

(ה) וַיֵּצֵא יוֹנָה מִן־הָעִיר וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לָעִיר וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ שֵׁם סֹכָה וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחְתֶּיהָ בְּצֵל עֵד אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה מֵהַיְהִיָּה בְּעִיר:

(ו) וַיְמַן ה' אֶל־לֵהִים קִיקְיֹן וַיַּעַל מֵעַל לְיוֹנָה לְהִיּוֹת צֶל עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרְעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקְיֹן שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה:

(ז) וַיְמַן ה' אֶל־לֵהִים תּוֹלַעַת בְּעֵלוֹת הַשֶּׁחַר לְמַחֲרַת וַתֵּךְ אֶת־הַקִּיקְיֹן וַיִּבֹשׁ:

(ח) וַיְהִי כַּזֶּרֶחַ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיְמַן אֶל־לֵהִים רוּחַ קָדִים חֲרִישִׁית וַתֵּךְ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ עַל־רֹאשׁ יוֹנָה וַיִּתְעַלֶּף וַיִּשְׂאֵל אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לְמוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי:

## THE MESSAGE OF THE KIKAYON PLANT

### Consider the following questions:

1. Since Yonah made himself a succah and sat underneath it in the shade, why did he need the kikayon plant to shade his head (verse 6)? And why did Yonah rejoice a great rejoicing about the kikayon (ibid.)?
2. What does it mean (verse 6) when it says that the kikayon grew to save him from his misfortune? From what misfortune was it saving him? If it is referring to the heat of the sun, the verse already said that the kikayon served to shade his head.
3. When the kikayon dried up, why did Yonah say that it would be better to die than to live (verse 8)? Couldn't he find a house or hotel in which to take shelter in a big city like Nineveh?<sup>6</sup>

5. *Kikayon* is a plant that grows to a good height and has many branches with leaves (see Rashi and *Metzudas Tziyon*).

6. The Alshich writes that this is not a very strong question, because one could say that Yonah had been left penniless after the ship sunk and therefore had no money to pay for any lodging. Indeed, he notes, the Midrash (*Otzar HaMidrashim, Yonah* p. 220) says

(9) God said to Yonah, “Are you so vexed at [the loss of] the *kikayon*?” He answered, “I am so vexed [that I want] to die.”

(10) God said, “You took pity on the *kikayon* which cost you no effort, nor did you make it grow; it sprung up in one night and disappeared the [next] night.

(11) “Should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand individuals who do not know their right [hand] from their left, as well as a multitude of animals?!”

4. What did Yonah mean when he told Hashem, “*I am so vexed [that I want] to die*”?
5. What did Hashem mean when He said (verse 11) that there were people in Nineveh *who do not know their right [hand] from their left*?

To answer all our questions, we need to explain the following: The fortieth day on which Nineveh was supposed to be overturned had already arrived. This is what was meant when it said above (3:10), *God relented from the evil ... and He did not do it*: although the fortieth day had arrived, God did not bring retribution upon Nineveh. In Yonah’s anguish that nothing seemed to be happening to Nineveh even as the fortieth day was coming to an end, he decided to take up a position to the east of the city. Why to the east? The wind that blows from the east is hot and blows slowly.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to sit to the east in the height of the

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that Yonah’s clothes became “burnt up” from the heat inside the fish — in which case it is probable that his money purse got destroyed as well.

7. The Alshich notes that it is for this reason that our Sages (*Bava Basra* 25a) tell us that a leather tannery should only be built to the east of a town. The wind from the east does not blow strongly, so it will not bring the unpleasant smell into the city.

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-לֹהִים אֶל-יֹנָה הַהֵיטֵב חָרָה-לָּךְ עַל-הַקִּיקָיוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר  
הֵיטֵב חָרָה-לִּי עַד-מוֹת:

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אַתָּה חֲסַתָּ עַל-הַקִּיקָיוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲמַלְתָּ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּ  
שִׁבְן-לִילָה הִיא וּבֶן-לִילָה אָבָד:

(יא) וַאֲנִי לֹא אָחוּס עַל-נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבָּה הָרַבָּה  
מִשְׁתִּים-עֲשָׂרָה רַבּוֹ אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע בֵּין-יְמִינוֹ לְשִׁמְאֻלוֹ וּבִהְמָה  
רַבָּה:

summer is extremely uncomfortable because of the heat. Yonah consciously chose to sit himself down on that side of the city to make himself suffer. He hoped that Hashem would take note of his suffering [over the non-punishment of Nineveh].<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, to make his situation somewhat easier to bear, he made himself a lightly constructed succah to give himself temporary shade from the sun, until he saw what would happen to the city in the few remaining hours of the day. This is what the verse means when it says that *he sat underneath it ... until he would see what would happen in the city*. The succah was only built to last for a few hours, since it was very flimsy. [The *kikayon*, in contrast, provided shade that Yonah had expected to last.] [This answers the first part of Question 1.]

