאֶרֶץ בְּרִחְתָּהּ בְּעָדִי לְעוֹלָם וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַתָּה תִּי - וַיִּהְיֶה אֱלֹהִים וַיִּזְכֹּר וַיִּתְּנֵנִי לְיָהוָה - When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto You, into Your Holy Temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

v. 9 וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה - But I will sacrifice unto You with the voice of thanksgiving: I will pay *that* I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.

10 And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*.

Twelve-Step Model

Acknowledgement: Standing at the turning point, asking for God’s protection and care with complete abandon

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless – that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood him*.

As noted above, in Step 3, one turns their will and life over to God, and this protection enables the process of self-inventory to take place. But without that protection

(safety net) and loss of protection, it is not certain that the upcoming inventory will be possible.

Much like the substance or destructive behavior that becomes part of one's routine, so too, is the womb symbolic of the place one escapes to in times of difficulty; one is looking for a life free of struggle and frustration. God, in essence, tells Jonah to go to the womb.

This flight to the womb, however, can be seen as one of the major disparities in Christian and Jewish thought.. A majority of Christian writers and thinkers, for example, legitimize the flight to the womb, noting that it is acceptable to renounce the world and struggles in life. Jewish tradition, however, rejects this premise. Our tradition might validate the feeling of wanting to escape, but in the same breathe, will also note that there are really no escapes. Confrontations are rarely easy, but often, it is worth the struggle. It is not enough just to live – one has to be alive! In the end, being alive is to struggle.⁵²

The womb can also be symbolic of *kiddushin* - holiness. After leaving the untouched, holy womb and exiting through the birth into opportunities that are filled with evil inclinations, people set out on long, arduous paths that ultimately become the footpath of God's service.⁵³

Differentiation is a separation between one's self and one's personality. It can be represented as a fear of danger – an existence not to be taken for granted, one that does not go routinely. We all search for existential problems in order to evaluate what we have, which ultimately promotes the uniqueness of self. This originality, however,

⁵² *Yisrael* translates as: "one who struggles with God."

⁵³ The entire purpose of the 12-Step way of life is to be of service to God and others, removing self-seeking from yourself and to be of service to God and to others.

requires a negative characterization in order to reach self-awareness.⁵⁴ We must go through our own setbacks to help us better define what we do not have, in order to find that which we do have.

In order for a person to truly understand and present themselves in their most authentic form, one must take a true and honest searching inventory of their shortcomings⁵⁵, a process that eventually help to define what one does not have compared to the whole picture, in order to make contact with that which we already possess; selfishness, self-seeking, dishonesty, and fear are all examples of defects, according to the AA Big Book.⁵⁶

Living in one's defects can be a temporary stage. After the separation caused by the suffering, the self is not yet aware of itself; it is only aware of the danger to its existence, like a spoiled child who has been protected from the need to confront existential problems, and so left weak, fearful, and selfish. Confrontation (as with Jonah and the people of Nineveh) calls on the resources of ability and leads to a solution. The contestant who wins, after having faced the danger threatening his/her existence, is full of a feeling of competence and of awareness of his/her talent, uniqueness, as opposed to the other, who represents the outside. During the danger stage, the negative reigns. Anxiety, envy, hatred, and anger are all examples of negative connectors between the inside and the outside. "And they [Adam and Eve] were not ashamed' before the sin because they lacked awareness. But after the sin, 'they knew they were naked' – the stage of the

⁵⁴ Lifshitz, 199.

⁵⁵ Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

⁵⁶ Bill W., 64.

rejection of the outside, the stage of seeking to protect oneself and of rejecting the other."⁵⁷

In Verse 4, Jonah states he was "cast out of thy sight". That alone could mean that God was not in Jonah's sight while in the belly of the fish. However, the rest of the verse says, "yet I will look again toward thy Holy Temple". It appears that Jonah knew he was going to die; his will, his arrogance, his running from himself were all catalysts of his impending death. At this stage of blind, compulsive belief, one loses the ability and will to judge. Hence, there is no chance at this stage for constructive self-criticism – for working on one's personal characteristics and inventory.

Further, in vv. 2:5-6, Jonah states, "the waters compassed me about, even to the soul". All this is happening as he is slowly sinking to the bottom of the ocean. Some believe this account is of his state in the fish's belly, but it could well be describing his sinking to the bottom of the sea before the fish swallowed him.⁵⁸ As well, it could be a statement to denote his sinking further and further into the depths before he comes to a place of reflection, inventory, and acceptance.

From *Elul* to *Yom Kippur II*: A Time for Reflection and *Teshuvah*

Teshuvah as Gratitude and Humility in the High Holy Days

Moses Maimonides (The RaMBaM) wrote that when a *shaliach tzibur* repeats the *amidah*, his/her prayer is only valid if s/he stands trembling before the Divine. This message can be for each of us as well. Each one of us, at one time or other, has been on our knees, wondering whether there would be an answer. For Jonah, this may have been

⁵⁷ Lifshitz, 199.

⁵⁸ J. Vernon McGee, Jonah & Micah, Thru the Bible Radio.

answered as he was in utter despair in the belly of the *dag gadol*. Throughout the days and nights in the depths, we see his ability to feel (spiritual) and marry his new-found awareness (the existential). The result was Jonah's seeking forgiveness in the belly of the *dag gadol*. For addicts, this can be answered in the miracle of recovery – through numerous smaller or larger miracles as one progresses on his/her journey.

