LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

www.huc.edu/libraries

Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

“THIS IS THE OCEAN:” RHETORICS OF RESILIENCE IN JUSTICE WORK IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH TEACHINGS

Alexandra Happ Stein

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
New York, NY

March 2022
Advisor: Rabbi Nancy H. Wiener, D.Min.

Abstract

This thesis examines original creative works (sermons, *divrei torah,* poems, creative liturgy, and a few opinion articles, pictures, and songs) published between 2016 and January of 2022 in the liberal Jewish world (primarily, in the United States) that take as one of their central topics the cultivation or activation of resilience in justice work. The terms "resilience" and "perseverance" are defined and placed in historical context, and a literature review of psychological research about the cultivation and activation of resilience is offered. After this, the bulk of the thesis is dedicated to analyzing the primary sources that were gleaned from the original creative works by mapping them onto psychological research about resilience, and by exploring internal patterns in the classical Jewish texts and stories they cite. (An analysis of some of the frequently cited classical Jewish texts is also offered.) Particular attention is paid to moral injury, ambiguous loss, and post-traumatic growth. Three stories that were utilized in many of the sermons (the flood story in Genesis 6-9, the story of the Ancient Israelites' time in slavery in Egpy in Exodus 1-14, and various stories from rabbinic texts set in the era immediately after the fall of the Second Temple) are explored at length.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you is owed to a number of people for their support in the process of researching and composing this thesis.

Thank you first and foremost to my advisor, Rabbi Nancy Wiener, whose wisdom, kindness and patience cannot be overstated. Thank you so much for your support and insight through every stage of this process, from framing to the final draft, and for modeling the kind of interdisciplinary analysis this thesis relies upon. I am also very grateful to Rabbi Wiener for teaching (along with Rabbis Kim Geringer and Lisa Grant) a number of courses that cover topics like moral injury and ambiguous loss, which gave me language for phenomena I had experienced in the world but could not quite name, and sparked some of the interests that led to this thesis. In a similar vein, thanks are also owed to the many HUC professors who taught us about reception history as a way to study text (and inculcated a love for and facility with text study, more broadly).

Thank you to my classmates at HUC-JIR for being really lovely people to learn with over these past five years, and to my friends Ben Dyme and Rabbi Ben Chaidell for studying some of the classical texts this thesis explores with me. And thank you to all of my family and friends for your support throughout this process (and throughout my life!). I'm extremely grateful.

Finally, thank you to the many, many clergy and lay leaders who composed the primary sources that are at the heart of this thesis. Talking about resilience in justice work can be hard on a good day, but all the more so when you are trying to help others navigate a challenge you are going through yourself. I am grateful for your work and for your wisdom. I am also very grateful on a practical level to the many people who responded to my emails and messages soliciting primary sources by emailing me their work. Some respondents even offered to reach out to communities I was not able to directly contact. Thank you to all of you - your generosity with your writing and with your time made this thesis possible.

Table of Contents

Introduction …… 4

Chapter 1: What Is Resilience, and How Can It Be Cultivated?……..…….12

Chapter 2: (How) The Texts Talk About Resilience ……26
Building Relationships and Community ……27
"Keep Things In Perspective" ……...34
Perspectives on Justice: Renegotiating Relationships with Jewish Justice Sayings and Texts ……...39
"Finding Hope," "Making Meaning," and Cultivating Joy ……..45
Moral Injury and Soul Repair ……..51

Chapter 3: *Parshat Noach* - A Story for Our Times? ……...56

Chapter 4: After the Second Temple's Fall ……...73
Part 1: Other waters: Yevamot 121a……...73
Part 2: Witnessing (or Anticipating) the Ruins ……..87
Part 3: To What is Our Moment Comparable? Subjugation Under Roman Rule ...101

Chapter 5: "Resisting Tyrants Since Pharoah" ……....110

Conclusion ……..…124

Bibliography (Primary Sources) ……..…133

Biblical, Mishnaic, Talmudic, and Select Midrashic Texts Cited In The Thesis ……140

Bibliography (Secondary Sources) ……142

Introduction

"Every generation confronts experiences that overwhelm them," Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt told her Conservative congregation in the fall of 2019, Rosh HaShanah 5780, "we are in our version."[1] And she continued:

> If I could write a commercial for identifying inner chaos it would go like this: are you having trouble sleeping at night because of rising sea tides or vanishing glaciers? You are not alone. … If any of these things keep you up at night: Gun violence, corruption of the government, the mental health and future of your children in a vastly challenging world, racism, sexism – you are not alone.[2]

Hers was one of many American Jewish sermons written between 2016-2021 that identified a similar problem: awareness of injustice -- even in religious communities that view themselves as morally obligated to engage in *tikkun olam,* the repair of the world-- is not necessarily enough to catalyze action. Sometimes, as Rabbi Holtzblatt identified, awareness leads to overwhelm. Sometimes, awareness leads to shame. Sometimes, awareness leads to fear. For these and myriad other reasons, a person or community can find themselves aware (perhaps painfully aware) of systemic injustice and/or impending (or ongoing) crisis, but also completely disengaged from any attempts to intervene. Or, they can find themselves less and less engaged in work on behalf of a cause in which they have long been deeply invested.

As Rabbi Arthur Waskow recently put it: ours is "an age that is ragged with fear, anger, even despair."[3]

The overwhelm, fear, anger and despair (and the inaction that can sometimes accompany these feelings) that Rabbis Holtzblatt, Waskow, and many others have identified runs counter to a

---

[1] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Facing the World: Rosh HaShanah 5780" (Fall 2019), delivered to Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, D.C.
[2] ibid.
[3] Rabbi Arthur Waskow, "Tales of the Spirit Rising," July 21, 2021, accessed online at: https://theshalomcenter.org/content/tales-spirit-rising

basic intuition of the justice rhetoric that flourished in the American Jewish community in the second half of the twentieth century in particular, which often named awareness as the central prerequisite for engagement in social change work (which, starting in the 1950s,[4] many American Jews began referring to as *Tikkun Olam,* the repair of the world). Particularly in the wake of the Holocaust, American liberal Jewry, deeply aware of the sin of apathy, went on to develop an extensive English-language discourse (in liturgical texts and elsewhere) extolling the virtues of attention and action. (In the Reform Movement, this discourse was linked to the concept of "prophetic Judaism."[5]) Justice, this discourse goes, is something we will all be moved to pursue if only we truly pay attention to the world around us, see all that is wrong, and accept our responsibility to take part in the work to repair it. A typical example of this rhetoric is a prayer composed by Rabbi Mitchell Fisher in the 1920s, which the Reform movement later incorporated into its Shabbat prayer books: "Disturb us, oh God, ruffle us from our complacency …deny us the false Sabbath which gives us/the delusions of satisfaction amid a world of war and hatred ...."[6].

What should we do when we are plenty "disturbed," but, perhaps, no less "complacent" than before?

Personal and professional curiosity about this question, as well as an anecdotal suspicion that American liberal Judaism currently lacks a hegemonic discourse with which to address it, were the initial catalysts of this thesis, which explores rhetorics of resilience and perseverance in

[4] Rabbi Jill Jacobs, *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice through Jewish Law & Tradition,* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing (2009), p.24.
[5] ibid.
[6] An adaptation of Fisher's words is currently one of the interpretive options for Kiddushat HaYom in Mishkan T'filah's Shabbat Evening Service I (p. 173). [Ed. Elise D. Frishman, *Mishkan Tefilah: A Reform Siddur: Shabbat, Evenings, and Festivals,* New York: CCAR Press (2007). Kindle Edition.]

justice work in sermons, divrei Torah, and other (primarily American[7]) Jewish writings of the last five years. If *tzedek, tzedek tirdof*[8] and similar slogans are, for some members of our community, no longer the motivators they once were, I wondered, what are clergy and other Jewish leaders saying instead? What sources are they drawing upon, and (how) do their words relate to psychological research on effective strategies for cultivating or activating resilience?

This thesis was proposed and composed in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic – a time, for many, of personal and communal challenges that had no precedent in our lifetimes, and relatedly, a time of tremendous national and international interest in the topic of resilience. And without question, the realities of life in this era form an important background for many sermons written in 2020 and 2021, whether they address the pandemic directly or not. But more fundamentally than this, perhaps, it is worth noting that *all* of these sermons (and other materials) were composed in an era in which citizens of democracies around the world were beginning to question the power of the citizen to effectuate systemic change. The systemic change version[9] of *Tikkun Olam* as it has been understood by many American Jews since the 1950s, 60s and 70s depends on an implicit belief in our power, not just as human beings, but specifically as citizens. What happens when this belief begins to crack?

---

[7] One of my original hopes for this thesis was to compare the ways in which Jewish people in different countries were discussing the topic of resilience in justice work. As an American Jew who has spent some time living in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, I have personally been both moved and inspired by the ways I have heard some Israeli Jewish communities discuss this topic, and I am anecdotally aware that there are many interesting discussions of the topic happening in Jewish communities in many different parts of the world. However, despite outreach to some organizations with an international membership, the vast majority of texts I collected were from the United States. (A few texts came from Canada and from Israel, and those are analyzed in this thesis as well.) Were I to expand this project in the future, more substantial transnational data collection and analysis would be one of my primary methodological goals.

[8] "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20, and a popular 20th and 21st century American Jewish slogan).

[9] As Rabbi Jacobs and others note, *Tikkun Olam* can connote a wide range of actions (and intended outcomes) depending on who you are talking to, and for many American Jews, it also incorporates direct service work without a systemic justice analysis. (Rabbi Jill Jacobs, *There Shall Be No Needy,* p.25-39.) This paper focuses on understandings of *tikkun olam* and *social justice* that do assume a need to work for systemic change.

In order to gather some data to address these questions, in June of 2021, I posted a message to several listservs (including the Avodah Alumni Listserv[10] and the T'ruah Chaverim listserv[11]) and Facebook groups (including JEDLAB,[12] the Jewish Women's Clergy Group,[13] and the CCAR Facebook group[14]) asking Jewish clergy and educators to send me any sermons/divrei Torah,[15] *iyyunim*[16] or lesson plans they had created in the past five years that were connected to the topic of "resilience or perseverance in justice work." About twenty individuals responded to my initial outreach (often, with multiple pieces they had composed, or even in some cases with websites[17] with a wealth of resources from multiple authors), and I collected more materials over the next several months by exploring the materials available on the websites of clergy,

---

[10] Avodah is a Jewish social justice organization that started in the late 1990s as an economic and racial justice service corps for Jewish young adults. It now runs its service corps, and a fellowship for Jewish young professionals, in multiple cities. The Avodah Alumni listserv has more than 1,000 members, many of whom work in fields related to Jewish social justice.

[11] The T'ruah Chaverim listserv reaches clergy from a variety of Jewish denominations who self-affiliate with T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights. As of March 2022, the total list of T'ruah Chaverim (which included some deceased members) numbered 2,338. (https://truah.org/about/our-people/chaverim/)

[12] JEDLAB is an English-language Facebook group for Jewish educators (including many clergy) to share ideas about Jewish education. In November of 2021, it had 12,178 members. JEDLAB is a notably pluralistic and transnational (English language) space – my only responses from Orthodox Jews, Canadian Jews, and Israeli Jews were on JEDLAB. (Some sources whose authors identified with one or more of these groups were also found independently.)

[13] The Jewish Women's Clergy group is a pluralistic Facebook group with (as of November 2021) 1,308 members. The group is open to ordained clergy and clergy students who identify as women.

[14] The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) is the umbrella organization of Reform Rabbis in North America. As a current rabbinical student, I do not have access to their Facebook group, and so Rabbi Rachel Gross-Prinz posted there for me.

[15] Some clergy (and lay people active in synagogue life) use the words "sermon" and "d'var Torah" (word of Torah – plural divrei Torah) interchangeably, while to others they mean different things (a sermon might be longer, for example, or more formal; and a d'var Torah is not necessarily delivered in the context of a religious service – it might be emailed to a listserv, for example – whereas sermon does imply something that is read or signed aloud during worship). I used both words in order to solicit the widest possible selection of responses.

[16] *Iyyun* (עיון) is a Hebrew word meaning "intention." In some subsets of contemporary Jewish American English, "an iyyun" (or the plural "iyyunim") refers to a brief original reflection offered by one of the service leaders that is thematically connected to an upcoming prayer and/or to important themes within the service.

[17] Rabbi Arthur Waskow wrote to suggest the writings available on his website, https://theshalomcenter.org/, and Rabbi Michael Fessler wrote suggest multiple projects by Reconstructing Judaism, including the podcast "Hashiveinu: Jewish Teachings on Resilience" (https://hashivenu.fireside.fm/), "Evolve: Groundbreaking Jewish Conversations" (https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/), the Reset project (https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/reset2020), and Ritual Well (https://ritualwell.org).

synagogues, and Jewish organizations known for their justice work.[18] I also drew materials from two books that were published in early 2022: *No Time for Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from an Era of Upheaval* (which is a collection of sermons and op-eds published during Donald Trump's presidency) and *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Additionally, three sermons are drawn from the *Social Justice Torah Commentary* (a 2021 publication of the Central Conference of American Rabbis).[19] This thesis engages in a qualitative analysis of all of these collected materials (primarily sermons and *divrei Torah*).[20] It seeks to analyze them in light of psychological research on the cultivation and/or activation of resilience, and it looks for patterns[21] in the ways the primary sources utilize classical Jewish texts and teachings.

One of my teachers, Rabbi Hannah Goldstein, has argued that participation in protests can have pastoral efficacy for people who care deeply about justice work; that regardless of the impact of the protest on a given policy, it certainly has an impact on the people who participate in it. She is supported in this analysis by research into healing and resilience during and after

[18] In particular, having been alerted in the summer that several clergy were planning to discuss resilience in justice work for their High Holy Days sermons, I did another round of website-scouring after the High Holy Days in the fall of 2021/5782.

[19] "Chukat: A Lesson in Trauma-Informed Care," by Rabbi Shoshana Conover; "T'rumah: The Heart-Incited Offering - Interdependence, Redistribution, and Community Care" by Rabbi Mackenzie Zev Reynolds; and "B'haalot'cha: Shedding Light on Solidarity - A Candle Loses Nothing by Lighting Another Candle," by Imani Romney-Rosa and Rabbi Ellen Lippman. The first two sermons were the only two sermons in the book to use the word "resilience," and the third was the only sermon in the book to use the phrase "keep going." The third sermon was also the only sermon in the book to use a form of the verb "to persist" to describe the actions of people engaged in justice work.

[20] The vast majority of materials I received were sermons and *divrei Torah.* These form the bulk of the primary sources this thesis analyzes, along with some poems, creative liturgical compositions, songs, and opinion articles (rooted in Torah) that were sent my way. I also received some lesson plans connected to resilience, but since they were not about resilience in justice work, they were not ultimately included in the analysis in this thesis.

[21] One of the fascinating initial findings of this analysis was that the primary sources utilize a wide variety of classical Jewish texts and teachings – so wide, that while there are some texts and teachings that appear in multiple primary sources, there were also many texts and teachings that were only utilized in one of the primary sources. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

experiences of ambiguous loss and moral injury (discussed further in chapter one), which suggests that protest, and finding a community of understanding peers, can both be healthy and life-affirming responses to some experiences of loss (especially loss connected to injustice). As such, one could argue that *any* sermon about a social justice issue might in a sense be a tool for resilience in justice work, because a speaker stands up for what they believe in, and a community of listeners and/or readers bears witness to that protest (and may feel affirmed if they share the author's perspective). It is clear in the introduction to *No Time for Neutrality* and the epilogue of *The Social Justice Torah Commentary* that perseverance in justice work was one of the goals driving the composition of each volume. That said, I limited the texts analyzed in this thesis to those that were submitted to me in response to an inquiry describing this project, and those I found independently that seemed explicitly connected to the topic of resilience or perseverance in justice work. A broader analysis of discussions of justice in contemporary Jewish sermons, creative liturgy, poems, and art would also be very interesting, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Two terms that went undefined in the data-gathering stage of this thesis were "justice work" and "resilience." Left to interpret both words according to their own understandings, most respondents returned written compositions (or videos of themselves speaking) in which "justice work" referred to one or several of the follow topics: anti-racism; solidarity with immigrants and refugees; work to fight climate change; work to combat governmental corruption; work to combat sexual harassment and assault; economic justice work; work to combat the effects of White Supremacy, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia; and work to combat transphobia. The implicit (or explicit) definitions of "resilience" also varied, encompassing both the idea of

resilience as "bouncing back" in the face of adversity (which, as discussed in Chapter 1, is one of the older definitions of the term) and resilience as growth in the face of adversity.

This thesis explores and analyzes the gathered materials to discern significant patterns. In Chapter One ("What Is Resilience, and How Can It Be Cultivated?"), I offer an overview of the history of the concept of resilience, and of 20th and 21st psychological research about how to cultivate and activate resilience on individual and communal levels (both in the context of justice work and more broadly). In Chapter Two ("How the Texts Talked About Resilience"), I explore the ways in which the primary sources' discussions of cultivating resilience relate to (and differ from) psychological research about the same. In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I offer an extended analysis of the ways the primary sources tell the stories of the flood, the Israelites' time in Egypt, and the creation of rabbinic Judaism in the wake[22] of the destruction of the second Temple, as frames to understand contemporary challenges to resilience and perseverance in justice work. . In the Conclusion, I offer thoughts about patterns that emerged from this study and potential directions for further research.

This thesis was born, first and foremost, of a desire to collect and celebrate contemporary wisdom about resilience and perseverance in justice work - wisdom that I believe is more vital now than ever before, as we are faced with systemic challenges that will require a great deal of resilience and perseverance. It was also born of a curiosity about the ways in which justice-oriented Jewish communities are currently utilizing and interpreting sacred stories and

[22] Historians believe that the seeds of rabbinic Judaism (including its emphasis on Jewish practice outside of the Temple cult) were present in Israelite society before the fall of the Second Temple. However, in the *mythology* of the creation of rabbinic Judaism (particularly the mythology of Yavneh) offered in midrash and in aggadic sections of the Talmud, rabbinic Judaism was created after the Second Temple fell. Some sermons acknowledge a difference between the stories classical texts tell about the birth of rabbinic Judaism and the history of the evolution of rabbinic Judaism, and some do not. In this thesis, I do not belabor the distinction between the myth and the history (unless a sermon or other primary source itself makes this distinction), because my focus is on how the stories are utilized.

teachings. The assumption undergirding this curiosity is that we tell sacred stories differently in different time periods, depending on our needs, and there is not one way of understanding these stories that is more "true" or more empirically "useful" than other ways. My hope is that as you read, you may find some of these stories and teachings useful for you.

Chapter 1: What Is Resilience, and How Can It Be Cultivated?

In some ways, Jewish texts (and the sacred texts of many other religious traditions) have been discussing what we now call resilience (and its absence) for thousands of years. The Exodus story, for one, offers an astute and compelling exploration of the conditions under which individuals and groups can come to believe (or disbelieve) in their own self-efficacy, and the rabbinic tradition is also full of explorations of what it takes for individuals and groups to keep going (or begin again) in the face of sometimes-overwhelming odds. But the English word "resilience" is also less than 400 years old, and it has only been used to refer to human beings for 200 of those 400 years.[23] Its modern Hebrew equivalent, חוסן נפשי (lit. mental/spiritual strength), is similarly young. It behooves us, then, to ask: what are we talking about when we talk about resilience? What has "resilience" meant, what does it mean now, and what are the ways that researchers of resilience believe it can be cultivated and activated (both in justice work specifically and in other arenas)? This chapter will explore these questions, such that they can form a background for an analysis of sermons and other contemporary compositions in the chapters ahead.

The earliest known usage (now obsolete) of the English word "resilience" was physical: "the action or an act of rebounding, or springing back." (For Sir Francis Bacon, a scientist, echoes had resilience.)[24] Its next (still operative) definition was also physical: "elasticity; the power of resuming an original shape or position after compression, bending, etc."[25] Only in the 1800s did "resilience" begin to describe the reactions of *people*. A now-rare definition in

[23] "resilience, n." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press. (accessed November 12, 2021).
[24] "resilience, n_1." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press.(Accessed November 12, 2021). Sir Francis Bacon used the word "resilience" in 1626.
[25] "resilience, n_2." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press. (accessed November 12, 2021).

seemingly common use in the 1800s and early 1900s was "the action of revolting or recoiling *from* something:"[26] Francis Bacon's word for describing a physical phenomenon had become interpersonal, and psychological.

