

(יא) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לָךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק הֵימָּם מֵעַלֵינוּ כִּי הֵימָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר:

(יב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּק הֵימָּם מֵעַלֵיכֶם כִּי יוֹדַע אָנֹכִי כִּי בְשָׁלִי הַסֹּעֵר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה עֲלֵיכֶם:

(יג) וַיַּחֲתְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ כִּי הֵימָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר עֲלֵיהֶם:

(יד) וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־ה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ אָנָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵי־נָא נֹאבְדָה בְּנַפְשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאַל־תִּתֵּן עָלֵינוּ דָם נִקִּיא כִּי־אַתָּה ה' כִּפְאֹשֶׁר חִפְצָתָ עֲשִׂיתָ:

## YONAH IS THROWN INTO AN UNNATURAL SEA AND THE STORM ENDS

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the verse use the unusual phrase הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר, which literally means the sea is going and raging?
2. Why does Yonah tell them (verse 12), “Lift me up and cast me into the sea”? Surely all he needed to say was “Cast me into the sea”?
3. Why does Yonah say “because of what is mine,” instead of simply saying “because of me”?
4. What is the meaning of the statement in verse 13 that *the sea was growing increasingly stormy “against them”*?
5. The sailors concluded their plea in verse 14 by saying, “as You wished, so have You done.” How is this a reason

35. Translation follows the Alshich.

(15) They lifted Yonah up and cast him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

(16) The men felt a great fear of Hashem, and they sacrificed an offering to Hashem and made vows.

why they should not be considered as having shed innocent blood?

6. What exactly was their offering and what vows did they make to Hashem (verse 16)?

At this point the sailors asked Yonah (verse 11), “*What should we do with you that will serve as an atonement for your sin so that the sea will become calm [around] us and we will not die? It does not seem possible to row back to dry land and let you disembark there, since the sea is going and raging.*” By this they meant that as the sea got closer to the land — for the waves are constantly “going” in that direction — the stormier and rougher it got. The storm was not raging in the open sea and getting calmer closer to the shore, but rather the reverse. [This answers Question 1.] Moreover, verse 13 states that *the men rowed hard to return to shore but they could not because the sea was growing increasingly stormy against them.* It is possible to interpret the words “*against them*” as indicating that when they neared the land,<sup>36</sup> the waves of *the sea*, which normally travel toward the sea shore, were instead moving miraculously in the opposite direction i.e. “*against them.*”<sup>37</sup> [This answers Question 4.] [Thus,

36. I.e., very close to the shore.

37. It will be noted that this differs from the Alshich’s interpretation of the waves (of verse 11) “going” toward land. The Alshich introduces this idea that the sea’s movement in verse 13 means “away from the shore” by saying it is an alternative *peshat* that is necessary in order to explain exactly how the sea was “*raging against them.*”

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

(טז) וַיִּירְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרֵאָה גְדוֹלָה אֶת־ה' וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־זֶבַח לַה' וַיִּדְרוּ  
נְדָרִים:

at one and the same time the sea grew rougher as it came closer to shore and also the waves were pulling the boat and its sailors away from shore by going in the opposite direction.] The sailors saw [both] these unnatural occurrences and recognized the Divine *Hashgachah* that was demonstrating to them that Hashem did not want Yonah to be returned to shore.

In reply to their question, Yonah said, “*Lift me up and cast me into the sea.*” Why did Yonah tell them to lift him up? Our Sages<sup>38</sup> tell us that Yonah instructed them to do something that would make it patently clear that the storm was due to him. He told them, “After you have already put me in the sea and you see that it has calmed down again, *lift me up* out of the water and you will see that the sea starts raging again. Then cast me into the sea again and you will see that the storm will once again abate.” [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to  
Question 2

Why did Yonah say that the storm had come upon them, “*because of what is mine (כִּי בְשָׁלִי)*”? Surely he should have just said, “because of me.” The answer to this is based on what we explained above (verse 4), on the words “*Hashem cast a great רוּחַ (lit., wind) upon the sea.*” The word רוּחַ in this verse actually

38. See *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* Ch. 9 [Hager ed.], et al., where *Chazal* say that the sailors tried lowering Yonah partway into the sea several times. Each time they put him in, the sea would calm down; and each time they pulled him out it would start raging again. They would then put him in deeper, and the same thing would recur. This kept happening until they had no choice but to cast him entirely into the sea.

refers not to the storm-wind but rather to the angel of destruction<sup>39</sup> that was created through Yonah's sin of trying to flee from Hashem. Hashem cast this impure spirit upon the sea, and it would not rest until Yonah himself was cast into the water. As long as this did not happen, it continued to rage all around the ship. This is why Yonah said, "*I know that this great storm has come upon you because of what is mine* [i.e., the impure spirit I created through my sin]. Thus, when you cast me into the sea with it, you will be safe." [This answers Question 3.]

Despite what he told them, they tried as best they could to get back to dry land. But they were unable to do so, as explained above.

However, before casting Yonah into the sea, *they called out to Hashem and they said, "Please, Hashem! Please let us not perish on account of this man's soul.* It is true that he has a very lofty soul and we are of no importance compared to him; nevertheless, it is still not right that we should perish along with him in this terrible storm. Since he is going to die anyway, what is the point of us dying along with him? We will cast him into the sea so that he alone will die. *And do not reckon it against us as innocent blood.*"<sup>40</sup>

[The sailors continued:] "For we are not really the ones doing all this, You are; *You, Hashem, as You wished, so have You done.* It is patently obvious that You wanted him to be cast into the sea; that is why You brought this great storm." This is particularly true according to what our Sages<sup>41</sup> tell us, that all the other ships came and went around them without being affected

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39. The word רוח also means *spirit*. See Alshich above, 1:1–4.

40. The Alshich writes very concisely here but appears to say the following: The sailors were concerned that since Yonah sinned only against Hashem and had committed no wrong against them, Hashem might consider them to have spilled innocent blood. They were requesting that Hashem not do so.

41. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* loc. cit.

by the storm. Furthermore, they couldn't even return Yonah to shore when they tried, because the waves were miraculously flowing toward the boat and preventing it coming to shore, as explained above. They were telling Hashem, "All this shows clearly that You want him to be cast into the sea so that it will once again calm down; it is thus as if You Yourself cast Yonah in." The sailors tried to save Yonah, as the Sages taught, lifting Yonah out of the water [a number of times]; but [each time they did so] the sea grew stormier again. This is the meaning of the words "*as You wished, so have You done.*" [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to  
Question 5

Then, not having any choice, *they ... cast him into the sea and the sea "stopped its raging"* (verse 15) — i.e., not gradually but all at once. Having seen this awesome display of Divine Providence, they acquired true fear of Heaven, as it says (verse 16), *The men felt a great fear of Hashem.* In fact, our Sages<sup>42</sup> tell us that they reacted by circumcising themselves and converting to Judaism. Commenting on the words in our verse, "*they sacrificed an offering to Hashem,*" the Sages asked how they could have offered up an animal sacrifice on the ship. They explained that it means that they circumcised themselves, with the blood that they shed being considered as if they had offered a sacrifice. The Sages further explained the verse's concluding statement, *and they made vows*, that they vowed to also bring their wives and children to serve the God of Yonah; and indeed, they fulfilled their vows. It is about such converts that we say in the blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei* that begins *עַל הַצְּדִיקִים*, "(May Your compassion be aroused) ... on the righteous converts." [This answers Question 6.]

Answer to  
Question 6

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42. *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayikra 8 (end).*