

## LECTIO MATTERS

## **Matters Series**

*Thoughts Matter: Discovering the Spiritual Journey*

*Tools Matter: Beginning the Spiritual Journey*

*Humility Matters: Toward Purity of Heart*

*Lectio Matters: Before the Burning Bush*

*Discernment Matters: Listening with the Ear of the Heart*

# Lectio Matters

*Before the Burning Bush*

Mary Margaret Funk, OSB



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*To my guardian angel,  
Brigid Funk,  
who shows up from time to time  
when lectio matters!*



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“Moses at the Burning Bush,” by Eastern Orthodox Nun  
Rebecca Cown of New Skete, Cambridge, NY,  
commissioned by Pamela Farris, based on an original at  
the Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, Egypt

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## Iconographer's Preface

**Rebecca Cown**

*By means of all created things, without exception,  
The Divine assails us, penetrates us, and molds us.*

*We imagine it as distant and inaccessible.*

*In fact, we live steeped in its burning layers.*

—Teilhard de Chardin

One of the pillars of spiritual teaching in Eastern Christianity is deification (Greek: *theosis*),<sup>1</sup> which means participating or sharing in the divine nature. This is our inheritance, according to St. Dorotheus of Gaza; it is an inborn spark of divinity like a light burning deep within our hearts, within the core of our being, guiding us as we discern what pleases God, and illuminating our journey upon this earth. Christ speaks about this same light when he says we are not to hide our light under a bushel but bring it into the light of day. In this broken world, however, this inner light, this divine

sensation, is often covered up by the cares and concerns of our daily lives and by our conditioning from early childhood. St. Paul also speaks about this enlightenment and the need to stay awake, to become conscious and aware—not simply about the life of our outer senses, but especially about our interior senses.<sup>2</sup> We call this the light of discernment. Another term is *aesthesis*, a Greek word difficult to translate into English, which we may understand as inner perception or divine sensation: a spiritual sense. Our innermost spiritual senses need to be made conscious and honed and practiced in our daily lives.

Our earliest Christian teachers reiterated that “God became human in order that the human person may become God.” This divine gift presupposes our personal and collective inner work, our synergy with God. This potential has been present from the very beginning, according to the account in Genesis, since we are created in the image and likeness of God. The “image” is the reflection of God. One commentary on this Genesis passage says that “likeness” refers to being endowed with discernment and understanding. So, by inference, we might say that the “likeness” is what we are called to bring into reality by inner discernment.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus says, “Whatever is not consciously embraced cannot be transformed.” That is, unless we awaken to this divine reality in our hearts, to who we really are and to what we are called, we cannot engage with this Divine Spirit within, and it will remain dormant. We are personally called to be transformed and

transfigured into our God-likeness, but not just for ourselves; we are called personally to become God's agents and to enable God's ongoing creation of this world of ours.<sup>3</sup>

God has no other hands, feet, eyes, mind, or heart than ours to continue God's creating. The Spirit of God is everywhere present and filling all things, and human beings have been called to cocreate with God. The raw materials, so to speak, need our working with God to bring about life, harmony, peace, justice, and beauty out of chaos and disorder. God has given us the mission and purpose of incarnating God's very first words—"Let there be Light"—and to make it a living reality in our lives.

The story of Moses before the burning bush may well be a paradigm of every person's divine visitation or awakening to the divine presence. If heeded, this encounter will change a person's life. This change, or *metanoia* (Greek for "change of heart," "change of purpose, direction"), moves us away from our former identity, where the ego is in control, to become an instrument in God's hand. This is what happened to Moses, who once was a Hebrew slave, saved by an Egyptian princess. He was raised and educated as an adopted prince but later, having slain an Egyptian overseer, fled for his life into a foreign land and then became a shepherd. After many years in this lonely desert, God revealed to Moses his true identity and purpose in life.