This understanding of *resilience* as *revolt* was closely related to another definition that emerged in the 1800s – the definition in most common usage today: "the quality or fact of being able to recover quickly or easily from, or resist being affected by, a misfortune, shock, illness, etc.; robustness; adaptability."[27] Interestingly, many of the early usages of *resilience* in a way that would be recognizable to 21st century readers dealt with the way groups or individuals reacted to oppression: "in their struggles with the ponderous power of England [the Scottish people] discovered an invincible vigour, not only of resistance, but also of resilience," a British history book declared in 1857.[28] And in 1923, the *Political Science Quarterly* described Mahatma Gandhi as possessed of a "curious resilience:" "he came back from his mourning and fasting more determined than ever."[29] The notion that resilience occurs in response to adversity (and specifically, in response to an adverse event or series of events) distinguishes it from a related word, *perseverance,* which *can* refer to continuing on in spite of specific challenges (as it does in several of the sermons this thesis analyzes), but can also refer to continuity over a long duration (where time is the only identified challenge).[30]

While in its early usages, the word "resilience" referred to a quality that a person, object, or group simply had or did not have,[31] resilience is now considered a quality that can be

[26] resilience, n_4a." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press. (accessed November 12, 2021).
[27] resilience, n_5." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press. (accessed November 12, 2021).
[28] ibid. The Book was *Cassell's Illustrated History of England* and the authors were Smith & Howitt.
[29] ibid.
[30] "perseverance_n.1a-c." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press. (accessed November 12, 2021).
[31] See the OED definitions and examples above. In the 1800s, physical objects had or did not have resilience, and so too did individuals or groups of people. Early research into human resilience also focused on childhood, on the

cultivated and developed before, during, and after challenging experiences. In the second half of the 20th century, the study of the cultivation of resilience became important in the field of psychology in particular, eventually becoming a central component of what would come to be called "positive psychology."[32] Beginning with studies on resilience in children, the field expanded outward to explore resilience in adults, and in groups of people. The study of resilience (particularly in individuals who face societal oppression or other systemic challenges) has been critiqued as applying an individualistic approach to systemic problems, and in particular, placing the burden of survival on the oppressed.[33] However, it is also an increasingly popular field of study, which has in many ways been shaped by critiques of its earlier individualistic approaches and now incorporates more systemic and community-oriented analyses.

In a public-facing guide to resilience that was initially penned in 2012 and most recently updated in 2020, the American Psychological Association (APA) offers guidelines for cultivating and/or strengthening individual resilience. These guidelines, penned collaboratively by nine psychologists who research resilience, offer a useful snapshot of current thinking in the field on the cultivation of individual resilience:

> Build your connections: prioritize relationships … Join a group;
> Take care of your body … practice mindfulness … avoid negative outlets [for challenging emotions, i.e. substance abuse];

(sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit) supposition that while resilience could be conditioned, this conditioning happened early. The growing understanding that resilience can be cultivated throughout one's lifetime has coevolved with advances in neuroscience over the past several decades demonstrating that the brain and its neural pathways (and so, our patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving) can change throughout our lifetimes, not just in childhood.

[32] Seligman, Martin. The Hope Circuit (pp. 279-294; 311-328). PublicAffairs. Kindle Edition.

[33] For a review of some of these critiques, particularly of research into resilience that focuses primarily or solely on the individual, see for example Kirmayer, Sehdev, Whitley, Dandeneau, and Isaac, "Community Resilience: Models, Metaphors and Measures," in Journal of Aboriginal Health (November 2009), pp.63-117. For critiques on individualistic resilience research from a disability studies perspective, see for example Hutcheon, E., & Wolbring, G. (2013). "Cripping" Resilience: Contributions from Disability Studies to Resilience Theory. *M/C Journal*, *16*(5). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.697.

> Find purpose: help others … be proactive … move towards your goals … look for opportunities for self-discovery;
> Embrace healthy thoughts: keep things in perspective … accept change … maintain a hopeful outlook … learn from your past;
> Seek help [when needed].[34]

Of these strategies, "building connections," "finding purpose," "keeping things in perspective" "maintaining a hopeful outlook" and "accepting change," in particular, are themes that recur in many of the sermons and other compositions explored in this thesis. Many of the sermons also have a strong interest, not in how individual listeners can "learn from their pasts," but in how we as a collective can learn from Jewish history and Jewish memory.

In the field of positive psychology,[35] there have also recently been some interesting preliminary studies suggesting that people who are happier are more likely to engage in social change work, specifically.[36] This could indicate that the pursuit or cultivation of happiness could be linked to resilience in justice work. "Happiness" and "joy" were not directly discussed in most of the sermons and texts this thesis analyzes, but a few did discuss the importance of cultivating joy (either as their main topic, or as a subtopic).

To the research on individually-oriented strategies for cultivating resilience, others have added community-oriented strategies. For example, in a 2009 study of resilience in indigenous

[34] APA, "Building Your Resilience," January 1, 2012 (Updated February 1, 2020), accessed online at: https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience.
[35] Positive psychologists study the individual and systemic conditions that contribute to the cultivation, activation and maintenance of emotions and cognitive frameworks like happiness, hope, resilience, optimism, and more. One of the founders of positive psychology was Dr. Martin Seligman, who famously launched the field when he transitioned from studying what he called "learned helplessness" to "learned optimism." (Seligman, Martin. The Hope Circuit (pp. 207-213). PublicAffairs. Kindle Edition.)
[36] See for example: Kostadin Kushlev, Danielle M. Drummond, Samantha J. Heintzelman & Ed Diener, *Do happy people care about society's problems?,* The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15:4, 467-477 (2020). See also: Kostadin Kushlev, Nina Radosic, and Ed Diener "Subjective Well Being and Prosociality Around The Globe: Happy People Give More of Their Time and Money To Others," Social Psychology and Personality Science 20:10 (2021).

communities, Kirmayer et al offered the following strategies for "promoting community resilience:"[37]

- "Revitalizing language, culture and spirituality"[38]
- "Strengthening local control and collective efficacy"[39]
- "Supporting families and healthy child development"[40]
- "Building social capital, networks and support"[41]

Some of these strategies have specific meaning in the context of the indigenous communities the authors studied. For example, not all communities need their "language, culture and spirituality" to be *"*revitalized*"* to the same extent – this is a recommendation that takes on a very specific meaning in the communities that were conquered by colonizing powers that then attempted to eradicate their language, culture and spirituality. However, the *importance* of language, culture and spirituality (as well as, certainly, collective efficacy, support for families, social capital, networks, etc.) is a more generalizable principle in discussions of community resilience.

Closely related to the study of resilience is the study of post-traumatic growth. As understood by its researchers, post-traumatic growth is "positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with traumatic or highly challenging life experiences."[42] Noting that the word "trauma" has, in the 20th and 21st centuries, come to connote a wide variety of life experiences (and lacks a singular definition even in the field of psychology), Tedeschi and Calhoun, the psychologists who coined the term "post-traumatic growth" in the 1990s,

> use the terms trauma, crisis, and major stressor … as essentially synonymous expressions that significantly challenge or invalidate an individual's assumptive world … the basic assumptions about one's future and how to move towards that

[37] Kirmayer et al, p.96.
[38] ibid, p.96-98.
[39] ibid, p.98-99.
[40] ibid, p.99.
[41] ibid, p.99-100.
[42] Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun. *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications*. New York: Routledge (2018), p.3.

> future. Inherent in these traumatic experiences are losses such as the loss of a loved one, of cherished roles or capabilities, or of fundamental, accepted ways of understanding life.[43]

Tedeschi and Calhoun understand the "growth" of "post-traumatic growth" to be "cognitive … emotional … and behavioral," and note that it "occurs as the result of *struggle* with the aftermath of a major life crisis … struggle to cope and survive."[44] Because of the centrality of *change* to post-traumatic growth, specialists in post-traumatic growth distinguish it from "resilience," which, as noted above, is classically associated with a "bouncing back from" (or a certain degree of imperviousness towards) adversity.[45] Phenomenologically, Tedeschi et al argue that "resilience" (in the sense of "bouncing back") is distinct from PTG because after a "potentially disruptive (seismic) event," *resilience* is initiated when a person's "assumptive core beliefs provide context for the event" and so the person's "emotional distress is mitigated by [their] beliefs."[46] In contrast, a potential PTG process is initiated only after an event *challenges* "assumptive core beliefs."[47] However, as the term "resilience" has expanded its own semantic range to include *growth* in the face of adversity (including growth through the reexamination and reconstruction of old belief systems that no longer fit one's lived experiences), a degree of overlap has emerged between the study of resilience and the study of post-traumatic growth.

The concept of post-traumatic growth is not relevant to all discussions of resilience in justice work, or all sermons (and other texts) analyzed in this thesis, but it *is* relevant to many of them. The *in*justice many experience in the world can catalyze loss, sometimes of beloved people, and sometimes of a worldview. Many of the sermons this thesis analyzes address an

[43] ibid, 4.
[44] ibid, 5.
[45] ibid, 72.
[46] ibid, 44.
[47] ibid.

audience that is indeed grappling with "challenges" to their "basic assumptions about [their] future and how to move towards that future."[48] Can the planet survive climate change? Can American and Israeli democracy survive (or emerge from) the many threats to democracy in both countries? Can racism be eradicated? And what can *we* do about these and other challenges? These – and other – questions inform many of our sermons, just as they inform many facets of contemporary American Jewish life.

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) can happen inadvertently, over time, but it can also be actively facilitated in relationship (and much of the scholarship on PTG focuses on the ways it can be facilitated in therapeutic relationships, specifically). A relational model of post-traumatic growth assumes that a person whose "assumptive core beliefs [have been] challenged"[49] will move (in a non-linear fashion) through cycles of :

- "(automatic) rumination"[50]
- "redirecting rumination/reassessing goals,"[51]
- (perhaps) "self-analysis" and "self-disclosure,"[52]
- "deliberate/reflective/constructive rumination,"[53]
- "acceptance of a changed world,"[54]
- and Post Traumatic Growth.

Post Traumatic Growth might include "relationships with others," "new possibilities," "personal strength," "spiritual/existential beliefs," and "appreciation of life," and may also be connected to

[48] ibid, 5.
[49] ibid, 43.
[50] ibid.
[51] ibid.
[52] ibid.
[53] ibid.
[54] ibid.

additional shifts like "changed narrative," increased resilience, "expanded coping repertoire," "increased wisdom," "compassion," and "acts of service".[55] A person working with someone who has experienced trauma can help facilitate PTG by listening to their self-disclosure, and helping to prompt reflection through a process called "co-authoring."[56]

Though therapeutic and pastoral work are very different, there is a high degree of overlap between research into the relational aspects of post-traumatic growth and scholarship on the accompaniment work of pastoral care (particularly given the very broad definition of "trauma" applied to the field of PTG). Pastoral caregivers often meet people in exigent moments in which their previous systems for understanding the world and their place within it (their "mental maps," which likely include their "assumptive core beliefs") have been seriously shaken,[57] and in which they may either be without a new vision of their future (inside of what Arthur Frank calls a "chaos narrative"[58]), or they may have a vision of their future that is incredibly bleak.[59] And yet, the

> experience of being unmoored from what usually keeps us connected to person, place and time also has the potential to foster an altered sense of connection. It may allow for the development of new stories – particularly ones that unite personal experience with larger religious, spiritual, and mythic narratives.[60]

It is this core insight – that precisely at a moment of disorientation,[61] a person (or community) may also be primed to co-create new stories and meaning – that informs Carrie Doehring's

---

[55] ibid, 43- 44.
[56] ibid, 143.
[57] Rabbis Jo Hirschmann and Nancy Wiener, *Maps and Meaning: Levitical Models for Contemporary Care,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press (2014), p.10.
[58] Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (second edition), Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2013), p.98.
[59] Rabbis Jo Hirschmann and Nancy Wiener, *Maps and Meaning: Levitical Models for Contemporary Care,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press (2014), p.24.
[60] ibid, 22.
[61] Including, of course, the various forms of spiritual, emotional, political, relational, and physical disorientation that the sermons and other compositions this thesis analyzes address.

understanding of "resilience as the relational ability to spiritually integrate moral stress." She writes:

> moral stress arises from lived theologies and spiritual orienting systems – patterns of values, beliefs and ways of coping energized by shame, guilt, fear of causing harm, or self-disgust … [in contrast,] spiritual care helps people co-create intentional theologies that draw upon goodness, compassion, and love.[62]

Pastoral caregivers work with people with a wide variety of beliefs (including those with no connections to formal religion). However, while discussing the "co-creat[ion of] intentional theologies," it is worth noting that some studies indicate that religious orientation seems to be correlated with decreased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)[63] and an *increased* likelihood of post-traumatic growth.[64] (PTSD and PTG are not mutually exclusive phenomena; they can and often do coexist.) In both cases, this is thought to be connected to the ways in which "religiousness and spirituality are strongly based on a personal quest for understanding of questions about life and meaning;" and so a religious orientation may more sharply prime someone to actively seek new meaning if their old "assumptive frameworks" are threatened by a traumatic event or events.[65] In the case of post-traumatic growth, some studies show that PTG is best predicted not just by religiosity, but by a person's "openness to religious change."[66]

---

[62] Carrie Doehring, "Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress," in *Pastoral Psychology* v. 64 (2015), p.635.
[63] Julio F. P. Peres, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Antonia Gladys Nasello and Harold G. Koenig, "Spirituality and Resilience in Trauma Victims," in *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Sep., 2007), pp. 343-350. Accessed online at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27513
[64] Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun. *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications*. New York: Routledge (2018), p.15-16.
[65] Julio F. P. Peres, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Antonia Gladys Nasello and Harold G. Koenig, "Spirituality and Resilience in Trauma Victims," in *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Sep., 2007), p. 343. Accessed online at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27513
[66] Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun. *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications*. New York: Routledge (2018), p.15.

Many of the sermons and other compositions this thesis analyzes address an assumed audience who are in a moment of moral stress – or, more broadly, a moment in which their previous narratives/assumptive frameworks for understanding the world are no longer serving them. In this sense, research on the opportunity a pastoral caregiver has to work with people who are going through such experiences to "co-create intentional theologies" seems quite relevant to the analysis of these sermons and compositions. However, it is worth noting that where pastoral conversations are dialogues that center the experiences (and literally, the voice) of the person being "pastored" to, sermons, poems, and *iyyunim* are one-sided messages, delivered by a speaker/writer to an audience of listeners/readers. Ideally, these messages are born in the context of relationships in which the speaker/writer has listened carefully to the experiences and needs of their audience (or good proxies for their audience) and tries to respond to those needs. Even so, they are still snapshots of one moment in a dialogue, in which a speaker/writer may try to make their audience feel seen and heard in their life experiences, and may also try to impart to their audience useful conceptual frameworks (and re-framings); they are not full conversations.

Another finding which is not directly applicable to the analysis of *sermons*[67] but is nonetheless useful to keep in mind is that community rituals have been found to be very helpful to the cultivation or activation of community resilience, particularly in the wake of disaster:

> Disasters and trauma disconnect people from one another and from their past and future. Routines are destroyed along with lives and cherished belongings. Questions of purpose and meaning inevitably arise as stricken communities struggle to find hope amid death and destruction. In the face of these many psychological challenges … [rituals] are activities that explicitly seek to enhance community bonds, strengthen its structure, enhance adaptation, and deal with anxiety or fear.[68]

[67] Except inasmuch as some sermons discuss the importance of ritual; however, sermons are not themselves rituals.
[68] Koshin Paley Ellison and Craig L. Katz, "Rituals, Routines, and Resilience," in Grant H. Brenner, Daniel H. Bush and Joshua Moses. *Creating Spiritual and Psychological Resilience: Integrating Care in Disaster Relief Work,* New York: Routledge (2010), Kindle Edition, pp. 188-189.

The study of the ways in which contemporary Jewish communities are using ritual to cultivate resilience in justice work is outside of the scope of this thesis, but would be an interesting area for further analysis. What this thesis *can* do is explore the ways in which the texts the thesis analyzes work to "enhance community bonds, strengthen its structure, enhance adaptation, and deal with anxiety or fear" (which most of our sources do, in different ways).[69]

Before delving into the sermons and other compositions themselves, two other frameworks relevant to resilience in justice work need to be briefly discussed: ambiguous loss, and moral injury. "Ambiguous loss" is a term coined by Dr. Pauline Boss in 1999, to describe situations in which a loved one is "present but absent" (for example, a person with late-stage dementia who was still alive, but no longer themselves) or "absent but present" (Boss' earliest work in this category was with families of soldiers who were MIA in the Vietnam war, and it expanded to include work with families whose loved ones were presumed dead but not found on September 11, 2001).[70] The framework of ambiguous loss has since been applied to a variety of experiences, including, most recently, aspects of daily life in the COVID-19 pandemic.[71]

Research on cultivating resilience while living with ambiguous loss is crucial to any discussion of resilience because ambiguous losses can challenge some of the benchmarks classically associated with resilience. For example, resilience is often connected to a restored or uninterrupted sense of "self-efficacy" or "mastery," however, ambiguous loss by its nature often

---

[69] Rabbi Dr. Tirzah Firestone has related observations in her 2018 book *Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma.* She writes in part: "containment is one of the important functions of religious community. [Containment] … is based upon the principle of allowing grief, yet putting boundaries upon our need to remember and mourn" (p.33).

[70] Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live With Unresolved Grief,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1999).

[71] See https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/06/covid-grieving-life and Pauline Boss, *The Myth of Closure: Ambiguous Loss in a Time of Pandemic and Change,* New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (2021).

thwarts complete "mastery" as a person may once have defined it, and so a goal for someone experiencing ambiguous loss might be instead to "temper mastery."[72] And when we discuss "resilience in justice work," particularly as "justice" has been operationally defined by many of our sermons and other compositions, we suddenly find a number of situations that can be usefully understood through the framework of ambiguous loss. Climate change, and what some activists are calling "climate grief," is a prime example: some things already have been lost in our world and in our sense of our lives, more will be lost, we do not know how much or when, and we still need to keep going. Boss writes that in therapeutic work with people experiencing ambiguous loss, clinicians can work with clients to help them: "find meaning,"[73] "temper mastery,"[74] "reconstruct identity,"[75] "normalize ambivalence,"[76] "revise attachment,"[77] and "discover hope."[78] While, again, clergy are not clinicians, these same tasks can also be facilitated in the context of religious communal life, and are topics explored in many of the sermons and other compositions this thesis analyzes.

Finally, essential to any discussion of "resilience in justice work" is the framework offered by Moral Injury. Moral Injury is a relatively new field, which originally emerged in military psychology to describe a condition in which a person is significantly impacted by their experiences as a perpetrator, collaborator, witness, or victim of an action that violated their own moral beliefs. (They may experience shame, grief, feelings of inefficacy, disconnection from

[72] Pauline Boss, *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience: Therapeutic Work With Ambiguous Loss,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2018), p. 97-113.
[73] ibid, p. 71.
[74] ibid, p. 97.
[75] ibid, p. 114.
[76] ibid, p. 142.
[77] ibid, p. 161.
[78] ibid, p. 176.

others, etc.) The framework of moral injury has since been applied to many other life situations outside of combat contexts, including, recently, the situation of being a citizen of a country whose leadership is making a number of decisions that violate one's own moral beliefs (and by extension of one's citizenship, being a collaborator in and witness to those violations).[79] Moral injury (and its healing correlate, soul repair) plays a complex role in conversations of resilience in justice work in the Jewish community, because on any number of "justice" issues (anti-racism, fighting violent and unethical governmental policies, responses to transphobia and other forms of prejudice and discrimination, building communities in which sexual harassment and assault are not condoned and perpetrators are held accountable, etc. etc.), community members find themselves variously in the positions of perpetrator, witness, and victim (and sometimes, in more than one position at once). Many sermons that speak to experiences of moral injury choose to address people in only one of these subject-positions (often but not always, the sermons I collected were aimed at an audience of perpetrators and/or witnesses), but on most topics, people who have experienced moral injury from all of these vantage points are likely all in the room at the same time.