Jewish prayer emphasizes gratitude and humility, with prayers of acknowledgment, gratitude, and petition, which permeate not only our High Holy Day experiences, but our everyday prayer as well. The prayers we find in our *siddurim* emphasize the awesome ineffability of *Adonai* and ask for what we need as a community and as individuals. The intention is that in every moment of prayer, one can also work the steps – that every moment is pregnant with possibility, renewal, and growth.

A young female college student is suddenly aware that she has lost control after learning that she is pregnant from having unprotected sex after another night of drunken stupor. A heroin addict realizes they have hit rock bottom when they come home to see an eviction notice on the front door of their home due to lack of payment.

In the Jonah narrative, his suffering in the belly caused him to awake and pray. Adam and Eve were awakened by the shame of their nakedness because their sin caused the birth of awareness, a state that every person goes through in the process of growing up.

The Hebrew word for prayer, *l'hitpallel*, is a reflexive tense verb. It suggests that we are building a cyclical connection with God. As we pray, it is the hope that we can see ourselves embraced by God, lifted up before the Divine (our Higher Power), spiritually

nourished and that finally, our realizations, self-awareness and maturity become united as a continuous guide for our behavior.

In the here and now, we can open ourselves up to the possibility that in each moment of real prayer, we can encounter a deeper understanding of self and divinity. During the month of *Elul*, we work towards our own definition of the self-inventory and reflection, looking inward, taking a personal inventory (Step 4⁵⁹) – all leading up to *Yom Kippur*, the experience of *teshuvah*, working the steps in a spirit of inventory and surrender – “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”⁶⁰.

Jonah's Teshuvah

Teshuvah is an act of human consciousness, awareness, and our readiness to take sides and responsibility for the future. Though we cannot change our past, we are all given the power to shape [or turn from the past and embrace] our future.

Jonah is meant to provide us insight in our own process of “turning”, and how it is relevant to our personal experience on *Yom Kippur*. *Yom Kippur* is our time in the stormy sea, with our own fearful sense of life hanging in the balance. Can it change us? For one full day, we confront the abyss. We starve our bodies. We recite *Yizkor* for our departed, the *Eileh Ezkerah* in memory of our martyrs, and the *Vidui*, the confession of sins, just as we are commanded to do when we prepare to die.

It is traditional to wear a white *kittel* (white shroud) on *Yom Kippur*, to remind us of the shroud in which we will be buried. The morning Torah reading begins with the

⁵⁹ Step 4: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

⁶⁰ Bill W., 59.

death of Aaron's sons. And near the beginning of the *Amidah*, we recite once again the words of the *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer, as we did on *Rosh Hashanah*: Who shall live, and who shall die. But on *Yom Kippur*, the words seem even more frightening than they did last week, because, at this time, it is *Yom Kippur*.

If, like Jonah, we were asked today, Who are we? What is our work? Where are we from...How would we answer? Would our gut cause us to answer, like Jonah, "*Ivri Anochi* - I am a Jew" And if we said those words, what would they mean to us?

The lesson of Jonah is that nothing is written or sealed. Even though punishment has been prescribed, there is always the potential to annul, which in essence, is the beauty of Jewish tradition: "every human being is granted one more chance, one more opportunity to start their life all over again. Just as God has the power to begin, man has the power to continue by beginning again – and again."⁶¹

This lesson is necessary and relevant to our "turning", using it as the impetus for creating our own *cheshbon hanefesh* (an inner moral inventory list/accounting), which is not only about rectifying our wrongdoings, but it is also constant, ceaseless, daily, and lifelong turning. This list is formed from the complexity of the human encounter with our *Yetzer HaRa*, and *Yetzer Tov* (evil and good inclination)

We all have a potential power – the power of humanity. We are taught not to endure tragedy with resignation because we should have no expectation that things will go right. Rather, we are taught to expect justice and fairness – not from nature but from ourselves; in light of the world being unfair and unjust at times, we are commanded to bring justice and fairness into the world, and into our daily lives. It is no secret that we

⁶¹ Wiesel, 151.

live in an imperfect universe, and our task is not to accept its failings with equanimity. Rather, it is to dedicate our energies to healing what is broken.

Teshuvah is the process of healing; it is an ongoing dynamic process of building one's personality, a constant effort aimed at essence and quality.⁶²

"Jonah Turns Back to God." (2:1-10)

Jonah's prayer (2:1-9), as noted previously, reads like one of the Psalms. It is a poetic prayer of thanksgiving to God for deliverance. Jonah, in his time of distress, immediately turned back to God. He was God's prophet, knowing God personally, as well as understanding that his circumstances were the result of his trying to run from God. Jonah freely admits he is under the chastening hand of God, and submits himself humbly to God, seeing the utter futility of his rebellion.

Deep in the depths of the belly of a big fish, in desperation, Jonah turned to God, who he knew was there and sought help. (2:2) What a pity that God had to go to such drastic measures to bring Jonah back to a place of dependence on Him. But now, as hopeless as his circumstances may have appeared, Jonah was in the best place he could possibly be; being under the care and protection of a loving God.

