



This talk of Jonah's miraculous escape triggered the lumber merchant to confess. He said that in fact he was an acquaintance of the prophet, and told them the truth about Jonah - everything he remembered about him including his being a true prophet of some Hebrew god and his eventually being eaten by a godlike whale, which, he added, was white, and declared that if he could come out of the whale in the ocean alive, it would have been a piece of cake for him to come out of a sealed statue of any god, if his almighty god in heaven had so desired.

This last remark caused the lumber merchant to be nearly arrested by plain-clothed temple policemen, who were among the listeners, on account of his blasphemy to the fish-god Dagon. He barely escaped imprisonment after showing the letter from the king and bribing them sizably.

That evening the lumber merchant searched Jonah, asking people whereabouts of the prophet that smelt fishy. Everyone with a knowing look directed him in wrong directions, and eventually a night watch, after taking much money from him, took him in outskirts of the city, and the prophet was found praying in a cave hewn out in a rock to be used as a tomb for a wealthy man. The merchant urged him to escape from Nineveh with him before it was destroyed. Jonah disagreed. So the merchant quitted the city alone at dawn, without settling what could have been lucrative business with the king.

This incident did not fail to bring about a consequence. Although people did not believe what the foreign merchant had said, they had to believe what the Dagon worshipper had said, and they loved to gossip the stories, especially those who hated the fish-god Dagon; and the rumor of Jonah's miracles rose like an early spring wind the next day. The fact that he smelled so fishy was well-explained by the whale-related rumor, and they added that the strangeness of his face color was caused by the bleaching effect of the whale's gastric juice. Soon Jonah was a hero. But this did not mean that people started to repent.

However, no sooner had the citizens learnt that the lumber merchant, the source of the whale rumor, was no longer found in the city and probably left it in secrecy without receiving a leave from the king, than the Ninevites at last began to feel uncomfortable and suspect what the merchant had said was not entirely untrue including Jonah's being actually a true prophet of some "living" god.

A shabby man walking throughout the city, everyday unflinchingly intoning the same

prophecy of Nineveh' s destruction but for Ninevites' repentance, at the door of every house and to everyone he met on the street, and meaningfully dropping a pebble each day from his bag, began to scare the people, who knew they were over bad.

Jonah's sandals were worn-out and his toe nails had dark reddish color owing to internal bleeding. On earlier days, Jonah chanted with a loud strong voice with forceful gesture, but now he got weaker and his gesture disappeared, and slowly his voice got husky and finally was hard to hear unless one was close enough to him to experience the unbearable smell. He now had to use a stick for walking. The fewer were the pebbles in his bag each day, the heavier did he feel it nonetheless.

But it was when Jonah's voice at last lost sound that people began to repent their sins. On the morning of the yet-three-pebble day, as Jonah was prophesying, suddenly his voice stopped coming out, but he kept moving his lips, and a man who had been listening to Jonah began pronouncing what Jonah had been repeating. It was as if this man were a ventriloquist and Jonah a puppet chanting the prophecy:

"Fellow citizens of Nineveh, listen;

And hear the Almighty God caution!

Fear Him and drop wrongdoings.

Repent of sins and stop evildoings.

For if we ever continue our sinful ways,

He shall exterminate our city in three days!"

Thereafter, repenters came to Jonah one after another, and as they walked with him, Jonah did not lack ventriloquists who gave voices to his voiceless lips.

By the noon of the yet-two-pebble day, the chanting group was divided into increasing number of sub-groups. Then an inventive citizen made a wooden placard on which he wrote Jonah' s prophecy, and each group made a few placards after it, and they carried them throughout the city. The placards attracted many because of their novelty although most citizens were unable to read. The whole city was in confusion. Crowds thronged main streets and gathered at each public plaza, though most of them yet did not know what they had come for. Some were shouting one thing and others another.

Gradually, the words on the placards were put in the mouths of the people, and the city was echoed with the chants of Jonah's prophecy. Some started fasting, others whitened their bodies with ashes and put on sackcloth, and prayed for pardon.

Those who were seen in the middle of wrongdoing were soon surrounded by a crowd who condemned them and demanded repentance. Idols were destroyed and burnt at every major plaza, and some human idols hid underground and others declared they were not gods; and the ritual of child sacrifice was interrupted by people, who threatened to sacrifice instead the priests that conducted the ritual, and thus the priests including the Chief Priest fled from Nineveh.

This revolution in the city caused by Jonah was soon reported to the king. To the royal family, it was a welcome change that people repented and stopped sinning, and lived more like lambs than wolves. However, the people did not live like lambs but surged to the palace and wanted the king to repent too. They brought the placards to the gate of the palace and chanted Jonah's prophecy. The excited crowd seemed to keep staying until and unless the king in person should appear and declare his repentance in front of them.