Cultivating resilience in the wake of moral injury (or in a situation of ongoing moral injury) requires specific attention *to* moral injury (and to the "life-limiting theologies"[80] or worldview(s) a person who experienced moral injury may have developed), which is one of the reasons that education about the concept is so valuable. As new as the field of research into Moral Injury is, explicit conversations in Jewish settings about moral injury and soul repair are

[79] Brenner, Grant (2017). "Considering Collective Moral Injury Following the 2016 Election," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis,* 53(4): 547-560.
[80] Carrie Doehring, "Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress," in *Pastoral Psychology* v. 64 (2015), p.635.

even newer. There are, however, a growing number of resources that explicitly connect Jewish tradition (and especially Jewish teachings on *t'shuvah,* repentance/return) to discussions of moral injury and soul repair,[81] and several sermons and compositions analyzed in this thesis address situations of moral injury, even if they do not call those situations by that name.

In the Jewish community specifically, an additional consideration connected to both moral injury and trauma is the topic of *intergenerational trauma* (which in our community has largely resulted from the morally injurious – and sometimes genocidal – actions of other human beings). As Rabbi Dr. Tirzah Firestone reflects,

> For many Jews, catastrophe remains an unconscious organizing principle, an internal representation of reality that is still passed from generation to generation, wittingly or not. Our ancestors' past rears its head in the marketplace and in war rooms, on the battlefields, and at home with our children.[82]

How much more so might this be true in a time period that many non-Jewish people have also identified as chaotic! Healing from (and grappling with) intergenerational trauma forms an important backdrop to many of the conversations of resilience in justice work in the pages to come, and will be discussed in more detail below.

***

A need for resilience can be catalyzed by many different experiences and challenges and, as discussed above, resilience can be cultivated and activated in many different (but interrelated) ways. In the pages that follow, we'll explore the challenges that different writers and speakers identify, and the responses they propose (and sometimes enact), in their discussions of resilience in justice work.

---

[81] See for example Rabbis Kim Geringer and Nancy H. Wiener, "Insights into Moral Injury and Soul Repair from Classical Jewish Texts," *Pastoral Psychology* 68 no.1 (February 2019). A number of conversations connecting Jewish teachings to moral injury (including situations of moral injury relevant to systemic justice work) also took place at a June 2021 HUC-JIR conference on moral injury.

[82] Tirzah Firestone. *Wounds into Wisdom* (p. 34).

Chapter 2: (How) The Texts Talk About Resilience

Fundamental to the definition of resilience is the idea that resilience is a response to a challenge. When I proposed this thesis, the challenges to resilience in justice work that I was most aware of (and implicitly, expected to see addressed in the primary sources) were moral injury (which can cause a person to stop believing in their own ability to create positive change), the feeling of being overwhelmed by all of the world's wrongs, ambiguous loss, and the phenomenon sometimes referred to as "compassion fatigue"[83] These challenges *were* addressed, but the primary sources identified and responded to other challenges as well, including fear, difficulty cultivating hope (and/or active despair), isolation, anger at God, and difficulty reconciling values that seemed to be in tension.[84]

In response to these many identified challenges, the primary sources recommended and utilized a number of strategies for cultivating and activating resilience, and they tied these strategies to a wide variety of Jewish texts (usually, with the implicit or explicit assumption that we can draw strength from the examples of those who came before us). Two of the most

[83] "Compassion fatigue" is a technical term closely related to the concepts of secondary or vicarious traumatization and burnout - it is a gradual inability to connect with or feel active compassion for people who are suffering, and it can happen over time when a person works with many people who are survivors of traumatic events, particularly when the person doing the work does not have adequate support to process their own experiences. (There are extensive studies of compassion fatigue in nursing and other "helping professions.") The term "compassion fatigue" is contested by some positive psychologists, who argue that "compassion" actually elicits the opposite of fatigue - compassion itself implies not just feeling for someone but also being motivated to act to mitigate suffering, and compassion can be a strategy for resilience and connection in the face of suffering and trauma. However, the phenomenon by which people who work with others who are suffering sometimes experience a sense of disconnect from or lack of empathy for the people they work with, as well as a sense of apathy towards their work (even if they were once very engaged by their work), is not a contested phenomenon. (For a literature review of different studies of "compassion fatigue" and its possible causes, as well as critiques of the term, see for example K. Ledoux, "Understanding Compassion Fatigue: Understanding Compassion" (2015). See also N. Ondrejkova and J. Halamova, "Prevalence of Compassion Fatigue Among Helping Professions and Relationship to Compassion for Others, Self-Compassion, and Self-Criticism" (2022). Ondrejkova and Halamova found that higher levels of self-criticism predicted higher levels of the phenomenon known as compassion fatigue.)

[84] Some of these additional challenges can be products of moral injury, ambiguous loss, or trauma, and that is the way some of the primary sources discussed them, but others presented them differently.

frequently discussed and employed strategies were (1) building (or celebrating) relationships and community and (2) reframing one's perspective, but many other strategies were discussed and employed, as well. They are discussed below.

Building Relationships and Community

One of the central findings of psychological studies about the cultivation of individual resilience is that close relationships (individual friendships and the experience of being part of a group) can strengthen a person's resilience. Related to this finding (though discrete from it) are the findings that helping others, and being able to reach out to others and ask for help when needed, also strengthen individuals' resilience.

Almost all of the sermons and other texts this thesis analyzed emphasized the importance of relationships in some way. Many explicitly named the cultivation of relationships and community as a strategy for resilience in difficult times.[85] In order to support this point, some sermons told stories from classical Jewish texts about times when people stood together, and then argued that we can follow their example. For example, Kendell Pinkney's 2021 sermon "Into the Unknown" focused on the Ancient Israelites' solidarity crossing the Red Sea [86] and argued that this solidarity can be an example for us as we too navigate fear and uncertainty.[87] Similarly,

[85] See for example Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum, "Riding the Waves on Planks: Epigenetics, Pin-Pricks, and Tools for Resilience" (Kol Nidre 2017); Imani Romney-Rosa Chapman and Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, "Shedding Light on Solidarity: A Candle Loses Nothing By Lighting Another Candle" (written in 2017, published in 2021); Rabbi Mackenzie Zev Reynolds, "The Heart-Incited Offering: Interdependence, Redistribution, and Community Care" (written in 2017, published in 2021); Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Rosh HaShanah 5780: Facing the World" (Rosh HaShanah 2019); Kendell Pinkney, "Into the Unknown" (Parshat BeShalach 2021); Rabbi Cassi Kail, "Riding the Waves" (Erev Rosh HaShanah 5782/2021); and Rabbi Miriam Margles, "Dismantling (And Building Anew)" (Erev Rosh HaShanah 5781), amongst many other sermons.

[86] In Exodus 14.

[87] Pinkney paid particular attention to the (typologically) huge numbers of people who went of Egypt, and the detail (in Exodus 14:21-22) that the crossing of the Red Sea happened at night. The literal darkness of night in the story became a metaphor for the difficulty we can have "seeing" in uncertain times. (Kendell Pinkney, "Into The Unknown.")

Rabbi Miriam Margles' 2020 sermon "Dismantling (And Building Anew)" told the story of a conversation between Rabbi Akiva and his contemporaries, and emphasized that the ability of everyone in the conversation to move forward with resilience was predicated on their togetherness. Other sermons employed classical sources in different, more symbolic ways to make their points. For example, in two different sermons titled, in part, "Riding the Waves," Rabbis Rachel Nussbaum and Cassi Kail argued that a plank Rabbi Akiva rides in a story - discussed in much greater detail later in this thesis - could represent relationships. In "Shedding Light on Solidarity," Imani Romney-Rosa Chapman and Rabbi Ellen Lippmann compare candles (in the tabernacle) to people.

Other sermons not only extolled the power of relationship and community, but also recommended that listeners take specific, proactive steps to help other people.[88] Still others (though a much smaller number) explicitly encouraged listeners or readers to reach out to others for help if need be.[89] Some sermons also encouraged attitudes and behavior that can help facilitate connection – for example, many sermons focused on the importance of cultivating

[88] See for example Rabbi Jen Gubitz, "Parshat Vayeitze: Ramping Up" (December 9, 2016), which provides concrete strategies for community members to support immigrants and refugees, and "Parshat Shemini: Vayidom: When we are silent," (April 13, 2018), which begins as a discussion of overwhelm and helpful and unhelpful silences, and ends as a call to attend congregational community organizing meetings; Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, "Rosh HaShanah Day 1 Morning Sermon" (Rosh HaShanah 2018), which mixes general exhortations to act on behalf of others (in the present and future) with concrete discussions of the community's solidarity work with immigrants and members of a nearby mosque; and the 2021 op-ed by a group of teens at Kehillah High, "It's Time for a Green New Deal," which suggests that the community's excellent record of supporting each other through disaster relief can be a jumping off point for communal engagement in proactive policy advocacy to curb climate change. Similarly, in a Rosh HaShanah 2021 sermon that opens with a discussion of how tired she (and many of us) are of "pivoting" in response to new challenges, Rabbi Hannah Goldstein concludes by flipping the word "pivot" from verb to noun and encouraging listeners to "be a pivot" - a person others can depend on. (Rabbi Hannah Goldstein, "Pitching Tents in the Wilderness" (Rosh HaShanah 5781).

[89] For example, in a 2017 source sheet called "Keeping the Faith: Hope and Resilience in Times of Despair," Rabbi Kelilah Miller asks readers "can you think of people, relationships or spiritual practices that sustain you as you keep going?" Some of the sermons and *divrei torah* listed above that celebrate the power of relationships also encouraged readers and listeners to reach out to others for help when needed.

hesed, loving kindness, in interpersonal interactions.[90] Many sermons also told stories about characters or historical figures who the authors viewed as models of resilience, and a key characteristic that many of these stories shared was that they featured two or more people in conversation with each other.[91]

Similarly, many of the sermons, as well as many poems, songs and prayers that authors either quoted or created used the "we" voice,[92] especially when discussing the challenges of spiritual, psychological, or physical isolation and loneliness. Some of the texts that used the "we" voice not only celebrated and encouraged the power of relationships, but were also performative: they named a relationship (and/or the existence of a "we") and in naming it, helped bring it into being.[93] A striking example of this was the January 2021 sermon "Most of Us Didn't Make It Out: The Dark Loneliness of Freedom Fighting," by Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein. Even as the focus of Rabbi Bernstein's sermon was how lonely it can be to work for justice when one perceives many of one's compatriots as "sell outs," he consistently used the "we" voice.[94] He also used a literal

---

[90] See for example: Rabbi Jonathan Roos, "Chesed (and Lawyers) Will Save Us" (Yom Kippur 2018); Rabbi Sid Schwarz, "Staying Sane in a World Gone Mad" (Kol Nidre 2018); Rabbi Marina Yergen, "High Holy Days Sermon 2017;" Rabbi Hannah Goldstein, "Pitching Tents in the Wilderness" (Rosh HaShanah 2021)."

[91] This was true of every story from the Talmud cited in one of the sermons (and it was also true of the stories cited from Avot D'Rabbi Natan, a late midrashic compilation, when those stories were set in the era after the fall of the Second Temple). It was also true of some of the *midrashim* cited about the Exodus generation, and of many of the stories told by and about Holocaust survivors. In some ways, it is fairly remarkable that dialogue between people is such a constant feature in the stories about surviving the fall of the Second Temple and surviving the Holocaust, because state-sponsored violence can have terribly isolating results, as well.

[92] For example, the Hashkiveinu, a prayer for collective protection ("spread over us the shelter of Your peace"), was cited or sung in multiple sermons (see for example Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, "Prisoners of Hope" (2022)). Tricia Arlin's poem "Chag Ha-Atzeret (Day of Stopping)" and her composition "A Shavuot Blessing for Essential Workers" (both published on May 5, 2021) both used the "we" voice, as do many sermons.

[93] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962. Austin's focus was on "performative utterances" like "I now pronounce you married" that (in the context of rituals) change an individual or group's status in society. However, others have built upon his work to discuss the many ways that speech can be performative. I would argue that when a person offering a sermon or piece of creative liturgy to a specific group uses the "we" voice, they are often helping to create or reinforce a sense of community.

[94] Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein. "Most of Us Didn't Make It Out: The Dark Loneliness of Freedom Fighting - D'var Torah for Parshat Bo." *Avodah.* January 22, 2021. Accessed online at: https://avodah.net/most-of-us-didnt-make-it-out-the-dark-loneliness-of-freedom-fighting-dvar-torah-for-parashat-bo/

translation of רבנן, a word used in a variety of rabbinic texts which means "our rabbis" (but can sometimes be translated as "the rabbis").[95] Rabbi Bernstein's choice of first person plural voice reinforced a message to his readers that they were not alone in the present and they were also *definitely* not alone in the scope of Jewish history - they stood in the footsteps of many who came before. Similarly, the Jewish singer-songwriter Aly Halpert's 2018 song "Beautiful People (Toch Emunei)" (which was composed in the wake of the murder of several people gathered for Shabbat at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburg, PA) contains the lyrics: "we are a beautiful people/though our hearts are broken/we sing for justice and wholeness/ … we know that we are not alone."[96] To sing along with these lyrics was not just to abstractly acknowledge a collective (the Jewish people) but to name oneself as part of it.

Another fascinating example of performative togetherness in song was the summer 2020 duet "I'm not alone," composed and performed by Anat Halevy Hochberg and Aly Halpert.[97] The song was part of the summer 2020 Let My People Sing "Community Song Share,"[98] where artists shared songs in videos filmed during a period of the COVID-19 pandemic in which in-person gatherings were restricted because a vaccine had not yet been authorized. Hochberg and Halpert filmed their part of the duet in separate locations; Hochberg's part was to sing the words "I'm not alone" over and over, and Halpert's part was to sing "I forgot / for a minute / who I belong to, the mama earth / the wind and rain / the beauty and the pain... I'm not alone, for me the world was created / I'm not alone, to dust I will return."[99] The explicit message of Halpert's

[95] ibid.
[96] Aly Halpert, "Beautiful People (Toch Emunei)" (2018), lyrics accessed online at: https://soundcloud.com/aly-halpert/beautiful-people-toch-emunei.
[97] Lyrics and performance accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKLTDSs_wpg.
[98] Accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcj9ul5DGXoajZn69zNP4nA/playlists.
[99] Lyrics and performance accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKLTDSs_wpg.

part of the song was that a person is never alone because they "belong to" the (life-giving) "mama earth" (with all of its physical and emotional experiences), and that as Jews we are also never alone because we are connected to a rich tradition that can remind us of our connections.[100] But the implicit message of the song was also that even in physical isolation, people can still be with each other. At times, the two parts coincided such that the singers sang "I'm not alone" together. This element of the duet underscored its performativity: the singers had brought their togetherness into being by working separately on two pieces that could be combined, bringing their voices into literal harmony.

The song "I'm not alone" is also an excellent example of another technique for resilience that many (many, many) of the primary sources employed, which was *perspective shift.* "I'm not alone" invites listeners to shift their perspective on the meaning of togetherness/connection and aloneness, and also on a fairly well-known Jewish teaching: the "two pockets" teaching. The "two pockets" teaching is typically interpreted as a call to balance one's sense of one's own value with humility, and this song recasts it as a reminder of our connections. The framing that "I forgot/for a minute/who I belong to" is also a gentle way of suggesting that connection is not just something we can access through creation or discovery; it is also something inherent to our being, that we can remember.

"I'm not alone" was also one of many primary sources to encourage a perspective shift in part through its allusion to classical Jewish sources connected to the creation of the world. The

[100] "For me the world was created" comes from Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, and "I am but dust and ashes" comes from Genesis 18:27 (it is a phrase Abraham uses to describe himself while advocating for the people of Sodom). In *Tales of the Hasidim,* Martin Buber shared the teaching that a person should carry both messages at all times - one in each pocket. (Buber, "Two Pockets," in *Tales of the Hasidim,* p.516). By pairing this teaching with the repeated words "I'm not alone," Halpert draws our attention to the ways in which "for me the world was created" connects us to a *creator,* and "to dust I will return" (typically understood as a reminder to be humble) connects us to the earth.

ideological through-line through these many different evocations of biblical and rabbinic accounts of creation seemed to be the idea that even in very challenging times, we human beings have what we need to survive and to thrive, because what we need was built into us or the world from the very beginning (even if we "forgot for a moment," as Aly Halpert sang). And so in a 2017 sermon, Rabbi Marina Yergin argued in part that we both need and often forget the reminder (in Genesis 1:26-27) that all human beings were created in God's image.[101] In a 2020 sermon, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum used the rabbinic idea of a "foundation stone" at the heart of the world to suggest that everyone in her community could and should tap into their own personal foundation stone, and further, shared a responsibility to collectively work to build a foundation stone of a better future world.[102] And in two Rosh HaShanah sermons that are discussed at greater length in Chapters 3 and 4, Rabbis Laurent Holtzblatt and Hannah Goldstein each used elements of the biblical stories of the first human being to offer listeners a roadmap for navigating the present.[103] It should be unsurprising that all of these sermons were also using creation stories to, in part, encourage connection and relationship building.

A few primary sources also used Jewish creation stories to encourage a stance of acceptance of human imperfection (and with this, a belief in the human ability to change and grow not in spite of our mistakes but with our mistakes). So, for example, the repeated lyrics of Jewish singer-songwriter Batya Levine's song "We Are Good, We Are Flawed" are: "we are

[101] Rabbi Marina Yergin. "High Holy Days Sermon 2017." Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, Texas.
[102] Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum. "Building our Foundation Stone in a Time of Plagues." September 18, 2020. Sermon Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, New York, NY.
[103] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Rosh HaShanah 5781," Adas Israel Congregation, and Rabbi Hannah Goldstein, "At The Edge of Destruction and Creation (Rosh HaShanah 5781)," Temple Sinai. (Both Washington, D.C.)

good/we are flawed/we are the breath of an imperfect God."[104] And Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson began a sermon that was primarily about the power of Jewish law to help us navigate and atone for our mistakes with an amusing retelling of a midrash from Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer:

> When God is about to create humanity, the Torah itself pushes back. How can God create these disappointing creatures called human beings, full of free will and liable to make all kinds of mistakes?! … Is the Holy Blessed One really ready for this kind of project, to deal with creatures as complicated and flawed as human beings? God responds to the Torah quite snappily, "al hinam nikarti Erech Apayim, v'Rav Chesed?!" "Is it for nothing that they call me slow to anger, and full of kindness?" … And then the Holy One gathers together the four corners of the earth … to make humankind, created to make mistakes.[105]

Lest we worry our mistakes are so huge no one can handle them, Rabbi Hughes-Robinson taught, we should remember that God made us *knowing* that we would make mistakes. God was ready from the beginning to be patient and kind. Whether or not a person literally believes in God (or in any of the creation stories the primary sources utilized), the allegorical message holds: what we need in moments of crisis (even those crises we and other human beings create) is already built into our world.[106]

The reminder that what we need is already inside of us, or available to us, is a powerful example of a perspective shift, and it is a perspective shift that many of the primary sources invited their readers and listeners to undertake.[107] That said, it is far from the only perspective

---

[104] Batya Levine, "We Are Good, We Are Flawed," on the Album *Karov,* released August 20, 2020 and available online at: https://batyalevine.bandcamp.com/track/we-are-good-we-are-flawed. In Genesis 2:7 (which is part of the second creation story in Genesis), God blows breath into the nose of the first human being.

[105] Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson. "Mishpatim 2020/5780." Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, New York, NY. This is a paraphrase of Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 11:5.

[106] This is also the ideological thrust of Mishnah Avot 5:6, which teaches that a series of objects that would later be instrumental to the continuation of covenant (for example, the well from which Ishmael drank water when he and Hagar were cast into the desert in Genesis 21, and the ram that Abraham sacrificed instead of Isaac at the last minute in Genesis 22) were created on the twilight of the final day of Creation. Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum used this mishnah in her "Rosh HaShanah Day One Morning Sermon 5779."

[107] Another source that encourages this shift is Sofia Freudenstein's "Eliyahu HaNavi and Burnout."

shift that the primary sources advocated. And so it is to the technique of inviting or modeling a shift in perspective, and to the other manifestations of this technique in the primary sources, that we will now turn.