The story tells us that Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, and led the flock to the far side

of the desert. He came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a thorn bush. Moses saw that, although the bush was on fire, it was not consumed. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush is not burnt.” When the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush: “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

The icon on the cover of this book depicts this encounter. Several aspects of the icon highlight our journey toward discernment. First, the bush is actually a thorn bush, typical of the desert, indicating that there isn't any place where God cannot be encountered! Next, we see the blackened sandals behind Moses. Sandals are made of the skin of animals; they are dead skins, indicating the passing nature of our persona, our identity in this world. Moses puts behind him his sense of who he has been; without it, he is vulnerable and full of fear. Yet, the icon manifests his readiness to follow the call into an unknown, to a mysterious and awesome divine encounter. His ego identity is not in control. The icon also indicates a change in his consciousness of who he really

is. His clothing is radiant with divine light. His ego is not obliterated but participates in the Light of God. He has awakened to the divine spark within, to his true identity in God. His inner senses are illumined, awakened, and he hears the voice of God telling him to lead his people out of Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

What ensues is a dialogue with God. Moses' first reaction is "Who am I?" Stripped of his former security in who he thought he was, he now is aware of his limitations, his sense of inadequacy. But his former identity doesn't just totally disappear; for now it will become God's agent in responding to the plight of his people. God assures him, "I will be with you." To us as to Moses, this is the invitation to center our attention on a new identity—on God consciousness, on a God who is full of compassion.

After the divine awakening comes the descent into the daily: the call for us to incarnate ("en-flesh") God's presence in this broken world. We perceive Moses' resistance, his difficulty in accepting the challenge of being God's instrument in the liberation of his people. He is *invited* by God; this mission is not forced upon him! The experience gives him the light, the strength, the discernment to face the challenges, to face his own fears, his resistances, and his limitations in fulfilling the divine mission—which is also his own purpose.

We see Moses at the foot of the holy mountain. Mount Horeb is at the bottom; the summit is Sinai, which Moses will later ascend and where he will commune with God

in the deepest recesses of his being. This present encounter is his new beginning. Enlightenment is not a place where we build a tent and savor God's presence in bliss for the rest of our lives. Nevertheless, it is a divine light.

When Meg asked me to write this preface, my very first thought was a certain sense that whoever is drawn to this book has most certainly already experienced something akin to Moses' visitation (or theophany, as Eastern Christians may say). In other words, one who is drawn or deeply attracted to God must surely be responding from a God-given divine sensation, the inner light I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Our experience may not be as dramatic as Moses' or St. Paul's experience, but even if it is more subtle, it is nonetheless real. It is one thing, however, to experience this divine presence and another to flesh it out in our lives. This process requires serious reflection on the tools for the spiritual journey. Who am I? What am I called to by God? How do I discern the path ahead? Discernment grows as we are purified in all the areas of our being.

In these times, when spiritual guides and teachers are often inaccessible, this book may well be a companion on the journey, one that will support us through what may feel like a labyrinth or a maze as we make our way through the complexities of everyday life and the seasons of more profound changes. Just as Moses in the desert received what he needed to discern his new life, these writings by Meg Funk offer tools for growth in self-knowledge, for deepening our relationship to God,

and for growing in discernment with God consciousness  
in our own life and purpose.

Rebecca Cown  
New Skete  
Cambridge, New York



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## Foreword

Who is the hero of the book of Jonah? Not Jonah himself, for he is, at best, an awkward instrument in the hands of God when given his commission to preach conversion to the people of Nineveh. Could it be the great fish which swallows the prophet, thus giving him a second chance to carry out the call of God? We all need second chances, and sometimes such a means is provided to take us back to where we were before.

Or could it even be the people of Nineveh who, unlike Jonah, respond to God's word immediately and so undergo a complete conversion? In fact, the real hero is God himself. He it is who initiates every action: the Hebrew word *manah* ("appoint") is used of God four times in the book, moving the story forward, as well as calling Jonah to go to Nineveh, which he does twice.

But one can also think of the hero of the book as oneself. In *lectio divina*, you open yourself to the working of God, almost becoming part of the sacred text for God to speak in the deepest part of your being, what Scripture

calls the heart. In this book you will accompany the author, Sister Mary Margaret, who will unfold to you the various levels of *lectio divina*. She uses the book of Jonah as an illustration of how to approach Scripture, so that it becomes a real encounter with the living God. She gives you not only an in-depth study of *lectio* but, more important, some guidance on how to go about it.

