

Boker Tov/Good morning everyone. In order to honor the science that teaches it is unhealthy to sit in front of a streaming device for five hours at a time, Cantor Kintisch pre-recorded both the haftarah for Yom Kippur morning and the haftarah for YK afternoon. I hope you take the time to listen to Isaiah speak his truth and all the people in Jonah to walk theirs. Today I would like to share with you what these two haftaroth have come to mean to me. My third lesson learned at CJC. These two stories have so much to teach us about our lives and how we are meant to improve ourselves. For none of us is born perfect.

Having said that, a biblical prophet is expected to be able to see the future perfectly. The way someone in biblical times was known to be a true prophet was when their prophecy came true. If a prophet said that Gd will destroy the Ninivites and the people repent and Gd forgives them, then that person is a false prophet because his prophecy did not come true. As it is written in Deuteronomy 18:21–22, “And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that Gd has not spoken?’ when a prophet speaks in the name of Gd, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that Gd has not spoken.” Isaiah and Jonah are expected to deliver perfect prophecies that come true. And yet the way they do that is very different in so many ways. It is in their differences we are asked to find ourselves and the kind of person we hope to become.

For some of us, we look to the exceptional leaders, the Isaiahs of the world, the people who are filled with righteous indignation and empathy, who live their whole life (or at least as much as we can see) following the path to justice and peace. For those of us with that inclination, Isaiah is our perfect prophet, our role model. Isaiah begins and ends his book of prophecy with moral teachings of a better life, if only we would repent. His personal life, desires, or needs are almost invisible. It is his message we are called to live into our lives.

Jonah, on the other hand, is the extreme example of other prophets like Moses and Jeremiah, who at first reject the call to prophecy. In Moses' and Jeremiah's case, it was a moral objection; they were not up to the task. Moses had some kind of speech impediment. Jeremiah was too young, or inexperienced. Jonah, on the other hand, did not want the Ninevites to repent for if they did, it would make him look bad as a prophet as it is written in Jonah 4:1-2 "This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. He prayed to Gd, saying, "O Gd! isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment." Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, a contemporary rabbi who recently authored the book The Book of Jonah, wrote, "Jonah is a strange prophet: without insight, without foresight, without compassion, and without courage."

Jonah might be a strange prophet, but if you ask me, he is a normal human being. We all find reasons not to repent, not to live the life we believe we should. Our job is too demanding; our kids need us; it is time for our once a week date night; there is a pandemic that complicates everything; our parents are aging; we are unemployed. The list goes on and on. It is always someone else's job to step up. There is a wonderful Midrash from Yemen: "They say to a person: 'Go to a certain town and learn Torah there. But the person answers: 'I am afraid of the lions that I will encounter on the way.' So they say: 'You can go and learn in another town that is closer.' But the person replies: 'I am afraid of the thieves.' So they suggest: 'There is a teacher in your own house. Go and learn from him.' But the person replies: 'What if I find the door locked, and I have to return to where I am? So they say: 'There is a teacher sitting and teaching right here in the chair next to you.'" But the person replies: 'You know what? What I really want to do is go back to sleep.'"

Gd made it clear to Jonah - you can choose not to repent, but if you do run from your sacred path, then that choice will be seen by the sailors, Gd and the plant for what it is, an evasion of one's responsibility. As Rabbi Yankowitz wrote, "When called to accountability, it is our instinct to hide or flee. Yet when we run away from Gd, we run from our responsibility to others, and, ultimately from ourselves and our true mission as human beings." Yom Kippur is a gift of time given to us to begin, not end, but to begin the process of determining what kind of righteous words or behaviors we are to share in the coming year.

The truth is that these haftaroth are perfect balances to the rest of Yom Kippur. You see for most of Yom Kippur we are asked, cajoled, lectured, serenaded, implored and lulled into paying attention to ourselves-our strengths and our challenges. Where have I done right? Where do I need to correct the course? It truly is all about me. For the only person I really can change is me.

Then Yom Kippur morning Isaiah hits us over the head by reminding us that the goal of self-evaluation is to help others. The goal of fasting, self-deprivation, is to nourish someone who goes hungry every day; the goal of a ritual life is to strengthen our ability to make life easier for our minyan, our community. As Isaiah wrote in chapter 58:5-6, "Is such the fast I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when Gd is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke."

Rabbi Rachel Cowan explains further, "And he [Isaiah] shows us that the song of the self is important. He reflects to us Gd's care for the fate of the individual. Gd clearly loves us, feels for us-Gd dwells with the humble and contrite, Gd promises peace for those far and those near.

