**Jonah: A Whale of a Story**

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**OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDED PREPARATION TASKS**

**About the Presenter:**
David J. Zucker, PhD, BCC (ret), recently retired as Director of Chaplaincy Care/Rabbi at Shalom Cares, a senior Continuum of Care Center, and Staff Chaplain at Shalom Cares Hospice, Aurora, Colorado. In addition to numerous journal articles, book chapters, and reviews, he has published several books, most recently, *The Torah: An Introduction for Christians and Jews* (Paulist Press, 2005). For more information, go to [www.DavidJZucker.org](http://www.DavidJZucker.org).

**Program Overview**
The book of Jonah holds a special place for both Judaism and Christianity. It tells us the story of a person who, like all of us is fallible, at times irascible, and who finds it easier to say “no” than to take on a difficult, and probably thankless task. Jonah is a liturgical reading for both Jews and Catholics. His story is the additional Scriptural reading for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) Afternoon service. Jonah is also a frequent reading in the Church, for example it was read on the third Sunday in Ordinary Time this year January 22, 2012. In the Christian Bible, reference to Jonah comes in Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus likens his own coming entombment for three days to the days that Jonah spends in the midst of the “belly of the sea monster” (NRSV); “sea-monster’s belly” (NEB); “belly of a huge fish” (NIV); “belly of the whale” (NAB). The Gospel of Luke mentions that as Jonah was a sign for the Ninevites, so likewise would the Son of Man be a sign for the present, evil generation (Matt 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-30).

Chaplains can make use of the book of Jonah in pastoral visits, and to supplement their own spiritual support by drawing upon the power of this wonderful and disturbing work. This course will introduce the book of Jonah, and then analyze its four chapters. We will discuss how a careful reading of either the whole book, or a selection of specific verses can offer personal and professional insights, comfort, and a release of emotion.

**PREPARATION - Part A**
About two weeks before the first session, approximately September 20-27 take time to read the book of Jonah. Write down a couple relevant questions.

In the week before the first session, approximately September 28-October 3, take time to read the book of Jonah again. Write down a couple of additional relevant questions.
(1) Jonah is not a heroic figure. Sent to Nineveh, Jonah heads off in the polar opposite direction, west on the sea not overland going east. Aboard ship, given a chance to save his life, Jonah opts for suicide. In Nineveh, his prophecy is less than one verse. It is a quick repent-or-else statement, uttered once. When Nineveh repents Jonah is upset, angry, and sarcastic. Jonah is resentful; he is not repentful of his own disobedience and bad behavior.

(2) A realistic read of the text “makes clear that our ancestors are by no means always models of ethical behavior that edify and inspire us. On the contrary, often the Torah [i.e. the Pentateuch, as well as the Bible as a whole] holds up a mirror to the ugliest aspects of human nature and human society.” Judith Plaskow, “Contemporary Reflection, Vayeira” Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, 2008, p. 107.