The 12-step philosophy stresses Judaic precepts. In the belly of the *dag gadol*, Jonah works his steps. Step 4 of the Big Book tells us that individuals in recovery conduct a thorough moral inventory of past deeds and step 5 states that we make amends for any wrongdoings. This is remarkably analogous to our self-examination while in a process of *Teshuvah*. We set aside a time for a literal "accounting of the soul" not simply to "repudiate the evil we have done", stresses Lawrence Kushner, author of God Was in

⁶² Lifshitz, 110.

This Place And I Did Not Know, rather to "receive whatever evils we have intended as our own deliberate creations."⁶³ We cherish them as banished individuals finally taken home again, ultimately transforming them and ourselves. When we say the *vidui* (confession), we not only pound our hearts to remember our afflictions, we hold ourselves to care for the internal afflictions that need to be nurtured and cared for on an ongoing basis.

It is through this kind of painful introspection that addicts embark upon the process of recovery; a road which ultimately leads toward the gates of spiritual awakening. Many regard addiction as the catalyst responsible for turning their lives around. Aaron Z., co-author of Renewed Each Day, writes "Recovery has more than a touch of redemption in it. And like the rope that has been broken in two, we are actually stronger for having been knotted back together."⁶⁴

Though one may consider outward trappings (in this case, the belly of the *dag gadol*,) not necessarily constituting true spiritual connections, it was pivotal for Jonah, as well as others who are trapped and searching, to come to a place of true connection to God in recovery. Both male and female addicts come to their recovery with all the outward signs of being present in their own spiritual awakening. This spiritual awakening can be fed through religious observance, going to therapy, meditation, etc. But once you strip away the prayer books, the outer layers, beyond the belly and into the darkness – once we get to the meta-stories, it is then that we will find spiritual provision in a very real sense.

⁶³ Lawrence Kushner, God Was in This Place And I Did Not Know, *Jewish Lights Publishing*, 97.

⁶⁴ Rabbi Kerry Olitzky and Aaron Z., Renewed Each Day: Daily Twelve Step Recovery Meditations Based on the Bible, Vol. 1, *Jewish Lights Publishing*, 55.

In Jewish tradition, a spiritual awakening exists in the creation story, through all of its diversity and difficulty. It is in confronting our own individual stumbling blocks that we access the potential for an ongoing relationship and dialogue with God. Like the Jonah narrative, it was through the darkness in the belly of the *dag gadol* that Jonah was able to transcend the physical and approach the spiritual, by placing his faith and his will in the hands of God. For the addict especially, this is imperative.

Consider the following prayer offered up by Rivka G., a recovering Jew from Queens in a previous JACS Retreat I attended, "In hopelessness, I call out to My Creator for help and guidance, as I now realize that as I work my steps, along with Your infinite love and patience, I can take hold of the serenity that I yearn to receive. *Esai Anai* – where will my help come from? I know – my serenity and God."

The problem of Jewish addiction and self-destructive behavior is one which concerns us all. The opportunity for true *teshuvah* (return to *Adonai*) is ever present for people in recovery and for those all around them. We can never turn away from our fellow human, nor can we turn away from ourselves, for as is stated in the Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery, "A human being reaches in three directions: inward to self, outward to others, and upward to God." When we are connected to self, we can reach out to others, and when we reach out to others, we may come to know God.

In his time of turning, Jonah concludes the prayer, in the belly of the *dag gadol*, with a statement of commitment to God: "*Yeshu'atah L'adonai* - Salvation is of the Lord". Jonah is thankful and vows to keep his promise to God.⁶⁵ This reference to God's salvation indicates that the reference is not to the distant future. Rather, it refers to a person who has been delivered (in our case, spit out of a *dag*) and arrives at the Temple

⁶⁵ Step 3: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood him*."

in the present. When one proclaims an offering of thanksgiving sacrifice, they are ready to fulfill what was uttered in affliction.⁶⁶

There is a great truth in the last five words of Jonah's psalm of affliction, "Salvation is of the Lord." Some commentators conclude this phrase refers to Jonah's being delivered from a perilous situation. However, much more is involved in this physical deliverance. Jonah's journey (up until this point in the narrative) had just straightened up his thinking. Salvation was the reason Jonah had been called to go to Nineveh. God wanted to save the Ninevites and God's purpose would not be hindered even by Jonah's disobedience. Before God called him, Jonah had a knowledge of turning to God through *teshuvah* in order to receive salvation, but his understanding of it was superficial, at best. However, through his experience in the darkness, the message had been made very clear. Jonah saw this practice very differently, which enabled him to relate to God on another level. He understood that salvation could only come from God, and that there was virtue in heeding God's instruction. God reached down and out to a disobedient man with an offer of forgiveness through *teshuvah*. God's response: "And the Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*." (2:10)

Jonah was glad to be alive and delivered from the sea and the fish, but this was overshadowed by the reality of the scope of salvation which included serving God; he was not only saved from death, but he was *saved to* life as well - a life dedicated to heeding God's command.

