**Lesson 3:**

**Extract from RE Today:** Opening up Judaism

One day God spoke to Jonah, ‘Go to Nineveh. In this city they are doing many evil and terrible things. Tell them if they do not obey my commandments, I will destroy them.’ Jonah was petrified and so decided to disobey God and run as far away as possible. He made a journey down to the port and paid his fare for a board heading to Tarshish. Jonah hoped to be able to escape God completely.

Once he was on the boat he went down into his cabin and fell into a deep sleep. He was exhausted. As he slept, the seas became stormier until eventually the sailors became petrified. The board was being tossed around and was in serous danger of sinking. Each of the sailors prayed to their own god asking for a solution, the cargo was thrown overboard, but nothing caused the ever-worsening storm to abate.

The captain eventually came into Jonah’s cabin and shook him hard until he woke up. The captain begged Jonah to pray to God to find some kind of solution to their terrible situation.

Eventually Jonah blurted out, “But I can’t pray to God because it’s him I am trying to run away from.” The sailors soon realised that it was Jonah who was causing the problem, but they weren’t sure what to do. They asked Jonah what the solution was, and his reply was “Throw me over the side.” At first the sailors couldn’t bring themselves to throw him over and persevered in trying to row the boat to shore. However, all their efforts were in vain and the storm seemed to get worse.

Eventually they realised that they had to throw Jonah overboard. As they threw him over, they prayed and tried to gain forgiveness from God. As Jonah was pitched overboard God provided a large fish which swam beside the ship and swallowed Jonah. The moment he was thrown overboard the waves subsided and the board ceased tossing and turning.

Jonah sat inside the big fish, wondering what to do next. If it hadn’t been so dark, he might have been able to see a way out. As he sat inside the fish he prayed to God, “Lord thank you for saving me from the swirling seas. Thank you, Lord, for thinking that I am worth saving.” As he lay inside the belly of the fish, hearing strange sounds and fearing the worst, he became more and more scared.

After three days and nights the fish vomited Jonah onto the beach. As he lay on the beach listening to the calm lapping waves and feeling the hot sun, Jonah could not believe how good God had been. His prayers had been heard and answered.

Suddenly Jonah heard God speaking to him again. This time Jonah agreed to go and speak to the people of Nineveh.