

The Prophet Yunus (Jonah), pbuh

The story of the Prophet Yunus (pbuh), known in biblical tradition as Jonah, is a profound narrative of divine mercy and the power of sincere repentance. Jonah's story, recounted in the Qur'an, provides a timeless lesson on the consequences of hastiness, the depths of God's compassion, and the enduring power of a prayer uttered in the darkest of circumstances.

In Islam, the profound respect for all prophets is a core tenet rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an, which consistently honors them and narrates their true stories.

According to the Qur'an, prophets were divinely chosen from the purest of lineages and endowed with the highest moral integrity. They are considered infallible and free from sins, serving as the most exemplary models for humanity. This distinction and purity are a significant reason for the deep reverence Muslims are commanded to hold for every prophet. Consequently, the Qur'an rectifies accounts found in other scriptures, exonerating them from any misdeeds or blunders and upholding their sublime status as God's chosen messengers.

It is essential to understand that Islam commands deep respect and reverence for all the prophets, without exception. In the Qur'an, each prophet is mentioned with honor, and speaking ill of any prophet is strictly forbidden. A core principle of Islamic faith is to hold every prophet sent by God in high

esteem, meaning that one cannot truly be considered a Muslim if they insult, belittle, or harbor negative thoughts about any of the prophets.

Jonah (pbuh) was sent to the people of Nineveh, near modern-day Mosul, Iraq. Jonah (pbuh) called his people to worship the One True God, urging them to abandon idolatry and forsake all others they associated with Him. He exhorted them to heed the divine message and return to righteousness, but they remained defiant, entrenched in disbelief and arrogance. Despite his tireless preaching, his people persisted in their rejection, mocking his warnings and refusing to reform themselves.

Overwhelmed by their stubbornness and believing his mission had reached a dead end, Jonah, in a moment of frustration, departed from his people after warning that divine punishment would descend upon them in three days. He left without God's permission, a choice that set the stage for a great ordeal for him, but ultimately became a testament to the transformative power of repentance.

Upon seeing the signs of the promised torment, people were seized by panic and remorse. A terrifying black cloud began to descend upon them. They realized the truth of Jonah's warning and were overcome with fear. In a remarkable and unique act of collective repentance, they rushed to turn to God in humility and supplication. They tore off their gar-



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ments, dressed in coarse sackcloth, and separated their livestock from their young, creating a scene of widespread wailing and desperate cries. Men, women, and children raised their voices in heartfelt pleas for forgiveness. In that moment of collective sincerity, God, in His boundless mercy, lifted the impending punishment that had almost reached them. The Qur'an attests to the unique nature of their faith: **"If only there were one town that believed and benefited by its belief. Except for the people of Jonah. When they believed, We lifted from them the suffering of disgrace in this worldly life, and We gave them enjoyment for a while."** (Quran 10:98).

Their faith was a rare exception.

Unaware of what happened to his people, Jonah (pbuh) embarked on his fateful journey. He took passage on a ship laden with cargo. The ship sailed into the turbulent sea that threatened to capsize it under the weight of its cargo and the fury of the waves. Fearing that a fugitive slave was aboard, the sailors decided to cast lots, believing that the one on whom the lot fell was the cause of the storm and should be thrown overboard to

appease the sea. They drew lots three times, and every time it fell upon Jonah, a testament to the divine will at play. The Quran describes this momentous event: **"And indeed, Yunus (Jonah) was among the messengers. When he ran away to the laden ship, and he drew lots and was among the losers. And the whale swallowed him while he was blameworthy."** (Quran 37:139-142).

The moment he was cast into the water, a massive whale, sent by God, appeared and swallowed him whole. However, this was not the end of his story, but the beginning of his most profound journey. God commanded the whale: **"Do not eat his flesh, nor break his bones, for he is not your sustenance."** Inside the belly of the immense sea creature, Jonah was alive. He realized he was in the belly of the whale. In this state of utter isolation and distress, Jonah heard whales praising God, so he turned to God, calling out with a prayer that has since become a source of hope for all believers in times of hardship. His supplication was not a desperate demand for rescue, but a humble admission of his own fault and a glorification of God. He called out: **"There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."** (Quran 21:87).

It was a cry of submission from the deepest confines of the earth's waters, a sound that ascended to the heavens. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: **"When**

Allah wanted to confine Yunus in the belly of the whale, He revealed to the whale, 'Take him, but do not scratch his flesh or break his bones.' And when he reached the bottom of the sea, Yunus heard a sound. He said to himself, 'What is this?' Then Allah revealed to him, 'This is the praise of the creatures of the sea.' And so he praised Allah, and the angels heard his praise and interceded for him."

The duration of his stay in the whale's belly is not known. Regardless of the exact time, the ordeal was a test of Jonah's (pbuh) faith. The Qur'an confirms that had it not been for his consistent submission to God before (and after) his ordeal, he would have remained in the whale's belly until the Day of Judgment. **"And had he not been of those who glorify [Allah], he would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected."** (Quran 37:143-144).

In His infinite mercy, Allah commanded the whale to cast Jonah onto the shore. He was thrown onto an empty, barren land in a state of extreme weakness and illness. The Quran describes him as **"ill,"** a man so frail he was likened to a newborn chick without feathers. To protect him from the sun and provide him sustenance, God caused a gourd vine to grow over him. The leaves of the gourd plant are large and smooth, providing excellent shade and protection from insects, and its fruit is nourishing. Furthermore, God sent a wild doe that would come

to him and give him milk, ensuring his sustenance as he recovered. This act of divine kindness is for those who turn to Him in repentance.

After his recovery, Jonah went back to his people. The Quran says he was sent to **"a hundred thousand or more."** To his surprise, Jonah found that all his people had embraced faith (Islam).

The power of prayer, repentance, and submission to God is the legacy of the Prophet Jonah's story. His supplication is a prayer for all believers in times of deep distress and despair.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) affirmed its universal power when he said: **"The invocation of my brother Yunus (Jonah), 'There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers,' no Muslim man (or woman) supplicates with it for anything but Allah (God) will respond to him."** This prayer is a powerful reminder that turning to Allah in humility and acknowledging His greatness are the keys to his mercy and forgiveness. It is a prayer that promises not only deliverance from worldly distress but also from the spiritual anguish of sin.

The story of Jonah (pbuh), a man of great resolve, shows that no matter how dire the circumstances, the doors of God's compassion are always open.

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