The cover of the book has a striking image—an icon of Moses before the burning bush. This is instructive, for that phenomenon which attracted Moses on Mount Sinai turned an ordinary day into an extraordinary one, and Moses from being a murderer and a fugitive into the deliverer and lawgiver of the people of Israel. It is the same God whom we encounter in our *lectio*, revealing to us who we are, and what it is that God wants of us.

With great skill, Sister Meg shows how *lectio* is related to the spiritual life, as taught by the ancient church writers, especially Cassian. Much of this teaching she has already given us in her previous books, especially *Thoughts Matter*, which, she tells us, took her ten years to write, so distilling her wisdom and experience for us.

More recent writers are not overlooked. In her book *Humility Matters* she gives us the teaching of both St. Teresa of Jesus and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, both of whom have that honorable title of Doctor of the Church. Sister Meg has given us the benefit of her own experience of growth through *lectio*, making this book a very personal one, to which the reader can so easily relate. She shows how life's experiences are a form of *lectio*, to find sermons

in stones, as Shakespeare puts it—a sentiment also found four centuries before him in St. Bernard.

“Did not our hearts burn within us, as he spoke to us on the way?” said the two disciples at Emmaus.

On your life’s journey may this book make such a fire burn within you until you, like them, recognize the presence of the Lord in the reading of the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread.

Abbot Laurence O’Keefe, OSB



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## *Introduction*

# ***Lectio Matters:* Before the Burning Bush**

**A**s a child I knew how to pray. It seems like as an adult I lost that natural, soft, abiding awareness both of myself and of God. I don't remember when this habitual consciousness thinned out, but I knew God was missing in my life and I needed to return to this home base as my number one priority. In 1961, at the age of eighteen, I entered the monastery. It took many years but I found again that childlike personal way of praying to God through *lectio divina*.

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI recommended this for all the faithful:

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading

hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If the practice of *lectio divina* is effectively promoted, I am convinced that it will bring to the church a new spiritual springtime.<sup>1</sup>

This book is my experience of seeking God through the ancient tradition recommended by St. Benedict. His directive in the Rule is to do *lectio divina* several hours each day.<sup>2</sup> When his directives are carried out, it seems to me that we are asked to do *lectio* whenever we are not doing something else. Though I love the choir and the common life in the monastery with the other sisters, I feel that this personal time for prayer and silence is necessary for me to live the monastic way of life. Through regular, long hours of silence, my habit of remembering God is restored time after time to the way it was when I was a child on that Benton County farm in Northern Indiana.

Now, after fifty years of being a nun, I would like to share with others who are also inclined toward this way of praying through *lectio*. The pages that follow present how I have learned to do *lectio* and how I teach others to do this kind of prayer through a sustained practice of *lectio divina*. First, I begin with a description of the method; then I provide a practical example from Scripture. I will share my recent experience of doing *lectio* using the book of Jonah. Scripture has the most theory about what *lectio* is and how to do it, but many may be called to listen to other revelatory texts, not from Scripture, but from experience or nature. I have included another example

from the book of life that weaves through the revelatory text of Scripture: *lectio* on experience is probably the way most people find God. Kathleen Cahalan, PhD, shares her sustained *lectio* in this book. Life experience is her first teacher and Scripture is a witness to what has already happened in her life. She's an example to me that many Christians are already doing *lectio divina* but discover the language in the tradition after having already lived it in their ordinary lives. In this sense, we don't need to learn how to do *lectio*, we only need this language to know what it is we are doing when we do it. We need each other to encourage us to sustain this inner work, not from time to time, but as a way of life.

Again, we know that sustained *lectio* can be sourced from one of three texts: the book of Holy Scripture, the book of experience, or the book of nature. For this book, *Lectio Matters*, I will teach the method of *lectio divina* through the book of Scripture, using the book of Jonah. All these revelatory texts bring us to our knees. We take our shoes off. We are each like Moses before the burning bush.

## **The Method of Sustained *Lectio Divina***

*Lectio divina* is a sustained immersion into a revelatory text. While Scripture is the classic revelation of encounter with God, the text could be from other sources like a personal event from the book of life or an experience from the book of nature.

