



## Story of Yunus, a Prophet of Allah

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### Chapter IV

Thus, Yunus was swallowed by the whale. Fortunately, the mammal did not chew as it swallowed him, so he was not injured. However, inside its stomach it was pitch dark and so thick with hot acidic stench that he coughed a lot and vomited. Only somehow he did not suffocate.

He felt many living things struggling about him, some sneaking into his clothes, and some fixing themselves on the skin of his legs, arms and then face. When something bit him in his foot, he shrieked and kicked it away and writhed desperately. He hoped he were dead. He swore, wept bitterly and called Allah for help. His voice, however, pitched high sounding funny on account of the atmosphere weighted with extra rich carbon dioxide molecules.

Eventually he collected himself and started praying. However, the acidic air attacked his vocal cord and thus caused his voice hoarser and huskier until it became only hissing. As he was praying earnestly, suddenly his left ear started ringing, and scenes of numerous memories began to run through his mind one after another, and the childhood episodes which had long been forgotten returned with such vividness as if they were occurring real-life.

In one scene he was in the holy temple marveling at its grandeur and beauty. His mother handed him a small dove for him to offer. He wanted to keep it, for he did not want it killed. But a priest dexterously snatched the bird off his hands and instantly wrenched its head off, dumfounding the boy; and when the priest began draining the blood out against a side of the altar, young Yunus started screaming in tears causing his parents to laugh, and his father hugged him, kissed him, and gave him a ride on his shoulders – the child's most favorite position. His father was so tall that he always felt proud there. An older priest, burning the bird on the altar, said to his father, "Mr. Amittai, you have a very clever-looking son!" "Ah, thank you, but whether really clever or not," said his father happily, "we must wait and see!" In the next scene, he was running in a race and was far ahead of other boys. He could see his parents cheering happily beyond the goal line, and he started wondering whether he should or should not run into his mother's bosom as he always had done, for she was expecting a baby now. Then, suddenly flashed a scene of his father fighting two intruders from Ninuwa in their house and as Yunus was trying to help him, his mother hit one of the Ninuwans in the head from behind with an ax and, seeing the blood sputtering, she fainted, falling back into the hearth. Youthful Yunus cried "Mother!" "Mother!" hissed the prophet in the viscous darkness of the belly of the whale, and a flying fish jumped into his face, and he swooned...and heard a voice in his dream:

“Hey, Yunus, howdy? Call me Ben. So, I understand you didn’t obey Allah the Almighty, did you? Me neither.” The voice was a young jolly sonorous tenor, a kind that would have gladdened Beethoven if he heard it sing in his ninth symphony. “Gosh, I didn’t really want to swallow you, or any other monk for that matter. You monks are no joy for us sperm whales, because, in the first place, we ain’t much fascinated about taking big lumpy food, contrary to our size. As you may have noticed, we do not have upper teeth. So we cannot crush and cut tough things in our mouth. Our teeth are used mainly for capturing and bringing smaller food to our children. So, generally, instead of eating large food, we rather enjoy slurping little ones like shrimps and cuttlefish. Of course we eat giant squid. They are good. They are actually very slim and nicely soft and slippery. There is nothing like the sensation of our throat stroked by one. They digest easily and don’t stay long in the stomach unlike you land species. You are not slippery; on the contrary you are so bony and scratchy that there is a danger of choking. Furthermore, your flesh is hard, lean and stringy, and distasteful anyway, and difficult to digest and, on top of these - or bottom of - causes constipation.

“But, Allah said to me I should go and swallow you alive. I knew he means it when he says a thing; so I said “No thanks, my Lord, no more monks in my tammy,” and I turned around and escaped from the Gulf to go beyond his reach.

“And look at what a misery He inflicted upon me the moment I passed through the Strait of Hormuz! ...the exit to the Arabian Sea, you know. He turned me snow white, and since then I have been in trouble one after another. ...How did I know that I turned white? The suckerfish on me were surprised at the sudden change and promptly reported it to me, for they didn’t like it either. They said they now looked too inviting to their enemies. But they are so fond of me they have stuck with me.

“Incidentally, for your information and for the sake of their honor, those suckerfish are by no means on me as mere free-riders, but are quite useful and congenial company. They keep watch for me when I am asleep. When it comes to caring for my skin and trimming my precious little body hair they are unsurpassed specialists. They pick any unwelcome adsorptions off my skin such as parasites but leave useful accessories such as small barnacles so as to make me healthy as well as attractive to lady-whales, who love to scratch their itchy body over my moderately coarsen skin. The suckerfish proudly say that they are called in Japan - if you know where it is - as oval-gold-coin shark after their oval connector - though they are not actually sharks. Aren’t they worth the name?