People cannot work for salvation. We cannot earn it by doing good works or taking part in some ritual. Salvation comes from God's mercy, not from people! God had used the storm, the sea and the *dag gadol* as pawns in a game of chess, waiting for Jonah

⁶⁶ Simon, "Jonah", JPS Bible Commentary, 24.

to make the next move – which he did! However, when God had Jonah in check (in the belly of the whale), Jonah was then able to admit that he was powerless over his shortcomings, owning that his life had become unmanageable (Step 1), and came to believe that a power greater than him (God) could restore him to sanity – to life (Step 2)! As such, Jonah made a decision to turn his will over to the care of God (Step 3).⁶⁷

In essence, salvation is an offer from God, given in response to surrendered faith, trusting in God's promise and mercy. Salvation is accepting God, accepting God's place in one's life. It comes when faith comes, replaces rebellion and there is a commitment to living life on life's terms.

Teshuvah in Nineveh

As seen in Jonah's process of *teshuvah*, we know that the practice of "doing *Teshuvah*" was introduced into ritual practice, with the ultimate experience of repentance occurring on *Yom Kippur*. Once introduced into the flow of daily and yearly practice, it opened the floodgates to all those who would not regularly take part in such a practice. Spiritual attainment was/is not a prerequisite, only "undistorted humanness."⁶⁸ Surely this was the case for the Ninevites.

So why were the Ninevites so ready for change? Eli Wiesel notes that the Ninevites lived in a large urban environment; there is no one to teach, warn, or show them the right way. Yet, as soon as they hear Jonah, they accept the message and

⁶⁷ Bill W., 59-63.

⁶⁸ Lifshitz, 69.

repent.⁶⁹ The Talmud quotes examples that illustrate their metamorphosis: they pay their debts, return what does not belong to them, and help and care for one another. And although they have forty days to change their ways to avert catastrophe, they do not wait. Rather, they repent immediately.⁷⁰

Perhaps Jonah's arrival and five-word relayed from God would catapult these people into change that they had already anticipated; what could be better than a mandatory push toward self-betterment? After all, *teshuvah* has become part of the human system⁷¹the inner urge of change comes from itself. "And God saw their actions, that they had turned back from their evil path, and God regretted the evil which He had said He would do to them and He did not do it" (3:10). Though the people of Nineveh repented, and God retracted his curse as promised, Jonah still was not satisfied.

The midrash hidden within the section of the narrative suggests that the Ninevites' did not practice the *teshuvah* described by the prophets as the one demanded from the Jews. Is this *teshuvah* to correct the actions in following deeds without turning the heart? *Teshuvah* birthed from love is, in essence, an initiative that comes from the concept of *betzelem elohim* (made in the image of God). It is a blending of one's *kavannah*, judgment, and control over his/her place in the world in which we live, all serving to invoke a divine response within.

As one embraces the eternal, the sins of the past are forgiven because that individual is no longer the person s/he was before the unification of one's inner and outer self. His/her previous transgressions not only play a role within the everyday, they are

⁶⁹ Jonah 3:5-6, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes."

⁷⁰ Wiesel, 147.

⁷¹ Lifshitz, 69.

transformed as part of one's core being. Jonah did not believe that the Ninevites repented from both the outer and inner cores, and since he believes that they have only healed their external domains, his efforts were of fleeting value.

Components of Teshuvah: Reviewing, Sharing, and Feedback

Man searches for existential problems in order to evaluate his/her uniqueness in the world. In order for someone to reach their own originality and express it, one must go through the negative, through limitation that helps define what it doesn't have. All this must be done in order to realize what each of us truly have.

During the danger stage of this evaluation period, the negative reigns. Feeling of anxiety, jealousy, and hatred serve as negative connectors between the inside and the outside. When Jonah was current in the belly of the *dag gadol*, he was wrapped up in the survival mode, which immediately cut him off from the world. His feeling of objectivity was suppressed for his egocentric feelings, which fostered a distortion of truth, logic, and judgment. At this stage, Jonah was in a blind, compulsive belief, which can also appear in the realm of the belief in God as well.⁷²

At the moment of Jonah's prayer, he had no questions, just confessed and prayed to God without examination and without taking a stand. At this point, there is no chance for constructive self-criticism or for working on one's own characteristics – for true, authentic, and serious *teshuvah*.

Therefore, starting upon a personal inventory, Step Four, leads us to authentically disclose damaged or unusable goods, searching out the flaws in our own make-up which

⁷² Lifshitz, 200.

cause our failures. Just imagine if Jonah had the insight of twelve-step philosophy – perhaps the gourd would not have been an issue!

In Step Four, we list people, institutions or principles with whom we are angry⁷³. In most cases, we may find that our self-esteem, our personal relationships, even our ambitions were hurt or threatened⁷⁴. We can go back through our lives with nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. The mere ambiguity of the narrative ending lends support to the fact that Jonah did not work his steps; Jonah only got as far as blaming God, which became a cyclical pattern of Jonah feeling wronged by God. The more Jonah tried to have his own way, the worse matters got. Jonah's moments of triumph were short-lived.

In these moments, we turn back to our inventory, prepare to examine it from a totally different angle – to see that these people, institutions or principles actually have the power to kill us, and we must master these resentments. This is easier said than done, so how do we do this?

First, we must avoid argument or retaliation. If we act in accordance with our resentments, we destroy our chance of being helpful to ourselves and others. If this were the *derech* that Jonah had chosen to follow, perhaps he would have been more tolerant of the Ninevites, even of God.