*Lectio divina* is an encounter with God:

1. through the revelatory text of nature, experience, or Scripture
2. mediated by the voices of the text: literal, symbolic, moral, mystical<sup>3</sup>
3. we receive through the senses of the reader: logical, intuitive, ascetical (personal), spiritual<sup>4</sup>

*Lectio divina* is a way of praying using the revelatory texts of Scripture, nature, or experience.

This encounter with God is to listen with the ear of our heart. *Lectio divina* is our burning bush. We take off our sandals and bow our brow to the ground: our being bends low before the living God.

We invoke the Holy Spirit to bring to mind our particular text to use for *lectio divina* in the coming months. We linger with this text for months, or until another text rises from underneath our conscious awareness.

- We listen to the literal voice of the text and study with our logical mind.
- We meditate on the symbolic voice of the text with our intuitive mind (aesthetical).
- We heed the moral voice of God with our personal senses of prayer and ascetical practices. We comply with this inner voice through our daily decisions and through the discipline of discernment.
- We receive the mystical voice with our spiritual senses.

Each of these voices is distinct and is mediated through the revelatory text. Our part in this encounter is to listen, meditate, heed with discrimination, and receive the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

This way of personal prayer becomes our way of life, a culture of God consciousness.

This method depends on the Holy Spirit enlightening our mind and filling our heart with desire. The text is given to us as an individual and each of us takes the necessary days, weeks, and months to live into the revelation. This is sustained *lectio*.

Skills of study, artistic appreciation, training of the mind for discipline, and the disposition of repentance prepare us for the deepest experience of the encounter with God before the burning bush.

Discernment becomes a way of life. We do this *lectio* as our default way of living in the world. We do this practice when we are not doing anything else. This *lectio* is the culture under the river of our interior life that provides us with directives of how to be loving above the river to all, especially the least among us.<sup>5</sup>

*Lectio divina* is an encounter with the living God within our loving heart. This is our individual practice that prepares us for liturgy, selfless service, community life, friendships, and an ecclesial way of being in the world. Sustained *lectio divina* is a way of life. Rather than a formal exercise of an hour a day, *lectio* is what we do all day long.<sup>6</sup>

The Alexandrian Catechetical School promoted study of the literal sense because, unlike the Greek myth system,

the Christian story had a human Jesus who was also God. He was the Christ who fulfilled the Hebrew Scriptures. The teachers from Alexandria did exegesis on the literal level of the text but went on to specialize in teaching the spiritual senses of Scripture. They not only communicated information about this event but also transmitted the Good News as a revelation. Scripture had not only a literal sense (which could also be historical) but also an allegorical sense, a moral sense, and an anagogical sense (movement toward contemplation).<sup>7</sup>

Later this richness of allegory and mystical interpretations comes to us through St. Benedict. His rule, possibly written about 520 CE, is a masterful anthology of the scholars and saints who taught during those first four hundred years of Christianity after the death of the apostles. The influence of the Alexandrian Catechetical School is embedded in the Rule of Benedict. Monks were taught a mystical way of interpretation as well as a diligent scientific exegesis of Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Benedict wanted his monks to be immersed in the Bible and provided hours every day for this work.

When we started the Beech Grove School of *Lectio Divina* in 2000, we found it helpful as a teaching method to separate the voice of the text from the reader's senses. This innovation is compatible with tradition.<sup>9</sup> In English, the word "senses" is used both for the text and for the reader and therefore causes confusion. So instead of using the word "senses" for the text, we use the word "voice." For the reader, we use the word "senses"

as receptors of the words of the text. There are more voices and more senses in inspired literature, but these four voices (literal, symbolic, moral, mystical) received by four senses (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical) will provide a little method to go deeply and devoutly into contemplative prayer.

We begin our sustained *lectio divina* with earnest prayer: *epiclesis*. Come, Holy Spirit, come. We know not how to pray as we ought but groan in eager expectation. First, we devote ourselves to prayer so that (a) the text is revealed to us and (b) we are open to receive.

There are three revelatory texts: nature, experience, and Scripture. We wait upon the Lord to reveal to us the text that is our invitation and what is on the other side of the door that invites us to this sustained *lectio*. The universal prayer form is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, or Mass. The common prayer form is the Divine Office. *Lectio divina* is the traditional individual prayer form.<sup>10</sup> No one can do this for us. If we are not doing it, we, as monastics, do not fulfill the directive of St. Benedict to do *lectio divina*.

