

- (1) The word of Hashem came to Yonah a second time, saying (לְאמֹר — lit., to say).
- (2) “Arise and go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to it the declaration that I am telling you.”
- (3) Yonah arose and went to Nineveh in accordance with the word of Hashem. Nineveh was a huge city before God which took three days to traverse.
- (4) When Yonah had begun to enter the city and covered one day’s journey, he called out [to the people], declaring, “In another forty days Nineveh will be overturned.”
- (5) The people of Nineveh believed in God (הֵאָזְנוּ-לֵהוָי) and they declared a fast and they put on sackcloth — from their great to their small.
- (6) The matter reached the king of Nineveh; he rose from his throne, removed his royal cloak from upon himself, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on ashes.
- (7) He had it announced and declared in Nineveh, on the counsel of the king and his leading officers, saying (לְאמֹר — lit., to say), “Neither man nor beast — cattle, sheep, and goats — should taste anything; [the animals] should not graze and [no one] should drink water.
- (8) “Both men and animals should be covered with sackcloth, and they should cry out mightily to God (הֵאָזְנוּ-לֵהוָי). Each person should turn back from his evil ways and from the robbery in their hands.

YONAH COMES TO NINEVEH AND THE PEOPLE REPENT

Consider the following questions:

1. The word לְאמֹר at the end of verse 1 seems redundant. What is it coming to add?

- (א) וַיְהִי דְבַר־ה' אֶל־יוֹנָה שְׁנִית לֵאמֹר:
- (ב) קוּם לךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרָא אֵלֶיהָ אֶת־הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיהָ:
- (ג) וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה כְּדַבַּר ה' וְנִינְוָה הִיְתָה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לֹא־לֵהִימ מהלך שלשֶׁת יָמִים:
- (ד) וַיִּחַל יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בְעִיר מֵהַלֶּךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת:
- (ה) וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ אֲנָשֵׁי נִינְוָה בְּא־לֵהִימ וַיִּקְרְאוּ־צוּם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שָׂקִים מִגְּדוּלָם וַעֲד־קִטְנָם:
- (ו) וַיִּגַע הַדָּבָר אֶל־מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה וַיִּקָּם מִכִּסְאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶדְרֹתוֹ מֵעָלָיו וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הָאֶפֶר:
- (ז) וַיִּזְעַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִינְוָה מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלָיו לֵאמֹר הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבָּקָר וְהַצֹּאן אֶל־יִטְעֶמוּ מֵאוֹמָה אֶל־יָרְעוּ וּמִיָּמִים אֶל־יִשְׁתּוּ:
- (ח) וַיִּתְכַּסּוּ שָׂקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־א־לֵהִימ בַּחֲזָקָה וַיִּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדְּרֹכֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הַחֶמֶס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם:

2. Hashem had just commanded Yonah to go to Nineveh (verse 2). Why do we need to be told (in verse 3) that Yonah went *according to the word of Hashem*?
3. Why in verse 6 are we given so many details about the king's reaction to Yonah's declaration (*he rose from his throne, removed his royal cloak, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on ashes*)?
4. In verse 7, the word *לאמר* once again seems redundant.

(9) “Who knows [if] God (יְהוָה-לֵּיָדָע) will turn back and relent? [Perhaps] He will abandon His anger and we will not be destroyed.”

(10) God saw their deeds, that they had repented from their evil ways; and God relented from the evil He had said to carry out against them and He did not do [it].

5. Why in verse 8 does the king command, “Each person should turn back from his evil ways and from the robbery in their hands,” whereas in verse 10 it just says that Hashem saw that they had repented from their evil ways without saying anything about the items they had stolen?
6. Why did the king say (verse 9), “Who knows [if] God will turn back and relent...”? Did he doubt that God accepts those who repent? Furthermore, if that is indeed what he meant, still, he should have said, “Perhaps God will turn back and relent,” rather than saying, “Who knows...”
7. Having said (in verse 10) that God had relented from the punishment He had planned, why does it go on to say “and He did not do [it]”? Isn’t that obvious?