After our acceptance and tolerance of the wrongs others have done, we can now lay focus to our own mistakes, our own defects. Along with reviewing our defects, we review our fears: why do we have them? Did our self-reliance fail us? Through a continuous process of self-realization, our work can lead us to trusting and relying upon

⁷³ If Jonah were following a twelve-step model, perhaps he would have listed God as one he was angry with.

⁷⁴ Bill W., 64.

God, rather than just ourselves, humbly relying on God, who enables us to match calamity with serenity.⁷⁵

Jonah's prayer becomes his outlet for God's acceptance, and reaches towards his own version of inward serenity. But like us, he fell short and stumbled. What do we do if this happens to us? Do we go back to our bad habits, our addictions and destructive behaviors?

On the contrary, our process depends on our *kavanah*, our true intention. If we review our list with an open heart, not only listening to ourselves, but feeling the sorrow from within, and have the honest desire to let our Higher Power take us to better things, our belief will be forgiveness, and our lessons, God willing, will be learned, allowing applicability to our everyday actions.

Our *teshuvah*, the admission of defects, leads us to acquire a new attitude on life, as well as to discover barriers along our paths. We strive to foster a relationship of meaning and purpose with God (our Higher Power), and admit to God, and to another human being, our shortcomings (Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs). Doing *teshuvah* is of great significance as we strive for healing and wholeness in our lives, but there is much more to be done. The actions we take and the humility we embrace from God's love and compassion will hopefully turn our hearts and souls to continual action and reflection. Like Jonah's open-ended narrative, the possibilities are endless. But it is up to each of us to do the work. Every authentic moment toward personal freedom involves both grace and will. God is both immanent and transcendent, but like Jonah, we are left with the mystery – the

⁷⁵ Bill W., 68.

mystery of consecration: the ultimate willingness to participate in mystery through faith
instead of through comprehension.

Conclusion

In the last verse of the Jonah narrative, God questions Jonah's authenticity of *rachmunus*⁷⁶. It is only at this time, I believe, that Jonah truly answers God's question with genuineness. The *kikayon* (gourd/plant) has been given to Jonah in response to his own private suffering, and a sign of personal Divine attention. Through this interaction, Jonah learns that he, too, is a partner in the running of his personal life. God demands that we initiate a feeling of belonging through participation in the responsibility of repairing ourselves.

Through our work and recovery, our own uniqueness is strengthened and deepened, ultimately inspiring our whole system. As a result of partnering with God, and sharing our stories of recovery with others, we are full participants in all of creation. We do not get swallowed up and lose our special character in the whole. Unlike Jonah, who first believed that his way of life would enable him to succeed and keep his special [however dysfunctional] character, we learn through Jonah's journey and through Twelve-Step recovery that, like *kikayon*, our lives with our addiction, compulsion, and self-destructive behaviors are an illusion – we should and can leave this withering seclusion. One's quality cannot be preserved if it lacks a link with the greater community.⁷⁷

In *Pirke Avot* it states, "Know from where you derive, from a putrid drop, where you are destined, to a wormy grave, and before whom you will have to give an account of your life, before the King of Kings."⁷⁸ There is great reason to believe that addictions, compulsions, and other self-destructive behaviors are but a reaction to an intolerable

⁷⁶ Yiddish term for "compassion".

⁷⁷ Lifshitz, 232.

⁷⁸ *Pirke Avot* 3:1.

feeling of worthlessness. However, through a process of introspection and recovery, it is possible to feel worthy and proud, with a healthy self-esteem, which can help to avoid the need for one's drug of choice. A healthy road to recovery requires knowing one's value and strengths, one's inherent greatness as being the possessor of a Divine soul, as one commissioned by God, like Jonah, to carry out a specific mission in the universe.

We are all created with the potential for holiness and wholeness, each having within us a Divine soul. But for us to be more than an animal with intellect, we must struggle against the powerful forces that pull us down, an inner-conflict that continues to the very day we die. Let us develop our spirituality and earn holiness and wholeness by sheer effort. Who knows, the potential for advancement is endless....

Appendix 1: Text – Pirke Rabbi Eliezer Ch. 10

פרקא רבי אליעזר

<10.1> פרק עשירי בחמישי ברח יונה מפני אלהים ולמה ברח. אלא פעם

ראשון שלחו להשיב את גבול ישראל ועמדו דבריו. שני והוא השיב את גבול ישראל מלבוא חמת.

>10.2< פעם שנייה שלחו לירושלם להחריבה. כיון שעשו תשובה הקב"ה עשה כרוב חסדיו וניחם על הרעה ולא חרבה והיו ישראל קוראין אותו נביא שקר.

<10.3> פעם ג' שלחו לנינוה. דן דין יונה בינו לבין עצמו אמר אני יודע שזה הגוי קרובי תשובה הם עכשיו עושין תשובה והקב"ה שולח רוגזו על ישראל. ולא די שישאל קוראין אותי נביא השקר אלא אף אומות העולם.

<10.4> הריני בורח לי למקום שלא נאמר כבודו שם.

<10.5> אם על השמים נאמר שכבודו שם שני על השמים כבודו. על הארץ נאמר שכבודו שם שני מלא כל הארץ כבודו. הריני בורח לי למקום שלא נאמר כבודו שם.