Notice this is not a group activity but our individual supplication: I pray. I discern which door of the revelatory text is being revealed to me and what will be my *lectio divina* for the next several months of practice. "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps 70:1).

Each of us will have a unique theme, but we share the same journey as we go deeper and deeper into the

revelation of mystery. The element of surprise and delight is a sign that the Holy Spirit is “at work” within and among us as a community.

### **Epiclesis: *Prayer of Invocation to the Holy Spirit***

First, I call the Holy Spirit to come down, overshadow me, quicken my mind, and warm my heart. I ask for guidance about where to start and what text to use; finally, I ask the Spirit to provide the grace to remove obstacles that hinder me in my resolve.

My entry-level initiative is to pray to the Holy Spirit.

*Epiclesis* is a Greek word meaning “to call down.” The *epiclesis* is to ask, like the priest does at eucharistic liturgy, the Holy Spirit to “Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup> According to the pre-Vatican II rubrics, at this point of the liturgy, a bell was to be rung and the priest was to place his hands over the bread and the wine. This signaled the faithful to kneel down before the mystery. This is the preparation before the priest pronounces the words of consecration.

We do the same in our individual prayer as at eucharistic liturgy. We invoke the Holy Spirit to come down and be with us as we start our *lectio divina* prayer. This is continuing the prayers at our eucharistic liturgy where there is a second *epiclesis* (“invocation upon”) when the priest begs the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, so that the offerings may become the Body and Blood

of Christ and that the faithful, by receiving them, may become a living offering to God.<sup>12</sup> The goal of *lectio divina* is to indeed become that living offering to God through Christ as we pray every day at Mass.

St. Benedict says that whenever we begin anything we begin with earnest prayer.<sup>13</sup> As you see, *lectio divina* is a prayer, and we place ourselves under this dove that is hovering. As we know from Scripture, the Spirit hovered over the waters in the Genesis creation account and in the overshadowing events in the New Testament: Jesus' baptism, the transfiguration, Mary's annunciation, and Pentecost. As we want to be quickened in our *lectio*, we linger here and invoke the Holy Spirit to come, inspire, dwell, abide, and let not the word return void.

You might ask, "How do we do this prayer? Is it a single prayer of supplication?" We do not know how to pray. That is why we need the Spirit to come and teach us.

So, as I gather my *lectio* revelatory text, I stand humble and ready. I watch and pray. Usually the text is right before my eyes. I had been into it for days, weeks, even years, this desire for God and a willingness to do whatever it took to find the Presence that I remember having as a child. I lift up this prayer like a dove soars to the heavens. I then dive deeply into the mystical stream of my Catholic tradition.

The text came: be simple. Take this little book seriously. Engage in the book of Jonah. I was trained to be a perpetual student. I doubted that such a little book would teach me much about Scripture or be deep and

wide enough for a long, lingering *lectio*, but I also felt a growing fatigue with reading. In my era of religious life, we were saturated with spiritual reading. I simply consumed book after book, and books, and then I read books about the books I read. The more I read, the less satisfied I became. Was I swimming in the direction of God, toward a contemplative life in prayer?

I asked for a confirming sign to trust my invitation to be content with a long, lingering look at the book of Jonah. I felt called to do an ascetical practice before I could hear God's directive about my invitation to *lectio*: I put boundaries on my reading of magazines, newspapers, newsletters, advertisements, the glut of paper that comes to me from all sides. I glanced but refrained from reading. I took care that watching television and listening to podcasts on my iPhone were in service of my *lectio* and not temptations away from it. In short, I emptied my mind of the flood of media.<sup>14</sup>

I opened my Bible to the book of Jonah.<sup>15</sup>

I felt that God is merciful; if I took up the wrong text or event, our Lord would guide my heart to find the right place. I felt I didn't want a mind full of current events; I wanted to seek God and put on the mind of Christ. After this *epiclesis* moment of asking and receiving in faith my revelatory text, I got started. *Lectio divina* is reading God.