"Keep Things In Perspective"[108]

Many primary sources encouraged their audience to reframe their perspective (usually, in such a way that could help transform experiences of despair, loneliness, or inaction driven by fear). As in the song "I'm not alone," some of these reframes were about relationships and a sense of connection: for example, Rabbi Jill Perlman based a High Holy Days sermon (which also drew from many classical Jewish texts) on a children's book about a tree that thinks it is alone but slowly realizes that the creatures (and inanimate objects) all around it are supporting it; she used this story to encourage her community to recognize that though they were living through a disorienting and frightening time, they too were not alone, and they were going to be okay.[109] Similarly, in her poem "2021/5782: Anew," Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt reflected in part:

> Here's the thing: the year begins anew/even at the worst of times … And sometimes we're afraid, and we can't know/what choice to make to keep everyone safe. … The good news is we're not in this alone/We'll help each other hope when light seems dim … We'll love each other fiercely … We who survive will help each other heal.[110]

Several sermons also encouraged listeners to consider their connections and obligations to the next generation, as a reminder that even when change takes a long time and our efforts are not bringing easily discernible results, we need to persevere because people are depending on us.[111]

---

[108] Advice for cultivating resilience offered by the American Psychological Association in APA, "Building Your Resilience," January 1, 2012 (Updated February 1, 2020), accessed online at: https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience.
[109] Rabbi Jill Perlman, "Rosh HaShanah 2017/5778 A Letter To My Children." The children's book in question is *The Hugging Tree,* by Jill Neimark.
[110] Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt, "2021/5782: Anew." https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/new-years-poems.html.
[111] See especially Rabbi Sharon Brous, "Building a New America" (Rosh HaShanah 2018), and all of Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum's sermons quoted in this thesis.

The message that future generations depend upon us was one example of a broader message, which was by far the most common perspective shift that sermons invited their readers/listeners to undertake: a shift in perspective about the amount of time positive systemic change would take, and where in the story of that change readers and listeners should see themselves. A number of sermons used classical and contemporary stories about the launch of a multi-generational project (the planting of a tree,[112] the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism, the flood story, a number of multi-generational projects in American history, etc.) to argue that we should see ourselves as at the beginning of a multi-generational project that we likely will not see to completion, but we must nonetheless participate in the work. Because this message was shared by so many sermons, and because a number of these sermons specifically used the stories of the Flood (Genesis 6-9), the Ancient Israelites' time living in Egypt (Exodus 1-14), and the rise of rabbinic Judaism in the wake of the fall of the Second Temple (various Talmudic sources), it is discussed at greater length later in this thesis, in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, which are dedicated to an analysis of uses of the flood story, rabbinic texts set in the era after the fall of the Second Temple, and the Ancient Israelites' time in Egypt, respectively. However, here, suffice it to say that one of the problems many of these sermons were addressing (explicitly or implicitly) was the hopelessness community members were facing as they worked for change and either did not see results, or actively saw the world getting worse, including on issues of concern to them. Shifting one's perspective about the amount of time it might take for change to come was a way of making it easier to continue to work for justice without necessarily seeing results.

[112] By a man Honi the Circle-Maker encounters in BT Taanit 23a. He famously plants not for himself, but for the next generation. (See for example Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum's 2018 Rosh HaShanah Day 1 morning sermon, and Rabbi Sari Laufer's May 2021 source sheet "Resilience through the Ages: Lessons from Brene Brown and Honi the Circle-Maker.")

Authors also offered innovative approaches to various traditional holiday customs and texts in order to encourage their readers to reframe their perspectives on the present moment in a number of ways. For example, in his compositions "Al HaNissim: Future Miracles Unfolding Now" and "Al HaNissim: Unmasking the Future's Past" (which are based on the Chanukah and Purim Al HaNissims, respectively), David Evan Markus wrote blessings in the style of the traditional Al HaNissim in which he imagined that people in the future (who would be saying the blessings) were looking back on their past (and our present) in awe at the ways many people had worked for justice in the face of formidable challenges and eventually built a better world.[113] His decision to use the format of the Al HaNissim served as a powerful reminder that when people are inside of struggles (like the characters in the Chanukah and Purim stories, or like people alive today) they don't necessarily know whether or not the struggle is going to end well. We can forget this when we tell ancient stories of struggle because we *do* know the endings, but the perseverance of those characters can be a model for us too, and we can imagine ourselves as people engaged in a struggle that our descendants will one day look back on with gratitude from the relative stability and security of *their* present. A similar message is conveyed by David Evan Markus' poems "A Blessing: For Planting the Future"[114] and "After/אחר."[115]

Similarly, on Rosh HaShanah, a number of rabbis noted in their sermons that the liturgical phrase "Hayom Harat Olam," which is sometimes euphemistically translated as "today the world is born" or "today is the birthday of the world," actually means "today the world is

[113] David Evan Markus, "Al HaNissim: Future Miracles Unfolding Now" and "Al HaNissim: Unmasking the Future's Past," in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), pp.40-41 and p.103.
[114] ibid, pp.64-65. This is a blessing for use on Tu BiShvat.
[115] ibid, pp. 192-193. This poem makes a comparison between the growth and rebuilding that happened in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple, and the growth and rebuilding the author imagines will emerge from the devastation of the present era.

pregnant."[116] Seeing the world as "pregnant" effectively turns back the clock on when, precisely, we expect positive change to be actualized - it's not that positive change is being born on the new year, but that it is gestating and may one day come into being. This might be a more realistic hope for people living through challenging times (people who, as Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt observed in her 2021 Rosh HaShanah poem, see themselves as living through "the worst of times," times they are not sure they will survive). Tying this hope to the language of Jewish tradition (in this case, the liturgy of the High Holy Days) reinforces the message that even as we work to shift our perspectives on the present in a way that might be new for us,[117] we can draw upon the guidance and wisdom of our tradition.

Sometimes holidays brought up complicated reactions for the authors of sermons, prayers and poems, and the sermons, prayers or poems functioned to both name and protest some of the challenges of the present, and to reframe an aspect of the holiday their authors found troubling or unhelpful so that it could be a more useful tool for navigating the present. Two authors suggested that as Yom Kippur approached, God also owed humanity an apology – and as they imagined what God's atonement to humanity could look like, they registered their protests against the difficulties of the present.[118] Three poems (two for Shavuot, and one for *Parshat Yitro*) grappled with their authors' discomfort with the story of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai: on the basis

[116] See for example Rabbi Aryen Bernstein, "Today is Pregnant with Eternity: The Dread and Possibility of the New Year" (September 18, 2020), Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Rosh HaShanah 5781" (September 2020) and Rabbi Hannah Goldstein, "At The Edge of Destruction and Creation" (September 2020). Rabbi Bernstein also notes that in its biblical (pre-liturgical) context, "hayom harat olam" actually comes from Jeremiah's wish, in the face of his own overwhelm at his priestly responsibilities, that his mother had stayed "eternally pregnant" rather than giving birth to him (Jeremiah 20:17). (The word עולם, *olam,* means "forever" in biblical Hebrew and *either* "forever" or "world" in rabbinic Hebrew.)

[117] i.e., we might be used to living in more optimistic times, times in which we felt delighted to say in uncomplicated ways "today is the birthday of the world," and to use the New Year to celebrate the possibilities ahead.

[118] Rabbi Marina Yergen, "Walk Humbly With Your God" (High Holy Days 2021), and David Evan Markus, "A Duet for Selichot: Our Selichot to God/God's Selichot to Us" (in *From Narrow Places,* pp.212-213).

of her personal experiences of loss and pandemic isolation, Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt asked whether being "ownerless" was truly conducive to "revelation;"[119] and in two different poems, Trisha Arlin registered her discomfort with the passivity of the metaphor of "receiving" Torah [120] and her difficulty having "faith" in a time of so much "fear" and "despair."[121] Each poem addressed the challenges it raised differently: in "Hefker," Barenblatt left her question open, and in "Chag Ha-Atzeret," Trisha Arlin invited others who were "tired" of being passive to join her in "mak(ing) something new." (The perspective shift here is that if what we have received does not work for us, we don't need to be stuck with it; we can make or do something else instead.) And in "Fear, Despair (and Faith): The Lily Among the Thorns," Trisha Arlin suggested that like God in a midrash, we have the opportunity to both recognize that much is wrong in the world, *and* "choose the lily among the Thorns."[122] We can act out of "faith" even when we do not feel faithful.

A fourth Shavuot poem, "Overhead," by David Evan Markus, offered a different take on the challenges (and opportunities) of observing Shavuot, and celebrating the giving of the Torah, in the midst of a global pandemic. The implicit challenge the poem responds to is the feeling that in a time of terrible stress about the future (of the planet due to climate change, of democracy

---

[119] "Hefker" by Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt (in *From Narrow Places,* p.154). This poem plays on a teaching in BaMidbar Rabba 1:7 that the Torah was given in the wilderness because to receive Torah a person must become "ownerless" (hefker), like the wilderness.

[120] Trisha Arlin, "Chag Ha-Atzeret (Day of Stopping)" (May 5, 2021), accessed online at: http://triganza.blogspot.com/2021/05/chag-ha-atzeret-day-of-stopping.html.

[121] Trisha Arlin, "Fear, Despair (and Faith): The Lily Among the Thorns" (February 14, 2020), accessed online at: https://triganza.blogspot.com/2020/02/the-lily-among-thorns-fear-despair-and.html?m=1.

[122] In the Hebrew midrash, the "lily" God chooses is actually the Jewish people - the world is likened to an abandoned garden (and God is the one who abandoned it), but God returns because amidst many thorns, a lily (Israel and Torah) remains (see Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:2:3) . As it is retold in English in "The Legends of the Jews" (which is the version Arlin cites), the "lily" is Torah itself. In both the original Hebrew and in the more universalistic English translation, the midrash registers protest against God's neglect even as it also suggests that there is still something worth continuing to live (in covenant) for. As discussed in other parts of this thesis, protest can be a very effective tool for cultivating resilience in the face of injustice and loss.

due to the rise of anti-democratic regimes, etc), celebrating covenant (the idea that God and the Jewish people are mutually obligated to one another and through the performance of *mitzvot* people can fulfill our end of the covenant) can be hard. In response to this challenge, Markus alludes to a famous midrashic teaching that when the Israelites agreed to receive the Torah, God was holding Mt. Sinai over their heads (and they were frightened). Except instead of considering this moment as exceptional, Markus suggests that "there is always some mountain over our heads" (whether that mountain is a current problem that feels unstoppable and existentially perilous like climate change, or something else).[123] Living in a time of existential challenges need not be paralyzing, Markus suggests; it can also be galvanizing. The mountain can be a "canopy of recommitment,/Wooing us home, hoping that we will do and we will hear."[124] It is, ultimately, a hopeful message: the world may frighten us, but it can also galvanize us; the things that scare us can give us purpose; the world needs us to be in relationship with it ("wooing" and "hoping"), and it is ours to respond.

Perspectives on Justice: Renegotiating Relationships with Jewish Justice Sayings and Texts

In the book *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era,* the visual counterpoint to David Evan Markus' poem "Overhead" is a drawing (also called "Overhead") by Steve Silbert.[125] The *drawing* "Overhead" seems slightly less optimistic, at the end of the day, about change work; rather, it expresses some of the challenges of engaging in *Tikkun Olam* in the present. it depicts a downtrodden Atlas holding up the globe, which is covered in a mountain-shaped pile of papers that say things like "MAGA," "fake news," "racism," "white

[123] "Overhead" (in *From Narrow Places,* p.156).
[124] ibid. "Canopy" seems like an implicit reference to the *Hashkiveinu* prayer ("spread the shelter of Your peace over us"); the last words are the words the Israelites speak when they accept the commandments.
[125] ibid, p.157.

supremacy," "synagogue vandalized," "shooting," "Jan 6," "anger," "hate," and more.[126] The figure who looks like Atlas is frowning, and words above his head (presumably meant to be thoughts or speech) read "keep calm and Tikkun Olam."[127] He does not seem to be in any danger of dropping the globe, and his slogan is a nod to a philosophy that has been remembered by American popular culture as successfully helping the United Kingdom through a very challenging time,[128] but his words speak to some strain with the concept of "tikkun olam." Can he repair all of the brokenness that, in this picture, is not in the world itself but instead a weighty mountain piled on top of it? Will the old strategies work? The Atlas of Greek mythology did not, in fact, hold up the globe, but he is frequently depicted as doing so in 20th and 21st century art, and so Silbert's image of Atlas under strain from not just the earth but also a mountain of words like "hate" suggests a person whose tried and true methodology for engaging with the world is being put under strain by the present moment. (It also suggests a person who feels alone - there is only one human figure in the drawing.)

Just as many of the authors, artists and liturgists whose work this thesis explores identified very clearly that some of the challenges of the present seem unprecedented in many of our lifetimes, and some explored the ways in which familiar approaches to holidays needed to be reconceived in order to be meaningful in the present, so too did many authors, artists and liturgists also identify that some tried-and-true Jewish social justice stories and slogans no longer felt like good fits.[129] Sometimes, the sign that a framework like "Tikkun Olam" or a

[126] ibid.
[127] ibid.
[128] That time is World War II (an era frequently mentioned in this thesis' primary sources).
[129] The one major Jewish justice slogan that seemed to be an exception to this pattern was Micah 6:8, which argues that God requires people to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." Several primary sources quoted Micah 6:8, and while they offered a variety of different interpretations of each of its three injunctions, they did not seem to be expressing a feeling of distance from it or a need to reframe it – the message of the sermons and

frequently-invoked biblical quote about justice was not working for someone in their present moment was not that the author or artist *explicitly* disidentified with this framework, but rather, that they did not mention it at all. But at other times, as in Silbert's "Overhead," the challenge is more explicitly named and grappled with.

Like Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt's poem "Hefker," the drawing "Overhead" did not necessarily answer the question it raised (*can* we "keep calm and tikkun olam" under all this strain?). But other primary sources (primarily source sheets and sermons) did offer their readers reimagined approaches to familiar Jewish justice slogans. For example, Rabbi Jen Gubitz taught listeners that generations of Jewish commentators have suggested that the biblical quote "justice, justice shall you pursue" might repeat the word "justice" not (only) to emphasize its importance but also to suggest that it is necessary to pursue two different kinds of justice at the same time.[130] Rabbi Gubitz offers, following Rabbi Sarah Luria, the teaching that perhaps these two types of justice could be "loud justice" and "quiet justice" (public-facing work and behind-the-scenes work), and people who engage in either type of work are important and should be celebrated.[131] By suggesting that justice can mean more than one thing (and tying this suggestion to a rich interpretive tradition in classical Jewish Torah commentaries), and offering concrete suggestions

---

text studies that used Micah 6:8 tended to be that Micah 6:8 offered solid, helpful advice. One possible exception might be Rabbi Lenette Herzog's text study, "Micah 6:8 and Justice," which reviews a number of interpretations of Micah 6:8 and then asks, "How does Micah's approach to justice inform, resonate with or strike a dischord in our own justice values?" (https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/354107?lang=bi.) Rabbi Herzog's question leaves open the possibility that someone might not identify with Micah 6:8 - but it leaves open other possibilities, as well. Similarly, in her 2021 High Holy Days sermon "Walk Humbly With Your God," (which, as discussed above, asked in part, "what about us forgiving God?"), Rabbi Marina Yergin suggested that Micah 6:8 could be read creatively as a guide to a *t'shuvah* process.

[130] Rabbi Jen Gubitz, "Immigrant Justice Drash," November 29, 2018.

[131] ibid.

of how to get involved in different styles of justice work, Rabbi Gubitz opened up a wider array of possibilities for her listeners than they might previously have been aware of.[132]

Similarly, a number of text study sheets (and one sermon) offered a variety of ways to reframe the famous teaching "it is not up to you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it" (which comes from the first half of Mishnah Avot 2:16). In some times and places, this teaching can stand alone - for example, in the 20th century it was set to a number of melodies that became popular in the liberal Jewish world, and these melodies did not provide any additional context for the quote - they just offered a platform for reciting the quote itself.[133] However, in the text study sheets about resilience in justice work that used Mishnah Avot 2:16, more context is provided (by way of accompanying stories, usually preceding or culminating in the quote, and by way of accompanying questions offering readers concrete strategies to connect Mishnah Avot 2:16 to their own lives), perhaps indicating that Mishnah Avot 2:16 by itself is not enough to help readers approach justice work resiliently in the present moment. We may not be

[132] It is perhaps unsurprising that Rabbi Gubitz's drash was the only collected primary source to use Deuteronomy 16:20, because the verse contains no overt or obvious connections to the topic of *resilience* in justice work. (Its plain meaning might be that justice is a prerequisite for individual or societal perseverance, but that still does not address the question of *how* to persevere *in* justice work.) If anything, for a person who believes in an obligation to engage in justice work but is finding it challenging to continue that justice work, the verse might actually elicit guilt or shame: *you are obligated to do this work that you are currently finding it hard to do.* And yet, this is precisely what can also make the verse's use powerful in discussions of resilience: to reclaim or reframe it in a way that addresses some of the challenges listeners might be facing is to affirm that listeners *do* have a way to fulfill the obligation, after all.

[133] Another good example of a famous Jewish quote (this one by Rebbe Nachman of Breslav) that is often sung without any context - indicating it may be meaningful without any additional explanation to some of the people who engage with it - is "The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the most important part is not to be afraid." Singing these words, or "Lo Alecha," without extra context, does not necessarily mean that contemporary audiences are interacting with the quotes in the same way their authors did - it just means that it does not take extra work to make them resonant. In contrast, the Dan Nichols song "Kehillah Kedoshah" (which offers a *number* of different examples of what it might mean to be a "kehillah kedoshah," or holy community) is a good example of a 20th century song that recontextualizes a popular phrase from Jewish tradition in order to make it maximally meaningful to an audience in a specific time and place. Amongst the texts discussed above, the songs "I'm not alone" and "Beautiful People (Toch Emunei)" are also examples of songs that engage in work to recontextualize famous teachings and/or texts (the "two pockets" teaching and the verse of L'cha Dodi that reads "toch emunei am segula," "in faith, a treasured people") to make them maximally meaningful to a contemporary audience.

free "to desist from the work," but even if we remind ourselves that others can help us (and "the work" may be a project that extends beyond our lifetimes), how do we *do* "the work" right now?

The text study sheets (and the one sermon) that incorporated Mishnah Avot 2:16 addressed this question by offering strategies for resilience in social justice, and/or inviting learners to think critically and creatively about their own strategies. For example, in her 2017 Rosh HaShanah sermon "A Letter to My Children," Rabbi Jill Perlman argued that the roadmap for fulfilling the injunction in Mishnah Avot 2:16 was offered by the U'netaneh Tokef's reminder to us to engage in "T'shuvah, Tefillah and Tzedakah" (which Rabbi Perlman interpreted as "recognizing the incredible potential for transformation within and beyond … living with love and gratitude … [and being] generous with our time").[134] And in her text study sheet "Resilience in the Fight for Social Justice based on 'How to Stay Resilient in the Long-Term Fight for Social Justice' by Reina Gattuso," Anna Calamaro also offered concrete strategies for resilience in justice work, by putting Mishnah Avot 2:16 in conversation with a contemporary work. Calamaro's specific focus was on resilience in racial justice work, and she argued for the importance of "rest," "self care and community care," (especially for people of color engaged in racial justice work), and also on the importance of "humility" for white people engaged in racial justice work.[135] Her text study drew the reader's attention to the ways "resilience" ("not disisting" from "the work") might mean different things depending upon a person's identity, and it also offered strategies for staying in the work.[136]

[134] Rabbi Jill Perlman, "Rosh HaShanah 2017/5778 A Letter To My Children."
[135] Anna Calamaro, "Resilience in the Fight for Social Justice based on 'How to Stay Resilient in the Long-Term Fight for Social Justice' by Reina Gattuso," August 1, 2020. https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/254411?lang=bi.
[136] ibid.

Another text study that offers strategies for staying in social justice work even when it is challenging (and beyond our capacity as individuals) was "Keeping the Faith: Hope and Resilience in Times of Despair" by Rabbi Kelilah Miller. Rabbi Miller's text study opened with the teaching that despair causes sin, and then explored two different stories of cultivating hope: the story of Rabbi Akiva laughing while he stood in the ruins of the Temple because he realized that the prophecy predicting the rebuilding of the Temple would come to pass,[137] and Fred Roger's teaching that in desperate situations we can find hope by "looking for the helpers," who can inspire us with their actions. Only after prompting readers to consider how Rabbi Akiva's and Fred Roger's strategies for cultivating hope might apply to their lives did Rabbi Miller turn to Mishnah Avot 2:16, and ask readers, "What are the kinds of work in the world that we may never finish? How, and why, do we keep working anyway? Can you think of people, relationships, ideas, or spiritual practices that sustain you as you keep going?"[138] These questions reminded readers of their purpose for doing hard work, and of some of the resources available to them.