But Gd has little patience for small-minded selves. Empty rituals, self-afflictions, don't move Gd. Actions that change the real world do. Isaiah instructs us that ours is both the work of justice and the work of spirituality ours is the work of removing the yoke of oppression, speaking with a gentle tongue, and delighting in the Sabbath. Tikkun hanefesh, repair of the soul, is meaningless outside a life devoted to Tikkun olam, repair of the world. “

And just in case you tuned out for that twenty minute hard hitting lecture from Isaiah, the book of Jonah lulls you slowly into the realization that using Yom Kippur to become self-absorbed to the exclusion of others is to miss the point. The sailors did everything they could to save Jonah's life. The Ninevites did a 180 degree turn to become more righteous people. Jonah had to sacrifice his self-perception of his own needs, first to save the sailors by being thrown overboard presumably to drown and second to save the Ninivites by being accused of being a false prophet. Our self-examination is only righteous if it brings us to a healthier relationship with the people around us and the greater world in which we benefit. Or as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: “We must begin with ourselves, but not end with ourselves. Turning (Teshuvah) means something greater than repentance and acts of penance. It means that by a reversal of one's whole being, a person who had been lost in the maze of selfishness, where he had set himself as his goal, finds a way to something greater than himself; that is, a way to the fulfillment of the particular task for which he has been destined. Repentance can only be an incentive to such active reversal. One who goes on fretting about his repentance, he who tortures himself with the idea that his acts of penance are not sufficient, withholds his best energies from the work of reversal. You have done wrong? Then counteract it by doing right. There are three prerequisites for turning. Eyes that see, ears that listen, and an understanding heart. If you have all three, you are ready to turn and be healed.”

Implicit in Isaiah and Jonah is an analysis of the problem they are trying to fix. For the first step in trying to solve a problem is determining what or who needs to change. For Isaiah, it is the Israelites. The Israelites are living a life of empty rituals for they are not backed up by a moral imperative. For the author of the book of Jonah, it is more complicated. Jonah himself blames Gd. Gd is too compassionate, too forgiving. Gd is letting human beings take advantage of Him/Her. Gd needs to become tougher on sinners, to give more punishments. And yet Jonah himself benefits from this compassion and forgiveness. When Jonah defies Gd's instructions and runs away from his destiny, Gd does not kill him. Rather Gd creates an elaborate (Disney-like) storm and whale that show Jonah the error of his ways. When Jonah repents, he gets a second chance. Gd forgives him.

Who are we blaming for our problems today? Is it the Democrats' or the Republicans' fault? Is it the lack of compromise or too much bending to public polls? Are people protesting or rioting? Is racism systematic or are there just a few bad apples? Am I a victim or a survivor? Can I determine my own destiny or am I controlled by others? Who are we blaming for our current circumstances? What is our implicit or explicit role in our dissatisfaction? And more important, what can we do to change it.

Isaiah can teach, Jonah can preach. What about you? Me? All of us together?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote, "There is no life without a task; no person without a talent; no place without a fragment of Gd's light waiting to be discovered and redeemed; no situation without its possibility of sanctification; no moment without its call. It may take a lifetime to learn how to find these things, but once we learn, we realize in retrospect that all it ever took was the ability to listen." We get so caught up in the blame game that we forget that our greatest accomplishments are really lessons learned from previous mistakes. As Rabbi Naomi Levy

wrote, “Sometimes we forget this simple truth: The broken pieces of ourselves are often our greatest teachers. It is from them that we learn compassion, wisdom, and understanding, devotion, faith, and insight. It is from them that we learn how to strive for better, how to empathize and offer help.”

Part of determining who we will become is by picturing in our mind what our ultimate goal is. We might never reach it. After all, we are commanded in Deuteronomy to *pursue* justice not to *attain* justice. But that does not mean we cannot get closer. Each step along the way is a sacred movement to a holy goal. So what are our goals? Isaiah is completely transparent. His goal is to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked. Isaiah wants to make sure every person has the necessities of life. Jonah’s goal, on the other hand, is to speak truth to power, the ultimate power-Gd. Jonah’s goal is to mete out justice to everyone who deserves it. What is your goal?

When I was in rabbinical school I was asked to do an emotionally terrifying exercise in my class on death and dying. I was asked to write my own eulogy. At that time the hardest part was trying to imagine myself as dead with people I loved summing up my life. Over time the hardest part of this exercise has become imagining how I have to change still to this day so that they have examples of what I hope they might choose to say. What is it you want people to say about you when they try to summarize your life?

What are your guiding principles, your ethical compasses? What do you need to change so they have enough examples in their arsenal to describe you as you had hoped to be?

Part of teshuvah, is not only seeing our failures, but also seeing ourselves in our goals. Can we picture ourselves in our future? What role do we see ourselves in? Are we the prophet, the leader, creating policy? Are we one of the righteous gentiles, the sailors who tried to save

Jonah, who reach out to our next door neighbors to bring them groceries during the pandemic? Do we think globally and act locally to change our county's laws thereby creating a more righteous local home for all its residents? Do we demand change from working within the government like Isaiah or from outside like Jonah? Take some time today and close your eyes [stay awake] and picture yourselves as you always wanted to be. For you will never become what you cannot see.

Ultimately the haftorot Isaiah and Jonah take us outside of ourselves so that we can return to ourselves with fresh eyes of who we can become. Or as Thomas Merton wrote, "It is only in assuming full responsibility for our world, for our lives and for ourselves, that we can be said to live for Gd." Yom Kippur might start as an analysis of who we are. But it fails if that is where we end. The conclusion of Yom Kippur is marked with the shofar blow-the primal call to repent, to imagine, to believe, to pray, to hope, to become. May this year be the year we live into the role of the Ninevites and transform ourselves into the sacred image of Gd we were always meant to be. Please rise in spirit or body as we begin our Amidah on pp. 868.