7. Yona and My Mission Statement

י וַיִּֽירְא֤וּ הָֽאֲנָשִׁים֙ יִרְאָ֣ה גְדוֹלָ֔ה וַיֹּאמְר֥וּ
אֵלָ֖יו מַה -זֹּ֣את עָשִׂ֑יתָ כִּֽי -יָדְע֣וּ הָאֲנָשִׁ֗ים
כִּֽי -מִלִּפְנֵ֤י יְדוָד֙ ה֣וּא בֹרֵ֔חַ כִּ֥י הִגִּ֖יד לָהֶֽם:

The storm threatens to sink the ship and end the life of the crew. The sailors, in a state of panic, understand that they are not dealing with an abnormal climate event, but with a Divine intervention. The celestial intervention has also point to Yona as the sole responsible for what is happening. The sailors want to know more, and they asked Yona: “What have you done?” Yona confesses his crime: I’m escaping from the Divine call. Yona also realizes that, although not with words, but through a storm, HaShem will keep “calling’ for him (and pushing him) to carry out his urgent mission: saving the lives of the inhabitants of Nineveh.

HOW DO YOU ESCAPE FROM GOD?
Escaping from God means escaping from what He expects from you. In general, and especially in our privileged times, HaShem grants us a generous shower of blessings: material abundance, health and talents. Many times we are not able to recognize the “Divine intervention” in everything we have. HaShem then might use other resources. A friend of mine sent his son to study at a university abroad. The father deposited money in his son’s account every month so that he would not be lacking anything. But the son did not have a word of appreciation or gratitude towards his father: he took the money for granted. After a few months the father stopped sending him money. And then, the son called: “Dad, how are you doing? How is everything? Such a long time we don’t talk. I wanted to thank you, by the way, for all your help. I have not enough words to thank you for your generosity. … Oh! and incidentally, I wanted to ask you a question: Is it possible that you forgot to deposit money for me this month? “

The Sages suggested that, just as this father, HaShem, may

retain His blessing since some times, as Yona, the only thing that awakens us and pushes us back to reconnect with God is a “storm”.

HOW TO FACE A STORM?

What should I do when the generous Divine rain turns into a dangerous flood? Raba said: אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש במעשיו. “When you perceive that you are suffering, you must examine your behavior.” When ח”ו one suffers an illness, economic hardship, or other type of crisis—apart from looking for the practical ways to solve the problem and praying for Divine assistance—one has to examine his actions and his goals. And like Yona, refocus on what God expects of him or her.

DISCOVERING MY MISSION

We Jews have two existential goals. First, to observe the covenant, a commitment, I have with HaShem, learning and observing His Torah. But beyond this obligation I also have another mission. This goal is not as obvious as the first. I have to discover it. By looking into my special talents and virtues, innate or acquired, that I possess and stand out from others. And when I discover my talents, I discover my personal mission statement in life. Suppose I I have a high level of intelligence, and I use it to shine and become popular in video games and card games. Wouldn’t that be a great wasting of the talents that God granted me? Wouldn’t God expect me to use my IQ to study Torah, teach it, counsel others or find a cure for cancer? The same happens with an individual whom HaShem has blessed with money, or with deep empathy or eloquence. All these resources and talents must be channeled to the achievement of what God wants from me.

Yona evidently had the talents and skills to go to Nineveh and announce the people God’s word.

To ignore our unique talents and resources is to neglect our potential, and to escape, as Yona did, from what HaShem expects from us.