A third text study that put Mishnah Avot 2:16 in conversation with stories (and modern resilience strategies) was "When the World Swirls Around You" by Rabbi Rebecca Rosenthal. In contrast to the three primary sources discussed above, Rabbi Rosenthal did not offer or encourage specific strategies for fulfilling MishnahAvot 2:16, but through the juxtaposition of the quote with other stories, she did offer new ways of understanding it. Rabbi Rosenthal opened her text study with several Talmudic stories of rabbis in existentially dire situations (under a pile of rocks, capsized out at sea, etc), giving voice to the experiences of people who might feel that

[137] This story is explored extensively in Chapter 4.
[138] Rabbi Kelilah Miller, "Keeping the faith: Hope and resilience in Times of Despair," October 27, 2017, accessed online at: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/84430?lang=bi.

they were living through a time in which "the world (was) swirling around" *them.* Having established the present as an exigent time, she turned to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's teaching that in dire times, "meaning is found by responding to the demand," to two teachings on BT Taanit 11a about the importance of standing with one's community in times of distress, to a teaching on BT Taanit 20a about flexibility, and to a Brene Brown quote about the importance (and challenge) of living in the face of the possibility of loss, which Brown argues we can bring ourselves to do because "we are not alone, we are never alone."[139] Only then did Rabbi Rosenthal quote Mishnah Avot 2:16. Her message seemed to be (in part) that we can do hard work that we know will extend beyond our time by living our life in community with others - perhaps especially "when the world swirls around you."[140]

"Finding Hope," "Making Meaning,"[141] *and Cultivating Joy.*

The cultivation (or renegotiation) of hope was an important topic for several sermons.[142] Interestingly, hope itself is not considered universally helpful for resilience. In situations of ambiguous loss, for example, Dr. Pauline Boss remarks that while "finding meaning must include some hope for the future,"[143] "the maintenance of hope [is not] the same as resiliency."[144]

---

[139] Rabbi Rebecca Rosenthal, "When The World Swirls Around You," July 1, 2021: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/333266.19.

[140] In some ways this message is implied by Mishnah Avot 2:16 itself (if "it's not up to you to finish the work," but the work is important, other people are probably going to do "the work" too), but Rabbi Rosenthal (particularly through her use of Brene Brown) made the possibilities offered by life in community (even in hard times) much more concrete.

[141] "Finding Hope" and "Making Meaning" are Dr. Pauline Boss' phrases (and two of the strategies she offers for healing while experiencing Ambiguous Loss) (Boss, 2018).

[142] Two sermons that were studied that are not explicitly discussed below, but that do encourage hope and resilience (and use several of the techniques to encourage resilience that other sermons employ, including reframing) are Rabbi Jill Perlman's 2020 Rosh HaShanah sermon "We Are The Hope" and Rabbi Denise Eger's 2019 Rosh HaShanah sermon "From Despair to Hope: Facing Our Depths and Lifting Towards Hope."

[143] Boss (2018), p.96.

[144] ibid, p.180.

This is because a return to a previous "status quo" is not always realistic - and so resiliency in many different situations of loss (including ambiguous loss) is connected to a person's ability (over time) to shift what they hope for so that they have realistic (and motivating) hopes.[145]

The sermons and other primary sources that took "hope" as their central topic (often using it for part of their title) all acknowledged that they and their listeners and readers were living in a time when hope was hard to come by. Although some of the "hope" sermons discussed situations that could absolutely be defined as ambiguous losses, these sermons (mostly) did not go so far as to actively name "hopes" that had been lost and "new hopes" that had been found. It is possible that specific "new hopes" for the future are not mentioned in these sermons because the authors had not yet had time to find them. The process of "finding new hope" is a long one (Boss views it as the culmination of work to heal while experiencing ambiguous loss), and many of the "hope" sermons were written by people living in the midst of upheaval. That said, a common message in most of these sermons (across their use of a variety of biblical, rabbinic, and contemporary sources to illustrate their points) was that "hope" does not necessarily have to be a feeling that comes to a person (through no action of their own). Rather, these sermons argued, "hope" can be something that people live out (and perhaps, eventually plant in themselves) by taking concrete actions to help bring about change, and a better future.

Rabbi Amanda Greene called this "The Real Kind of Hope" (and this was the title of her 2016 Rosh HaShanah sermon), and in the same year, Rabbi Toba Spitzer called this (and her sermon) "Active Hope."[146] In 2021, Rabbi Deena Cowans titled her Erev Rosh HaShanah

[145] ibid.

[146] Rabbi Spitzer's title was inspired by a book by Joanna Macy and Dr. Chris Johnstone called *Active Hope: How To Face The Mess We're In Without Going Crazy.* (Rabbi Toba Spitzer, "Active Hope," Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, Newton, MA: https://www.dorsheitzedek.org/divrei-torah/rabbi-toba-spitzer?post_id=358264.)

Sermon "There Can Be Miracles When You Believe," and she used the lyrics of the Disney song with this chorus to illustrate how she was conceptualizing "miracles," "belief," and "hope:" "Though hope is frail, it's hard to kill/Who knows what miracles you can achieve/When you believe, somehow you will/You will when you believe."[147] (In the Disney movie *The Prince of Egypt,* these humanistic lyrics are paired with the singing of excerpts from the Song of the Sea, and images of the Ancient Israelites leaving Egypt en masse.) Meanwhile, in a 2019 sermon (connected to the prayer Shalom Rav) at the URJ biennial, Evan Traylor discussed the ways that his ancestors who survived the Holocaust and his ancestors who survived slavery modeled hope for the future in the ways they lived their lives.[148] And on Rosh HaShanah of 2019, Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi celebrated the ways that community can help us cultivate hope (and move towards action), and she ended her sermon by inviting her students (at New York University) to discuss hope with one another (thus living out the possibility of moving towards hope in community).[149]

Of all of the sermons that took "hope" as their main topic (and often, one of the words of their title), only Rabbi Angela Buchdahl's January 2022 sermon "Captives of Hope" shied away from strongly recommending a specific (hopeful) path forward. Given less than a week after synagogue goers in Colleyville, Texas were taken hostage (a crisis into which Rabbi Buchdahl was herself drawn, because she was contacted twice by the hostage taker), Rabbi Buchdahl's sermon expressed the difficulty of offering concrete words of "hope" and "comfort" in the present, when the shock and pain of the crisis was so fresh. (In so doing, she also gave her

[147] Rabbi Deena Cowans, "Erev Rosh HaShanah 5781: There Can Be Miracles When You Believe," posted online September 24, 2020. Mishkan Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. https://www.mishkanchicago.org/erev-rosh-hashanah-5781-there-can-be-miracles-when-you-believe/.
[148] Evan Traylor, "URJ Biennial 2019 Shabbat Sermon." December 2019, Chicago, Illinois. Accessed online at: https://evantraylor.com/urj-biennial-2019-shabbat-sermon/.
[149] Rabbi Nikki DeBlossi, "Hope: Grab Hold of the Thread" (Rosh HaShanah 5780/2019), accessed online at: https://medium.com/curious/hope-grab-hold-of-the-thread-4aaac7094760.

listeners space to feel their own responses to the crisis.) She then expressed, as Rabbi DeBlossi had in very different circumstances two and a half years before, that no matter, the way forward was *together* - as a united Jewish community also reaching out to and partnering with people of other faiths.[150] She concluded with a prayer (adapted from the words of the prophet Zechariah), blessing God who made the Jewish people "captives of hope."[151] The message was that she had not yet found concrete (new) hope, but that she - and we - certainly would in the future, because it is our inheritance as a People.

In the language of ambiguous loss, the ambiguous loss Rabbi Buchdahl named in late January 2022 was the loss of a sense of safety in shul (and possibly also in America).[152] She modeled for her community an intermediate stage of healing, by naming what had been lost (and/or challenged) as a result of Colleyville and also naming which resources remained. She also identified that one hope for the future - that the United States would continue to be a very safe place to practice Judaism - had been lost in the wake of years of anti-Semitic attacks, and a new hope for the future would need to be articulated (over time) in its wake.

In studies of ambiguous loss, "finding meaning" is a task that goes hand-in-hand with finding (new) hope. "Meaning" and "purpose" are also considered important for individual resilience more generally. (Much of the research into the importance of meaning and purpose builds on Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning,* which uses the story of Frankl's own

[150] Rabbi Buchdahl's sermon coincided with Parshat Yitro, and she quoted Yitro's words to Moses in Exodus 18:18 "this is too heavy for you, you cannot carry it alone." (Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, "Captives of Hope." https://www.centralsynagogue.org/worship/sermons/captives-of-hope.)
[151] ibid. Citing Zechariah 9:12.
[152] This loss could be characterized as ambiguous because there was not (in late January 2022) a consensus in the American Jewish community about whether a sense of safety in synagogue (and America) was, in the wake of several years of escalating anti-Semitic incidents, permanently gone, or simply missing for now. ("Absent but present")

experiences in the Holocaust to frame his belief in the importance of meaning, and to introduce logotherapy, his therapeutic technique.) The importance of pursuing a sense of meaning and purpose is discussed in a few of the sermons explored above (for example, "Rekindling Our Lights," discussed in the subsection "Joy," below), and in some of the sermons explored in Chapters 3-5. (Some of the sermons in Chapters 3-5 are also, themselves, meaning-making endeavors - they use sacred stories to make sense of the present, and to assign a purpose to their readers/listeners, like working to make a better world for the next generation.) When meaning *is* mentioned by name, it is sometimes by way of an aspiration or prayer, as in Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh's Yom Kippur 2021 sermon "What Now? Resilience During & After COVID-19," which asks God to help the community make meaning of what they have just lived through.[153] Sermons that either elide the task of meaning-making or mention its importance but do not actively engage in making meaning of recent events may do so for the same reason that none of the "hope" sermons articulate a concrete new hope for the future: meaning-making can take time. (This is especially the case when, in the language of post-traumatic growth research, one's previous "assumptive framework" has been seriously challenged.)

Joy

As discussed in chapter one, recent studies suggest that people who are happier are more likely (than people who are unhappy) to engage in systemic change work. Supporting individual and communal happiness and wellbeing could therefore be considered a prerogative of those committed to inculcating resilience in justice work. In spite of this, however, very few of the sermons and other sources this thesis analyzes discussed the cultivation of "happiness" or "joy"

[153] Missaghieh directly cites Victor Frankl in this request.

as strategies for resilience in justice work. The exceptions were a 2021 Pride Shabbat sermon by Kelly Whitehead which described embracing and celebrating "black, queer joy" as an "act of resistance" and an investment in resilience,[154] and a February 2021 d'var by Evan Traylor ("Rekindling Our Lights") that discussed the importance of "rekindling our own eternal lights" by "seek(ing) out the people and things that bring us joy, meaning, love and purpose … so that we will shine out for another glorious day."[155]

It is perhaps unsurprising that only two sermons discussed "seeking … joy" because what most sermons *did* discuss were experiences like "chaos," "loss," "suffering," "isolation" and "fear," which are often experienced as at odds with happiness and joy. It is worth noting, however, that the two sermons that did discuss joy did so not in spite of an awareness of the world's challenges, but with that awareness. Both sermons emphasized that *cultivating* joy is something a person needs to make time for. Kelly Whitehead discussed the ways their work as an educator and consultant for diversity, equity and inclusion can sometimes mean they focus a lot on pain and loss (so embracing joy needs to be intentional), and so attention to joy is a choice. Evan Traylor used *Parshat Tetzaveh*'s description of the priests' daily rekindling of what would come to be called by later communities "the eternal light"[156] as a metaphor for the ways that pieces of our experience we hope will be perpetual need to be rekindled/attended to on a regular basis.

---

[154] Whitehead, Kelly. "Pride Shabbat D'var Torah." June 28, 2021, Beth Emet, Evanston, Illinois. Accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9DTCdawkTc.

[155] Evan Traylor, "Rekindling Our Eternal Lights," accessed at https://www.ammud.org/blogposts/parashat-tetzaveh.

[156] "Eternal light" is a translation of נר תמיד (in Exodus 27:20) that emerged long after the Torah was compiled; in context, the word תמיד functions as an adverb indicating that the light was perpetually (i.e., repeatedly) kindled. Evan Traylor's *d'var* plays with both the modern-day definition of נר תמיד and the phrase as it appears in the Torah itself, using both metaphorically.

Post-Traumatic Growth: A Future Hope?

The *possibility* for healing and growth in the wake of traumatic loss and change was discussed extensively in the primary sources (especially those utilizing stories of the rabbis set during the period immediately after the fall of the Second Temple), but very few present-tense *examples* of such growth were given. This phenomenon is discussed more extensively in Chapter Four, but for now, suffice it to say that as with the task of "making (new) meaning," post-trauamtic growth may be an unrealistic expectation for many of these primary sources, composed in the midst of terrible upheaval. Rather, they emphasize the possibility of healing and growth in the wake of traumatic loss, and tell the stories of the ways people in other times and places made meaning of the challenges they experienced. These stories are an (implicit) expression of faith in (a possible) future.

Moral Injury and Soul Repair: Infrequently Mentioned by Name, Frequently Relevant

Very few of the primary sources addressed moral injury by name, likely because it is a relatively new concept, and an even newer concept in the Jewish world. The major exceptions were a sermon and presentation by Rabbi Mary Zamore, related to the moral injury experienced by many female identified clergy people (and others) due to sexual assault and/or sexual harassment perpetrated by men who held power and prestige in the Jewish world. In an explanatory note that she emailed with her sermon (whose original audience was the Women's Rabbinic Network, or WRN, a professional organization for female and nonbinary Reform rabbis), Rabbi Zamore explained that she wanted to make sure women who had experienced assault or harassment knew they were not alone, and felt encouraged to come forward. Her sermon coincided with *Parshat Korach,* and she argued that often, as women, we may worry we

are being like Korach (who, tradition teaches, defied Moses' authority because of his own thirst for power), when actually to speak out against injustice who make us more like Zelophehad's daughters (who challenged an unjust law, and improved their community's lives through their actions (Numbers 27:1-11) or even like Shifra, Puah, Moses, and Aaron (who each, in their own ways, defied Pharaoh).

One of the reasons that being the victim of or witness to a morally injurious event can be so challenging is because it can significantly undermine one's sense of oneself *and* one's belief in the community in which the event was allowed to occur.[157] It can cause people to disconnect from each other. Many survivors of sexual assault in the Jewish community experienced (at least) two moral injuries, the first being the assault itself, and the second being the way their community initially responded to the assault (often, by silencing victims and defending perpetrators, allowing the perpetrators to keep their jobs and power). In addition to reassuring victims that they were not alone (in the present or in the scope of Jewish history), Rabbi Zamore's work also embodied a response to the second level of moral injury (communal silencing) because, as a person in a position of authority, she was encouraging victims to come forward and affirming that what had happened to them was wrong.

Another sermon, by Rabbi Jonathan Roos, did not mention moral injury by name, but *did* offer an excellent discussion of what in the study of moral injury would be called the moral injury experienced by perpetrators. Rabbi Roos' (Rosh HaShanah 2019) sermon "The Honest and the Good" addressed the challenges of discerning one's ethical "red lines" and conforming to

[157] "Victim" is a complicated word and some people against whom harms have been perpetrated choose not to use it, for a variety of reasons (including, but not limited to, not wanting to apply a label to themselves that implies that they lack agency). I use it above because it is currently the technical term in the moral injury literature for people against whom harms causing moral injury have been perpetrated. (A "witness" and a "perpetrator" can also experience moral injury.)

them while working as the subordinate of an unethical leader.[158] The context of his sermon was that many of his congregants were career[159] employees of the United States government, and some had approached him to express that they did not know how to handle that under the Trump administration, they were being told to do things at work that they believed to be wrong. Rabbi Roos worked to offer congregants in this position some guidance from Jewish law. He invited listeners to begin a process of self-exploration (with the ultimate goal of determining their "red lines" and making a concrete plan for how to honor these "red lines") using Maimonides' definition of *t'shuvah,* the practice of *Cheshbon HaNefesh*, and the text of the *Vidui* (which Rabbi Roos called a "code of conduct") as starting points. He emphasized the principle of "*lifnim mishurat hadin*,"[160] going beyond the letter of the law, and the injunction in Deuteronomy 6:18 to "do what is right and good," which (he taught) Nachmanides interpreted to mean that laws cannot always guide our actions, but principles can (and should). At the same time, Rabbi Roos also encouraged his listeners to practice enough self-forgiveness to "move ahead."[161]

One of the reasons that the situation Rabbi Roos describes is an excellent example of the moral injury experienced by perpetrators[162] is that many of the people who experience moral injury because of harms they perpetrate are not at the top of the chain of command. His focus on

---

[158] Roos, Jonathan. "The Honest and the Good (Rosh HaShanah 5780)." September 30, 2019. https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2019/10/RH-5780-AM-Rabbi-Roos-Ethics-Sermon.pdf.

[159] Meaning that they were not political appointees, but worked for their entire careers in the federal government, regardless of their personal agreement or disagreement with any specific political administration.

[160] In the Talmud, this term can actually refer to both God's actions (as in the passage on BT Berakhot 7a that imagines the prayers that God god's-self says) and human actions (see for example BT Bava Metzia 30b's discussion of why Jerusalem was destroyed). Rabbi Roos' invocation of the term is linked to a rabbinic and medieval interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:18 (found, he notes, in Ramban's commentary and elsewhere)..

[161] Roos, Jonathan. "The Honest and the Good (Rosh HaShanah 5780)."

[162] It is worth noting that one of the texts Rabbi Roos cites is Leviticus 19:16, and one of the questions shaping his sermon is "what does it mean to stand idly by?" In the language of moral injury, a person who "stands idly by" (who may or may not have the power to change anything) and witnesses something that violates their moral code is a "witness," not a "perpetrator." And Rabbi Roos also discusses the responsibility of witnesses - but his main focus is on people who are worried that they have committed, or will commit in the future, unethical acts in the course of doing the duties assigned to them at work.

Jewish law about repentance and ethical behavior is also aligned with scholars who argue that Jewish teachings on repentance can be excellent tools for the soul repair work of perpetrators of morally injurious acts, because they offer ways for a person to take responsibility for their actions (and make change) and also believe that they are *capable* of change, even after causing harm.[163]

Rabbi Roos' focus on perpetrators was fairly unusual amongst the sermons (though he was joined in this focus to an extent by Rabbi Michael Marmur's 2021 Rabbis for Human Rights High Holy Days sermon, discussed in Chapter Three). Far more typical were discussions of (what could be called) the moral injury experienced by victims and witnesses of acts (by the government, corporations, white supremacist extremists, and others) that violated their moral code.[164] "Moral injury" is a useful (though not explicitly stated) framework for understanding most of the challenges described in sermons in Chapters Three, Four and Five, because they are sermons about navigating eras of tremendous destruction and loss (with a focus on destruction and loss caused or exacerbated by other human beings). "Moral injury" may also be a useful (if anachronistic) framework for interpreting the sacred stories - of the flood (and the people and animals who were either killed by it or who survived by standing idly by the murder of others), the destruction of the Second Temple, and the Israelites' experiences of slavery in Egypt - at the

[163] See for example Rabbis Kim Geringer and Nancy H. Wiener, "Insights into Moral Injury and Soul Repair from Classical Jewish Texts," *Pastoral Psychology* 68 no.1 (February 2019). "Insights into Moral Injury and Soul Repair from Classical Jewish Texts" also highlights the power of Maimonides' teachings about repentance and the Vidui.
[164] One sermon that followed this pattern which is not discussed in subsequent chapters in Rabbi Jen Gubitz's June 2020 "Fighting Complicit Silence: A Rabbi's Commitment." In this sermon, Rabbi Gubitz discussed and modeled atonement, atoning for a recent experience (in a different zoom service) in which she was shocked by a person's disrespect about pronouns and did act quickly enough after they made a dismissive comment to set a public norm for the group. Her sermon is also an excellent example of the way in which lines between "witness" and "perpetrator" can be blurry - she did not perpetrate the inciting incident, but she did hold herself responsible for not speaking up after it occurred.

hearts of the sermons in Chapters Three, Four and Five. It is to these stories, and the sermons that use them, that we will now turn.

