



Odyssey of Yunus

Odyssey of Yunus, a Prophet of Allah

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Chapter I

It came to pass that voice of Allah, the Most High, rang in the ears of prophet Yunus, son of Amittai, ordering that he should alarm the exceeding city of Ninuwa against a destruction purposed by Him, at whom her evil eyes were glaring. However, Yunus was not willing, for he had long desired destruction of Ninuwans.

About 1,320 years before prophet Muhammad was born, there was a city called Ninuwa, which is modern-day Mosul of Iraq, where remain its ruins. It was one of the central cities of an ancient empire Assyria, and later it would be the final capital thereof. Having a king of its own, Ninuwa was a city-state as well.

As is invariably the case with exceeding cities in all ages and lands, Ninuwa was not an honorable one. Corruption, iniquity and deception were practiced at all levels of the society, ever aggravating imbalance of wealth, which invited violence. Striving to remedy the imbalance in vain, violence only added to insecurity of the city until terrorism was no longer big news. Growing stronger through competition and merges, armed bands came to have such might that even the king had to compromise with them. Uncontrolled and gaining momentum, some bandit groups got so powerful as to advance outwards as well: they went to sack foreign communities and took home captives and spoils, bringing about wars between the nations. The history of the vicious cycle of attacking and being overly retaliated increased the mutual hatred and fear of enemies in the neighborhood region so much that nations became excessively cruel to each other, and Ninuwans, for example, were notorious for flaying war prisoners alive. They scarcely feared gods.

Then, gods for Ninuwans were usually idols of various myths and traditions, made by human hands in the shape of a human being or an animal or a combination of them. The idols were enshrined at various places in the city, and a wealthy family would boast of having two or more idols in their house. No small number of these gods, however, were vague about their origins of divinity, and a human-shaped idol in a shrine of a handsome temple could originally have been a wooden puppet used in a puppet show, nobody knowing how it had ever found its way up into the shrine. Such a thing was not uncommon with regard to human beings either, in that a genuine human being would be raised to rank as a divinity and treated as a living idol for a reason that he or she did or was said to have done something that seemed unexplainable unless they were a

god or a goddess. (This book provides incidentally an example which might have led to such an idolization for both categories – a puppet and a man.)

Now, the gods, living or not, worshipped by Ninuwans were far cry from the concept of a righteous and almighty being, the creator of the universe, and were more like Greek gods and goddesses, who fall short of almightiness and, like human beings, can be unrighteous, sometimes setting examples of immoral nature.

Thus, for many Ninuwans the gods they daily saw were not such terrible beings to fear. However, authorities exalted the gods for the purpose of extracting wealth from the citizens to stabilize their supremacy, especially through strengthening of military and police power.

Many stories were concocted to incite fear of the gods. The story writers described natural phenomena and disasters as gods' signs and punishment, thus exalting gods above the nature. The authors created histories of immortals and mortals, in which immortalization of the latter was among the powers of the former, thus exalting gods above time. The histories were entwined with well-known myths and legends full of supernatural phenomena and mystification allegedly wrought by gods, thus thwarting scientific approach. The editors supplemented the manuscript with many laws allegedly given by gods, and quoted divine testimony to sanctify the entire script. Thus, the stories and laws were compiled to form holy textbooks and preached, and people believed – for who, atheist or theist, or educated or uneducated, is not superstitious?

The story makers and the cohorts availed themselves of the wealth gained. So, for example, in temples, where gods were usually wooden idols overlaid with gold or silver plates, which were cast from articles offered by worshippers, the priests would steal pieces from the gods for their private use. To them they were virtually money trees. Consequently, the general tendency became such that the higher in the hierarchy did a Ninuwan rank, the less pious he or she turned. Gods were used by them to justify the hierarchy by which they could maintain their privileges, while they scarcely did justice to gods.

Naturally, the authorities would punish people who were found tending to be blasphemous, while they themselves were more so in fact. The laws bound people in strict obedience to gods, and any departure from the laws was severely punished. Thus, pious or not, a citizen of Ninuwa would fear the authorities far more than gods.

