

The rabbis were the greatest programmers of all time, affixing readings and designing observances in a way which had and continues to have great meaning for us, to the point where we're continually noticing new aspects of the texts and the rituals each time they come around.

The *prima facie* reason they picked Jonah for Yom Kippur seems pretty clearly to have been the way, in chapter 3, the Ninevites fast and are forgiven. We're fasting, and we hope to be forgiven, so it's a clear connection. But I think the deeper wisdom of assigning Jonah as the haftarah for Yom Kippur is that each of its four chapters, each very different from the others, exemplify different spiritual moments, each of which we might well find ourselves inhabiting in a given year.

In Chapter 1, it's this: "God wanted me to do something for Him, and I ran away." Surely we can all relate to that. In Chapter 2, Jonah is stuck in deep darkness, without hope, and he calls out to God - surely we have all felt that at times too. And in Chapter 4, with God having forgiven the Ninevites, Jonah nevertheless petulantly sets himself up to watch their destruction anyway, and then God sends a gourd to shield him from the sun, and then kills it, and Jonah whines about that too. I think all of us, at some time or other, have also found ourselves, in the midst of privilege, whining about it all the same.

Chapter 3 appears to be different, in that it's focused not on Jonah but on the Ninevites and their fasting and repentance and God's forgiveness, but I think it has a spiritual moment for us as well. It's a huge city, described as three days' journey, and it's not clear what that could mean - the archeological site of Ninevah is only about 8 miles in circumference. But whatever - it feels to Jonah like a huge city, and Jonah enters having finally mobilized his courage, ready to do his thing. But he has only walked into it as far as one day's journey, and he has only said that one sentence - "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed" - and the people respond right away, the king gets down off this throne right away, they get into sackcloth and ashes, they all fast, and God forgives them. That's all Jonah does - he doesn't get very deep into the city at all, and he just says the one thing, and bam - all that happens.

I think the spiritual moment of Chapter 3, then, is to not dismiss your small actions. It's easy to think: Puny me and my tiny little effect on the world. But the story is telling us that even very small actions can have big effects. So don't diss your little contribution: your vote, your letter to the editor, your helping someone out in some small way, your helping the proverbial little old lady across the street, your giving \$25 to some good cause. Whatever it is that you can contribute, don't diss it as small - it can still have a huge effect.