


does the world around us.

Educators can use children's natural affinity for this story to help them express some of the most profound emotions that children grapple with on a regular basis, and that Yom Kippur challenges us as adults to face each year. Has anyone recently asked something of you that felt overwhelming and made you want to run away? Have you ever tried to do something and failed? Did you want to try it again? How did you feel? What does it feel like when someone expects something of you and you aren't sure you can do it? Educators can help children acknowledge the importance of these questions, and help them understand that even adults grapple with them. And they can entice children to explore these questions in a variety of ways: through bibliodrama, in which children take on the characters of the story and explain motives and context; through visual art projects; through journaling or creative writing; and through re-enactments, such as a pup-

pet show or a musical performance.

The book of Jonah offers a wonderful educational opportunity to connect the core pieces that underlie a Jewish child's education; it is a seamless example of the intersection of Jewish literacy, the meaning behind a Jewish holiday, and the connection of Jewish stories and holidays to our lives. It provides educators with opportunities to help children make meaningful connections between this story, the issues and questions with which they grapple, and the value of Yom Kippur. And maybe these uniting threads connect to the value of education in general and can serve as a reminder to teachers of why their job is so important. They have the opportunity, each day, to convey a critical message to their students: When you're rushing down the stairs, take pause for a moment. Think about who you are, where you're going, and why you're in such a hurry to get there. And when you finally do arrive, do your best, and try not to *kvetch*. 

## Upcoming in Sh'ma

- Communities & Synagogues
- Aligning Jewish Values and the Workplace
- Social Movements
- The Multi-dimensional Jew: Whole Jewish Learning
- Networks of Jews
- What Is a Soul?
- Uses & Abuses of Memory
- Gossip
- Intra-preneurship
- Active Covenanting

What Jewish conversation would you like to have? Send suggestions for future Sh'ma topics to [SBerrin@shma.com](mailto:SBerrin@shma.com).

## Emerging from a Locked Room

STEPHEN HAZAN ARNOFF

As I turned to the story of my old friend Jonah to write this essay, I returned to a recording of a rock opera I composed more than a decade ago: *The Tale of A Boy Who Would Be King*. What grabbed me about Jonah when I first wrote the music still grabs me now: Within the cacophony of rough-edged, quick-tempered, hyper-poetic voices of the prophets, Jonah is and always will be unusual. What makes him unusual is also what makes Jonah a compelling and fresh model for young people.

As the great teenager of the biblical narrative, Jonah wants to slam the door in the face of authority and responsibility. His judgment of the world around him (and within him) strikes not only at mere mortals, like the judgments of so many other prophets, or at God, like those of a special few of his prophetic peers. Rather, Jonah grits his teeth and furrows his brow and shakes his fist at the perceived folly of both humans and God. He sees injustice everywhere, and it makes him furious, sullen, and exhausted — just like a teen.

Jonah complains about his boss, his role, and the people he has been asked to serve. Then, he throws himself into the deeps of the ocean, where human and divine hypocrites can never bother him again. And then, locked

in his room — the belly of a great fish — with the door slammed watertight behind him, he starts to understand that if he ceases to blame others for his plight and if he acknowledges that he can change his own destiny, his sense of his own power and purpose will increase.

When Jonah emerges from his locked room and is released to the shore, he may be calmer and stronger because of his time alone, but the world around him hasn't changed. His responsibilities are the same: Nineveh awaits and God is still in charge. But rather than running away, Jonah is ready to assume his matured identity and the task before him.

Teens thrive when they have opportunities to pour their sense of injustice and a bit of "this is the most important thing that ever happened to me" grandeur into a mission or project — the *Sturm und Drang* of friendship, of course, but also sports, the school newspaper, a play, or work with a team of peers. Indeed, in recent years we have seen a dramatic rise in teen social justice work and philanthropy. Teens seem to be built for immersion in projects that feel as if they contain the entire world within them.

But, of course, Jonah's lesson, just like that of any teen, is more complicated. Teams *continued on next page*


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lose, friendships fade, and lines of a play get flubbed. The passion that engages a teen does not always translate well to the rest of the world — be it fashion or music or a great plan to change the world. Part of the joy of being a teen is creating one's own bubble, even when the realities of the outside world want to burst it. It is God who is the obvious choice to play the "heavy" in sharing this hard truth, calling out Jonah at the end of the story for presuming to understand things the way they really are.

So much of teen life is about struggling for autonomy and control in a world that requires an artful balance between the individual and the larger community, between destiny and free will, and what "I" want and what "you" want. Part of the beauty of Jonah is that, despite all of his ups and downs, his ins and

outs, the ultimate lesson of the story remains open and unresolved. It is very much like a parable, meant to be heard and reflected upon long after its telling is done.

When I listen to Jonah, I learn about the complexities of being an individual who wants to be of use to the community. I learn that fiery indignation and expectation need not be extinguished by the imperfection of the people and places the dreamer carries within.

This lesson makes Jonah a wonderful choice to read on Yom Kippur as penitents emerge from internal reflection to the realities of the mundane world. It is also a profound story for understanding the imperfect, frustrating, and beautiful passion and power that teens show as they strive to create themselves and be in the world. 

## Jonah and the Multiverse

HOWARD SMITH

Yom Kippur is about *teshuvah* — the possibility of repentance and the exercise of free will. Jonah ran from God's instruction because he believed in *teshuvah*, and — according to the rabbis — because he did not want the people of Nineveh to repent and thereby embarrass Israel. Unlike events of nature, which are prescribed by physical laws, human actions are free; they are not predetermined. Shockingly, the turning point of the story of Jonah — his admission of guilt — does not come as he asserts his free will but the opposite, when he realizes that the free course of nature has been constrained by the sailors' casting of lots. What must Jonah have thought when against all odds he picked up that short stick? Uh-oh: Random events are not accidents. A sailor's ritual, a game of chance, has marked him. God's hand is in everything! Jonah is not free to flee.

The motif of chance resonates throughout Yom Kippur. In the morning, we hear about the "lots" used in the high priest's selection of the goat for Azazel. And Hasidim note that even the sound of the name, "Yom K'Purim," alludes to lots ("*purim*"), and to the mysteries that define the seemingly opposite holiday of Purim in which God remains hidden.

Atheists and pantheists believe that all events are determined by the laws of nature.

Most scientists, perhaps most *Sh'ma* readers as well, would also agree. Known laws (and the laws of nature are known) can be used to predict future results. When a system is complicated, however — for example, because trillions and trillions of atoms are jostling around — its evolution is too hard to calculate exactly, and we rely on statistical analyses to compute the most probable outcome. But the most probable outcome may not be the actual outcome. The result, though predetermined, is a chance (random) event.

The behavior of chance — the occurrence of one choice from many possibilities — has assumed remarkable new significance in modern science. A feature of our universe acknowledged universally by physicists, the Anthropic Principle, states that the universe is perfectly adapted to nurture intelligent life. If any of the physical parameters of the cosmos — for example the speed of light, the charge on the electron, the strength of gravity, the size of Planck's constant, or the details of the big bang creation — differed in value even slightly from what they actually are, we could not exist. There is no known reason why the physical constants should take the values they have — or, indeed, why they should take any particular values. All possible numbers are equally likely. So why do they have these numbers that

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