Then, the authorities on their part feared the revolt of dissident citizens more than anything else, especially the kind tied to an enemy nation. And to prevent this, they regularly conducted public events such as cruel execution of enemy soldiers, which was designed to intimidate and discourage the citizens from revolting, as well as to satisfy certain barbaric desires. And for the purpose of the latter, the most atrocious event was this:

Despite the general belittling of gods, Ninuwans had indulged themselves in an evil practice on the pretext of being loyal to gods - they sacrificed to them their own children. And this manslaughter, borrowing the authority therefor from gods, was the greatest of all sins committed by Ninuwans.

So, Allah the Almighty, unable to live with Ninuwans any further, decided to inflict a capital punishment. However, he deigned to give a final chance to the Ninuwans, and rang an oracle in the ears of Amittai's son Yunus, a Hebrew prophet and captive in Ninuwa.

Allah said to Yunus, "The evil glare of Ninuwa has reached me. You, my prophet, are to go out and instruct the inhabitants of Ninuwa to repent and abstain from evildoings. If they listen to you and repent, well and good, I shall stay my hands from Ninuwa. If they do not, I shall wipe out Ninuwa from the face of the earth."

"My Lord!" retorted Yunus, "what are you saying? You want me to help the Ninuwans escape your punishment? But they deserve your punishment and deserve no mercy from you! Besides, I hear they are contemplating on attacking Israel again to loot the harvests, for the crop this year has been very low on this side. So, please do not delay your plan or they will destroy many Israelite cities."

Now, when a man or a woman is visited by Allah's spirit, as Yunus was on this occasion, they become ecstatic and unusually talkative and would say many things that they would not say out loud otherwise. Oftentimes, they would fall into what is called glossolalia, in which they would start saying things in words they themselves do not understand, sometimes in a genuine language unknown to themselves, although they would know what they are meaning. Such was the state in which Yunus was on this occasion, and therefore he talked very much and rather eloquently in response to Allah's oracle, although he was normally a reticent and non-eloquent person; and moreover he spoke in a language quite foreign to himself – who knows it was in fact modern English and he went on exactly as follows:

"As you well know, my Lord the Highest, I was brought here as a captive three years ago by the bandits from this hateful city. At that time, I had been married only one year and my son was barely a month old. The Ninuwan bandits broke through the town wall and attacked houses. They killed many who resisted them including my own father and mother. Many young men and women including myself were captured and brought here in chains and fetters like stolen cattle, which were many too. I have since been separated from my wife and my only son and do not know what has become of them. I was put to forced labor for half a year as a boat tugger. We towed a heavily laden boat upstream the canal four or five times a day. As you know, I was so miserable and despaired that I wished you'd annihilate this evil city totally and end my life too.

"Then, King of Ninuwa emancipated me from the slavery when he learned that I was the very prophet that had predicted for Jeroboam, King of Samaria, about his recovery of the frontier lands from Hamath, which,

true to your words confided to me, was fulfilled, and caused me to be the most honored prophet in Samaria and perhaps also in other parts of Israel. Coming to know this, the king of Ninuwa made me promise that thereafter I should first inform him of any new word from you, my Lord. In return for this he rationed me half a loaf of bread each day and gave me a small hermitage to live in. It has a patch of field from which I can harvest vegetables, fruits and herbs. Thanks to this I have been able to live on without eating gentile food. There is a public well nearby from which I can obtain water.

“I have lived peacefully since I was freed. I would help support my fellow Israelites that were brought to Ninuwa as captives as much as I could. I gave food to the hungry, medicine to the sick, and clothes to the naked. Whenever I saw or heard that the corpse of anyone from my nation had been flung outside the city wall, I would go and bury it before dogs or birds would touch it.

“But when the Israelites in Ninuwa had come to learn that I had promised to the king of Ninuwa the first report on any words from you, my Lord, they called me a hired prophet and started ostracizing me, as you well know. I retreated to a life of hermit, scarcely going out to the public, nor receiving anyone but the bread delivery boys, sons of the baker, who serves the king. And now I got the first word of yours since the previous one, and I’m not sure.

“There are already many self-professed prophets who are prophesying Ninuwa’s destruction but for the citizens’ repentance. They claim their prophecies are from their respective gods, but without doubt they are secretly incited by the king, who wants lawless Ninuwans to repent and be law-abiding; however, needless to say, no prophetic words ever can come from fake gods – only you, my Lord, can inspire the prophets. Now, all in all, Ninuwans never have repented for they are generally not afraid of gods – especially foreign gods (of which they think you are one).