After everything that had happened to Yonah, one would have expected him to go to Nineveh without being prompted. So why was it necessary for Hashem to come to him a second time and instruct him once again to go to Nineveh? However, we explained¹ that Yonah fled from the land of Israel as soon as Hashem told him to go to Nineveh, because he did not want Hashem to tell him what he must say when he arrives there. Hashem was now coming to tell him what to say. The seemingly extra word לְאָמַר at the end of verse 1 is coming to tell us just this: *The word of Hashem came to Yonah a second time [in order] to say [to him what he should*

1. See Alshich above, 1:1–4.

(ט) מִיִּיּוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנַחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֹאבֵד:
 (י) וַיִּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדְרָכָם הִרְעָה וַיִּנְחַם
 הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

Answer to
Question 1

tell Nineveh. [This answers Question 1.] What was it that he was supposed to say to the people of Nineveh? “Call out to it the declaration that I am telling you which I did not tell you the first time” (verse 2) — namely, that *in another forty days Nineveh will be overturned* (verse 4). We are also told (in verse 3) that Yonah went to Nineveh *according to the word of Hashem*. This means that he did not go there out of fear of what happened to him the first time when he tried to flee. Rather, he went there only to fulfill Hashem’s command. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

There is no doubt that when Yonah warned the inhabitants of Nineveh that in forty days the city would be overturned, he did so using the Name “E-lohim.”² Verse 5 tells us, *The people of Nineveh believed in E-lohim and they declared a fast...* From here we learn that it was only when they heard the Name E-lohim that they were stirred to action.³ At once they were all humbled,

2. Even though God had always spoken to Yonah with the Name “Hashem” (יְיָ-וַה), here God commanded Yonah to warn Nineveh with the Name “E-lohim” (see especially verses 5, 8 and 9) which always represents God’s Attribute of Strict Justice.

3. The Alshich does not explain why simply hearing this Name of God caused the inhabitants of Nineveh to become humbled and repentant. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yonah* 550) tells us that the king of Nineveh was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, who had been saved from death at *Yam Suf*. Certainly Pharaoh would have been in dread of God — and the Torah tells us that he knew the Name “E-lohim” (see *Shemos* 9:28; see also 8:15 and 9:30 where Pharaoh’s magicians and Moshe Rabbeinu, respectively, used that Name in speaking to him). It is thus logical that his subjects in Nineveh would have known about all that had happened in Egypt. Alternatively, Radak here writes that the sailors from the ship had come to Nineveh and told the residents everything that had happened on the ship with Yonah, and this is why they believed his prophecy and repented.

starting with the more important people and then the less important people, as it says, *from their great to their small*. However, the king of Nineveh was stirred into action even before he heard that the warning had been given in the Name of E-lohim. Rather, immediately when *the matter* — i.e., Yonah's warning, "*In another forty days...*" — *reached the king of Nineveh*, he proceeded to humble himself in stages. First, *he rose from his throne* — i.e., he removed himself from a completely external symbol of his importance. Then, *he removed his royal cloak from upon him*, i.e., his vestments of royalty and status. After that, he humbled himself even more, donning clothes of submission and humility: *he covered himself with sackcloth*. Finally, *he sat on ashes*. Through this action he was saying, "I realize that really we deserve to be consumed by fire and brimstone like the inhabitants of Sedom. Here I am sitting on ashes, which are like a scorched remnant that has been saved from the flames of destruction." Only then, having humbled himself completely before God, he addressed the people who would then accept his reprimand. If he had not first humbled himself, the people would not have listened to him. [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

We asked above why it says לֵאמֹר in verse 7 and also why the king says, "*Who knows [if] God will turn back and relent*," seemingly suggesting that he was not sure if God would accept their repentance (Questions 4 and 6). To answer these questions, we need to make the following introduction: There is a fundamental difference between someone who has a physical affliction and one who has an inner, spiritual affliction. Generally speaking, physical illness is not under a person's control. The vast majority of the time, the sick person does not understand what exactly is wrong with him, nor does he know how to heal himself. The doctor will use his examination and diagnostic skills and administer the appropriate cure. But a doctor cannot cure one who has a spiritual affliction; only the person himself can do so. This is because he alone knows the suffering of his soul and how he has

sinned against it. He alone has the ability to repent and repair the damage he caused by doing those sins.