Chapter 3: *Parshat Noach* - A Story for Our Times?

> "Meaning-making occurs through the narratives we construct to make sense of our world and our position in it … [and] stories have particular significance in our response to major life challenges. Adversity and accompanying distress becomes tensions and organizing principles for coherent life stories and belief systems. Whether a widespread catastrophe, a personal tragedy, or a persistent hardship, adversity generates a crisis of meaning and a potential disruption of personal integration. This tension prompts the construction or reorganization of our life story and beliefs. Over time, we revise our stories of adversity and resilience to gain narrative coherence and integrity." - Dr. Froma Walsh[165]

To what is this moment comparable?

In classic rabbinic literature, there is a frequently-employed construct called a *mashal* (sometimes translated as "parable"). The *mashal* is a story employed to explain some aspect of the way the world works (and/or some historical event that the rabbis are trying to understand in theological terms). And so a given midrash or Talmudic sugya might begin by citing a verse from the Tanakh, or begin by describing an event in the world, and then ask: *to what is this matter similar?*[166] The midrash or sugya will then answer itself: "[It is similar] to …", and tell a story (sometimes featuring a human king, who represents God, and sometimes not). After the story (the *mashal*) comes the *nimshal*, or explanation, in which the narrator explains who each character (and inanimate object) in the story represented.

The functions of *meshalim* are very diverse: some are explicitly theological in nature and some focus only on human beings; some explicate verses or stories from Tanakh and others are much more focused on other life experiences; some seek to explain why or how something

---

[165] In Froma Walsh, *Strengthening Family Ties and Resilience: Third Edition,* New York: The Guilford Press (2015), p.39.

[166] In Hebrew: למה הדבר דומה? The word "דבר," which is translated above as "matter," can also mean "word" or "event." *Meshalim* can be introduced with a few different formulaic questions, and sometimes they are introduced with no question at all, but simply the prefix "ל" (meaning "to"), which implies the question and answer formula: "to what is this similar? To …".

happened (or happens) and some offer guidance on how to live in the present. But they all rely upon the human capacity to make connections between different stories and experiences, and to use analogy to understand the unfamiliar or confusing - or to reframe the familiar in a new light.

Many of the sermons analyzed in this thesis tell stories, too. Some are historical and some are contemporary, some come from the Jewish canon and some from secular life, but what most have in common is that they seek (usually implicitly) to address the question: *to what is this moment comparable?* From which other moments can we draw strategies, and strength; which other stories might help us find meaning and connection, here and now? These are particularly poignant questions in contemporary discussions of resilience and perseverance in justice work because what many of these discussions share is a sense that we are experiencing challenges without precedent in our lifetimes. Many of our previous "givens" about how to engage in effective social justice work are no longer givens, and the stories we told about our place in the world (as well as the classical Jewish stories we identified with, if any) may no longer feel like good fits. And so, *to what is this moment comparable?* becomes a way of asking not just *how should we understand what we are experiencing?* but also *what should we do next?*

One of the most interesting trends in the sermons (and poems, iyyunims, and source sheets) studied is that the vast majority of stories (from classical Jewish texts, Jewish history, and world history) that the *darshanim* analogized to their present moment were stories of people living in extremely exigent moments - sometimes, much more literally exigent than what was being experienced by the vast majority of the sermon's audience. (It is worth noting that the stories utilized in sermons written after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic were not any more or less dire than the stories in sermons from 2016-early 2020.) The two most frequently

employed narratives from the Torah were the story of the earth-destroying flood in *Parshat Noach,* and midrashim and other stories about the experiences of the Ancient Israelites *while they were still slaves in Egypt.* (In contrast, the desert wanderings, which make up the majority of the Torah, received much less attention.) Stories about the lives of the rabbis in the wake of the fall of the Second Temple also made frequent appearances in these sermons, as did anecdotes from perilous moments in the lives of individual ancient rabbis - for example, being cast into the sea after one's ship has been destroyed, or living through a time of famine. Meanwhile, the 20th and 21st century events most frequently invoked were the Holocaust, and September 11.

Early in this research process, when the pattern delineated above had not fully revealed itself, but I had noticed several mentions of the Holocaust, I had an interesting conversation with a friend. I told her I was surprised to see the Holocaust being repeatedly invoked, "because we're *not* currently the victims of a genocide." She replied that she thought it was understandable, and added that when she had experienced difficulties related to being pregnant during pandemic lockdown, she would remind herself that many women in the Holocaust had given birth in much worse circumstances - and if they could do it, she could, too. There is certainly an undercurrent of this message in some of these sermons ("if they could persevere, how much more so can we!"), but if the sermons stopped at "we can do it!", they would likely be dissatisfying to a majority of their listeners. Instead, using these stories as their launching points, many of the sermons seek to address not just whether we can continue to survive and work for justice in times of loss, change, and limited options, but *how.*

The next three chapters each deal with one of the major stories (or in the case of the fall of the second Temple, the many stories set in a single era) that were repeatedly told and alluded

to in the primary sources this thesis analyzes. We will start, in this chapter, with an analysis of the flood story in *Parshat Noach* (Genesis 6-9). This story featured prominently in fourteen primary sources, most of which were *not* composed for the Shabbat on which *Noach* is read.

In a March 2021 op-ed entitled "It's Time for a Green New Deal,"[167] teens at the Houston, Texas-based Kehillah High School made an impassioned appeal to readers of the *Jewish Herald-Voice* that taking action to mitigate climate change was both existentially urgent, and Jewishly imperative. To emphasize the urgency, they cited local weather changes in Houston itself, including a recent freeze that had cost many lives. To convey that protecting the earth was a Jewish value, they wrote in part:

> Judaism teaches that G-d created the world and gave human beings a specific responsibility within creation to cultivate it and protect it. Just like Hashem told Noah to protect the creatures of this earth, as Jews today, we must carry forward this responsibility.[168]

The teens' choice to mention Noah is fascinating for a few reasons. Judaism *does* teach that "G-d … gave human beings a specific responsibility within creation to cultivate [the world] and protect it," but in the Torah, this happens in the story of the first human being, not Noah.[169] In contrast, Noah's instructions to build an ark and then take a pair of each type of animal onto this ark[170] were commandments given him in a very specific time and place, for a very specific

---

[167]Conde, Nathan, Kraut, Rachel, Vallarta, Emilio, and Dulberg, Sophie. "Kehillah High Teens: It's Time for a Green New Deal." *Jewish Herald-Voice* [Houston, Texas,] March 11, 2021, https://jhvonline.com/kehillah-high-teens-its-time-for-a-green-new-deal-p28846-159.htm.

[168] ibid.

[169] See especially Genesis 2:15, which is part of the second creation story: "And *Adonai Elohim* took the human being and put them in the garden of Eden, to work it and to protect it" (לעבדה ולשמרה). This verse and the one that immediately follows is an implicit base for a midrash (the first half of a midrash in Kohelet Rabba 7:13) in which God says to the first human being: "look at my creations, how pleasant and excellent they are, and everything I created – for you I created it. Set your mind that you do not ruin or destroy my world, because if you ruin (it), there is no one who will repair (it) after you." This midrash is often employed (without its second half, which argues that the first human being caused the death of Moses) as a proof text that environmentalism is a Jewish value. (For a typical example see "Jewish Environmentalism: An Ancient Value," a source sheet created by Adam Rossano on May 12, 2013, accessed online at: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/260?lang=bi.)

[170] Genesis 6:14-21.

reason. In fact, the flood as the Torah imagines it was a singular event - with the rainbow a sign of God's promise that another, similar flood will never happen again.[171]

And yet it was Noah, and not the first human being, who the Kehillah High teens chose to mention by name. And on a second read of their op-ed, this choice makes a sad kind of sense:

> We, in Houston, know that climate change is a serious issue because Houston doesn't normally freeze like it did last month. Houston has seen many serious weather events, including floods, droughts and high temperatures, in the past decade. Scientists also are predicting even longer and hotter summers. … In addition to the people Houston lost during the historic freeze, thousands of bats, living under the Waugh Bridge, and many plants and other animals died, also. … We've seen mega-storms, like Hurricane Harvey, hit Houston and flood our neighbors and friends. We've also seen the Jewish community take action to rebuild and help people in areas that have been destroyed. We know how to look out for each other. Now, we need to look out for our futures.[172]

The first human being in the Torah certainly lived through dramatic change, but never natural disasters and mass death related to those disasters. But Noah did. And by invoking him instead of the first human being, the teens implicitly compare the Green New Deal (the policy for which they are advocating) to the ark. The first human being, brought into the world in part to care for its creatures, could likely never have imagined how imperiled those creatures would be in only a few generations. Noah, on the other hand, becomes a model for action in a time when waters are rising.

Noah's story is also the subject of several other climate-change related pieces that have been written in the past half-decade. For example, in a tongue-in-cheek article called "Noah's

---

[171] Even before the rainbow, in Chapter 8 of the book of Genesis, God decides to never again destroy the earth on account of human sin, because sin is a fundamental part of humanity (Genesis 8:21-22). For God's promise (part of a formal ברית, or covenant, where the rainbow becomes an אות, or divine sign) that there will never be another earth-destroying flood, see Genesis 9:9-17.

[172] Conde, Nathan, Kraut, Rachel, Vallarta, Emilio, and Dulberg, Sophie. "Kehillah High Teens: It's Time for a Green New Deal." *Jewish Herald-Voice* [Houston, Texas,] March 11, 2021, https://jhvonline.com/kehillah-high-teens-its-time-for-a-green-new-deal-p28846-159.htm.

Ark Is One Weird Bedtime Story," Andrew Silow-Carroll reviews a wide variety of children's books about Noah, and notes that:

> A lot of the children's books … treat Noah as an ecological cautionary tale. That's a Jewish tradition too, based in part on the verses: "The earth became corrupt before God." (Genesis 6:11) A literal reading suggests that humankind's evil had infected the earth itself — a potent metaphor and prophecy for environmentalists. And Noah, as the savior of all life on earth, can be portrayed as the very first Eco-warrior.[173]

Some adult-oriented environmentalist interpretations of Noah use Genesis 6:11 as a base, too. In a 2021 blog post entitled "Noah: A Biblical Model for Contemporary Climate Calamities," Dr. Allen Katz notes that שחת, the root of the verb "to become corrupt," is also found in the phrase בל תשחית, the rabbinic commandment not to wastefully destroy the natural world that has its roots in Deuteronomy 20:19, and he suggests, by extension, that perhaps one of the ways human beings in Noah's time had become destructive was that they were destroying nature.[174] Similarly, Katz connects the word חמס in Genesis 6:13 (in which God explains to Noah that God will destroy the world because it has become full of חמס) to the prohibition against being an עד חמס, *malicious witness*, in Exodus 23:1, and uses this link to discuss the dangers of climate change denial (and other kinds of false speech that can incite violence or indirectly lead to mass death).[175] Katz goes on to argue that three of Noah's qualities - his righteousness, his ability to rest, and his faith in God - helped Noah navigate a world where everyone else had lost their way, and forge his own path. And then, Katz explicitly suggests that Noah can be an exemplar for us, too: "The prayer I will end with is that we know what corruption looks like; we have the equanimity to be in proper

[173] Andrew Silow-Carroll, "Noah's Ark Is One Weird Bedtime Story," https://www.jewishexponent.com/2021/10/14/noahs-ark-is-one-weird-bedtime-story/.
[174] Allen Katz, "Noah: A Biblical Model for Contemporary Climate Calamities." https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/350731?lang=bi.
[175] ibid.

relationship with the land, despite seeming difficult or unpopular at first glance; and we have the faith in Hashem, to support us in the path of righteousness."[176]

But how righteous *was* Noah? The biblical source for Noah's righteousness is Genesis 6:9, which describes Noah as איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו, a righteous and blameless man in his generations. However, seizing on the phrase בדרתיו, *in his generations,* a number of classical commentaries ask: how righteous was Noah, really? His generation was awful - maybe he was just righteous in comparison?[177] After all, he let all of humanity outside of his own family *die.* But then again, others respond, to have been righteous in such a corrupt generation, he must have been righteous indeed.[178]

Two sermons that take an intermediate approach to assessing Noah - and by extension, what he means for us today - are Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt's Rosh HaShanah 5781 (2020) sermon, and Dena Weiss'[179] "On Being Good Enough: Parshat Noah 5778" (2017). Rabbi Holtzblatt draws a connection between Noah and the first human being (as described by Genesis 2), calling them both "stewards;" she then makes an analogy between the way Noah (especially according to aggadah) took care of the animals on the ark, and the way many people who were staying home in the first months of the Coronavirus pandemic became "sourdough bakers, plant [parents], new dog owners, homeschool teachers …".[180] She argues that in the context of lockdowns, retreating into one's home and taking control of what one could (like Noah, who

[176] ibid.
[177] See for example the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan on BT Sanhedrin 108a.
[178] See for example the opinion of Reish Lakish on BT Sanhedrin 108a.
[179] Dena Weiss serves as Rosh Beit Midrash and Senior Faculty at Hadar, the observant egalitarian learning center in New York City.
[180] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Rosh HaShanah 5781," sermon delivered (online) to Adas Israel (Washington, DC) on September 19, 2020.

could not save the earth but could care for the animals on his ark) was not just necessary, it was helpful to humanity:

> By cocooning in our homes we were flattening the curve, we were saving humanity and we were also saving our own psyches. We had to be in charge somewhere and if it could not be out in the world, then our own inner worlds would have to do. It is part of the human condition to seek order, to grow things, to do (*laasot*) so we did in the only way we knew possible. In our *teivot* [arks] with no compass, no anchor, no time frame and no direction.[181]

But, Rabbi Holtzblatt continues, "cocooning" is not a way to live forever - both because it can be very painful, and because human beings have a drive and obligation to change the world for the better. She ultimately uses Rabbi Joseph Solovetchik's teaching that human beings have the capacity to both emulate God's creative work (like the first human being in Genesis 1[182]) and serve as stewards (like the first human being in Genesis 2) to argue for the importance of balance - and of utilizing the liturgy and ritual of the High Holy Days to move, once again, outwards, towards a belief in our ability to work for change in the world. So Noah, in this sermon, is not a model for all times - but his *is* an example of a type of behavior that can, when situationally appropriate, be not only understandable, but helpful.

In "On Being Good Enough," Dena Weiss argues that Noah was "middling" in a different way:

> rabbinic tradition speaks of three types of people - those classified as righteous, *tzaddikim,* those considered wicked, *reshaim,* and the truly average, *benonim.* … And it is Noah's averagenesss that is his most important quality and the key to [his] righteousness. … If a man with Noah's small amount of faith and small amount of resilience is able not

[181] ibid. Italics added to the transliteration of Hebrew words.

[182] To make the argument that Adam I has the capacity to be creative, Rabbi Holtzblatt quotes *The Lonely Man of Faith,* in which Soloveitchik offers an interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27, which says that *HaAdam* was created in the "image" or "likeness" of God. Soloveitchik wrote in part, "Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator. Adam the first who was fashioned in the image of God was blessed with a great drive for creative activity …" (Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith,* p.12, as cited in Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Rosh HaShanah 5781.")

> only to survive, but to save his entire generation, then so can we. Noah is relatable and Noah is emulatable.[183]

Dena Weiss argues that what made Noah "average" was that he (like most people) was always one decision away from being either righteous or wicked – and with God's help, in *Parshat Noach,* he made little decisions that were nonetheless courageous and righteous. Of course Noah was not like Abraham (the character to whom Rashi, among others, compares him disfavorably), but then, Dena Weiss points out, neither are most of us.[184] She concludes: "Just surviving, just being average, is so hard. But just as Noah found the inner strength and resolve to be the better person God knew he could become, so too we take the single step, followed by the single step, followed by the single step, which is the path to greatness."[185] Weiss' analysis leans much less heavily on an explicit comparison between Noah's time period and our own than some of the other sermons and documents analyzed in this thesis that invoke Noah,[186] but if the challenges Noah faced (having limited choices, needing guidance, living through great loss, etc) and his need to "save his entire generation" were in no way relatable, Weiss' conclusion would not have the power that it does.

Whether we consider Noah a precedent-setter, exemplar, relatable person, or someone who committed wrongdoing(s) we must strive not to repeat, in recent sermons and other Jewish

---

[183] Dena Weiss, "On Being Good Enough: Parshat Noah 5778." Available for download at https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/being-good-enough.

[184] ibid, The Rashi that Dena Weiss cites is Rashi's commentary on Genesis 6:9, which builds on Sanhedrin 108a and then compares the phrase "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9) to God's instructions to Abraham to "walk before Me" (Genesis 17:1) to argue that Noah needed more support from God than Abraham did, because Abraham was stronger.

[185] ibid.

[186] In fact, Weiss even initially asks "why should it matter to me that Noah wasn't that impressive? Why do we need to pass judgment on Noah at all?!" One of the reasons a reader might care about passing judgment on Noah is if they saw his situation as relatable in some way - and were trying to determine if he was an exemplar or a cautionary tale. (Another reason to care, which is implicit in the direction Weiss takes the piece, is because you think it's desirable to try to be a *tzaddik,* and you want to understand how and whether Noah fits into that group in a way that's meaningful for us to learn from, given his complicity in some much death and destruction.)

compositions about resilience in justice work, Noah himself is far from the only character (or inanimate object) in Genesis 6-9 that preachers and writers have suggested their audiences might find relatable. In a November 4, 2016 *drash* (short d'var Torah), on the eve of the American presidential election, Rabbi Aaron Alexander suggested that just as the tradition considered Noah's ark (for which the Torah specifies finite dimensions) to be infinitely expandable within (thus fitting all of the animals who needed shelter from the storm), so too did the hearts of his listeners have the capacity to expand to hold whatever happened on election day.[187] Four years and two months later, in the wake of an attack on the U.S. Capitol that was meant to overturn the results of the 2020 elections, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum again invoked Noah's ark, this time in tandem with the basket Moses was placed in as a child.[188] She said:

> We see the power of building a *teva* (an ark) to protect and carry hope for a future after catastrophe. In Parshat Noach, Noah builds an ark that can ride atop the flood, preserving the minimum amount of life needed to replenish the earth. In the first chapter of Exodus, two women conceal the baby Moses in a tiny makeshift ark because, as Midrash recounts, God had revealed to Miriam why her brother would need to be saved. Farther down the river was another woman who defied the tyrant (not every Pharaoh's daughter abets his crimes) and rescued the baby from the water. These women accomplished Moses's rescue. His job was to free his enslaved people. We maintained and reinforced our community as a *teva* to carry us through the tsunami of Donald Trump's America.[189]

As in Rabbi Holtzblatt's Rosh HaShanah 2020 sermon, which normalized (and even explicated some of the virtues of) "cocooning" like Noah without suggesting that such "cocooning" was a

---

[187] Rabbi Aaron Alexander, D'var Torah on Parshat Noach delivered at Shir Delight services at Adas Israel (Washington, DC) on Friday, November 4, 2016. For a summary of the argument that Noah's ark was (miraculously) larger inside than out, see for example Nachmanides on Genesis 6:19. (This citation is based on my own recollection of Rabbi Alexander's drash, with the date of services - and its Torah portion and proximity to the 2016 elections - confirmed by my copy of the 2016 email advertising services.)

[188] Comparisons between Noah's ark and the basket Moses was placed in are fairly common because the Hebrew word for both is the same (תבה - *teivah*), and it does not appear in any other stories in the Tanakh - making Noah's ark different from other ships, Moses' basket (or other baby-sized flotation device) different from other baskets, and the two similar to one another. (This is one of many literary parallels between the early chapters of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus.) The Shabbat on January 8-9 2021 (the Shabbat after the events of January 6, 2021) was the Shabbat of *Parshat Shemot,* in which Moses' תבה is mentioned (Exodus 2:3 and 2:6).

