



Photo by Alan Abrams

# BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

## JONAH, ROUGH SEAS AND FOSTER CARE

Second Nurture Adult Education for Yom Kippur

# Betwixt, Between and A Place to Stand

## Jonah 1: 6-9

*A mighty wind rocked the boat on which Jonah sailed to escape God's decree.  
As the ship's crew fought to keep the vessel afloat, Jonah went below to the hold and fell asleep.*

אלאליהיך אולי יתעשת האלהים לנו ולא נאבד (ז) ויאמרו איש אלרעהו לכו ונפילה גורלות ונדעה בשלמי הרעה הזאת לנו ויפלו גורלות ויפל הגורל עליונה (ח) ויאמרו אליו הגידהנא לנו באשר למיהרעה הזאת לנו מהמלאכתך ומאין תבוא מה ארצך ואימזה עם (אתה) ויאמר אליהם עברי אנכי ואתיהוה אלהי השמים אני ירא אשרעשה אתהים ואתהיבשה(ט)

The captain went over to [Jonah] and cried out, "How can you be sleeping so soundly! Up, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will be kind to us and we will not perish." (7) The men said to one another, "Let us cast lots and find out on whose account this misfortune has come upon us." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. (8) They said to him, "Tell us, you who have brought this misfortune upon us, what is your business? Where have you come from? What is your country and of what people are you?" (9) "I am a Hebrew," he replied. "I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land."

## Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 10:4

ויונה בצרת נפשו נרדם וישן לו. בא אליו רב החובל, אמר לו: הרי אנו עומדים בין מות לחיים ואתה נרדם וישן מאיזה עם אתה? אמר לו: עברי אנכי

Now Jonah, because of the anguish of his soul, fell into a deep sleep. The captain of the ship came to him, saying, "Behold, we are standing betwixt death and life, and you are in a deep sleep; of what people are you?"  
He answered them, "I am a Hebrew" (Jonah 1:9).

### Jonah sleeps through life-threateningly rocky seas.

- Do you sometimes shut down when your life is tumultuous?
  - What do you do when you shut down? Is it something you can control?
  - What helps you emerge and recover from that state?
- How does "shutting down" compare to self-care?
  - How does shutting down impact your life? And the lives of those around you?
  - How does "self-care" impact your life? And the lives of those around you?

### Desperate for redemption, the sailors ask Jonah who he is.

- They ask Jonah his business and three questions about his identity: Where he came from, what is his country and of what people he comes from.
  - How would you define what each question is asking?
  - How do *you* answer those questions?
    - Do your answers share a source?
    - Are they from multiple sources?
    - What challenges might emerge—psychological, spiritual or social—when there is dissonance between these categories?



### **A lens into youth outside of permanent, loving families**

- What might it look like for a children in foster care to "shut down" when their lives are tumultuous?
  - Is it something a child can control?
  - What might help them emerge and recover from that state?
  - What might the captain's questions teach us about helping someone calm the rocky seas of their souls?

## **Perhaps the seas are a metaphor for Jonah's internal chaos.**

**In Pirke DeRebbe Eliezer, the captain rouses Jonah saying, "Behold, we are standing betwixt death and life..."**

- What is "betwixt"?
  - Are there times you have felt betwixt?
  - As Jews, we have a long history of not being rooted, of living "on packed suitcases."
    - How did that play out in your family history? In your life?
    - How has that affected us as a people?
  - Can people live "in-between" in some ways—for example, as a person who holds multiple racial or cultural identities—and not feel in limbo" or "betwixt"?
  - Can people have clear definitions of self—culturally, geographically, communally—and yet in their souls be "betwixt"?
  - In what ways are our outer and inner realities necessarily—or not necessarily—interdependent?
  - How would you describe Yom Kippur as living "betwixt"?

### **Does this text offer a lens into youth outside of permanent, loving families?**

- Are Jews better positioned or more obligated to take care of children outside of families because of our history?
  - How might we uniquely understand
    - the internal struggle to feel safe?
    - creating identity while living "betwixt"?
  - What might our families and communities offer children whose lives are in those in-between spaces?





**Our community can be a place in which fostering and adoption are a norm. Whether you want to foster, adopt, or be part of our community support system, there is a role for you.**

- Families are supported before, during and after the licensing and adoption processes
- Our community provides foster and adoptive children with peers of similar backgrounds
- The values of foster and adoption are integrated into our community culture
- Our whole community embraces families with support as they become foster and adoptive parents
- We partner with the leading and best-aligned local social service partners
- We both nurture and are nurtured by our growing capacity as a synagogue to support foster and adoptive families



*Second Nurture creates a community within our community — and expands our vision of what family and belonging truly mean.*  
—Cohort Member