

## EDITORIAL

# The Prophet Yunus (Alayhi As-Salam) being swallowed by a Big Fish: A Spiritual View in the Light of Current Information

HÜSEYİN ÇAKSEN

Divisions of Pediatric Neurology and Genetics and Behavioral-Developmental Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine Necmettin Erbakan University, Meram, Konya, Türkiye

Correspondence to Prof. HÜSEYİN ÇAKSEN, MD, PhD, E-mail: [huseyincaksen@hotmail.com](mailto:huseyincaksen@hotmail.com), Telephone: +90 332 223 66 84;

Facsimile: +90 332 223 61 81 and +90 332 223 61 82,

ORCID iD <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8992-4386>

Prophets are highly qualified individuals who are tasked with conveying the information and commands they receive through revelation from Allah and calling their interlocutors to the true religion<sup>1</sup>. One-hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets came from the first Prophet Adam (Alayhi As-Salam [AS]), the first man, to the last Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam). A total of 25 prophets' names has been mentioned in the Quran and one of them is the Prophet Yunus (AS), also known as Jonas or Jonah<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the tenth Surah including 109 ayats of the Quran is the Surah Yunus<sup>2</sup>.

Yunus Ibn Matta (Jonah son of Amittai or Jonas) lived during of the reign of the second Jeroboam (793-753 BC), one of the kings of Israel. It was stated in the holy books including the Bible, the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) and the Quran that the Prophet Yunus (AS) was swallowed by a big fish and then he was saved by the will of Allah. However, some authors claimed that the story of Jonah was a myth, fable, or symbolic story<sup>3,4</sup>. Herein, we discuss the story of Yunus (AS) being swallowed by a big fish in light of current information to emphasize that Yunus's (AS) story is not a myth and that it contains some lessons for today's people including scientists.

The booming city of Nineveh had long forgotten the message of Allah and became a city filled with idol worshiping and sin around the 8th century Before Christ. Yunus (AS) was sent a prophet by Allah to Nineveh, a city in Northern Iraq with a population of over a hundred thousand. However, Yunus (AS) did not want to warn the people of Nineveh, who were the enemies of the Israelites. He disobeyed the Divine command and boarded a ship from Yafa (Jaffa) to go to Tarshish. The ship traveled through the calm waters during the day, but as the night closed in, a storm raged on, rocking. As the storm raged through the night, the ship's captain ordered his men to throw off all the unnecessary luggage and extra weight to lighten the ship's load. The crew, one by one, discarded just about anything they could, but their efforts fell short as the ship struggled to stay afloat. In an effort to understand who caused this disaster, lots were drawn among the passengers of the ship and the lottery was drawn to Yunus (AS). When Yunus (AS) was thrown into the sea, the storm subsided. A big fish in the ocean came to the surface and swallowed Yunus (AS) by the command of Allah. He remained in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights. Yunus (AS), who was initially unconscious, awoke to find himself enveloped by three layers of darkness. The first layer is the night's darkness, then the sea's darkness, and lastly, the dark confines of the fish's stomach<sup>3,5</sup>. He cried to Allah through the depths of darkness, "There is no god but Thou: glory to Thee: I was indeed wrong!"<sup>6</sup>. Allah commanded the fish to spit out His Messenger at the nearest shore. The fish obeyed Allah's command, swam to the nearest shore, and ejected Yunus (AS)<sup>4</sup>.

Although it is noted in the holy books that Yunus (AS) was swallowed by a large fish and he was saved by the will of Allah after staying in the stomach of the large fish for three days, there is no detailed information about the fish<sup>3,4</sup>. In 1554, Guillaume Rondelet<sup>7</sup> (1507-1566), an anatomist and a naturalist, also noted that Yunus (AS) was kept safely in the stomach of a great fish (shark or whale) by Divine providence for three days consistent with Biblical facts<sup>8</sup>. Rondelet<sup>8</sup> emphasized that he saw a shark large enough to swallow even a fat man and proposed that Yunus (AS) might have been swallowed by a shark. However, based on

our current knowledge about white sharks and whales, Rondelet's assumption appears to be incorrect. White sharks usually attack the animal (its prey) by surprise and inflict a sudden and massive fatal bite. A white shark tends to inflict a single bite on its human victim and then retreat. In many instances, however, the shark does not return for a second bite<sup>9</sup>. Sharks do not actually chew their food. Their teeth are perfectly designed for piercing, gripping, and tearing prey. The combination of highly acidic (pH between 1.0 and 1.5) stomach fluid and digestive enzymes allows sharks to easily, quickly and efficiently break down food that has simply been swallowed whole or in large chunks<sup>10</sup>. White sharks prey includes sea turtles, seals, sea lions, porpoises, dolphins, and small whales<sup>9</sup>. Also, great white sharks are able to swallow a whole human<sup>11</sup>. In 2015, a great white shark swallowed Sam Kellet whole during diving session in Australia<sup>12</sup>. Henri Murray, a medical student, was also swallowed nearly whole by a great white shark while scuba diving and spear-fishing near Cape Town, South Africa<sup>13</sup>.

