

Jonah, Ivri Anochi

- Nisson Shulman.

Rabbi David Hollander's thought, that Jonah's answer, Ivri Anochi, is the response to anti-Semites down through the ages who are on that ship

JONAH: IVRI ANOCHI

(Based on a sermon by Rabbi David Hollander with some changes)

Dear Friends,

Remember the story of Jonah, which we read at Mincha? Not the spectacular part we all remember so well about the whale swallowing Jonah, but the early part about the storm. And not literally as the words seem to give it, but reading behind the words, interpreting the story of Jonah for our time, because our Rabbis saw in Jonah a Jew for every period of Jewish history, a Jew for all time.

The story tells that Jonah took passage on a ship. He isn't on the upper deck. He isn't even in second class. He is BEYARKETAI HASFINAH; in the steerage; the cheapest part of the boat, the very bowels of the ship.

Suddenly comes a furious storm. The ship reaches a crisis; OMEDET LEHISHABER. It is about to be dashed to pieces.

The Captain and the officers of the ship frantically search for someone on whom to blame the storm. All the passengers on the upper decks escape their attention. The Captain's eye falls on Jonah the Jew. He is hauled up on deck from the bowels of the ship, and they ask him a series of questions.

"Tell us now, you who has caused this distress, what is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? To what people do you belong?"

What does Jonah answer to all these questions? IVRI ANOCHI. "I am a Hebrew." ET HASHEM ELOKEY HASHAMAYIM ANI YARE. "And I fear the One God."

Jonah! Why don't you answer the questions? They asked you about your occupation, your country, your people, and you answer that you are an Ivri who fears God? The answer is that he is answering the questions, and correctly. He is saying: "Gentlemen: Let us stop beating around the bush. You aren't interested in my occupation, where I come from.... All you want to know is who I am. So I'll make it easy for you. I AM A JEW. I AM A HEBREW. IVRI. Ivri means different, like Abraham HAIVRI, Abraham the different one. Like Abraham, I am different. Even if the whole world were on one side, I am on the other. I would be steadfast in my difference. My values, my philosophy, my outlook on life, are diametrically opposed to yours. And that's why you don't like me. You even fear me. And when there is a crisis, you are trying to put the blame on me.

But I warn you. You may not like my philosophy. And you may overwhelm me by your numbers. But I want you to know that I have a powerful ally. I have a God. True, there are times when, for His reasons, He turns away from us. But even when that happens, it is only temporary. Ultimately, we are under HIS protection, not yours.

That is the early part of the story of Jonah. But isn't it also the story we read in the headlines today?

The ships of State of the world, OMEDET LEHISHABER. States are shuddering and many are breaking up, struck by crisis after crisis, storm after storm; political storms, economic storms, revolutions, civil wars, religious wars and even attempts at genocide, especially terrorism striking deadly fear into even otherwise fearless hearts.

Captains and officers of the ship look around to see who is responsible. On the ship there are very important passengers. Mr. Hamas, Mr. Fatah, Mr. Iran, Mr. Arafat, Mr. Saudi Arabia, Mr. Al Queda, Mr. Assad, Mr. Anti-Semite. Of course, none of them could possibly be connected with the crisis of peace in the Middle East, with the economic storms that threaten nations and their security, with civil wars. Only Jonah, occupying a little strip of geography in the Middle East with perhaps four million people, he must be the obstacle to peace!

All of them are in First Class cabins, with plenty of money; passages bought with oil wealth, with threats and terrorist posturing, passages bought with money tainted with Nazi connections, passages bought by inspiring fear of terror attacks.

If there is a betrayal of his own people by Arafat, if rockets fall on peaceful towns, if busses blow up, even if the World Trade Center is destroyed, if there is any terrorist bombing, blame Jonah! If there is an outbreak of attacks against Jews in France, Amsterdam or Antwerp, our first reaction is, "will they blame Jonah?" If there is a religious leader of half the world who refuses to recognize Jonah, it isn't because he stays away from controversy or because he hasn't made up his mind, for he had before embraced Arafat when Arafat was still a persona grata. It is because Jonah is Jonah, the IVRI, the different one, and that religious leader cannot stand the difference!

Poor Vanunu, now out of jail, elicits the sympathy of the world, but Pollard in years of solitary confinement receives nothing. Pollard defended Jonah the IVRI by giving up to Israel the State Secret that Sadaam Hussein had rockets capable of carrying poison gas; that was espionage and deserved a life sentence, but when Vanunu tells about Jonah's attempts to defend himself, that is an expression of conscience, and to be commended, rewarded with sympathy and praise, because he was only betraying Jonah. If there are no goods on shelves because of a country's lethargy or corruption, if states insist on labeling supermarket products "Produced in Israel" in order to harm her economy, if Arabs bring destruction on their own economy by forcing Israel to keep them out of the country and the jobs they need because they insist on homicide bombing, it's Jonah's fault, and not because Jonah is dangerous, but because Jonah is different! So that the accusations may sound ludicrous, but all of them really mean one thing: "You Jew, you are different. You don't belong."