[189] Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, "Two Days After the U.S. Capitol Is Attacked." (January 8, 2021)

desirable (or even tenable) permanent state, Rabbi Kleinbaum did not frame the ark itself as an end goal.[190] But neither did she diminish its importance - or the importance of the real-life experience of community she argued the ark could represent. In a sermon that primarily compared Donald Trump to Pharoah, her brief mention of "the tsunami of Donald Trump's America" affirms the hardships (and overwhelming nature) of her audience's past four years while also providing an implicit reminder that these hardships would be time-limited (like the flood) - likely an important reminder two days after an attempted coup. The flood eventually ended, and Noah, his family, and all the animals (just like Moses many generations later) did eventually leave the ark.

What happened when they left, and what allowed them to leave? Two recent pieces (from the summer of 2021 and the High Holy Days of 2021, respectively) explored connections between our world and the parts of the flood story that come after the rains had stopped. The first of these pieces was a text study (the first of a four part series called "Out of the Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience") which invited learners to consider the post-flood experiences of Noah and his family, and of the raven and the dove (the first birds to leave the ark).[191] Rabbi Avi Strausberg[192] invited learners to read Genesis 8, and then "imagine" "what it was like" for Noah and his family on the ark and after they left it.[193] She then invited learners to read and consider a

[190] Her end goals, much more tied from a literary perspective to the Exodus story, will be discussed in the section below on the way sermons invoked Egypt.
[191] This text study series was designed to explore resilience in the broad sense (and not necessarily resilience in justice work specifically). I include it in this chapter because the text study on Noach dealt with the resilience of Holocaust survivors - people who had experienced profound moral injury - and it prompted readers to consider their own strategies for resilience in relation to systemic as well as personal challenges.
[192] Rabbi Avi Strausberg is affiliated with Yeshivat Hadar in New York City. Learners around the world had access to this text study (and the course it was part of) through Hadar's *Project Zug*.
[193] Rabbi Avi Strausberg, "Session 1: Noah and the Flood: Emerging to a Changed World" in "Out of The Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience," an asynchronous learning opportunity first offered in the summer of 2021 by Hadar's Project Zug (www.projectzug.org), p.3.

modern Israeli feminist midrash called "The Raven and the Dove." (In Genesis 8, the raven is the first bird sent forth from the ark, and the dove is the second). The midrash asks: "אותם עורב ויונה ששילח נח מן החלון – מה עלה בגורלם?"[194] (*The raven and dove that Noah sent from the window - what were their fates?)* The midrash uses the raven and the dove to represent the responses of two different types of Holocaust survivors: the raven flies continuously and never rests, feeling that it can see the dead staring up at it from the ground, while the dove gives birth continuously, also feeling that it can never rest. Eventually, the dove and the raven die, and the Shechina tells the other birds (who had judged both, especially the raven, for their lifestyles after the flood) that no one living can judge the dove and the raven, because "none of us were sent from that window, to see."[195]

Rabbi Strausberg asks learners to discuss how each bird "respond(ed) to trauma" and was "resilient" and to answer the question "what is this midrash teaching us about resilience?"[196] It is a striking lens through which to read a midrash that could just as easily be seen exclusively as a tragedy about two individuals (or archetypes) whose lives were forever shaped (for the worse) by an experience of extreme trauma. The message seems to be, in part, that "resilience" comes in many forms, and that certain types of life experiences might be more available to the descendants of survivors of (Holocaust-or-flood-scale) traumatic violence than the survivors themselves. Strausberg's focus on the raven and the dove (and not just the human beings) is also an important reminder that sometimes we are *not* in Noah's position of being able to build a grand structure and save others, and possibly of having the opportunity to shape major world events. (The reason

[194] "The Raven and The Dove," by Tamar Biala, in Rabbi Avi Strausberg, ""Session 1: Noah and the Flood: Emerging to a Changed World" in "Out of The Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience," p.5. The translation above is my own.
[195] ibid, p.8.
[196] ibid.

commentators can debate whether or not Noah should have argued with God about the flood is that Noah was in the position of speaking with God, in the first place). Sometimes we (or people we know) might be the raven and the dove, who did not get to choose to be on the ark, and also did not get to choose whether or not to leave first - their only choice (an important choice) was how to live after surviving.

The final sermon to invoke the flood story also compared its audience to non-human characters in the story in order to, in part, offer a very different perspective on our agency – though this sermon compared its human audience not to animals or to the ark, but to the flood waters themselves. What does it mean to own that we ourselves are the destructive, interconnected waters, and that we ourselves have the power to retreat from our destructiveness to make way for a new world? Of the many sermons that invoked the images of perilous and potentially destructive waters (from the flood story and beyond), Rabbi Michael Marmur's 2021 Yom Kippur sermon ("Towards a More Complete Return") was the only one to analogize those waters to the actions of human beings in the sermon's audience. (The sermon was written for the Israeli organization Rabbis for Human Rights, and parts of it were specific to an audience of Israeli citizens, but parts of it were not.) By comparing us to the waters, Rabbi Marmur emphasized our interdependence[197] and our responsibility,[198] while also offering an opportunity to conceptualize repentance as a process rather than an all-or-nothing proposition.

Specifically, Rabbi Michael Marmur suggested that the receding flood waters of Genesis

[197] Not only did he explicitly name his audience's responsibility "as a collective," but interdependence is also implicit in the analogy - a single wave cannot decide to go somewhere on its own (and even if it could, it would not end a flood).

[198] His emphasis on human responsibility was also reinforced by the way he introduced the discussion of "returning … in mercy." Rabbi Marmur noted that traditional Jewish liturgy asks for God to return to Zion in mercy, but perhaps we should be focused on bringing more mercy to our human return to Zion, which is already well under way.

8:3 could be a model for our own repentance (*t'shuvah*). Noting that the phrase describing the waters' retreat, הלוך ושוב (lit. "walking and returning"), is also the idiom in contemporary Israel for what in English is called a "return trip," Rabbi Marmur observed: "we have arrived (millions of us) in Zion, but we have yet to fulfill the vision of returning in mercy. There is no absolute state of return - it's a process, *haloch vashov.* … May this Yom Kippur be a gateway to a fuller and more merciful return. May we consider how each of us as individuals and as a collective can make meaningful *t'shuvah*, can return in mercy in an unfolding wavy, *haloch vashov.*"[199]

Rabbi Marmur and Rabbi Strausberg's pieces also draw our attention to something important about the Noah's ark story: it (and certainly its midrashic offshoots) can be understood, in modern terms, as a parable about moral injury. By comparing us to the waves (and suggesting that the retreat of the waves offers a model for *t'shuvah,* repentance/return), Rabbi Marmur challenges us to consider the ways in which we (as drops of water, individual waves, or similar) are perpetrators. Like government workers who do not make policy, or soldiers following orders, the waves in the flood story are also an important example (as Rabbi Marmur imagines them) of characters who perpetrate an injustice they did not design or order, but for which they do need to take responsibility. The waters in the flood story did not plan the flood, but they did kill, and as Rabbi Marmur frames it, we, the waters, are now responsible for pulling ourselves back. He also invites us to see ourselves as having power over the future of our society - not unilateral power, but power *with* others. His approach emphasizes taking responsibility and finding a way forward, towards repentance and eventually a more just society - which is

[199]Marmur, Michael. "Toward a More Complete Return." Yom Kippur D'var Torah Composed in 2021 for *Rabbis for Human Rights*. Jerusalem, Israel. Accessed online at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MYo6s4t50AS9oGzo2h5zCTaFo9UT2lxA/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106981278040655643968&rtpof=true&sd=true.

consistent with approaches for people experiencing moral injury after perpetrating injustice.

So too, Rabbi Strausberg's focus on the raven and the dove (and the ways in which the modern midrash she cites use the raven and the dove as analogues for Holocaust survivors with particular ranges of responses to what they experienced) invites us to consider the perspectives of *witnesses* of morally injurious events. The raven and the dove were truly powerless to change the flood (unlike Noah, they were not invited into dialogue with God) or their tasks after the flood, but they still lived with enormous guilt over the destruction they had witnessed, and a strong impulse about what they were obligated to as a result of survival. And having noted this, we can notice that Noah, himself, is also certainly a candidate for experiencing moral injury (especially as tradition imagines him); after all, he stood idly by when God described a plan (which was later carried out) to destroy most life on earth. Conceiving of Noah as a witness (who, like the raven and then dove, then tried to control what he could) sheds a new light on his story, and on the sermons that invite their readers to identify with him.

Another implicit message in both Rabbi Marmur and Rabbi Strausberg's pieces might be something like: *if you are living through a flood, it is just the beginning.* Whether we are the birds or the waters (or even, as in other pieces, Noah and other human beings building or living on arks), there can be a future after the flood, one in which we have agency. If, these sermons as a whole seem to suggest, our moment is, in some ways, comparable to the era immediately before, during, or after the Flood of Genesis 6-9, what this means in part is that we are living through an era in which our world has been fundamentally altered (for the worse) by forces that we are experiencing (or did recently experience) as beyond our control, and our ability to act is (or has been) more limited than we might have hoped it would be. We may also specifically be

coming to recognize ourselves as either perpetrators of or, certainly, witnesses to systemic injustice. But, each of these texts argues in its own way, we do still have choices, and we can choose to work for a better world. This world may not come in our lifetimes (Noah himself did not see a repopulated planet, and the raven and the dove never stopped seeing horrific visions of the world immediately after the flood), but it will come one day. The flood story becomes, in these sermons and other texts, not just a cautionary tale, but a guidebook for living ethically in a time of injustice, isolation and upheaval.

The primary sources' uses of the flood story also provide an opportunity to return to discussions of meaning-making in situations of ambiguous loss and/or trauma. While it is true that none of the flood sermons, articles or text studies provide a fully-baked analysis of the "meaning" of our times (which, as discussed in Chapter 2, is likely an unrealistic goal for pieces composed in the midst of turmoil), they do engage in a number of the techniques that are understood to help facilitate healing while experiencing ambiguous loss, and, eventually, post-traumatic growth. As Dr. Froma Walsh observes, "coming to terms with traumatic loss involves finding ways to make meaning of the trauma experience, put it into perspective, and weave the fabric of loss and recovery into the fabric of individual and collective identity and life passage."[200]

When they look back in the future, the flood story may or may not remain a helpful parable for communities to employ in order to describe and understand their life experiences from 2016-early 2022. But we can see in the ways the flood story is used some early attempts to "put (this time period) into perspective." Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum's argument that during the

[200] Froma Walsh, *Strengthening Family Ties and Resilience: Third Edition*, p.232.

Trump administration communities created arks so that the next generation could survive is one example of perspective-taking. Her analogy acknowledged that many communities were more limited in their abilities to create change during this era (the ark did not stop the flood), but it also reaffirmed that the "flood" (or "tsunami," as she said) was a time-limited event. This meant that community members could continue to believe in and work for a future (perhaps to be experienced by them, perhaps by future generations) *after* the flood, a future of increased agency and, by extension, increased positive change. Rabbi Holtzblatt offered a similar message when she acknowledged the limitations *and* importance of "cocooning" on the ark, and then told her community that the time had come to leave the cocoons - she acknowledged the pain of the present and recent past, while also offering a new framework through which her community could have faith in themselves and in their own future.

Similarly, Dr. Walsh writes that one of the prerequisites for "mak[ing] meaning of [a] traumatic loss experience" is to "normalize [and] contextualize distress."[201] Almost every primary source that employed the flood story used it to "contextualize [the] distress" their community or audience was experiencing. To (implicitly or explicitly) compare one's own time period to a story of trauma and destruction as total as the flood story in Genesis 6-9 is to acknowledge and "normalize" a very high level of loss, suffering, and distress. The primary sources' uses of the flood story also affirm that amidst great distress and loss, proactive work is still possible, and in the long-term, a more redemptive future is still possible. The same could also be said of the uses of stories set in the time period after the fall of the Second Temple - and it is to primary sources that use *these* stories that we will now turn.

[201] ibid.

Chapter 4: After the Second Temple's Fall

Part 1: Other waters: Yevamot 121a

Less prevalent than the flood story, but no less evocative, were citations of two stories in the Babylonian Talmud (which appear one after the other) dealing with the case of a famous rabbi who survived after his ship was destroyed at sea. Both stories focus on the idea of "riding the waves" (one rabbi, Akiva, held on to a plank (*daf)* while he rode the waves, and the other rabbi, Meir, simply rode the waves with nothing to hold on to). The five texts (four sermons and one source sheet[202]) that cite one or both of these stories in order to discuss *resilience in justice work* focus fairly narrowly on the act of riding the waves (with or without a *daf*) and read it as a metaphor for how to survive challenging times. The texts that grapple with these stories are included in this chapter because while the Temple and the Roman Empire are not mentioned in the stories themselves, the characters in the stories lived in or immediately after the time of the Second Temple's destruction, and as discussed below, it seems plausible to read these stories as (amongst other things) a parable for the ways they navigated their era.

The sugya in which these stories are found is part of Tractate Yevamot (which literally means "brother's widows"). The sugya as a whole discusses various types of situations in which men disappear in bodies of water, and asks: in which of these situations can the man's wife be permitted to remarry (i.e., in which of these situations can the man be reasonably presumed dead), and in which of these situations should the man's wife be forbidden from remarrying

[202] The source sheet is a source sheet by Rabbi Rebecca Rosenthal (of Central Synagogue in New York City) called "When the World Swirls Around You" (July 1, 2021; accessed online at: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/333266.19?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en). It is not discussed at length in this section, but it is discussed in Chapter 2 (as part of the broader discussion of the recontextualization of "classic" Jewish justice sayings), because Rabbi Rosenthal puts Yevamot 121a (and other classical and contemporary sources) in conversation with a famous quote from Pirkei Avot 2:16 ("it is not up to you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it").

(because the man might still be alive, even though he disappeared)? As part of this discussion, a number of stories are martialed to illustrate the wisdom of the principle that if a man disappears in a body of water "that has an end," his wife can remarry (because he can be presumed dead), but if he disappears in water "that does not have an end," his wife cannot remarry (because he might have survived, even if the people who are waiting for him on the land might not have seen him return to the shore). The stories of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir, who each ride the waves, are two of these stories:

> It is taught in a *baraita*: Rabban Gamliel said, "One time I was traveling in a ship, and I saw one (other) ship that was broken,[203] and I was grieved about a *talmid hacham* (smart/wise student) who was on (the ship). And who was he? Rabbi Akiva. And when I went up onto the dry land, he came and sat and judged *halakha* before me. I said to him, 'my son, who brought you up (from the water)?' He said to me, 'A plank (*daf*) of the ship came into my hand,[204] and for each wave that came upon me, I bowed my head to it.'" From here the sages said: If wicked ones come upon a person, he should bow his head to them. "I (Rabban Gamliel) said in that same moment, 'How great are the words of the sages, who said: 'Water that has an end, (the wife is) permitted (to remarry), waters that do not have an end, (the wife is) forbidden (from remarrying).'"
>
> It is taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Akiva said, "One time I was traveling in a ship, and I saw one (other) ship that was torn to pieces in the sea,[205] and I was grieved about a *talmid hacham* who was on (the ship). And who was he? Rabbi Meir. When I went up into the land of *Kafotk'ya,* he came and sat and judged *halakha* before me. I said to him, 'my son, who brought you up (from the water)?' He said to me: 'one wave carried me to its fellow (wave), and its fellow (wave) to *its* fellow (wave), until it spit me[206] onto the dry land.' I said in the same moment, 'How great are the words of the sages, who said: 'Water that has an end, (the wife is) permitted (to remarry), waters that do not have an end, (the wife is) forbidden (from remarrying).'"[207]

---

[203] The Hebrew word he uses is נשברה.

[204] Lit. נזדמן, which Jastrow defines as "to meet, to come to hand (providentially), to join oneself to."

[205] Lit. שמטרפת בים. The root טרף has a variety of definitions (including, on land, being bitten and torn apart by wild animals) all of which are generally more evocatively violent than נשברה, the equivalent verb in the story that Rabban Gamliel tells. Rabbi Akiva's word choice is an intensification.

[206] The word he uses is הקשיאני. The verb הקשיא means "to spit" or "to vomit."

[207] BT Yevamot 121a. (Translation my own.) The black text is words that appear identically in both stories, the blue text are words and phrases that are different between the stories but have a correlate in each story in the exact same location, and the red text are words and phrases that only appear in one of the stories, without a correlate in the other.

One of the most interesting elements of these stories is the framing device. Although Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir each eventually speak and tell the story of how they got to dry land after their boats were destroyed, we only hear their words because they are (briefly) quoted by their teachers (Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Akiva, respectively). The teachers are the storytellers from whose perspective we hear the entire story - and so each is a story of a teacher first thinking that he had helplessly watched his student drown (possibly symbolic of the future itself drowning), only to later learn that (happily) this first impression had been incorrect. By concluding in praise of the words of the sages, each teacher ultimately celebrates the power of a widely taught principle[208] to protect individual human beings (such as themselves) from jumping to false (and potentially harmful) conclusions because of their own despair. The wisdom of those who came before,[209] in other words, can help us remember that sometimes there are salvific forces in the world of which we, from our own limited perspectives, are unaware.

In some ways, this point is made especially forcefully by the second story, told by Rabbi Akiva, of what it was like to watch his student Rabbi Meir's ship get torn to pieces in the sea. Rabbi Akiva, readers have just learned, is himself a survivor of shipwreck - so why is he so quick to assume that Rabbi Meir could not also survive? One clue might come from an important word difference between Rabban Gamliel's story and Rabbi Akiva's: where Rabban Gamliel saw a ship *broken* (נשברה), Rabbi Akiva saw a ship *torn to pieces* (מטרפת). Was Rabbi Meir's ship more totally destroyed than Rabbi Akiva's, such that Rabbi Akiva thought to himself, "When this happened to me, I grabbed a plank, but there are no planks left for Rabbi Meir to grab"? Or was

[208] The principle, articulated a number of times on Yevamot 121a, is: "[If someone disappears in] waters that have an end, his wife is permitted (to remarry), [but if someone disappears in] waters that don't have an end, his wife is forbidden (from remarrying)."

[209] The importance of the wisdom of those who came before is emphasized by the repeated refrain: "כמה גדולים דברי חכמים שהם אמרו …' – how great where the words of the sages, that they said …! (BT Yevamot 121a)

it perhaps destroyed in a similar way, but as a helpless bystander Rabbi Akiva experienced it as a more violent event than Rabban Gamliel had? Either way, the point is clear: even Rabbi Akiva, who had himself survived shipwreck and returned to land to the great surprise of one of his teachers, was ready to assume the death of his own student when that student was put in a similar situation. Despair can be powerful (and at times deceptive). The wisdom of those who came before (captured here as the דברי חכמים, the words of the sages) can help mitigate the potential negative consequences of false despair.

And, another part of the sugya implicitly argues, the wisdom of those who came before can also help mitigate the potential negative consequences of false hope that someone (or something) who has been lost will be returned (or restored). At several points in the sugya, Rabbi Meir argues for more stringent rules regarding when the wife of a man who went missing at sea should be allowed to remarry. He believes she should be forbidden from remarrying in a few situations where other rabbis (who overrule him) believe she should be permitted to remarry. While Rabbi Meir has a reputation for often arguing for more stringent rulings than the rabbis ultimately promote, in this case, one wonders if his own life experiences might have shaped his desire to err, even in very unlikely scenarios, on the side of hope. He, after all, survived a shipwreck with absolutely nothing to grab on to - just the waves themselves. His own teacher, who was himself a shipwreck survivor, was surprised by his survival. Might he want to hope that other men in situations of similarly unprecedented exigency survive too? Perhaps, but he is overruled, because *too much* hope that men will survive against extremely difficult odds has the potential to be damaging to those men's widows, who could be forbidden from remarrying even in situations in which their husbands were almost certainly dead.

The way Yevamot 121a encourages its readers to approach hope - as realistically as possible, so they do not unnecessarily despair and *also* do not rigidly hold onto an impossible hope that will prevent them or other people from growing and changing in the wake of loss - is an important cue that the "wave" stories, as well as all of the other stories on Yevmaot 121a, are stories of ambiguous loss, and specifically, the subtype of ambiguous loss Dr. Pauline Boss called "absent but present."[210] The men in the stories may or may not be dead, and their wives, teachers and friends are grappling with a lack of certainty. The solution offered in Yevamot 121a is to try to sort different experiences of a person going missing into two categories - situations where their wives can remarry (i.e., they are effectively assumed to be dead) and moments where their wives cannot remarry (because it is assumed to be possible that they are alive, and could return).

