# Jonah and the Whale

06/26/16

Jonah 2:10 *So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land*.

The story of Jonah and the whale has always been a captivating story, especially for children. The idea that a man could live in the belly of a whale and be spit out to tell the tale...how fantastic is that?!

As we grow older, and enjoy some life experience, we start to become more doubtful of the story’s authenticity. We learn that according to the Hebrew translation, Jonah was swallowed by a “large aquatic animal”; they didn’t use the word whale. Perhaps they didn’t have a word for whale, so they called it a large aquatic animal. Perhaps when they saw a whale spewing its foam, they would say, “Look there. That large aquatic animal and its young are breaching.” We spend so much time wondering about the details that we miss the meaning in the story.

I am not here to discuss the story’s authenticity. I personally believe that God moves in mysterious ways. If Spirit wants to save me from some tragedy by sending a whale, I’m down for that! What I do want to share are some spiritual insights - deeper meanings - about the story and how it can relate to our lives, and the choices we make.

So the story goes: God says to Jonah, “Arise and go to Nineveh and tell them that if they don’t change their ways, I’m going to destroy their city.”

Nineveh was an Assyrian city built by Asshur. The people of Nineveh were not willfully wicked; they only awaited spiritual instruction. They were good people, growing outwardly, growing intellectually, just spiritually ignorant. The hustle and bustle of a large city reflects our egoistic mind and the thousands of daily busy thoughts, which anchor us to the physical world. If our thoughts are not centered in spirit, our outer development may result in excessive materiality. This was the direction Nineveh was moving towards and God wanted to correct them; so he called upon the prophet Jonah.

The way Jonah saw the people of Nineveh, however, was that they were evil. They didn’t listen to God, and deserved to be punished. So on the one hand, Jonah was anxious to see God give them their just due. After all, he saw what they were doing and saying, and surely, God should punish them.

In a sense, Jonah represents that part of our individual consciousness that seeks justice by judging and condemning without mercy or saving grace. Love and mercy do not enter into this perspective of justice and Truth.

Have you ever felt like that? So and so deserves what they get. After all, the Law of Karma demands compensation. We reap what we sow; Cause and Effect, that’s how God works. That is so Jonah.

But on the other hand, Jonah knew that God was a forgiving God. He might just forgive them and nothing would happen to them. They would get off Scott-free, without punishment. Jonah thought that this great city didn’t deserve the attentions of God. He may have been afraid for his own safety, since it was a long journey. He had also prophesied plenty among his own people, with little results. How could he have any impact on such a huge city as Nineveh? Many things probably went through his mind.

So when God told Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh, Jonah did one of these… (put hands over both ears and go la-la-la…) I can’t hear you. And he ran away from God, and abandoned his mission for him. He wanted to run to Tarshish, one of the most remote places he could go; as far away from God as possible.

I know how Jonah felt; I’ve felt like that myself. Maybe you have too. We feel the nudge from God to forgive ourselves or someone else, our intuition guides us to love, we hear that “still small voice” and then what we hear scares us so much, or demands so much from us that we ignore it and run away.

That’s what happened to poor old Jonah. He gets on a boat to sail to Tarshish, when a horrible storm comes upon them. Haven’t we had storms in our lives after we’ve made some poor choices? He tried to hide from God, but of course, that was a silly attempt.

The Bible author tells us that Jonah was sound asleep on the ship as the sea raged and nearly broke it apart. This seems unlikely until we realize that to be asleep meant to be ignorant of God’s presence within us; to be enshrouded by our ego and residing in our lower nature.

Everything was against Jonah at this point. When they drew straws, of course Jonah lost. Although the sailors refused to throw him overboard at first, Jonah said it was the only thing they could do. So they did, and immediately the storm stopped.

Jonah had stopped thinking about himself and started thinking about the sailors. He knew that the storms were there because of him. So he needed to think of their safety. There comes a turning point in our own thinking when we stop thinking about ourselves, caught up in our negative, self-centered righteousness, and think of the people we are affecting. We can take responsibility for our actions and the results that follow. If we can reach that point, we can stop the tempests.