The king of Nineveh was not slow to anticipate the impending riot, and declared that he too would repent. As the crowd watched, the king took off his royal robe and changed into dark sackcloth and poured ashes from a pot over his head, as he shouted, "I repent! I hereby repent and shall fear the god of Jonah!" The crowd raised a roar of approval.

The ministers and members of the royal family and servants of all the ranks followed the king, repenting loudly, burning their coats, and pouring the ashes of the coats over their heads, and praying to the god of Jonah for pardon and mercy.

On the morning of the yet-one-pebble day, the king of Nineveh proclaimed that all the citizens and their animals should fast and should not even drink water. Then, at the sunset of that day, the king ordered that people should pour ashes over their heads and wear sackcloth and pray all night aloud to the god of Jonah for mercy, swearing they would never do unrighteous things. People obeyed the orders from the palace. On that day, the fishy smell left Jonah's body and his face skin began to recover radiance, although he could not yet recover his voice.

Then, the not-a-pebble day heard many prayers for forgiveness and songs blessing the god

of Jonah, and passed peacefully without taking any mortal's life with it. Hence the song sung by Ninevites those days:

Not a person to the earth fell, oh Jonah,

When not a pebble from your finger fell.

Not an animal to the ground fell, oh Jonah,

When not a pebble from your finger fell.

So, Jonah was successful and fulfilled his mission assigned by God.

The Ninevites, knowing that they were not punished on the fixed day, came to Jonah and worshipped him from a distance. They wished him well, and said "You rescued us. You are our hero, the great pride of us, and the high honor of Nineveh. May you be forever blessed by the heavenly God!"

Then, some, finding that he was no longer smelling, came close to him and bowed at his feet; a barber came with a basin filled with water and washed and trimmed his hair, and another washed his feet with perfumed oil. A skilled cobbler gave him a new pair of sandals he made for him, and a rich family gave him clothes to change in including a fine robe with hood.

At sunset, the order for fasting was lifted, and people gathered round Jonah with wine and food for celebration, and Jonah was given wine and food of choice and was crowned with a laurel. Some women performed a dance for him.

A herald came from the palace, and said that the king wanted Jonah to come to the palace so that he could express his gratitude toward the prophet. The herald let Jonah ride on a donkey he had brought from the palace. Soon a procession was formed with people marching before and behind Jonah, many carrying torches and more shouting, "Jonah, the reviver from a whale! Jonah, the true servant of the true God!"

When someone proposed that they should ask the king to appoint Jonah as the new Chief Priest, the chorus was changed to "Long live Jonah, the new Chief Priest, a prophet begotten by a whale!" People played musical instruments and many danced as the

procession started toward the palace.

However, Jonah was unhappy, and unwilling to do anything, let alone meeting the king.

Jonah thought:

"Did I really desire this? - that the people of Nineveh should be saved from God's punishment? No, I can't say I did. What I desired was to please God. I feared my God and tried to be loyal to Him, and that only because I had realized I could not escape from Him anyhow. Do I love this people of Nineveh? No, I don't. I can't. I can never do so. I can scarcely forget the day when my parents were murdered by the plunderers from this same Nineveh. I thought it lucky that I had bad smell, because the detestable Ninevites did not come too close to me. Without passion for saving the Ninevites, I only tried to methodically carry out God's order on each one of the forty days - and not a single day more. As it were, I was nothing more than a puppet manipulated by God. It did not matter to me whether the people of Nineveh were annihilated or saved. I was only interested in becoming a perfect puppet that dances and chants exactly as God willed.

"There is no doubt about my loving God, for I thank Him for answering my desperate prayers that I uttered from the depths, writhing in that slippery stomach of the whale, with eerie animals swirling about me; and when I was saved, I decided to offer everything left of me to God. And I now have completed my mission with a perfect result. But what is this emptiness, dissatisfaction...this loneliness? Being unable to partake of the joy these men and women are feeling so cheerfully, I certainly have come to have a wooden heart of a puppet. Yes, I am like a puppet that politely bows on the stage at the end of a show toward the cheering, applauding audience; the polite bow however is a mere heartless dipping of the head caused by slackening of a string. A puppet cannot be expected to have a feeling. Thus it is with me too that the joyous cheering of the Ninevites does not excite me, does not warm me at all. Oh, my Lord, Jonah on the run from you was yet a man, but Jonah in Nineveh has been a puppet. Yeah, exactly like that wooden puppet that was swallowed by the whale with me. How he danced nonstop merrily, tossed and twisted by that tumultuous pool of sea animals, without ever stopping that smile!

"Oh, my God, you have saved the crooked Ninevites using me! And you gave them no less than forty days to repent. But you did not even try to warn my father and mother when the plunderers from Nineveh attacked my town and killed my parents with a baby in my mother's womb, while I was watching! Nevertheless, you used me to save the very same Ninevites!...the born villains, rotten to the core! I cannot make head or tail of what you will. Oh, how would I have been proud of myself only if it were some other people

that I helped survive!”

