



He came to a tree and condemned it, for it was fruitless. Then, he condemned himself as a fruitless prophet, and swore that it would have been better if the womb of his mother had not born him. He frequently fell into absent-mindedness.

And one afternoon he went into a marketplace. He had thought he would sing his prophecy at a corner where the street performers did jobs, for then he might earn some little money to appease his hunger a little. Street performers invited him to do his singing, for they loved it, but he was so hungry he could not. The stomachache due to hunger had become so unbearable. He strayed away, and passed by a juggler who was throwing shining daggers in the air, then right underneath an acrobat who was balancing himself on a tightrope with a long pole, and then by a snake charmer playing a double-reed pipe with the cobra swinging its head according to the music, all the while Yunus not noticing them at all, for his eyes were glued on a plateful of figs laid on a table of a fruit merchant. When he was close enough to them his hands reached the ripened fruits, and put them into his mouth without peeling the rind. He then started eating any food his hands could reach: he swallowed a banana, strawberries, an orange, a bunch of grapes, a peach, a pomegranate, a lemon, and when he bit an apricot, he was stopped by the merchant. He was brought to the palace police, where he was scourged as many times as the number of kinds of the food he took, and was deprived of his cloak to compensate the merchant.

Released, he strayed to the gate of the royal palace, and started prophesying again; but he could not help stopping short frequently due to the surging pains from the scourging. Then, suddenly he was seized by the Spirit of Allah and, thus ecstasized, became another man and started shouting glossolalic speech fluently. Some were scared at this sudden change and said he was invoking his god to exterminate the city; others said he was simply demented.

The palace police came and took Yunus to a nearby temple, where the monks locked him up inside the tall, huge, hollow statue of fish-god Dagon so his strange shouting was muffled. The statue had a human head and chest but fish elsewhere, was brass outside but clay inside and was stood on a flat bedrock. It was customary to isolate any dangerous persons there without feeding them.

Recovering from the ecstasy in the darkness, Yunus felt something creeping on his skin here and there. He picked one which was trying to enter his right nostril, and was panicked to find it a maggot. He quickly shook and brushed them off his body and clothes. Then he realized he was lying on something fragile, for as he moved, the things beneath him made crushing sound. He soon knew what they were, for the round thing on which he had comfortably laid his head for a pillow had rich hair. He shrieked and could not stop trembling.

He was on a tremendous amount of dry bones, skulls and clothes, which were remnants of those who had perished there before him. He shouted for help. He hit the statue with his fists. But he could hear nothing except the echoes of the sounds he made. He then prayed desperately for mercy to Allah.

Then Yunus heard a noise, a rattling sound. At first he thought it was a rat or two gnawing the bones. But he felt some bones start moving about him on their own. He even felt a skull roll over his legs, and heard another grinding its teeth in the darkness. He was scared and crawled away from the bones. When he reached the wall, he stood up with his back pressed to the wall. Now the sound of the bones moving was everywhere. As they grazed against each other, the scratched parts started dimly fluorescing white. It appeared the scattered bones were trying to meet their old mates for a reunion. One after another they seemed made whole and, standing up as skeletons of various sizes, they started walking as if to try and see if the bones were correctly assembled. One after another, they started skipping with light dry steps in a circle. By the time no bone was left lying on the floor, a circle dance had begun and they did not forget to invite Yunus to join. He was dumfounded and his knees failed him and he slowly slid down keeping his back on the wall. It was when they started singing that Yunus shrieked and swooned, and this was what he heard them, some being women, sing in harmony as he collapsed to lie on the floor:

*“Let us collect ourselves upright, and hear Yunus preach  
For we are sinners and have no hope save it be through repentance!”*

*Let us compose ourselves aright and hear him teach,  
For we lost our flesh and have no life save it be through penitence!*

*Let us re-make ourselves outright and hear him speak,  
For there is no peace in our bones as we are but freak... ”*

## Chapter II

A bodily urgency awoke Yunus. He yawned a lot. He was tired and a little dizzy. It took some time in the darkness before he could recall where he was. The scene of skeletons dismembered and scattered all over reminded him of where he was. “So, did they fight and destroy each other? Or,” wondered Yunus, “was it only a bad dream I had on these bones?” Then he remembered that the dying florescence from the bones were caused by friction between them. So, he thought, they did fight each other. Then, he started breathing short and heavily as if he had been exercising. He panted helplessly, and realized that the dead there had perished not from starvation but from suffocation. He despaired and prayed a farewell prayer to Allah, for he was sure he was a failure and would not be in touch with Him anymore. He sought forgiveness for his

failure. But in the midst of the breathless desperate agonizing prayer he heard the door unlocked and saw it open quietly, and he saw a young tall man with a lantern in his hand inviting him to come out. He quickly grabbed a few breaths of cool air smelling burnt oil, and steeled himself against the visitor. The man said something politely in a language he could not understand. He took a deep breath, rose to his feet and went out, staggering and cracking the bones underneath.