“And, oh, how they love our stories! You know, we sperm whales have the largest and hence the greatest brain among all the creatures ever created by Allah. And naturally we are the greatest

thinker and think out many great things every day. Then, we need listeners for propagation of our ideas for the enlightenment and welfare of the world. But, why, most of the creatures do not have interest in great things, but are fond of foolish fish stories and tabloid gossips. The suckerfish are different. Oh, they really know what are great and what are not. So they are attached to our talks, especially our non-fiction stories...like this one I am telling you now. Believe it or not, there is even a theory that they came to have their sucking connector through evolution on account of their great love for whale talks; that is, they so disliked to miss any word of our talk that they kept pushing their ears to our body incessantly and Allah was so touched by their diligence as to allow their ears to develop into the pluggable connector to help their listening - believe it or not. By the way, Allah took care of us too in that our nose was allowed to gradually move to the top of our head so we can breathe better.

“Well, now, as I was saying, in spite of the efforts of the suckerfish to improve my look and feel, my being white has made me unlucky with ladies. I used to be quite popular with them, and they scarcely let me alone. They would say “Hey, Ben, you are my only sweetheart, so don’t you ever flirt with other girls,” while pinching me there. But now they say I am a whale god, and keep aloooof from me. Hum, that’s OK with me though, for I think I have already known enough of them to know them better, if you know what I mean. Besides, even I can use some vacation once in a while, you know. But, you see, unless you are in Arctic or Antarctic - if you know where they are - where white is the color of the background, being white is a great handicap. Yes, like the suckerfish, I too advertise my presence to my enemies, in the air or water.

“First, a couple of nasty seagulls came and pecked and picked on me. They eat things like oyster and small crabs on me but not only that! They have come to enjoy tasting our very skin and the flesh underneath. Oh, it’s very painful and, you know, they kill child whales sometimes this way. So, I had to dive more often and thus I could not enjoy peaceful sun-tanning.

“Then, ravenous orcas would not fail to find me either, and they come by many. Five is OK but more than that I run away. Unlike sharks they work in a team, a team of well-organized synchronism. They train themselves to be a good beach hunter too. Normally, to go aground on a shoal or shallows means a death to whales – but orcas are rare exception. From youth, they practice hard to gain the skill of going over a beach and wriggling back to water unharmed. This way they can chase a walrus or a seal or the like right on to the shore above the waterline, and grab the victim and drag it back to the water like an alligator does. There are some who witnessed them killing a polar bear on an iceberg. So they are the strongest gang in the ocean and on the water edges and are nicknamed as killer whale.

“The other day I had ten of them on me. At first, I noticed only five approaching from behind, so I planned to smack them dead with my flukes; but then I found, with the help of a sucker in charge of patrolling, that five others were lying in ambush beyond the waves ahead - cunning creatures. As you know, we sperm whales cannot see ahead, for the eyes are on the sides of our head, like your ears. So, it's time to run away, but not through the waves, for they can swim more than three times faster than we can, that is, as fast as 70 kilometers per hour. However, we sperm whales can dive deeper than they. They come only 300 meters deep or so and give up, but I can go as deep as 1100 meters, and one of my cousins has a record of 3002 meters - a desperado! Incidentally, he said that at that depth the sea bed is like a bright starry sky twinkling with many luminescent creatures and organisms, and not without occasional shooting ones.

“Anyway, I took a deep breath and, peaking my flukes high in the air, dived and went down perpendicularly as fast as my flukes could drive me. I heard one orca shouting “Gosh, the whitey has found us! Go catch him!” and they dived after me and in a moment neared me dangerously close. If two or more of them could bite hold of me at my flukes at the same time, my flukes are stayed and the game is over. One caught me hard there; so I quickly bent my body and gave him a full swing – this must have caused him unconscious and he at once released me. Now, as I go deeper, an advantageous phenomenon takes place in my body. As the water gets colder and the water pressure higher, and as my body, especially the soft large forehead, is squeezed in by the pressure, it begins to shrink and harden on its own, and at the depth of about 200 meters my body becomes quite streamlined and the body weight substantially overbalances the buoyancy so that I can increase my speed.