You might wonder what was my confirming sign both to do *lectio* with the book of Jonah and also to report about my practice of *lectio* in this book. The book of Jonah first came to me from a practical point of view, as a good

teaching tool. It was short, dramatic, and densely instructive. Then I realized that Jonah had been an abiding metaphor for me. I saw the text no longer as a teaching tool for others but as a necessary transmission for my spiritual journey. My confirming sign was a realization of a pattern of my own recurring experience of setting out in one direction, getting washed out, then spending deep down time, like Jonah in the whale.

It seems to me that often I would embark on a mission of this or that and get turned back rather dramatically. Three times I felt called to do something. Went. And three times I was washed overboard and returned to my Indiana monastery (Catholic University, Bolivia, Ireland). I never considered myself to be a prophet, but certainly I felt that I was called to do the will of God. Over and over again, though, I found life's events shifted me back from this or that false start. Also, I found the audiences to which I was sent to be far more in touch with God than I was. Nineveh converted me over and over again.

Another confirming sign was to have an eye condition that lasted about eighteen months. For one year, I could neither read nor drive a car. I could, however, see in my mind's eye the whole book of Jonah. I actually felt swallowed and parked in the belly of a great fish with impending darkness for the rest of my life, but, thanks to Dr. Tom Funk, I had a surgery that returned almost my full sight. But this gets ahead of my story here about teaching this sustained method of *lectio divina*. I consider writing this book to be a great privilege. This book, *Lectio Matters*:

*Before the Burning Bush*, refrains from talking about *lectio*; instead, I hope to encourage doing the practice of *lectio*.

### *Voices and Senses*

There are many ways of doing *lectio divina*.<sup>16</sup> The method I use is a contemporary version of what I would have learned if I were a student in the Alexandrian Catechetical School that goes back to the fourth century. This early theological school taught the voices of the text. Living in the twenty-first century, I realize that different parts of my mind receive a voice specifically designed to fit certain parts of my brain. I consider how a reader, such as myself, receives the different voices. I use a different part of my brain to figure out the plain voice. I use other parts of my brain that decodes the symbolic voice. The text may have as many as four voices or may use one of the distinct voices that requires the reader's specific senses designed to receive that particular voice:

- 1) The literal voice is studied by the logical senses of the mind (left brain).
- 2) The symbolic (allegorical) voice is received by the intuitive senses of the mind (right brain).
- 3) The moral voice is heard by the personal senses that heed the directives of the voice (I come to my personal senses and take action because the directive comes from God and is intended for me). The moral voice comes through my own voice, but as I get more attuned to hearing this moral voice, I

can distinguish the promptings from the voice of the Holy Spirit.

- 4) The mystical voice is the experience of God that simply rises from within when purity of heart reigns. This voice is received by the spiritual senses. Just like our physical senses, we have eyes, ears, touch receptors that get the message with wonderful proportion, delight, and surprise.

This method of *lectio divina* is an encounter with the living God.

If this seems daunting, be at peace. *Lectio divina* is simply a way we humans have of knowing and loving. Prayer is natural and has its own inherent symmetry. After all, prayer is our personal relationship with God who made us—and made us with a huge desire for the deepest life lived in our Creator.



## Chapter 1

# **The Text of the Book of Jonah: The Actual Reading of the Text**

*First, let's read the entire text as a whole.<sup>1</sup>*

## **The Book of Jonah**

### *Chapter 1*

**T**he Word of the Lord came to Jonah the Son of Amittai.  
“Get up: go to Nineveh the great city,  
preach against it, for the evil it has done has come up  
before me.”

Jonah rose to run away to Tarshish, from the Lord.  
He went down to Joppa and found a ship bound for  
Tarshish.

He paid his fare and went aboard to go with them to  
Tarshish far away from the Lord.

Then the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea,  
and such a fierce storm that they thought that the ship  
would break up.

## 2 *Lectio Matters*

The sailors were afraid, and each one prayed aloud to his god.

They threw the ship's cargo into the sea, to lighten it, but Jonah went below deck, lay down, and fell asleep.

The ship's captain came to him and said:

"Get up: why are you still sleeping? Pray to your God. Perhaps he will take notice of us so that we do not die."

They said to one another:

"Come, let us cast lots to know whose fault it is that this disaster has come upon us."

They cast lots, and Jonah was singled out.