This is what the king meant in his address to the people. What he initially commanded *on the counsel of the king and the leading officers* was only **to say** to the people that they should fast and not feed their animals; that they should wear sackcloth; and that each person *should turn back from his evil ways* (in a general sense). The king then addressed the people as individuals and said, “Whoever knows [his particular sins] should repent [for those sins], since he is the only one who knows what they are. And through this, E-lohim will [certainly] relent.” [This answers Questions 4⁴ and 6.⁵]

The king could also have meant as follows: “Each person should think that he himself, as a single individual, has the ability to put everything right. He should think that perhaps the measure of sins and good deeds of Nineveh is precisely balanced [and if he repents from his own sins the whole city will be saved]; or that the problem is solely because of him.⁶ According to this, the interpretation of verse 9 would be: *Who knows, [perhaps with] his own repentance [and consequent salvation he will tip the balance] and E-lohim will turn back and relent? [Perhaps] He will abandon His anger and we will not be destroyed.* [This is a second answer to Question 6.]⁷

Answer to
Questions
4 and 6

A Second
Answer to
Question 6

4. As the Alshich often writes, the word **לאמר** usually means “to say to someone else.” In our verse, he is saying here, the word **לאמר** comes to tell us that the king is instructing his men to convey to the people that they are to fast, etc.

5. The Alshich is reinterpreting the words **מי יודע וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים**, with God no longer being the one who may or may not “turn back and relent” (for God certainly forgives). Rather, the king is referring to whether the people will do *teshuvah*. [It may be noted that the word **יָשׁוּב** is written in the singular, which points to the fact that the king is speaking to them as individuals. This is highlighted by the contrast to the previous verse, which uses the plural **אִישׁ מִדָּרְכוֹ הִרְעָה** — which the Alshich has interpreted as speaking in general terms about the people repenting.]

6. I.e., the threatened destruction of the city is due to his personal sins being so severe.

7. According to this interpretation, the words **מי יודע וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים** do not mean “Who knows [if] E-lohim will turn back and relent” but rather “Who knows [if the individual’s] repenting [will tip the balance] and Hashem will relent.”

We asked above (Question 5) why the king commanded in verse 8 that every person should *turn back from his evil ways* and also *from the robbery in their hands*, whereas in verse 10 it does not mention the stolen items. It is possible that the two statements are referring to different periods of time when the thefts were committed. When the king said, “*Each person should turn back from his evil ways*,” he was referring to theft occurring in the present. But when he said, “*and from the robbery in their hands*,” he was referring to theft that had taken place in the past. Therefore, it says in verse 10 that *God saw their deeds, that they had repented from their evil ways* of the present [that is, they ceased stealing from one another]. However, they did not repent regarding robberies they had committed in the past, [and they did not return the items they had stolen to their rightful owners]. Nevertheless, He *relented from the evil He had said He was going to inflict upon them*, for He was appeased by what they had done. [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 5

Having said that God had relented from the punishment He had planned, why does it then go on to state the obvious, namely that *He did not do [it]*” (Question 7)? We can answer that it was possible that God had relented from punishing this generation but that He would visit their sins upon the next generation, as we find with King Achav. This king acted exceedingly wickedly. However, since he repented,⁸ God did not bring disaster upon him, but rather upon his offspring. Therefore, here it says that God *relented from the evil He had said to carry out against them*, and not only did He relent from punishing them, in addition *He did not do [it]* at all, even to the next generation. [This answers Question 7.]

Answer to
Question 7

8. See *Melachim I*, Chs. 21–22.