Regarding whales, there are around 90 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises, known collectively as "cetaceans." All whales and dolphins can be divided into two categories: baleen whales and toothed whales. Toothed whales include the sperm whale, beaked whales, dolphins, porpoises and the beluga whale and narwhal<sup>14</sup>. The sperm whale or cachalot (*Physeter macrocephalus*) is the largest of the toothed whales and the largest toothed predator. An 18 meters long male sperm whale is estimated to have weighed 57 tones. Sperm whales feed on several species, notably the giant squid, but also the colossal squid, octopuses, and fish such as demersal rays and sharks. They may also possibly prey upon swordfish on rare occasions<sup>15</sup>. The sperm whale has a four-chambered stomach that is similar to ruminants. The first secretes no gastric juices and has very thick muscular walls to crush the food (since whales cannot chew) and resist the claw and sucker attacks of swallowed squid. The second chamber is larger and is where digestion takes place. Undigested squid beaks accumulate in the second chamber and most of them are vomited by the whale<sup>15</sup>.

Only one species (sperm whale) of whales even has a throat big enough to fit a human. If you were digested by a sperm whale, parts of you may resurface in ambergris, a waxy substance that eases the passing of hard objects like squid beaks<sup>16</sup>. James Bartley (1870-1909) is the central figure in a late nineteenth-century story according to which he was swallowed whole by a sperm whale. He was found still living days later in the stomach of the whale, which was dead from harpooning. It was said that Bartley was inside the whale for 36 hours, that his skin had been bleached by the gastric juices, and that he was blind the rest of his life. He died 18 years later and his tombstone in Gloucester says "James Bartley – a modern day Yunus"<sup>17</sup>.

Considering the hunting behaviors and characteristics of the sharks and whales and the anatomical structures of their stomachs, mentioned above, it is highly probable that Yunus (AS) was swallowed by a whale, but not by a shark. Yunus (AS) was probably swallowed by a sperm whale. After Yunus (AS) stayed in the first chamber of the whale's stomach for 3 days, the whale threw him out by the command of Allah.

There are more than one hundred stories in the Quran. One of the stories is about the Prophet Yunus (AS), who was swallowed

by a big fish. Historical events and lives of the prophets have been described through stories in the holy books so that people take lessons.

Taking into account the conditions of today's people, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi<sup>18</sup> (1877-1960), the author of the Risale-i Nur Collection<sup>19</sup>, a tafsir of the Quran, interpreted the ayats related to the Prophet Yunus's (AS) story as follows: "Now we are in a situation one hundred times more awesome than that in which Yunus (AS) first found himself. Our night is the future. When we look upon our future with the eye of neglect, it is a hundred times darker and more fearful than his night. Our sea is this spinning globe. Each wave of this sea bears on it thousands of corpses, and is thus a thousand times more frightening than his sea. Our fish is the caprice of our soul (temporary desires of the nefes) which strives to shake and destroy the foundation of our eternal life. This fish is a thousand times more maleficent than his. For his fish could destroy a hundred-year lifespan, whereas ours seeks to destroy a life lasting hundreds of millions of years"<sup>20</sup>.

This being our true state, we should in imitation of Yunus (AS) avert ourselves from all causes and take refuge directly in the Cause of Causes, that is, our Lord and Sustainer. We should say: "There is no god but You, Glory be unto You! Indeed, I was among the wrongdoers," and understand with full certainty that it is only He who can repel from us the harm of the future, this world, and caprice of our souls, united against us because of our neglect and misguidance. For the future is subject to His command, the world to His jurisdiction, and our soul to His direction"<sup>20</sup>.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that the story of Yunus (AS) being swallowed by a large fish is true, real, and truth, but not a myth, because Allah says it in the holy books. However, no detailed information was given about the fish. Based on our current knowledge about sharks and whales, Yunus (AS) was most probably swallowed by a sperm whale. The Quran gives the following messages to today's peoples including scientists interested in marine animals and physicians through Yunus's (AS) story. Big fishes such as sharks and whales are able to swallow a whole human. A person swallowed by a whale can survive without any disorder, if removed from the whale's stomach within the first three days. Moreover, the Quran traces the limit that is far ahead of man's present progress in medicine. The Quran encourages catching a shark or a whale that has swallowed a human and then surgically removing the human from its stomach, because a person's life is invaluable. A human individual is like a species of other creatures<sup>21</sup>. For example; marine animals are a beautiful mirror of some of Allah's names, but they cannot be a complete mirror of all of Allah's names and attributes. However, since man was created in the most beautiful nature and is a complete mirror of all of Allah's names and attributes, s/he is far superior to all living things. Allah says "if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people"<sup>22</sup>. Lastly, the Quran gives the following message to all people regardless of their faith and religion: Man's object of worship, Lord, refuge, savior, and goal then can only be the One in the grasp of whose power is the whole universe, under whose command are both atom and planet. Man should therefore constantly say like Yunus (AS): "There is no god but Thou: glory to Thee: I was indeed wrong!"<sup>20</sup>.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, HÇ; Writing—original draft, HÇ; Writing—review & editing, HÇ.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests:** The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding:** The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Ethical Approval:** This study was a review of published literature and no ethical approval was required.