“This happened as usual, and the orcas gave up. It was a narrow escape though. If I went up too soon, the orcas would be waiting above to attack me again. They would try to prevent me from taking breaths by pushing and pulling me down until I drown. So I had to stay underneath for quite some time. We can stay long in the depth - two hours or even more if we take many deep breaths before diving. Anyway I had to recover enough buoyancy to be able to go up without much labor. The recovery, that is re-inflation of my body, occurs naturally by the body heat, which has increased due to the desperate diving; but it occurs faster in a hot spa, and I am a great lover of hot spas! It's not difficult to find one, for often bubbles are going up from spas, and I can hear the bubbling if it is not too far or too small.

“I found a cozy one in a small ravine and, descending into it, rested and hid my body among craggy rocks, and let the hot rushing bubbles and water massage and warm my cold body. How comfortable it was! Then, I carefully applied the wounds I got from the seagulls and the orca to the bubbles for disinfection and prompt healing. A very good medicine. I must warn you however that

you must not swallow the bubbles. They are very poisonous when inside your body. Now, as my body got warmer I dozed and fell asleep as usual; but this time not without a problem.

“Octopuses were no problem to me when I was not white and could sleep hidden among the rocks and corals; but now they find me without difficulty, because what is a big white thing in the dark background if it ain't a stupid sleeping snow white whale? And they say white color incites their appetite. One biggish octopus is enough to paralyze a whale. First it hugs you with the long huge sucking legs or arms, whichever you like to call them, and the hugging is a nasty, sticky, spirally wrenching one. A shark would swoon if it is twisted by this hugging. However hard you may dance the many-armed partner will never let you change partners. Meanwhile, the octopus injects paralyzing saliva into your skin. Then, sooner or later, he would start devouring you and, as you know, they have very strong beaks. Only you do not feel the pain thanks to the anesthetic effect of the saliva, which prevents you from going wild, to the benefit of the epicurean devourer.

“So, I was awakened by a huge octopus as it hugged me round and started twisting my body. I shook and swung my body to escape but it seemed too late. Soon I began feeling numb where I was touched by the octopus and thought that my painless end was nearing. However I was lucky then, for I noticed that this particular octopus had not as many legs as the name of his species informs, and when I asked him what had happened to his missing legs, he said with a curse upon himself that he had been so hungry that he ate four of them himself - which made him - ah uno, dos, tres, yeah quatropus, right? Ha-ha-ha. So, I took courage and said to myself, “All right, I'll do my last dance as wildly as possible no matter what!” And so did I, and scratching his head against a huge rock, I was able to break away from his hugging, and did not look back when he yelled at me to return and return his precious leg that had been torn off anew - leaving him a tripod. That torn leg was stuck and wriggling on my belly as if it were another suckerfish, and I thought it would make a good takeaway for my sucker friends waiting above – and also would be an unmistakable evidence to prove to them that my next adventure story in the octopus's garden was not a makeup. Incidentally, I hear octopus's legs are disposable because they grow anew.

“Now, my brother, ‘that's enough!’ was what I declared to myself, and I repented and changed my mind. I knew Allah is merciful and forgiving. So I turned round and rushed back through the Strait to swallow you, as Allah had ordered me in the first place - which I have done like a good circumcised whale should, as you have witnessed from outside and inside.

“...How is it that you have not suffocated in my stomach? Well, I can tell you that, but I'm afraid I must use some technical terms you may not have heard yet. OK? Well, then, I will try to explain as simply as I can. First you must know that our stomach is made up of four rooms in series. You are

in the foremost one, which is called fore-stomach and is by far the largest of the four. There almost no digestive juice is secreted, or tapped. So, so long as you stay where you are, you will not be digested...if pickled. Oh, by the way, brother, please feel free to help yourself to any fish and squid and sea weed round you. They are nicely pickled too.

“So, going back to the subject, the fore-stomach is primarily for crushing and softening big tough food. So, it has a powerful muscular system. Of course, I’m not working it now, for Allah’s order is to keep you alive; and as a result, I must keep fasting as long as you are in. No appetite anyway with a monk praying in my tummy.

“Now, as you know, we sperm whales have to dive deep for long periods of time for various reasons, and therefore we need to stockpile as much oxygen as possible in our body. Thus, our lung has come to acquire a capacity of transferring oxygen from the inhaled air into our blood by 80 to 90 %, which is very high compared with your 10 to 15 %. Also, in order to stay long in the depth, our body is made capable of reducing our buoyancy through volume reduction under high water pressure and cold temperature, like our forehead as I already explained. Likewise, our ribcage is made flexible to allow temporary lung collapse. And now, correspondingly as our volume decreases, our heart rate is slowed gradually until it is halved, and our metabolism also slows down significantly to slow the oxygen consumption.