<10.6> ירד יונה ליפו ולא מצא אניה לירד בת. והאניה שירד בה יונה היתה רחוקה מיפו מחלץ שני ימים לנסות את יונה. מה עשה הקב"ה. הביא עליה רוח סערה בים

והחזירה ליפו וראה יונה ושמח בלבו ואמר עכשיו אני יודע שדרכי מיושרת לפני.

<10.7> אמר להם ארד עמכם. אמרו לו הרי אנו הולכים לאיי הים תרשישה. אמר להם

אנא עמכם

<10.8> ודרך כל האניות כשאדם יוצא ממנה הוא נותן שכרה ויונה בשמחת לבו הקדים

ונתן שכרו שני ויקם יונה לברוח תרשישה מלפני ה' וירד יפו

<10.9> פירשו מהלך יום אחד ועמד עליהם רוח סערה בים מימינם ומשמאלם ודרך כל

האניות עוברות ושבות בשלום בשתיקות הים והאניה שירד בה יונה היתה בצרה גדולה

שני והאניה חשבה להשבר.

<10.10> ר' חנניה אומר משבעים לשונות היו באניה וכל אחד ואחד שקוצו בידו.

שנאמר וייראו המלחים ויזעקו איש אל אלהיו והשתחוו ואמרו נקרא איש

בשם אלהיו והיה האלהים אשר יענה ויציל אותנו מצרה זאת הוא האלהים וקראו

איש אל אלהיו

<10.11> ויונה בצרת נפשו נרדם וישן לו. בא אליו רב החובל א"ל הרי אנו עומדים בין

מות לחיים ואתה נרדם וישן. מאיזה עם אתה. אמר לו עברי אנכי

<10.12> א"ל והלא שמענו שאלהי העברים גדול הוא קום קרא אל אלהיך אולי יתעשת האלהים לנו ויעשה עמנו נסים כמו שעשה לכם בים סוף. אמר להם לא אכחד מכם כי בשבילי הצרה הזאת עליכם שאוני והטילוני אל הים וישתוק הים מעליכם. שני שאוני והטילוני.

<10.13> ר' שמעון אומר לא קיבלו האנשים להפיל את יונה אל הים והפילו גורלות עליהם ויפול הגורל על יונה. שנאי ויפילו גורלות ויפול וגוי. [מה עשו נטלו את הכלים שבאניה והשליכו אותם אל הים להקל מעליהם ולא הועיל מאומה רצו לחתור ביבשו: ולא יכולו]

<10.14> מה עשו נטלו את יונה ועמדו על ירכתי הספינה ואמרו אלהי עולם ה' אל תתן עלינו דם נקי שאין אנו יודעין מה טיבו של האיש הזה. אמר להם בשבילי הצרה הזאת עליכם שאוני והטילוני אל הים

<10.15> מיד נטלוהו והטילוהו עד ארכבותיו ועמד הים מזעפו לקחו אותו אצלם והים סוער עליהם ויטלוהו עד טבורו והים עמד מזעפו העלו אותו אצלם והים הולך וסוער עליהם. הטילוהו עד צוארו והים עומד מזעפו ועוד הטלו אותו אצלן. הים הולך וסוער עליהם הטילוהו כולו ומיד עמד הים מזעפו.

<10.16> ר' טרפון אומר ממונה אותו הדג לבלוע את יונה מששת ימי בראשית. שני

וימן ה' דג גדול לבלוע את יונה. נכנס בפיו כאדם שהוא נכנס בבית הכנסת גדולה ועמד
והיו שתי עיניו של הדג כחלונות אפומיות מאירות ליונה

<10.17> ר' מאיר אומר מרגלית אחת היתה תלויה במעיו של דג מראה ליונה כשמש
חזה שהוא מאיר בצהרים ומראה לו כל מה שבים ובתהומות ועליו הכתוב אומ' אור
זרוע לצדיק.

<10.18> אי"ל הדג ליונה אין אתה יודע שבא יומי להיאכל בפיו של לוייתן. אי"ל
הוליכני אצלו.

<10.19> אמר יונה ללוייתן בשבילך ירדתי לראות מקום מדורך שאני עתיד ליתן חבל
בלשונך ולהעלותך ולזבוח אותך לסעודה הגדולה של צדיקים.

<10.20> הראהו חותמו של אברהם אמר הבט לברית וראה לוייתן וברח מפני יונה
מחלך שני ימים.

<10.21> אי"ל הרי הצלתיך מפיו של לוייתן. הראיני כל מה שבים ושבתהומות

<10.22.1> והראהו נהר גדול של מימי אוקיינוס שני תהום יסובבני

<10.22.2> והראהו ים סוף שעברו בתוכו ישראל שני סוף חבוש לראשי.

10.22.3 < והראהו מקום משברי ים וגליו יוצאים ממנו שני כל משבריד וגליך עלי עברו.

10.22.4 < והראהו עמודי ארץ ומכוניה. שני הארץ בריחיה בעדי לעולם.

10.22.5 < והראהו. גיהנם שני ותעל משחת חיי ה' אלהי.

10.22.6 < והראהו שאול תחתית שנא' מבטן שאול שועתי שמעתי קולי

10.22.7 < והראהו היכל ה' שני לקצבי הרים ירדתי. מכאן אנו למדין שירושלם על ז' הרים היא עומדת.