The man hastily fell on his knees and, putting the lantern on the floor, said with suppressed tone, this time in Aramaic which Yunus understood more or less: “My master, if I have found favor in your sight, please allow me to escort you out of this temple safely. I am a servant of the king, a eunuch from Ethiopia. And yesterday, to my great surprise, I heard your prophesy in none other than my own mother tongue, and thus I knew you were not demented but were possessed by Allah, your god!”

Yunus raised him to his feet, and said, “I did not know in what language I was speaking then, for I was in ecstasy, nor do I know any Ethiopian word. So, it’s Allah’s plan that you should be enlightened. Well, then, please guide me out.”

The eunuch closed and locked the door of the deadly statue and, taking off his mantle, he said, “Please wear this and you will be taken for one of my colleagues, just in case a guard suspects us.”

Then, carrying the lantern, he led the prophet through the labyrinth of the temple. They passed a few guard monks, who had fallen fast asleep, for the eunuch had put on the altar of the fish-god a skin bottle filled with strong wine. On their way the eunuch said that he had now repented and believed in Allah, that he had reported to the queen about the phenomenon he had witnessed and where the prophet had been locked up, in the hope of obtaining the king’s permission to rescue him, and that only late that evening did the queen hand him the key to the statue confidentially – lest king’s enemy should know this. “Hence,” continued the eunuch, “I came to free you secretly. This way the temple men shall not know that you are away.”

When they got outside the temple, it was midnight with the new moon glowing in the color of cheese. Cold wind was blowing and fanning a fire being burnt by a group of moon worshippers in the nearby plaza. A leader was chanting a song in an extremely low and thick voice and others repeated the lines. The women were kneading and baking bread in the shape of the new moon, and children were gathering fallen leaves and twigs for fuel. The wind brought the appetizing smell.

The eunuch said, “My master, please keep the mantle, for winter is coming, and take care not to catch a cold.” Yunus kissed his hands and wished him Allah’s blessing. After seeing him disappear in the dark, Yunus put hands into the sleeves of the mantle to warm them, but found a silver coin in one of the sleeves. He thought to return it to the eunuch, and called, “My son, come back! I found this!” But no response came from the

darkness except the sound of the wind and the chanting of the moon worshippers. As he walked toward the fire of the moon worshippers, he started prophesying.

Time went by and six years passed since the beginning of Yunus's prophesying. Although he became weak, he had kept prophesying single-mindedly. However, Ninuwans did not repent nor did Allah exterminate them. Yunus at last invoked the Almighty:

"Allah, my God!" he said, "are you not convinced yet? Are you still waiting...yet hopeful that the Ninuwans would repent? Have I not preached your words to every one of them? Have I missed anyone? Have I not acquainted myself with every man, woman and child in this city? Have I not acquainted everyone with your judgment? And they have not repented, except a very few. I have done all that I could. What else would you like me to do? Is not Ninuwa ripe enough to harvest with your scythe? Is not six years long enough for you? Or have you already changed your mind and totally forgotten about Ninuwa and this minor prophet? Now, I fear I myself will soon be doubtful of the truth of this prophecy. I said it before, and will say it again: Ninuwans have been alarmed for too long to be alarmed! To them what I am doing is mere crying wolf. So, it's the wolf and not the crying messenger that they need now! Inflict your heavy punishment upon them so they will learn that you are Allah the Almighty! But I suspect you are not yet ready. So, I'll quit. I am tired of prophesying. Like a Hebrew slave in my motherland, who is freed from slavery after working for six years, as the laws prescribe, am I also not entitled to a freedom from this mission? For I have worked for you half a dozen years prophesying in this city, my Lord. So, let me have a furlough at least for a while. Or is it asking too much? I will take a shot...say...tomorrow I will say to the Ninuwans that unless they repent within three days they shall be exterminated. So, please let it be so, or I shall be an eternal laughing stock in Ninuwa."

On the next day, Yunus did prophesy to the citizens that unless they repent within three days they shall be exterminated one and all. The citizens did not believe him. They too were tired of his prophesying. They had heard him caution for six years by now. They would rather believe the optimistic prophets who were saying that there should be no destruction of the city but that the gods would give them lasting prosperity because they and their forefathers had worshipped those gods for many generations and no fatal harm had ever fallen on them. They mocked Yunus by calling him "Son of Eunuch" - for he had been wearing the eunuch's mantle for years.

So, Ninuwans were not afraid of his threats nor Allah. They would even say "Let it happen, we are not afraid of your empty threats, Son of Eunuch!" Yunus was disheartened. Then, he got angry and said, "In that case, I will desert you to your doom!" And on the second day before dark he left Ninuwa without waiting for the three days to expire nor receiving Allah's permission, still less the king's.