And we answer, IVRI ANOCHI. "Yes, we are different, and we are proud of this difference, even if it means that you expect so much of the Jew that he may not do what anyone else can do. When the best of people judge us with a different and tilted standard, reserved only for Jews, we are aware that it is because IVRI ANOCHI! And the worst of people invoke a picture of a vague and shadowy presence they conceive as special to the Jewish people, a specter which had been created by the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" which pictures Jews with a diabolical international power. So that the enemy preys upon this suspicion when it exploits the Jewish lobby in Washington, accuses them of betrayal of our United States, or describes the Jewish businessmen in New York or London as ruining these countries with their economic power. Because we are different!

And we are different! IVRIM ANACHNU!

We read about a policy of "ethnic cleansing" in certain countries in Africa and Europe, a euphemism for mass murder, and I remember, as I am sure you do, how Khoumeni killed 17,000 Iranians, his own people, in a few weeks. I remember the Hama massacre of Iraq's murder of more than 10,000 of its citizens. I remember atrocities in Kuwait, and scud missiles aimed at population centers. And I bear in mind that after 56 years of the State of Israel and the constant threats under which they continue to live, Israel has still not given the death penalty to even one terrorist they have captured; Yes, to prevent terrorism they target murderers seeking to do murder, but when captured alive, no matter how brutal their crimes, no matter that they are from an enemy people sworn to our destruction, no matter that their continued life behind bars in Israel poses an additional terrorist threat each day, from their fellow terrorists bent on terrorizing Israel into letting them go. We are ready, to let scores go if they would embrace peace, but the world will not recognize this, because we are different, IVRIM ANACHNU!

Almost every leader in the world, travels through Europe as well as America in a special bullet proof car to guard against assassination. So does the Pope representing the religion of peace and turn the other cheek. In Italy judge after judge is brutally murdered by families of thugs seeking to rule that country and even parts of the world. Death stalks the streets of most capitols of the world, because political assassination is an every-day occurrence. Genocide is taking place in North Africa. But of course they will condemn Israel's pre-emptive attacks on masterminds of terror, because IVRIM ANACHNU, WE ARE DIFFERENT.

Yes, it is true that Jews have on occasion violated national territorial boundaries. But for what purpose, with what motives, and in what way?

In 1961 we violated Argentine territory to capture Eichmann and bring to justice one of the most infamous mass murderers in the history of mankind.

In 1976 we violated the territory of Uganda to rescue 100 Jews at Entebbe, saving them from almost sure death, for they had already been separated from all the other hostages who had been released, in an Auschwitz like selection.

In 1981 we destroyed the nuclear facility in Iraq, on a Sunday, when no one was to be there, to rescue future generations of Jews from atomic destruction.

In 1987 we captured Vanunu, who was while at large in the rest of the world, the greatest single threat to Israel's security.

How then shall we - who proudly with Jonah declare Ivri Anochi - how shall we retain this uniqueness this special character that gives us so much pride?

After all, what made us different in the past? What gave us this pride and this strength of character? Certainly not genetics! Why is it that after a few generations you frequently find that children can be empty of all Jewishness, and hardly different from those around them?

When today we suffer anti-Semitism, or are treated with prejudice, a Jew has two choices. He could say he doesn't want to pay the price. He can escape easily through assimilation. Many did this in Germany before the war, only to find that when Hitler came, even if they were 1/8th Jewish there was no escape after all. The other choice is to seek the road to Jewish pride. What is that road?

Chauvinistic nationalistic pride is not enough! Because otherwise, we would be no different than the Chechins, Bosnians, Croates, Iraqis, Iranians, or the Arabs! We are different because, ET HAELOKIM ANI YARE, WE FEAR GOD, We have His Torah! He gave us commandments to make us better people, not only more faithful Jews, mitzvos to temper us and improve us, and that will only work if we take them to heart, if we apply them, if we learn the lesson of Neilah; and in this way we can become more moral, more ethical, more pious, more disciplined.

We all know that even just being in this synagogue building is not enough, for we come to learn from this place, the message of Torah and Yiddishkeit, For Jewish children who are not taught and exposed to Jewish life and the Jewish spirit as found in the Torah will not gain this Jewish pride!

If we are concerned about the values our children learn and copy, if we worry whether our children will have Jewish pride in twenty-five years from now, we must do something about it because they surely will not absorb it from our blood!

There are many ways, but I suggest that learning our faith and our heritage is the most important way, and that is the most important Neilah resolve we can make; to learn even more Torah this year! Your fathers and grandfathers had visions of greatness before them, because they saw in the home and street how Jews were different and how they lived their proud heritage. Will your children have such examples and such pictures before them, pictures of Jewish behavior, Torah study, Jewish commitment, charity and kindness, and especially the example that their own parents are studying Torah, and not forsaking it? Only if you show them that example. And only if you do will they begin to appreciate what the declaration IVRI ANOCHI really means!

Let us this day face tomorrow bravely. Let us do what we can to win friends and influence people, always with pride and in the spirit of the declaration IVRIM ANAHNU, relying with confidence on E---Y HASHAMAYIM, who alone we must revere and worship, faithfully follow, and upon whom alone we can well and safely rely. And let us learn our heritage, and give

the example to our neighbors and children, of Jews who are proud of their tradition, Jews who are indeed the people of the book, and who seek to learn it, because IVRIM ANACHNU, We are different, and we are proud of it. And in this merit, God will bless you and yours in the coming year and in future years, AMEN VEAMEN.