



The Enduring Merit

Dayan Yehonoson Hool | Federation Beis Din



One of the remarkable aspects of the story of the prophet Yonah that we read recently on Yom Kippur, is that Hashem sent Yonah to warn the non-Jewish people of Nineveh that Hashem had noted their wickedness and would destroy the city if they did not repent.

Many times in Tanach we find the *nevi'im* being sent to Yisroel to rebuke them for their sins and to warn of impending disaster if they do not repent. However, we do not usually find the same privilege being accorded to the other nations of the world.

In their cases, Hashem does not normally warn them of looming punishment. When their “measure” is full, the punishment is meted out without further warning (see Rashi, Bereishis, 15:16).

With Nineveh, though, Hashem gave them a chance by sending a *navi* to rebuke them and warn them what would happen if they did not change their ways. Why were the people of Nineveh so privileged?

The answer, says the Chizkuni, is to be found in a *medrash*, commenting on this week’s *parsha* that traces the foundations of the city of Nineveh.

Nimrod was a wicked king who attempted to rebel against Hashem by building a tower that he thought would reach to the heavens. He was also charismatic and very persuasive, and influenced many others to follow in the path of rebellion against Hashem, (Rashi, Bereishis, 10:9). One of the people who lived at the time was called Ashur, whom the *medrash* tells us was righteous, and who noticed that his children were being influenced for the bad by Nimrod. Determined to ensure that his children would remain righteous, Ashur left the civilised world that at the time was

concentrated in one place under the reign of Nimrod, and travelled to a distant place where he settled down to build a new life for himself and his family. To this the verse refers when it says, “From that land Ashur went out, and he built Nineveh,” (Bereishis, 10:11). It was in this merit of the *tzaddik* Ashur moving away from the wicked of his generation in order to educate his children in the path of righteousness that generations later, when the people of Nineveh degenerated to the point that would bring Divine destruction, that Hashem gave them a last chance, and sent a *Navi* to bring them back from the brink of obliteration.

The merit of Ashur’s *mesiras nefesh* was still effective in giving his descendants a chance to save themselves many hundreds of years later.

The Maggid of Yerusholayim, R’ Mordechai Druk *zt”l*, added an insight.

The *pesukim* relate that Yonah entered the city of Nineveh and called out that in forty days’ time Hashem would overturn the city. This prompted a drastic transformation in the people of Nineveh. “The people of Nineveh feared Hashem and they declared a fast, and wore sackcloth... And they called out strongly to Hashem, and each man repented from his evil way...” (Yonah, 3:5,8)

Rav Druk used to say that if he were to go to the Machaneh Yehudah marketplace in Yerusholayim and call out that in forty days the *shuk* would be destroyed, they would take him away

to an institution! And yet the people of Nineveh immediately recognised the true prophesy that Yonah delivered and responded by radically changing their whole lifestyle for the good. Where did they get the conviction to recognise the word of Hashem and strength of character to repent so thoroughly?

The answer, says R’ Druk, is implied in the *medrash* that we mentioned. Ashur’s courage in going against the flow to serve Hashem, and the strength of his conviction, lingered on many generations later. Even though his descendants had sunk spiritually to the stage where they were to be wiped out, the memory of Ashur’s actions was still buried deep inside. When the *Nevi Hashem* came to rebuke them, they instantly recognised the word of Hashem and immediately responded to the call.

The lesson is clear. Our actions and *mesirus nefesh* today, to safeguard the *ehrllichkeit* and *yiddishkeit* of our children, will both stand in their merit for generations to come, and will ingrain in them the fear of Hashem and the characteristic to respond to Hashem’s call as soon as they hear it.

Riddle Answer

The Medrash Tanchuma in Parshas Vayikro tells us that there were 3 people who Nevuchadnezzar put a second time in a furnace, 2 were false prophets who were burned and one was Yehoshua Koihen Godol who survived.

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