10.22.8 < והראהו אבן שתייה קבועה בתהומות תחת היכל ה'. ובני קרח עומדין ומתפללין עליה אייל הדג ליונה. הרי אתה עומד תחת היכל הי התפלל ואתה נענה.

10.23 < אמר יונה לדג עמוד במקום עמדך שאני מבקש להתפלל. עמד הדג והתחיל יונה להתפלל לפני הקב"ה ואומר רבשי"ע נקראת מוריד ומעלה ירדתי העליני. נקראת ממית ומחיה. הרי נפשי הגיעה למות החייני.

10.24 < ולא נענה. עד שיצא מפיו דבר זה ואמר אשר נדרתי אשלימה. אשר נדרתי להעלות לויתן ולזבוח אותו לפניך אשלם ביום ישועת ישראל.

10.25 < מיד רמז הקב"ה לדג והשליך את יונה. שני ויאמר ה' לדג ויקא את יונה אל

היבשה.

<10.26> ראו המלחים את כל האותות והנפלאות הגדולות שעשה הקב"ה עם יונת. מיד
עמדו והשליכו איש את אלהיו שני משמרים הבלי שוא חסדם יעזובו וחזרו ליפו
ועלו לירושלם ומלו את בשר ערלתם שנאמי וייראו המלחים יראה גדולה את ה' ויזבחו
זבח לה'.

<10.27> וכי זבח זבחו והלא אין מקבלין זבח מן הגוים אלא זהו דם ברית שהי

כדם זבח ונדרו ושלמו ועליהם הוא אומי ועל גירי הצדק

Appendix 2: Text Translation – *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer Ch. 10*

[10.1] Chapter 10. On the fifth day, Jonah fled from before God. And why did Jonah flee? Because the first time, [God] sent him to restore the border of Israel, and they were fulfilled. As it says: “He restored the border of Israel from [the entrance to] Libo-Hamat.”⁷⁹

[10.2] The second time, [God] sent him to Jerusalem to destroy it. When they repented, the Holy One, blessed be God, did according to God’s mercy, and repented of the evil (decree)⁸⁰, and did not destroy it. And Israel called him a lying prophet.

[10.3] The third time, [God] sent him to Nineveh. Jonah reckoned with himself saying: “I know that this nation is close to repentance, right now they are making repentance and the Holy One, blessed be God, will direct His anger upon Israel. It is not enough that Israel call me a lying prophet, so too, the nations of the world?”

[10.4] “Behold, I will flee to a place where God’s glory is not said to be.”

[10.5] “If ascend above the heavens, it is said that God’s glory is there, as it says: “Above the heavens [is] God’s glory⁸¹.” Upon the earth, it is said that God’s glory is there, as it says: “All the earth is filled with God’s glory (Is. 6:3).” Behold, I will flee to a place where God’s glory is not said to be.

⁷⁹ II Kings 14:25.

⁸⁰ The “evil” here refers to the evil which God was going to do.

⁸¹ Ps. 113:4.

[10.6] Jonah went down to Yaffo, and did not find a boat to go down in. And the boat that Jonah traveled in was far from Yaffo, of a two day journey, in order to test Jonah. What did the Holy One, blessed be God, do?⁸² God brought upon the boat a storm wind in the sea and returned [the boat] to Yaffo. Jonah saw and rejoiced in his heart, and said: "Now I know my path I will succeed."

[10.7] He said to them: "I will go down with you." They said to him: "Behold we are going to the islands of the sea, Tarshish." He said to them: "I will go with you."

[10.8] It is the way⁸³ of all boats that when a person disembarks from it, he pays his fare. And Jonah, in the rejoicing of his heart, had paid his fare in advance, as it says: "And Jonah rose to flee towards Tarshish from God's presence and went down to Yaffo (Jonah 1:3)."⁸⁴

[10.9] They were out one day's distance, and rose (came upon them) a storm at sea from their right and from their left. The path of all other boats passed and moved⁸⁵ in peace, in the quiet of the sea, but the boat that Jonah went down in was in great peril. As it says: "And the ship was in danger of breaking up (Jonah 1:4)."

⁸² Modern interpretation lends itself to a progressive syntax.

⁸³ Another idiomatic translation could be "custom".

⁸⁴ In order words, Jonah found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard...

⁸⁵ Idiomatic translation: "Came and went"

[10.10] Rabbi Hananiah says: There were people from seventy nations on the boat, and each of them had an idol in their hands. As it says: "And the sailors were frightened and each one called out to his god (Jonah 1:5)." They bowed down and said: let us each call out in the name of our own god and the god who answers and saves us from this trouble is the God. And each man called out to his god, but it did not avail.

[10.11] and Jonah with a troubled soul was fast asleep.⁸⁶ The captain of the ship came to him and said: "Behold we are standing between life and death and you are dosing in sleep?"⁸⁷ From what nation are you?" He said to them: "I am a Hebrew (Jonah 1:9)."

[10.12] They said: "Haven't we heard that the god of the Hebrews is great? Get up [and] call out to your god. Perhaps the God will act for us, and make for us miracles like He did for you in the Sea of Reeds." He said to them: "I will not withhold from you, that it is because of me that this trouble is upon you. Pick me up and throw me to the sea and the sea will quiet before you, "as it says: "Pick me up and cast me to the sea from before you (Jonah 1:12)."

