

"WHAT MAKE AND MODEL IS MY KIKAYON?"

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Jonah had gone out of the city, and had stationed himself on the east of the city, and there he made himself a hut and sat under it in the shade until he would see what would happen in the city. Now HASHEM appointed a Kikayon, and it grew up over Jonah to be shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort, and Jonah was overjoyed with the Kikayon. Now HASHEM appointed a worm at the rise of dawn on the morrow, and the worm attacked the Kikayon, and it withered. Now it came to pass when the sun shone, that G-d appointed a stilling east wind, and the sun beat on Jonah's head, and he fainted, and he begged to die, and he said, "My death is better than my life." And God said to Jonah; "Are you very grieved about the Kikayon?" And he said, "I am very grieved even to death." And HASHEM said: "You took pity on the Kikayon, for which you did not toil nor did you make it grow, which one night came into being and the next night perished. Now should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are many more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?" (Yona 4:5-11)

What an odd and almost anticlimactic ending to the Book of Yona. The prophet tries to dodge his designated mission, for whatever reason, by running away on a ship, which lands him in a storm tossed at sea where he is swallowed by a big fish. Eventually he saves the day in Ninveh and after his plant dies he is rebuked for being overly grief stricken about the Kikayon. I never got this whole business with the plant. What is it meant to teach? For what grand good is the Kikayon strategically placed right there ready to be read before the last hours of Yom Kippur?

I am thinking about two different approaches to this overgrown glorified house plant. One is the point of view of Yona and the other has to do with the perspective, if we can say so, of The Almighty. How could a Prophetic personality, a spiritual giant get so attached to a piece of flora and fauna? There is a universal appeal here, because if it true about Yona, it must be equally applicable to the likes of you and me of the world.

I once shared with a group of prisoners something I had read in a nature magazine. It described the methodology employed by hunters in South America for capturing monkeys. They hollow out a coconut and put rice inside. Then they place it in a clearing. The unwitting monkey finds the prize and squeezes his hand into the perfectly calibrated hole to grasp the rice. Holding the rice in his fist the monkey quickly discovers that he cannot remove his hand from the hole anymore and he cannot figure out how to access the rice without opening his hand. While he is there contemplating his

quandary the net comes over his head and he's trapped. When the prisoners heard this they all broke into spontaneous laughter. I was surprised. So I asked them, "What's so funny?" One fellow answered, "That's how we all got here!" They all laughed again.

We are all concerned about lofty things, like World Jewry, peace on earth, health and happiness, education of children, safety and security for our people and all of humanity. It's wonderful and awe inspiring just how much idealism and good will there really is in the hearts of many good people. Yet we are capable of getting stuck with our hand in the coconut.

If our car gets a nick or we get a ticket we just might grieve more intensely than if we hear that a Tsunami swept away an entire island. Are we cruel hearted? Are our values twisted? No! We just got stuck on the small and less important. We find ourselves possessed by our possessions, and possibly loving our cell phones or cars as a mate. What's the cure? Here we are treated to an object lesson in this most teachable moment. As much as we are capable of becoming attached to things we have invested so little in, HASHEM is more devoted and concerned for His handy work than we can ever possibly imagine. That realization shrinks the Kikayon back to proportion. Now, as we bathe in His loving gaze, we can all ponder privately, **"What make and model is my Kikayon?"** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.