## REFERENCES

1. Yavuz YŞ. Turkish Religious Foundation. Encyclopedia of Islam. Prophet (in Turkish). Istanbul: TDV Publishing, Printing and Trading Business [Online]. 2007 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/peygamber>
2. Surah Yunus. The Holy Quran. Surah 10; Ayat 107. KURAN.GEN.TR. The World's Largest Quran Portal [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://kuran.gen.tr/the-prophets-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s\\_main&y=s\\_middle&kid=14&sid=10](https://kuran.gen.tr/the-prophets-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s_main&y=s_middle&kid=14&sid=10)
3. Jonah. Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonah>
4. Harman ÖF. Turkish Religious Foundation. Encyclopedia of Islam. Yunus (in Turkish). Istanbul: TDV Publishing, Printing and Trading Business [Online]. 2013 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/yunus>
5. Surah As-Saffat. The Holy Quran. Surah 37; Ayats 139-148. KURAN.GEN.TR. The World's Largest Quran Portal [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://kuran.gen.tr/the-prophets-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s\\_main&y=s\\_middle&kid=14&sid=37](https://kuran.gen.tr/the-prophets-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s_main&y=s_middle&kid=14&sid=37)
6. Surah Al-Anbiya. The Holy Quran. Surah 21; Ayat 87. KURAN.GEN.TR. The World's Largest Quran Portal [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://kuran.gen.tr/the-prophets-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s\\_main&y=s\\_middle&kid=14&sid=21](https://kuran.gen.tr/the-prophets-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s_main&y=s_middle&kid=14&sid=21)
7. Guillaume Rondelet. Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillaume\\_Rondelet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillaume_Rondelet)
8. Rondelet G. Gvlielmi Rondeletii doctoris medici et medicinae in schola. Monspelienis professoris regii. Libri de piscibus marinis, in quibus verae piscium effigies expressae sunt. Quae in tota piscium historia contineantur, indicat elenchus pagina nona et decima. Postremo accesserunt indices necessarii (in Latin). Lugdini: Apud Matthiam Bonhomme; 1554.
9. Long D. White shark. Encyclopedia Britannica [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/animal/white-shark>
10. Thomberry M. Do sharks chew their food? A detailed look at how sharks eat. Berry Patch Farms [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://www.berrypatchfarms.net/do-sharks-chew-their-food>
11. Blackman S. 10 animals that could swallow a human whole. Discover Wildlife [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/can-animals-swallow-a-human>
12. O'Connor R. Great white shark 'swallowed teacher whole' during Australia diving session, inquest hears. Independent [Online]. 2015 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/great-white-shark-swallowed-teacher-whole-during-australia-diving-session-inquest-hears-a6673496.html>
13. Man swallowed whole by great white shark. Reef Central [Online]. 2005 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://archive.reefcentral.com/forums/showthread.php?t=607380>
14. Whale and dolphin species guide. WDC [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://us.whales.org/whales-dolphins/species-guide>
15. Sperm whale. Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sperm\\_whale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sperm_whale)
16. Miller MT. This is what would happen if a whale swallowed a person. Nerdist [Online]. 2022 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <https://nerdist.com/article/what-would-happen-whale-swallow-people-house-of-the-future>
17. James Bartley. Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Bartley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bartley)
18. Said Nursi. Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Said\\_Nursi%C3%AE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Said_Nursi%C3%AE)
19. Risale-i Nur. Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risale-i\\_Nur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risale-i_Nur)
20. Nursi BS. From the Risale-i Nur Collection. The Flashes. The First Flash. Istanbul: Söz [Online]. 2012 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.205.62>
21. Nursi BS. From the Risale-i Nur Collection. Signs of Miraculousness. Sura al-Baqara. Istanbul: Söz [Online]. 2012 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: <http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.205.62>
22. Surah Al-Maidah. The Holy Quran. Surah 5; Ayat 32. KURAN.GEN.TR. The World's Largest Quran Portal [Online]. 2024 [cited 2024 December 10]. Available from: [https://kuran.gen.tr/the-food-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s\\_main&y=s\\_middle&kid=14&sid=5](https://kuran.gen.tr/the-food-suresi-english-quran-by-a-yusuf-ali?x=s_main&y=s_middle&kid=14&sid=5)

**This editorial may cited as:** Çaksen H: The Prophet Yunus (Alayhi As-Salam) Being Swallowed by a Big Fish: A Spiritual View in the Light of Current Information. Pak J Med Health Sci, 2024;18(10):1-2.