The people who were involved with the storms and experienced Jonah’s act of selflessness were greatly affected, and opened their hearts to God. When we live our lives without the small self and maintain a balanced ego, we positively affect those around us.

Jonah was thrown overboard into the sea, which represents our subconscious, or the great raging collective consciousness. He was then swallowed by the whale, big fish, or large aquatic animal. This represents our willingness to accept ideas of increase and promise. The whale represents our surrender and enforced silence so that the soul can search itself and realign with Spirit. Jonah remained there for three days – which is Bible-speak for being whatever time necessary to attain the unity of our human and divine natures.

During those three days Jonah had time to be still and know God. He recognizes his erred thinking and recommitted his faith in God. By correcting his thinking and heart, he was “delivered” – that is, spit out upon dry land. It was really a ‘resurrection’ experience for Jonah; being raised from his lower human nature to his higher spiritual understanding.

The Christ referred to this in Matthew 12:39-40*: “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*.

So through prayer and meditation, Jonah emerges from his internment with a new understanding, a growing consciousness.

But he hadn’t attained a full awareness of God yet. God says again, arise and go to Nineveh and preach to them as I tell you. Despite Jonah’s error thinking in the past, God gives him another shot at it. This time he says “ok”.

He makes the three day walk to Nineveh and tell them that in 40 days their city will be overthrown. There was a part of Jonah that feels good about that prophecy: At last, they would receive their just punishment. But the Ninevites received the message, became enlightened, made the proper atonement to God, and God forgive them, just as Jonah had feared.

This angers Jonah, because a part of him still thinks they deserve to be punished for their erred way of thinking and not be forgiven. He seems to forget that God forgave him for his missteps. He goes to the edge of the city to have a pity party, and says it is better he die than live in the shame of being a false prophet. He figured if he preached Cause and Effect, and if it didn’t happen, then he was looked on as a fake. He was still stuck in the “It’s all-about-me” mind set.

Jonah is resolved to be miserable. He creates a booth of boughs, because he still expects that God may destroy the city, so a house would tumble onto his head. He is still exposed to heat and wind for the 40 days.

And it gets hot. So 40 days come and go, and Jonah must be beside himself with self-torture and self-recrimination. God causes a gourd to grow and create additional shade for him. Jonah is very happy to have this comfort, and values its worth. Yet, still he does not acknowledge God or show his appreciation to God for his blessing.

Seeing this, God has a tiny worm destroy the plant the next day. Such a tiny distraction can remove our comfort and peace when we are not aligned with God. The worm of unappreciation is such a destructive force in our lives.

So Jonah whines on, and claims he has reason to be “angry, even unto death”. When people have made up their minds to complain, they always will be given plenty to complain about.

After additional whining, finally, in the book of Jonah: ***4:10-11: The Lord said to him, "This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next; you didn't do anything for it and you didn't make it grow—yet you feel sorry for it! How much more, then, should I have pity on Nineveh, that great city. After all, it has more than 120,000 innocent children in it, as well as many animals!"***

And here the story stops. We can only imagine that Jonah, after this rebuke sees the error in his thinking and is pleased that God has spared scores of thousands of lives through His mercy and compassion. Or perhaps he just dies angry. We don’t know what happens to Jonah.

Whenever we are predicting gloom and doom, and can only see failure, bad luck, or ill, we are expressing our Jonah-nature. Although the Law of Cause and Effect may be alive and well, so is the Love, Mercy, and Grace of God. Our errors do not necessarily have to be followed by an equal and opposite result. If we are aligned with the Holy Spirit, attuned by sitting in the belly of the whale, or in our closet as we are instructed in Matthew 6:6, we can avoid being Jonah, “angry, even unto death”.

By embracing our Christ-nature, our suffering receives forgiveness and our soul receives compassion. My prayer is that we can be still and hear Christ whisper to our hearts: “Come to me, you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Let us pray….