“...Are you following so far? ...Oh, you don’t understand metabolism, do you? Well, don’t worry about that, I too learned the real meaning of it only recently. That’s sort of how fast your body consumes your stock of what you have eaten, drunk or inhaled. So, the faster the metabolism, the faster you get hungry, thirsty and in need of breath. In other words, the slower the metabolism, the longer you can stay undersea without taking oxygen.

“...What!! you don’t understand oxygen either?! Holy cow! Didn’t your teachers teach you some basic chemistry? ...No, it has nothing to do with ox! Oxygen is something in the air that keeps you alive. ...No, it’s not Allah!...but, maybe you are close. Anyway, know that oxygen is the thing in the air that keeps you from suffocating.

“So, turning back to my explanation, in order to keep more oxygen in our body, our myoglobin, which stores oxygen in muscle tissue, is by far more abundant than that of any other creature. Also, our blood has an extra-high density of red blood cells, which contain oxygen-carrying haemoglobin. Thus, our blood can even be over-saturated with oxygen temporarily, and this over-oxygenated blood becomes the source of oxygen gas, as I will explain later.

“Now, as we stay undersea, the oxygen level of our body decreases with time and when it becomes lower than certain thresholds, emergency phases occur whereby the oxygenated blood is selectively directed towards essential organs only. Thus, the longer we stay undersea, the more essential or vital an organ must be to continue receiving the oxygenated blood. The top-most priority is given to none other than the fore-stomach - the brain only the next. The reason for this is that when we dive deep, whether to escape from an enemy like orcas or to hunt for food, we swallow a newborn, if any is with us, into the fore-stomach for protection while we fight or hunt. Then we need to prevent the baby from suffocating. Thus the oxygenated blood is kept supplied to the fore-stomach so as to maintain a certain level of oxygen concentration in the atmosphere there. So, even when we are brain-dead, the baby survives in our fore-stomach where oxygen gas is created from the blood, which is supplied to it so long as our heart beats. The baby can sneak out when it is safer.

“Now, we’ve come to the difficult part: how the oxygen is released from the over-oxygenated blood. In our fore-stomach the mucous membrane forming the inner surface of it is said to have a capacity of triggering a reaction between the blood and carbon dioxide and certain enzymes, whereby the extra oxygen is released from the blood in the form of oxygen gas into the atmosphere. This reaction mechanism however is very complicated and has not been satisfactorily identified yet, although many scholars have postulated various theories. According to a most recent theory, which received a prize, the thin hydrogen peroxide, which is produced by organisms in our stomach, such as facultative aerobes, acts as the priming or catalyst to urge the blood to continuously give away its extra oxygen into the atmosphere.

“I was absorbed in reading a pamphlet containing the summary of this prize-winning theory and, in particular, studying the chemical formulae involved in the proposed reactions, when Allah called me to put me on this errand of delivering you. So, my knowledge stops here and is incomplete, but I suppose what I have told you so far is enough to satisfy you that you will not expire so long as you stay where you are. So, don’t you ever start writhing and kicking again in my soft tummy lest you slip into the second-stomach where you will be perfect jelly.

“...So, all in all, that’s about how I have been able to give you a safe harbor in my oxygen-flowing fore-stomach, ...which...ugh...I already regret I did! I knew this was coming! I’m beginning to feel very sick... Woo, I feel like vomiting, as I had expected, and so did I warn Allah from the beginning, didn’t I?! ...Ugh, I need some good stomach pill! Brother, do you have one to spare?”

Such and many other things did Yunus hear in his dream, and if the author were to write down all of them, it would take up dozens more pages without adding any substance to the story of the prophet.



So, I cut it here. It must also be cautioned however that Yunus heard all of this mysterious talk only in his dream, so that the readers should not try to swallow it, for who knows Ben's was but another fish story.

Now, eventually Yunus awoke, and found himself no longer as much terror-stricken as before despite finding himself in the fish's belly. Thanks to some chemical reactions that had been taking place in the bodies of more sensitive creatures, a pale bluish phosphorescence had dawned in the room, which enabled him to know its landscape. He moved to a place where he would be less interfered by his room-mates, and started praying earnestly with his hissing voice. He fell asleep now and then, but did not hear the whale talk again.

Now, the white whale often dived deep to increase his speed, and, led by the Great Navigator Allah, took underground shortcuts and crossed oceans and lands.

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