By now Jonah's procession had come in view of the palace and as it got nearer to it the louder the people got. Their chorus lost unison and became a meaningless clamor, their music lost harmony and their dancing became rhythmless, and with that Jonah's loneliness turned to anger.

“Ah, what an irritating din they are making. Oh, God, why are these people making such a hideous noise? Certainly they could thank you in a more peaceful manner...Oh, yes! This is it! The same craziness! I remember they were making exactly the same uproar as this in triumph when they sacked and plundered the town of my birth in Galilee!”

“Oh, you should have done away with this people, as I often have pleaded with you. This people you just saved today will sooner or later relapse into the habit of wrongdoings and barbaric rituals. They'll continue treating the slaves like animals. They will continue executing war prisoners. These people are no longer thinking of you, they are thinking only of themselves. Who knows they might set me up as a new god? Ah, I might as well have gone away with that lumber merchant rather than see this!

“These people are advancing to the palace to have me appointed as the new Chief Priest. But, you will see, my Lord, as soon as the procession is inside the palace, they will cast me aside and start looting the treasures. Look! Some are already at the palace gate and are scrambling for the ornaments hanging from it!

“Oh my God, what a waste of time and labor! It is not yet too late! Do, please, do away with this hateful people soon. I will have gone outside the city by the sunrise. Or else, please do away with me... Ah, what a terrible thing am I gibbering out! A slip of tongue again, my Lord! Pardon me, for I am delirious.

“...Did you hear that, my Lord? This man just asked me to make him a priest when I am assigned as the new Chief Priest. Their repentance is a mere makeshift. ...Oh, but only the ones who first repented and walked with me saying the words I could no longer utter are truthful ones...and that eunuch. But where are they now? If I saw them joyous, even I might have been able to share their joy and be happy and... Can it be that they were...*your*...?”

Then he saw a row of slaves pass by on the dark side of the street. They moved like

ghosts, not at all influenced by the joyous atmosphere of the people. And he saw a cross in the rearmost of the row. And as it approached he found, to his great fright, that it was the Ethiopian eunuch bearing on his shoulders a wooden yoke to which his hands were tied. He was staggering and his half naked body showed that he had received many floggings.

"Oh my God, why?! Why did you allow this? What's the point? Do you have to put him through this tribulation? Did he try to escape from you like I did? He is an innocent man - as innocent as a lamb. He is so skinny he cannot survive this. If you will let him die, then please do so by executing your judgement - by wiping all mortals off Nineveh!"

Jonah tried to get off the donkey, but was stopped by the herald, who had been drawing the donkey. Then, he heard a voice of God: "Jonah, is your anger just?"

"...My Lord, ...maybe not.," Jonah replied, quivering his voiceless lips. "But my anger is beyond my control. It's beyond just or unjust to me. After all, I cannot forgive the Ninevites who were the deaths of my father and mother...and my sibling whom I never see. And I am well aware that as a servant of Yours this is the greatest of all my misfortunes."

[Verses 5 - 11, Chapter 4, Book of Jonah, follow]:

Thereafter, Jonah went outside the city, to the east thereof, and rested. He then set up a shelter to live in. He sat in its half shade and waited to see how the city would be dealt with.

Then, Lord God created a gourd, which quickly climbed the shelter and its green leaves provided a pleasant shadow over him, to the greatest jubilation of the prophet.

But at dawn the next day God had a worm chew all the leaves of the gourd so that it became leafless.

At sunrise God brought forth a scorching wind from the east. The sun shot Jonah's head

till he grew nearly faint. He felt so wretched that he wished he were dead, and whined to God, "I would be better off dead than alive."

But God said to Jonah, "Do you really want to be dead because of your anger about the gourd?"

"I do," said Jonah. "I am so angry that I can die!"

Then, God said, "What a moving thing it is for you to mortally miss a gourd which you did not even plant or grow, but grew up on its own over a night and withered over the next! If so, indeed you should be able to appreciate at least a modicum of my feeling! Look at the huge city of Nineveh. There are no less than a hundred and twenty thousand people living here who cannot even tell right from wrong, and there are a huge number of cattle, too. Would I make myself a laughing stock if I, the creator of them all, cherish them sometimes?"

The End

p.s. *"It was not to judge the world that God sent his Son into the world, but that through him the world might be saved." John 3:17*

For Japanese version, please view (日本語版は下記にて掲載しています) :

<http://p.booklog.jp/book/55689/read>

(back to Chapter I: <http://p.booklog.jp/book/72551/read>)

For the updated and complete version and photos, please go to:

amazon.com/author/nagamitz-kazuhiro

for a related story "Adventures of Yunus, a prophet of Allah" please go to

<http://p.booklog.jp/book/113104/read>

For a related non-fiction story, "A Missionary in the Shadow of the Sun", please

view: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B078ZVZYHD>