### Chapter III

Yunus used a raft, which he had prepared with the help of the eunuch. The prophet's father Amittai was a lumberjack and had taught his son various things about the profession through on-the-job training, including how to make a raft. The eunuch, although he provided various materials and pieces of information for Yunus's travel, did not stop trying to dissuade the prophet from leaving Ninuwa, until the last moment. But the prophet was too adamant to change his mind.

The raft Yunus made with the eunuch was relatively small but was equipped with many commodities. For example, they put many sheep skin floats to the assembled lumbers, some placed underneath the lumbers and others above them, the latter for the purpose of providing a soft bed for the prophet to sleep on. The eunuch advised that Yunus could sell the lumbers to a lumber merchant and the sheep skin floats to an animal skin merchant at the destination down the river - which had been in fact the practice adopted by the lumber traders in those days.

They put the raft on the canal, and it was carried downstream gently. Many criminals and slaves had tried to escape the city this way but were caught by the soldiers at the strait water gate. Thanks to the eunuch's pre-arrangement, Yunus was allowed to pass the water gate. He slept all night and did not wake up until the sun started scorching him the next morning.

Now, had he not slept so tightly on the raft, he would have been awakened by and witnessed a strange phenomenon in the sky that night. Hardly had he fallen asleep when the skies began to change color and looked as if they were burning and smoking. When sulfuric soot and smell came down, people of Ninuwa were filled with fear, for it was as if the world was totally demolished. They realized Yunus had not been bluffing and the news (spread by the Ethiopian eunuch) that he had left the city and that timely, confirmed that it was the work of his god Allah, whom he also called the Almighty.

People began to repent their sins. Firstly led by the eunuch, they began repeating what Yunus had been reciting. They shouted:

"Fellow citizens of Ninuwa,

*Let us* hear the words of Allah:

*Let us* repent and drop wrongdoings.

*Let us* fear the Almighty and stop evildoings.

*For, Yunus said,* if we ever continue our sinful ways,

*Alas, He* shall exterminate our city in three days!"

The penitents gathered and formed groups one after another to propagate Yunus's prophecy. Then they marched the streets in all directions chanting the words of the prophecy on the melody Yunus had composed. They did not need torches, for the sky was bright.

By midnight, the chanting groups merged to form large crowds. Then an inventive citizen made a wooden placard on which he wrote Yunus'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 of the citizens were unable to read. The whole city was in confusion. Crowds thronged in streets and gathered at each public plaza, for they were scared by the phenomenon in the sky. They demanded to know the cause of it. 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 Yunus'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 together with their altars were destroyed and burnt at every major plaza and shrine, and some human idols hid themselves underground and others declared they were not gods.

The heavenly phenomenon continued until the third day, and citizens continued to seek Allah's mercy. The ritual of child sacrifice for a god, which was attempted so as to appease the same deity, who they said was the worker of the phenomenon above, was interrupted by people, who threatened to cook the priests instead that was trying to conduct the ritual, and thus the priests including the Chief Priest fled from Ninuwa.

This revolution in the city caused by Yunus 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 Yunus'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, no less scared by the phenomenon than the others, 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 Allah, the god of Yunus!" 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 Allah the Most

High for pardon and mercy.

In the afternoon of the third day, the king of Ninuwa 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 long aloud to Allah for mercy, swearing they would never do unrighteous things.

People obeyed the orders from the palace. Thus, the third day heard many prayers for forgiveness and songs blessing Allah, and passed peacefully without taking any mortal's life with it.

So, Yunus was successful and fulfilled his mission assigned by Allah, although he was no longer in the city but was riding down a river on the raft.

Yunus knew he was on the Tigris, of which the canal was a bypass, and knew that it would carry him to a foreign sea. He wanted to go back to Samaria; but he was afraid of Allah. He knew Allah was not glued to Israel, but he felt like going in the opposite direction from Israel where Allah's holy temple was. So, arriving at a seaport of an island Dilmun in Persian Gulf after several days of rafting, he sold the raft together with the sheep skin floats to a fisherman and bought a ticket and jumped on a fine ship, which was leaving for a long voyage bound for Indus. Yunus thought if he could reach a distant place way beyond the horizon of the vast ocean, he would eventually be unreachable and forgotten by Allah, for in those days people did not yet realize that the earth was round - still less spinning.

Yunus climbed down into the bottom of the ship and fell into a deep sleep.

As the ship sailed outside the harbor, the wind rose and got stronger and pushed her off the course. A gray giant-like cloud far away began to collapse and surge to roof the vast ocean, and soon the sea line was darkened by black rain. Upon a flash of lightening and cracking of thunder, cold rain started to pour on the ship. The waves, pushed high by the strong winds, tackled the ship with such force that she squeaked and rolled dangerously and would topple any moment. Then, a whirl wind rose and started twirling her.