They said: "Tell us why this disaster has overtaken us.

What is your occupation? Where do you come from?

From which country? From which people?"

He answered: "I am a Hebrew. I worship the Lord of heaven,

who created the sea and the dry land."

The men were greatly afraid,

for he told them that he was running away from the presence of the Lord.

They asked him, "What ought we to do to you to make the sea calm again?"

For the sea was growing more and more stormy.

He said: "Take me and throw me into the sea and it will become calm.

For I know that it is because of me that this storm has come upon you."

The men rowed to get back to dry land, but they could not

for the sea grew more and more stormy against them.  
Then they prayed to the Lord:  
“Let us not perish because of this man’s life  
nor regard us as guilty for shedding his blood.  
For you have done as it pleased you.”  
Then they took Jonah and threw him into the sea.  
And the sea ceased to rage.  
The men revered the Lord greatly.  
They offered sacrifice and made vows.

## *Chapter 2*

The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.  
He was inside the fish for three days and three nights.  
Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish.  
He said:  
“In my suffering I cried to the Lord, and he answered me.  
From the depths of the grave I cried for help  
and you heard my voice.  
You threw me into the deep, into the heart of the seas.  
The flood surrounded me,  
all your breakers and waves passed over me.”  
He said: “I am rejected from your presence,  
I will never again look on your holy temple.  
The waters surrounded me up to my throat,  
The deep surrounded me, weeds twisted round my head.  
I went down to the very bases of the mountains,  
the gates of the Underworld closed upon me,  
yet you raised me up from the pit, O Lord my God.  
My life was fainting away, then I remembered the Lord.

My prayer came before you into your holy temple.  
Those who revere empty idols forsake the mercy shown  
them.

As for me, I will sacrifice to you with loud thanksgiving,  
and repay you what I have vowed.”

The Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited up Jonah  
onto the dry land.

### *Chapter 3*

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.

“Get up: go to that great city Nineveh  
and proclaim to it the message I am telling you.”

Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the  
word of the Lord.

Now Nineveh was a great city—it would take three  
days to walk through it.

Jonah began to go through the city; it took him one day.

He proclaimed: “In forty days’ time Nineveh will be  
overthrown.”

The men of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast.

Both small and great put on sackcloth.

Word came to the King of Nineveh;

he rose from his throne, took off his robe of state,  
and sat in ashes.

A proclamation was made throughout Nineveh.

“By the decree of the King and his court  
no one is to taste anything: not even the animals,  
oxen or sheep, shall taste anything.

They shall not be pastured, or drink any water.

Everybody—men and animals—must put on sackcloth and make fervent prayers to God.

Everyone should turn from his evil way of life and from the violence which he does.

Who knows—perhaps God will change his mind and feel sorry for us,

turn from his wrath, so that we do not perish.”

God saw what they did,

how they turned from their evil way of life.

He changed his mind about what he would do to them, and did not do it.

#### *Chapter 4*

Jonah took this very badly and became angry.

He prayed to the Lord and said,

“O Lord, isn’t this what I said when I was in my own land?

That is why I ran away to Tarshish that first time.

I know that you are a merciful and compassionate God, patient, and full of kindness, ever changing your mind about doing harm.

Now, Lord, I might as well die, for to me death is better than life.”

The Lord said, “Is it a good thing for you to be angry?”

Jonah went out of the city, and sat down at the east of it.

He made for himself a shelter, and sat in its shade to see what would become of the city.

The Lord made a little plant and made it grow up over Jonah

so as to shade his head, to keep him from any discomfort.  
Jonah was very glad about the little plant.

The Lord made a maggot at dawn the next day  
which attacked the plant so it withered away.

When the sun rose, the Lord made a scorching east wind.  
The sun beat down upon Jonah's head, and he grew  
faint.

He wanted to die, and said, "Death is better than life."

The Lord said, "Is it a good thing for you to be angry  
about the little plant?"

Jonah answered, "Yes, angry enough to die!"

The Lord said "You feel sorry for the little plant,

yet you did not do any work for it or make it grow.

It existed for a day then came to an end in a night.

Should I not feel sorry for Nineveh, that great city,

in which there are more than twenty thousand people

who do not know right from wrong,

as well as many animals?"