

(ד) וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצּוֹלָה בְּלִבֵּב יָמִים וְנָהָר יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל־מִשְׁבְּרֵיהָ וְגִלְיָהּ  
עָלֵי עֵבְרוֹ:

(ה) וְאָנִי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיהָ אִךְ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הַיָּכַל  
קִדְשָׁהּ:

(ו) אֶפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ תְּהוּם יִסְבְּבֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֵאשִׁי:

## YONAH'S SUFFERING PURGES HIM OF SIN

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why does Yonah say, "You [Hashem] cast me into the depths"? It was the sailors who cast him into the sea and not Hashem. He should have said, "They cast me..."
2. Yonah says, "a river surrounded me." What type of river is found in the depths of the sea, and why was it surrounding Yonah?
3. Why does Yonah use the expression (verse 5) "banished from before Your eyes" rather than just saying, "banished from before You"?
4. Why does Yonah declare at this point, "but I will once again gaze upon the palace of Your holiness"?
5. Why does Yonah first say (verse 4), "a river surrounded me," and then (verse 6), "the depths surrounded me"?
6. If Yonah was in the depths of the sea, how could he say "reeds enclosed my head"? Don't reeds grow at the surface of the sea rather than at the bottom?

believed that Hashem had answered his prayers even before he formulated them; in the second clause ("I cried out ... from the belly of the underworld") he describes his belief in Hashem's love for him.

We learned<sup>13</sup> that when Yonah ended up inside the second, female fish, he realized that Hashem did not want him to die but rather to cry out to Him to save him from his suffering; in fact, Hashem yearned to hear Yonah's heartfelt prayer. Now Yonah had to explain how he had atoned for his sin of running away from Hashem to such an extent that not only did Hashem desire to hear him pray, he was now so much in Hashem's favor that He had chosen to listen to the entirety of his prayer. This, despite the fact that He had already agreed to Yonah's request before he had even started.<sup>14</sup> To explain all this Yonah said, "*You cast me into the depths...*" By this he meant that before the first fish swallowed him, Hashem had brought great suffering upon him to purify his soul from the effects of his sin, in the way that Gehinnom purifies the soul of a person after death. [This answers Question 1.]<sup>15</sup>

Answer to  
Question 1

At the same time, Hashem gave him supernatural strength and vitality to withstand such extreme suffering, just as He does for those who are sent to be purified in Gehinnom. This is what Yonah meant here when he said, "*a river surrounded me*": "Hashem cast me into the sea so that my suffering should be an atonement. But *a river* — i.e., that particular river which flows out from Gan Eden from under the Tree of Life<sup>16</sup> — *surrounded me* and gave me the strength and vitality to withstand the suffering of the *breakers and waves* crashing down upon me. In this way I was able to survive while my sin was purged." [This answers Question 2.]<sup>17</sup>

Answer to  
Question 2

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13. See Alshich above, 2:1–4.

14. As explained by Alshich loc. cit.

15. The sailors had cast Yonah into the sea, but Hashem then cast him down further, into the sea's depths, in order to increase his suffering as atonement for his sin. (The rest of verse 4, as well as the verses that follow, continue to describe what Yonah experienced before he was swallowed by the fish.)

16. See *Bereishis* 2:10, *A river goes out from Eden to water the garden*. The previous verse mentions the Tree of Life.

17. While normal rivers are not found deep under the sea, this river was a unique, spiritual river from Eden, placed there as a protection for Yonah.

“However, all this was really a gift from You. For initially *I said [to myself], ‘I have been banished from before **Your eyes**’* — that is, because of the sin of fleeing from Eretz Yisrael, the place where Hashem’s eyes constantly gaze,<sup>18</sup> I imagined that I would never merit to go back there, and I would be permanently banished from that land which is before **Your eyes**. [This answers Question 3.] *But because of my suffering when all Your breakers and waves swept over me, I will now be worthy not only of returning to Eretz Yisrael, but also I will once again gaze upon the palace of Your holiness (i.e., the holy Temple).*” [This answers Question 4.]

Having finished explaining in general how he had atoned for his sin through his suffering, Yonah now clarified to what extent the river from Gan Eden had surrounded him and protected him. He explained that it was only when he was cast down into the depths of the sea that he felt the protective mantle of this river giving him the strength to stay alive, but afterward he no longer needed this extra protection. Why was that? Because then *the water enveloped me [only] up to my soul*” — i.e., up to his nose but no further. At that point, he was no longer completely submerged under water, and since he could now survive without supernatural help, he no longer found himself surrounded by the river from Gan Eden. However, at that point, the depths of the sea rose up around him to try to drag him back down because of his sin.<sup>19</sup> [This answers Question 5.] Nevertheless, they were not able to pull him downward at all, because the reeds that were growing near the surface of the water enclosed his head and did not allow him to be drawn back down into the depths. [This answers Question 6.]

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18. As *Devarim* 11:12 says, *The eyes of Hashem your God are upon it [Eretz Yisrael] from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.*

19. Thus in verse 6 Yonah no longer spoke of the river surrounding him (as in verse 4) but rather said, *“the depths surrounded me.”*