

- (1) Yonah was extremely displeased and he was vexed.
- (2) Yonah prayed to Hashem and he said, “Please, Hashem, this is what I was saying while I was still in my own land. That is the very reason why I quickly fled toward Tarshish: I knew that You are a forgiving and compassionate God, slow to anger and showing abundant kindness, and that You would relent from punishing them.
- (3) “Now, Hashem, please take my soul from me, for it is better that I die than I live.”
- (4) Hashem said, “Are you extremely vexed?”

YONAH IS DISTRAUGHT THAT NINEVEH HAS BEEN SPARED

Consider the following questions:

1. In verse 1 it says that Yonah *was extremely displeased* and also that *he was vexed*. What does the latter add to the former?
2. Why did Yonah pray (verse 3) that Hashem should take his soul from him? How would that help?
3. Why did he also say that it was it better for him to die than to live?
4. What did Hashem mean when He said to Yonah (verse 4), הַהֵיטֵב תָּרָה לָךְ, *Are you extremely vexed?* If it is a question seeking information, Hashem knows what people are feeling and does not need to ask such questions. Furthermore, where is Yonah’s answer? On the other hand, if it is an expression of astonishment (with God’s intention being to rebuke Yonah for his anger),

(א) וַיִּרַע אֱלֹהֵי־וֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיַּחַר לוֹ:

(ב) וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אָנָּה ה' הֲלוֹא־זֶה דְבָרִי עַד־הַיּוֹתֵי עַל־
אֲדָמָתִי עַל־כֵּן קִדְמָתִי לְבָרַח תִּרְשִׁישָׁה כִּי יִדְעָתִי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי־חַנוּן
וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנָחָם עַל־הָרָעָה:

(ג) וַעֲתָה ה' קַח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִמּוֹנֵי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתֵי מַחֲיֵי:

(ד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הֲהֵיטֵב חָרָה לָךְ:

Hashem should have said, לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ, “Why are you so vexed?”¹

5. Since Yonah was both *extremely displeased* and *vexed* (as it says in verse 1), why does Hashem focus only on his anger?

Yonah was upset that Hashem relented from punishing the inhabitants of Nineveh. This reflected poorly on the Jewish people, who had ignored the warnings of the prophets and failed to repent and return to Hashem. But really Yonah should not have been irritated, since this was Hashem’s will! Yonah knew this and so *he was vexed* at himself for having gotten irritated. He realized that he was committing a sin by feeling this way over what Hashem had chosen to do. [This answers Question 1.]

Yonah prayed to Hashem, expressing why he felt so displeased: “Please, Hashem, this is what I was saying while I was still in my own land ... I knew that You are a forgiving and compassionate God ... Now there will be accusations against the Jewish people [in the Heavenly tribunal]. Therefore, now, Hashem — i.e., before I have to see them being punished — please take my soul from me.” [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 1

Answer to
Question 2

1. As Hashem said to Kayin in *Bereishis* 4:6.

(5) Yonah left the city and dwelt to the east of the city. There he made himself a succah and sat underneath it in the shade until he would see what would happen in the city.

(6) Hashem, E-lohim, designated a *kikayon*⁵ plant there which grew up above Yonah to shade his head and to save him from his misfortune. Yonah rejoiced a great rejoicing about the *kikayon*.

(7) Then God designated a worm at the dawn of the next day; it struck the *kikayon* so that it withered.

(8) When the sun rose, God designated a stifling east wind. The sun beat down on Yonah's head and he became faint. He asked for his soul's death, saying, "It is better that I die than I live."

"Furthermore, *it is better that I die than I live*. At the moment I am still righteous and I am worthy of You taking my soul from me with a Divine kiss.² If I live any longer, perhaps I will sin, just as I already sinned, by being so upset at what You have done. Therefore, it is better that I die while I am still righteous, while I am still vexed with myself for being upset with Your actions, for this anger at myself is a partial repentance for my sin." [This answers Question 3.]

To this God replied, "*You are extremely vexed* at yourself because of the fact that you were upset with what I had done. There is no greater repentance than this, and therefore you are free from any taint of sin. You should not [express a wish] to die." [This answers Questions 4³ and 5.⁴]

2. Just as Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam died in this most special way (see *Bava Basra* 17a).

3. The Alshich does not interpret this as a question (*Are you extremely vexed?*) or as an expression of astonishment (*Why are you so vexed?*). Rather, he understands it as a statement: "*You are extremely vexed* at yourself for being upset at My actions. This in itself is a high level of *teshuvah*."

4. According to the Alshich, it was Yonah's anger (at himself) and the repentance it represented that was God's focus in this verse (and not Yonah's displeasure at God's actions).