“But, my Lord, if I went out and said that Allah the Almighty says Ninuwans are doomed to death but for their repentance, they would probably hear me and may even repent, if they come to know who I am, for I am not a regular prophet. And then you would save them. And I would hate myself. I would rather that you demolish this city altogether than that all the Ninuwans are saved and continue maltreating those miserable slaves, of whom I used to be one!

“So please spare me from this mission. It crashes me. If I ever succeed in this mission, I shall curse myself every day during the rest of my life. Please pick someone else – there are quite a few eloquent prophets. Or why not summon someone from Israel. But not Yunus, please!”

“I decided on you because you are the best for this” said Allah. “I never use a second best. Go out and alarm the Ninuwans. They are waiting for you at every corner of the city.”

Yunus did go out, but went straight to the palace and was soon brought to the king. He reported to the king about the first words he had had from Allah in Ninuwa. King strongly desired Yunus to propagate the prophecy throughout the city immediately, for the security of the city was worsening due to food shortage. Starvation was devouring fruits of the established order and moral of the city. Many places where food was stored had been attacked by armed citizens as well as bandits. A lot of cattle had been stolen, and only those market places which were under the control of the bandit groups had survived plunders, but the prices of food and water there went sky high. In the most stricken corners infants were in fear of being killed for food, like dogs were. Thus, the king ordered Yunus to disclose his proven status as the successful prophet in Samaria and propagate Allah's words.

Yunus pleaded with the king for a bargain. He said that he would do his best to prophesy the true words of Allah only if the king would agree to emancipate all the slaves and allow Yunus to take Israelite captives back to Israel if Ninuwans repented within forty days. To this the king did not agree, but offered Yunus the highest priesthood should he succeed in causing the Ninuwans to repent and drop evildoings. He also promised to give him a daughter of his as his wife.

Yunus did start prophesying but half-heartedly, and did not particularly audibly disclose his identity as a prophet with a successful career. People therefore thought he was merely another self-professed prophet that hawked about chanting hymns to earn food and drink, and scarcely paid attention to his prophecy.

Thirty-four days passed, and yet no one had repented. People kept being unafraid of Allah and repeated violence, theft and abominations, and Yunus did not care. However, it happened on the thirty-fifth day that when he was on his way back to his hermitage, he encountered a flow of a mob and joining it he entered a shrine, where a ritual of child sacrifice was about to be performed in honor of a god named Nis'roch.

He had never wanted to see the atrocious ritual, and would not have entered the shrine, had he not overheard in the mob that nowadays the victim children were picked from orphans, abandoned or captives. Yunus climbed a wall of the shrine and started prophesying severely and urged the people to repent and stop evil rituals such as the one they were about to perpetrate.

He said, "Abstain from evil barbaric rituals or you will pay the price! Allah the Almighty is planning to demolish this city unless you repent and stop piling up these sins!"

Some of the people jeered at him and others just ignored him; temple policemen came up and gave him whippings and took him down the wall. Then a keen piteous shrieking of a boy was heard, followed immediately by threatening sounds of cymbal, trumpets and drum, which made the weak boy's wailing

inaudible. Then, Yunus saw the bloody ritual perpetrated by masked priests, and the mob roared crazily. The smell of the wholly burnt body sickened Yunus, and when he saw some worshippers eating the cuts from the body he was terrified lest Allah should annihilate the city any moment.

Since then he started prophesying wholeheartedly. He composed and learned by heart the following words in Aramaic (a language spoken by Assyrians) and recited them all day long:

"Fellow citizens of Ninuwa,
Hear the words of Allah,
Repent and drop wrongdoings.
Fear Him and stop evildoings.
For if we ever continue our sinful ways,
He shall exterminate us in a few days!"

He entered every street he could find and prophesied at every household on the street. The city had many public squares and he visited all and revisited many for the propagation of Allah's words. The city was surrounded by huge thick walls connected by fifteen gates, and he encircled the city walking along the inside of the walls clockwise, all the way reciting the prophecy. (Where the canal passed across the city boundary line, either the wall there functioned as a bridge or there was a ferry to cross the canal.) He went up the walls where possible and cried repentance. By the time he completed the circuit, his words had a melody, which began to attract some citizens.

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