[10.13] Rabbi Shimon says: The men did not accept [the idea] to cast Jonah into the sea. So they cast lots amongst themselves, and the lot fell on Jonah. As it says: "And they cast lots and the lot fell [on Jonah] (Jonah 1:7)."

⁸⁶ Literal: "Was slumbering and sleeping to himself."

⁸⁷ Cf. Jonah 1:6.

[10.14] What did they do? They lifted up Jonah and stood him on the edge/side of the ship and said: "God of the universe, Adonai, don't cause us to be guilty of murder (Jonah 1:14) since we do not know what the character of this man is. He said to them: because of me is this trouble upon you, pick me up and throw me into the sea.

[10.15] Immediately, they picked him up and placed him {into the sea} up to his knees, and the sea abated from its anger. They took him back to themselves, and the sea raged upon them. They threw him [into the sea] up to his navel, and the sea stood still from its anger. They lifted him to themselves and the sea went back to storming against them. They threw him completely [into the sea] and immediately the sea abated/ceased from its anger.

[10.16] Rabbi Tarfon says: The fish was designated to swallow Jonah from the six days of creation, as it says: "God provided a big fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 2:1)." He entered its mouth like a person who enters the Great Synagogue, and stood (inside). The two eyes of the fish were like windows⁸⁸ giving light for Jonah.

[10.17] Rabbi Meir says: One pearl was hanging in the belly of the fish, gave light to Jonah, like this sun which shines at noon, and showed him (to Jonah) all that is in the sea and in the depths, and concerning it, Scripture says: "Light is sown for the righteous (Ps. 97:11)."

⁸⁸ The Hebrew translation is unclear. This translation follows Friedlander, who cites Marcus Jastrow as his source.

[10.18] The fish said to Jonah: "Don't you know that my day has come to be eaten by Leviathan?" He said to him: "Take me to him."

[10.19] Jonah said to Leviathan: "Because of you I have come down to see the location of your dwelling place, since in the future I will place a rope in your tongue,⁸⁹ draw you up, and sacrifice you for the great feast of the righteous."

[10.20] He showed him the seal of Abraham. He said: "Look at the Covenant"⁹⁰, and the Leviathan saw (it), and fled from before Jonah a distance of two days.

[10.21] He said to him: "Behold, I have rescued you from the mouth of Leviathan, show me all that is in the sea and the depths."

[10.22] He showed him the great river of the water of Oceanus, as it says: "The deep was all around me (Jonah 2:6)." He showed him the Sea of Reeds which Israel crossed through, as it says: "Reeds wrapped around my head (Jonah 2:6)." He showed him the place from which the sea surf and waves go out, as it says: "All of your surf and your waves passed over me (Jonah 2:4)." He showed him the pillars of the earth and its foundation, as it says: "The bars of the earth closed upon me forever (Jonah 2:7)." He showed him Gehonim, as it says: "You brought my life up from the pit (Jonah 2:7)." He showed him the bottom most *Sheol*, as it says: "From the belly of the *Sheol* I cried out and you heard my voice (Jonah 2:3)." He showed him the Temple of God, as it says: "I

⁸⁹ Cf. Job 40:25. An idiomatic translation can be: "I will catch you."

⁹⁰ It is assumed here that Jonah showed his covenant of circumcision to the Leviathan.

sank to the base of the mountains (Jonah 2:7)." From here we learn that Jerusalem stands upon seven hills. And he showed him the foundation stone placed firmly in the depths underneath the Temple of God. The children of *Korach* were standing and praying upon it. The fish said to Jonah: "Behold you are standing underneath the Temple of God - pray and you will be answered."

[10.23] Jonah said to the fish: "Stand in the place where you are. I want to pray." The fish stood still and Jonah began to pray before the Holy One, blessed be God, and said: "Master of all the world, You are called the one who kills/takes life and who raises up. I have gone down, raise me up. You are called the One who causes death and who gives life. Behold my soul has come to death, give me life."

[10.24] He was not answered until this word came out of his mouth, saying: "That which I swore, I will fulfill (Jonah 2:10)." That which I swore, to offer up Leviathan and to sacrifice him before you, I will fulfill, on the day of Israel's deliverance.

[10.25] Immediately the Holy One, Blessed be God, gestured to the fish, and he cast out Jonah, as it says: "And God spoke to the fish, and the fish vomited Jonah to the dry land (Jonah 2:11)."

[10.26] The sailors saw all of the signs and great wonders which the Holy One, Blessed be God, did with Jonah. Immediately they stood and each one cast away his god, as it says: "They who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare (Jonah 2:9)." They

returned to Yaffo and went up to Jerusalem. They circumcised the flesh of their foreskin, as it says: "The sailors greatly feared Adonai, and they offered sacrifices to Adonai (Jonah 1:16)."

[10.27] Did they really offer a sacrifice? Aren't sacrifices from Gentiles not accepted? Rather, it was blood of the covenant (of circumcision) which is like the blood of the sacrifices, and they vowed and fulfilled [their vows]. Concerning them it is said: "And on upon the righteous converts."⁹¹

⁹¹ Cf. The thirteenth benediction of the *Amidah*.

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