Answer to  
First Part of  
Question 1

When Hashem saw Yonah there, He wanted to let him know that he shouldn't be upset about Nineveh being spared. He wanted him to know that He has compassion on all His creatures — particularly on such a large city whose inhabitants had repented from their evil ways. Hashem also wanted to save Yonah from his sin of being upset at Him and questioning His

8. See *Taanis* 24b, with Rashi s.v. *ki havah shalif*, that *tzaddikim* afflict themselves so that Hashem will answer their *tefillos*.

ways.<sup>9</sup> But Hashem knew that if He just instructed him not to be distressed at Nineveh's being spared, Yonah would not be saved from his sin. God therefore *designated a kikayon plant there* (verse 6). He made it sprout and grow overnight, in a miraculous way, so that *it grew up above Yonah*, for two reasons: first, *to shade his head*, and second, *to save him from his misfortune*, i.e. from the misfortune of sinning by questioning Hashem's ways. [This answers Question 2.] How did the *kikayon* save Yonah from this sin? In verses 10–11, Hashem tells Yonah, “*You took pity on the kikayon which cost you no effort... Should I not take pity on Nineveh...?!*”

This *kal vachomer* argument<sup>10</sup> helped Yonah come to terms with what Hashem was doing, because having experienced pain at the loss of the *kikayon* he understood what Hashem was saying. If Hashem had not made the *kikayon* grow, and had simply told Yonah, “*Should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, etc.*” Yonah would not have accepted it.

Furthermore, verse 6 states, *Yonah rejoiced a great rejoicing about the kikayon*. He *rejoiced* at the fact that his head was now shaded from the sun; and he further felt *great rejoicing* at the *kikayon* itself, for like a person who sees his orchard suddenly flourish and grow to ten times the size it was before, Yonah rejoiced at the miraculous growth of the *kikayon* that protected him. His joy is [also] described as a *great rejoicing* because it enabled him [at least so long as the *kikayon* lasted] to forget how upset he was at God about Nineveh being spared. This, in turn, enabled him to be “saved from his misfortune” [i.e., the sin his

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9. See above, 4:1–4, where the Alshich writes that Yonah recognized this as a sin and in fact was angry at himself for his improper judgment of God's actions. However, the Alshich indicates here, Yonah was still agonizing over the issue, and God wanted to help him.

10. Namely, if the principle of having pity applies in the case of the *kikayon*, all the more so should it apply to the inhabitants of Nineveh, who are His handiwork and who had done *teshuvah*.

feelings comprised, as mentioned above]. [This answers the second part of Question 1.]

Hashem then arranged for the worm to come and cause the *kikayon* to wither, exposing Yonah to the sun and causing him great anguish — thus preparing the way for the *kal vachomer* mentioned above [and leading Yonah to accept God’s judgment].

Furthermore, *God designated a stifling east wind*. This is a type of wind which is not felt [as a cooling agent] since it has been heated by the sun; *it beat down on Yonah’s head until he became faint*. Then *Yonah asked for his soul’s death*. [But this was not because of the terrible heat. Rather:] Generally speaking, it is difficult for the soul of a *tzaddik* to leave him, since it desires to remain on earth to learn more Torah and do more mitzvos. But here Yonah asked his soul if it would agree to leave him.<sup>11</sup> He told it: “The whole reason you want to keep living is to do more mitzvos. But since I am sinning (by being angry at Hashem for sparing Nineveh) rather than doing mitzvos, *it is better that I die than I live*. [This answers Question 3.]

Then Hashem said to him (verse 9), “*Are you so vexed at [the loss of] the kikayon?*” By this He meant, “Apart from being upset at the loss of the shade, did you get very upset at the loss of the *kikayon* itself — just as you rejoiced at the presence of the *kikayon* itself when it grew so miraculously?” Yonah answered, “*I am so vexed [that I want] to die*. The joy I had experienced at the *kikayon*’s miraculous appearance had made me forget my distress that Nineveh had been spared. But now that it has dried up, I have gone back to how I felt before, when I said (verse 8), ‘*It is better that I die than I live*.’ I am unable to prevent myself from being distressed at Your sparing of Nineveh, so it is better that I die.” [This answers Question 4.]

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11. The Alshich hints that this request was easier to fulfill in Yonah’s current faint state.

Then finally, Hashem was able to convince Yonah through the *kal vachomer* mentioned above: “You took pity on the *kikayon* which cost you no effort... Should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city...?! Even though there are idol worshipers among them,<sup>12</sup> there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand individuals who do not know their right [hand] from their left — i.e., they are simple people who had no intention of sinning; they just did not know the difference between right and wrong. Since they erred through their lack of understanding, I cannot consider them as true sinners. [This answers Question 5.] So too there are a multitude of animals that did not sin. [My justice thus dictates that they should not die, as it says, *Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, Your judgments are like the vast depths below* —] man **and animals**, Hashem, You shall save.”<sup>13</sup>

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12. The Alshich writes that they still worshiped idols, despite the fact that they had repented from their acts of theft (as it says in 3:10 above, *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]*).

13. *Tehillim* 36:7.