"This is a double catastrophe! A storm and tornado at once!" shouted the helmsman, who could no longer hold the spinning helm.

"Oh, my good god, help, help me this once!" cried a sailor holding to a rope lest he be blown away.

"Boatswain, furl the sail, hurry!" the captain shouted to the sailor. "And you there, drop the anchor immediately!" (The latter was to prevent the ship from dashing against rocks or going aground on shallows,



for in those days ships sailed alongside the coasts.)

All the cabin lamps having gone out owing to the rough motion, passengers stirred and groped their way from their darkened creaking corners up the hatchway to the deck with troubled hearts. They were rapidly outpaced by many rats running toward as high a place as possible. A few ferrets, which fed on them, appeared on the deck too and hissed and danced crazily, causing the ship dog to chase after them barking.

"My men, beseech your gods for mercy! Ask your respective gods to kindly calm the sea and lull the wind," the captain was ordering. "You, good passengers, too! You surely worship a god or two; so do pray to your dear gods and vow that when you can ever walk on the firm land again you will do a handsome offering for them!"

The terror-stricken individuals on the deck sought mercy of their gods for their dear lives. But, the stormy winds were not endeared. Nor did the ship stop making shrieks as if she were having labor pains and wanting to be delivered as soon as possible – or, perchance, was she too praying for mercy to some secret goddess?

The rats and ferrets clinging to high places squeaked and squealed for mercy too; then the ship dog whined and joined their lament with pensive howling – keeping its throat stretched as perpendicularly to heaven as possible, despite the motion.

"Oh, my god, my beloved god Bel, please pardon and help us!" a rich lumber merchant cried earnestly. "I swear I will make a shrine of Lebanon cedar for you if you help me out of this peril."

"Ah, great goddess Artemis, daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo!" pleaded a gambler. "I bet a hecatomb to be sacrificed in your wonderful shrine if I'd be allowed to live to do so! So please help me I don't have to hand in my cards yet!"

"Alas, my plentiful Dagon, the fish-god and filler of our stomach with corn and wine! Please do not allow our stomach to be filled with salty water and seaweed!" the chef.

"Please turn from your anger, my lord Poseidon, god of the Sea!" prayed the captain. "Please spare us our lives! What did we do to deserve this catastrophe? We did nothing wrong to you, did we? Or is there anyone among us who overlooked a duty? If so, please let us know of it and we shall amend the wrong immediately."

"Oh, Baal, my good god Baal, please! Please help Jojo! If you must sink this ship, please turn me a dolphin,

for I can't swim!" shouted an apprentice cook in tears.

"Mother, Mother, help me! I am scared!" wept a cabin boy bitterly, who had come out to sea for the first time in his life.

The sailors, while uttering respective prayers to different gods, began throwing cargos and anything they could reach overboard so as to lower the gravity center of the ship as well as to lighten her.

Now, Yunus was still sleeping in the bottom of the ship, although his body was shook and rolled like a log.

The captain came down there with a lantern. Hearing a groaning in the dark, he soon found the prophet and was awe-struck that a man should be able to stay asleep in such a rough motion.

"Terrible man!" thought the captain with a shudder, "sleeping in this tumult?! ...Still you are steadfastly awake to some sin or suffering you seem to have bred. ...Certainly some god must be angry at you and working this storm to rouse you up...in vain. ...But, how come am I here?! Alas, alas! Has the same god possessed me to come down here to kick this man up? For I don't recollect why and how on earth I have come down in the midst of this dangerous motion!"

"Hey!" he shouted, shaking Yunus up, "How can you sleep in a moment like this? Wake up, and pray now to your god and appease his anger, whoever he may be! Maybe your god would turn merciful and help us."

"My God? No! I can't pray..."

"Don't you worship any god?"

"Yes, I do. I worship almighty god Allah, the Creator. But I am now escaping from him."

"You are escaping from your god? What do you mean? You must tell me!"

"Well, my god Allah told me to alarm the people of Ninuwa against his punishment, and persuade them to repent and stop their sins. But Ninuwans are so adamant, especially against foreign gods, so scarcely any one repented in spite of my task. So I cursed them predicting their destruction and quitted the city, thereby disobeying Allah. After all, the task was a burden too heavy for me."

"(Aside) Why, *you* are a burden too heavy for my ship!"

"So, I am not fit to pray to Allah anymore!"

"Not fit to pray? But, you must pray! You see, this storm may be nothing but your god's fume at you. ...Suppose your god is only trying to bring you back...back to Ninuwa. Oh, yes, you must pray to your god immediately, and say that you'll go back to Ninuwa! The lives of many innocent men here are endangered due to your misconduct. If you do not repent and pray to your god for mercy, I as the captain of this ship in peril shall become your god's hand to do away with you."

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