Through its stories, Yevamot 121a illustrates the stakes of the principles it is discussing - these are real people, and so are their families, and the experience of being lost in the water or having a relative or student lost in the water is very widely shared in their world. It also uses stories to demonstrate that at times, inherited principles[211] are necessary to prevent someone from harming themselves or others through false despair, or false hope. For the people left behind (on

[210]Thank you to Rabbi Nancy Wiener for pointing out that Yevamot 121a contains a series of stories of people experiencing what would now be called "ambiguous loss." "Ambiguous Loss" was a concept coined by the psychologist Dr. Pauline Boss (first explicated in her book *Ambiguous Loss*) to describe situations of loss that are not total (and so mourning and other rituals of closure are elusive, creating a unique set of challenges for people experiencing ambiguous loss). As discussed in Chapters One and Two, ambiguous loss is an important area of consideration in discussions of resilience in justice work. In her early research, Boss recognized two subtypes of ambiguous loss: "absent but present" ambiguous loss (situations like a soldier being missing in action - they are not physically with their families and friends, but they are still on their family and friends' minds in a very different way than if they had died) and "present but absent" ambiguous loss (situations like dementia, where a person may be physically present but something important has changed about the types of interactions they are able to have).

[211] Such as the principle regarding when someone who disappeared in a body of water should be considered truly lost at sea, and when someone who disappeared in a body of water should *not* yet be considered definitively lost. It is tempting to call this principle a "law" (particularly because of the language of מותר (permitted) and אסור (forbidden)), but since this is not the word used for it in the sugya, I have tried to avoid imposing that word here.

land, or on ships that did *not* sink even as others' ships did), resiliency in these situations of ambiguous loss can be facilitated by both honoring and sometimes transcending the limitations of one's own perspective/first impressions, and drawing support from the wisdom of one's forebears and community.[212]

In contrast to the stories within the sugya, all of which focus on the perspectives of people on land (or on non-capsized boats) waiting to see if their friends and family members will return from the water, all four of the contemporary sermons that used Yevamot 121a as a parable about resilience in justice work (and/or times of societal turbulence) told the "wave" stories on Yevamot 121a from the perspective of the people thrown into the water - Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Meir. There is some precedent for allegorically identifying with Rabbi Akiva within the Gemara itself, inasmuch as the Gemara interrupts Rabban Gamliel's story to note "from here the sages say: if wicked ones come upon a person, he should bow his head to them." But the four contemporary sermons (and one text study) go much further than this, in that they *exclusively* identify with and focus on the perspective of the person in the water.

Importantly, the people lost at sea on Yevamot 121a are *also* experiencing ambiguous loss - they are separated from their families, friends, and teachers, as well as their society, and they do not know if or when they will return. It is the people in their lives, and their connections to society itself, which are, from their perspective, "absent but present." The decision the authors of the contemporary primary sources made to identify with the characters lost at sea (riding the

[212] The importance of one's community (in addition to the wisdom of those who came before) is emphasized in Yevamot 121a because many of the stories martialed to illustrate the law feature people having conversations with each other, and trying to help each other figure tricky situations out. Particularly telling in this regard is a story in which Rav and Shmuel wonder whether they should excommunicate someone who made a mistake (by marrying a woman whose husband disappeared in waters that had no end), and they ultimately decide to communicate with the person instead, and he recognizes his mistake. The emphasis, then, is on trying to create connection whenever possible - certainly with regards to the people missing in the water, but also amongst the people left behind.

waves) is striking because these characters were essentially experiencing a more intensified form of ambiguous loss than their counterparts. The choice to identify with Rabbi Akiva (at sea) and Rabbi Meir rather than their teachers seems to speak to feelings of a high degree of distress, uncertainty, and isolation – feelings that could be best expressed by identification, not with people who were not sure about the future of their students, friends or husbands,[213] but rather with people whose *own* futures were in doubt.

For example, in the fall of 2018, Rabbi Zusha Weiner reflected:

> I came into rabbinical school expecting to walk a *derekh—a* way forward, with Torah as my map. And then … well frankly, Trump got elected. I didn't use phrases like "end fascism," "white supremacy" or "we will outlive them" when I started rabbinical school in 2015. This wasn't the Jewish future I planned for. Sometimes, it feels to me like our Jewish tradition shares great wisdom and tells beautiful stories about standing before high mountains and marveling at them. But THIS IS THE OCEAN, and I am staring down waves. My story is Rabbi Akiva's: I was pitched into the waters. And I almost drowned in the despair. And … a *daf* appeared to me, and to every wave that came my way I bowed my head.[214]

Rabbi Weiner drew the attention of his original listeners (incoming Reconstructionist Rabbinical College students) to the word "daf," which means both plank (as, in the story, the plank of a ship) and page (as in a page of Talmud). He encouraged his listeners to "grab hold of every daf" as they navigated "the ocean" of the present, not only for themselves but also for their communities. And he also lightly touched on a theme that is present in many of the sermons this thesis analyzes, which is some degree of alienation from an aspect of Jewish tradition one had

---

[213] It is important to note that ambiguous loss presents a challenge to the identities of everyone experiencing the loss, because our identities are formed in our relationships with (and relations to) other people. So someone experiencing the ambiguous loss of their student, friend or husband is caught between multiple identities – are they currently a teacher to this person, or *were* they a teacher? Are they currently a friend to this person, or *were* they a friend? Are they currently a wife, or are they a widow? Cultivating resilience in the face of these challenges to their identities requires both "dialectical thinking" and the renegotiation of their relational identities (Boss, 2018, p.114-127). All that said, there is a difference of degree between the ambiguous loss experienced by the people on land and the ambiguous loss experienced by the people in the water.

[214] Weiner, Zusha. "A 'Daf' Appeared to Me: Words To Keep Us Afloat," October 28, 2018, *Evolve: Groundbreaking Jewish Conversations:* https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/daf-appeared/.

previously relied upon (in his case, the "beautiful stories about standing on high mountains and marveling at them" - these were, for him, stories that once helped him understand the world and his place in it, but they no longer served this function). Rabbi Akiva's experience of being thrown into the sea becomes a metaphor for Rabbi Weiner's experiences of "despair" in the post-Trump United States - and what kept him afloat (i.e. not totally despairing) was inherited Jewish wisdom. But not just any inherited Jewish wisdom - Jewish wisdom about navigating oceans and their waves. Learning, in turn, is analogized to the plank of a downed ship (is the ship the country/Judaism Rabbi Weiner thought he was in before? Or something else?) - every page we turn, an opportunity to stay afloat gifted us by a previously robust infrastructure of meaning and connection (a ship) that has been "broken" but not entirely lost.

For Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum, in 2017, Rabbi Akiva was also a model of resilience - for what she called "stormy times."[215] She suggested that three "planks" her listeners could grab on to were "ritual," community, and "the stories you hold sacred." Hers is an interesting sermon to put in conversation with the other sermons that cite Yevamot 121a, because it was written at least a year before all of them. Rabbi Nussbaum assumed that Rabbi Akiva's ship was broken in a storm: she likened the ocean to life, and the storm to recent events in 2017 America, particularly a white supremacist demonstration in Charlottesville that resulted in casualties. Her sermon carried a more overt assumption that the difficulties of the present were temporally limited.[216] And water, for Rabbi Nussbaum, was a much more neutral metaphor than for Rabbi Weiner - in

[215] Nussbaum, Rachel, "Riding the Waves on Planks: Epigenetics, Pin-Pricks, and Tools for Resilience" (Kol Nidre 2017). Sermon delivered to The Kavana Cooperative. September 29, 2017. Seattle, Washington. Accessed online at: https://www.kavana.org/notes/kol-nidrei-sermon-riding-the-waves-on-planks.

[216] All of the other sermons carried an inherent assumption that one day the difficulties of the present would be over - after all, Rabbi Akiva eventually made it out of the ocean and onto dry land - but they lacked overt messaging to this effect.

the form of a storm, it could be destructive, but in the form of an ocean, it just represented *all* of life, the good and the bad. Further, the "plank (*daf*)" as she interpreted it was also the signifier of a slightly wider range of signifieds – where Rabbi Weiner suggested that his listeners turn to Jewish texts (especially, specifically, Talmud) as a source of strength, Rabbi Nussbaum turned her community's attention to the power of "ritual," "community," and "the stories you hold sacred." Part of the difference in these interpretations can likely be attributed to audience: Rabbi Weiner was speaking to rabbinical students, and Rabbi Nussbaum was speaking to a lay synagogue community, who might connect more readily to more universalistic (and personalized) definitions of the sacred, and more universalistic (and personalized) approaches to meaning-making. Rabbi Nussbaum was also far from the only person to analogize an inanimate object keeping someone afloat to "community" (for example, Rabbi Kleinbaum made a similar comparison between the ark and her synagogue community, and Rabbi Cassie Kail, whose sermon is discussed below, also invoked "community" as something that could keep a person afloat). What's interesting about this is that on Yevamot 121a itself, the one thing that Rabbi Akiva (and every other character temporarily lost in *waters that have no end)* is definitively (physically) cut off from *is* his community: they don't know where he is, or if he is alive, and they don't know how to help him, so they need guidance on how to proceed. And similarly, *he* may not know if he will ever see them again. But, a number of these sermons (including Rabbi Nussbaum's) remind their listeners: *you* are *not* cut off from community. You may feel alone and helpless, but this need not be so. This (like other discussions of community, explored in Chapter 2) seems like a statement designed not just to affirm a possible reality, but also to try to bring it into being - community will only be real and powerful if people choose to create and support

their community. Ritual and sacred stories can only be powerful if people perform and (re)tell them. And Rabbi Akiva was only able to surf the waves on a plank because when the plank came into his hands, he held on to it, and when the waves came, he ducked his head.

Four years later, in a Yom Kippur sermon about choosing love in the face of fear (named after the first words of the Carole King song "Beautiful":"You've Got to Get Up Every Morning,") Rabbi Hannah Goldstein also turned her community's attention to Yevamot 121a. She chose to focus on the moment Rabbi Meir, a generation after Rabbi Akiva, told *his* story of survival to Rabbi Akiva, and she invoked Rabbi Meir's name as one in a litany of survivors of disaster who had decided to "just keep going" in the face of destruction, and in the face of their own fear. (Some of the other exemplars of this mantra she named included Holocaust survivors, Winston Churchill,[217] and family members of people who died in the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.) Rabbi Goldstein explained:

> To keep going is not to deny the fear, it's not to deny the roaring waters around the boat sinking into the sea, but to allow the waves to carry you. To choose life in spite of the fear. To love, knowing that loving makes us vulnerable to loss, to build knowing that what we construct can be destroyed. To weed the garden, to call the plumber, to do the dishes … because even though tomorrow is not guaranteed … you can choose to keep living … for now.[218]

For Rabbi Goldstein, like Rabbi Nussbaum, the sea itself stood for life (or at least parts of life): dangerous, at times frightening, but worth living. Rabbi Goldstein also drew her audience's attention to something remarkable about Rabbi Meir's outlook: if the sunk ship represented a lost world (or lost meaning-making system or support system of another kind), Rabbi Meir's approach (in contradistinction to Rabbi Akiva's) was not to grab onto something from that lost

[217] Rabbi Goldstein used his famous quote: "When you are going through hell, keep going."
[218] Rabbi Hannah Goldstein, "You've Got To Get Up Every Morning," sermon delivered at Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, September 16, 2021 (Yom Kippur 5782), p. 3. The ellipses are part of the original text, and connote verbal pauses rather than skipped content.

world, but simply to live in the new world in which he found himself. By preserving the part of the story where Rabbi Meir tells Rabbi Akiva about his experiences (and putting that in conversation with moments in which other people who survived disaster and loss told *their* stories to people who weren't there, but were stunned by their survival), Rabbi Goldstein also drew our attention to something implicit in the *daf* itself: if and when we find ourselves in extremely exigent circumstances, we can remember that other people have lived through exigent circumstances before, and have lived to tell the tale. Their stories contain strategies for us, too.

Shortly after sharing Rabbi Meir's story, Rabbi Goldstein noted that the existential "fear" her community had been experiencing very acutely in the months leading up to Yom Kippur 5782/2021 (due to the coronavirus pandemic, climate change related disasters, and threats to American democracy) "has always been there;" it was just newly challenging to feel because recent events had brought this fear to the fore in a new way. The fundamental challenge her community was facing, then, was not existential threats as such, but rather a perspective shift (due to imminent existential threats) that had engendered greater awareness of mortality. Another perspective shift, then, could help the community keep living - and loving - in the face of their own mortality, no matter what the world around them looked like. (As the full first sentence of the song "Beautiful" declares: "You've got to get up every morning, with a smile on your face, and show the world all the love in your heart …")

Ten days before Rabbi Goldstein gave her sermon, on Rosh HaShanah 5782 (2021), Rabbi Cassie Kail also drew *her* community's attention to the power of perspective. In a sermon called "Riding the Waves" (the only sermon analyzed here to tell both Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir's stories), Rabbi Kail focused almost exclusively on an extended exploration of Yevamot

121a. But she started elsewhere in the Talmud, with the story of different sea-faring rabbis. Like Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir, these sea-faring rabbis were far out at sea, with no one nearby to help them if something happened. They came upon what they thought was an island, and decided to disembark - only to discover once they were on the "island" that it was actually the back of a large sea creature, and once they started to cook food on the creature's back, it flipped over! The story ends with its narrator, Rabba bar bar Hana, noting, "ואי לאו דהוה מקרבה ספינתא, הוה טבעינן" - *and if it were not that the ship was nearby, we would would have drowned*.[219] For Rabba bar bar Hana and his compatriots, the problem was not the huge sea creature per say, but rather their mistaken perspective on the nature of the huge sea creature - which almost killed them. Rabbi Kail told her community that lately, she had had many conversations with people who felt a lot like Rabba bar bar Hana. Not only had they been dealing with the "combination" of "civil unrest, polarity, antisemitism, and racism … [and] the immense loss we've experienced over the past 18 months of the pandemic"[220] (all of which might be analogous to the sea in which Rabba bar bar Hana was traveling), but over the summer of 2021, many had assumed the challenges of the COVID pandemic were over only to be confronted once again with rising caseloads, and they weren't sure how to go on. They had thought they were finally on an island of dry land, but actually, the summer had turned out to only be a brief respite from a vast and unstable sea.

The story of Rabba bar bar Hana and his compatriots' encounter with the sea creature appears in a series of what we might now call "tall tales," which are told one after the other on Bava Batra 73b. Many of these tall tales are told by Rabba bar bar Hana himself, and the story of the sea-creature-that-seemed-like-an-island is the third in a series. Each of these three tales

[219] BT Bava Batra 73b.
[220] Rabbi Cassi Kail, "Riding the Waves: Erev Rosh HaShanah 5782/2021, delivered to Temple Beth El in San Pedro, California. Accessed online at: http://bethelsp.org/rabbi-cassis-erev-rosh-hashanah-sermon-5782.

features a creature of unusually large size that poses a challenge (often, a life-threatening challenge) to the other living things with whom they share an environment. And yet, remarkably, the characters (both humans and animals) around the larger-than-life creature adapt: a tree holds the weight of an enormous bird ("תא חזי כמה נפיש חיליה דאילנה," Rabba bar bar Hana remarks, *come see how strong that tree is!*); a town rebuilds a year after many of its structures were destroyed by a large beached sea creature (Rabba bar bar Hana sees both the initial disaster and the rebuilding from a ship out at sea); and finally, Rabba bar bar Hana and his fellow travelers *do* make it back to their ship without drowning. The message might be something like: sometimes, we can rise to meet our moment. We can survive even that which we never could have imagined.

It is an apt message for the first story quoted in Rabbi Kail's sermon, as her sermon as a whole asks not "can we survive this moment?" but rather "how can we survive this moment?" Returning to Yevamot 121a, Rabbi Kail sees Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir as each exemplifying situationally useful "strategies of resilience and strength," which her audience might also be able to draw upon.[221] She argues that they both demonstrate the power of "resisting the urge to fight the waves … not wasting energy fighting against the current … relinquishing control over that which is out of their hands and taking their journey to safety one wave at a time."[222] (In other words, both rabbis are exemplars of the strategy of "tempering mastery"[223] in a situation of ambiguous loss.) For Rabbi Kail, the "waves" represent the "waves" of the COVID-19 pandemic (18 months long at the time of her sermon), and both stories teach that staying in the moment is the only way to survive situations whose parameters we cannot control. But she also saw Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir as exemplifying distinct survival strategies:

[221] ibid.
[222] ibid.
[223] Boss, 2018, p.97.

> Rabbi Akiva latches onto a plank - a floatation device - to help him weather stormy waters. When the stress of the pandemic rises, we hike, read, bake, and meditate [and engage in a variety of other activities]. … As Rabbi Akiva demonstrates, these are more than hobbies. They are life vests giving us the balance, buoyancy, and hope that we need … Rabbi Akiva teaches us the importance of having outlets and balance in our lives. What are ours? … When there is so much outside beyond our control, what are positive forces in our lives that we can [control]?
> Rabbi Meir employs an equally important strategy. He focuses all of his attention on the present moment, responding and moving with each wave. … Rabbi Meir understood that so much of our lives is spent focusing on the past or the future. Our history is important because it shaped us into the people we are today. … there is danger, however, in dedicating too much thought to the past. … As long as we live in the past, we cannot fully participate in the present.[224]

Rabbi Kail did not go so far as to suggest that the sunk ship itself might represent a lost society (though this does seem like a possible read, particularly as Rabbi Akiva and his teacher Rabban Gamliel were both of the generation that survived the fall of the second Temple, and Rabbi Meir was of the generation immediately after that), but she did make a connection between Rabbi Meir's wave survival strategy and the story of how the rabbis reacted to the fall of the Second Temple. She tells the story of how her own community (Temple Beth El in San Pedro, California) "found blessing" through shared learning and lifecycle and holiday celebrations during the "waves" of the pandemic, and then says, by way of introducing a discussion of the development of rabbinic Judaism in the wake of the fall of the Second Temple, "adapting and finding blessing is part of our Jewish story."[225]

Rabbi Kail was one of many authors to invoke the people who transformed Judaism in the wake of the fall of the Second Temple as positive examples – and it is to other sermons, text studies, and creative liturgy that center the experiences of people after the fall of the Second Temple that we will now turn.

---

[224] ibid.
[225] ibid.

Part 2: Witnessing (or Anticipating) the Ruins

In addition to the four sermons and one text study discussed above that retell parables of Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir, three generations of rabbis who lived through the destruction of the Second Temple and its aftermath (the beginning of the flourishing of rabbinic Judaism), an additional fourteen primary sources answered the implicit question "to what is this moment comparable?" with other stories set immediately before, during, and after the destruction of the Second Temple. Like Rabbi Cassi Kail's "Riding the Waves," most of these sermons (and other sources) mentioned this era in order to make the general point that in Jewish history, terrible destruction and loss has often been followed by an era of new creativity and growth. (Although a few sermons actually made long lists of moments in Jewish (and sometimes secular) history when destruction was followed by creativity and renewal,[226] many of these sermons drew their stories either exclusively or primarily from rabbinic texts describing (and perhaps (re)imagining)[227] the period before, during and after the destruction of the Second Temple.) The sermons tended to both celebrate growth that the author has witnessed in their own community, and express faith that even more healing, creativity and growth will happen in the near future.

In order to emphasize that growth and creativity can come from times of loss and upheaval, a few sermons cited Rabbi Benay Lappe's "Crash Talk."[228] In her "Crash Talk," Rabbi

[226] For example, in 2021, Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh reflected "our greatest books and movements were birthed out of chaos," and then she listed amongst these "books and movements:" the bible (because it was codified in exile); the Talmud; the Zohar; Hasidism; and Zionism. She went on to say, "like a soft piece of clay, hit us with disaster and we reshape our narrative into something new, creative, more vital." (Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh, "Now What? Resilience During and After COVID-19," Yom Kippur 2021/5782, Temple Israel of Hollywood, California.)
[227] Although most of the stories analyzed in this section are in Hebrew (which is sometimes a sign of an older rabbinic story than a story in Aramaic), they are also highly stylized, and it seems possible (and in the case of stories from the late midrashic compilation Avot D'Rabbi Natan, quite likely) that some or all of them were composed in Hebrew by Aramaic speakers in order to give them a more "old-timey" feelings.
[228] "An Unrecognizable Jewish Future: A Queer Talmudic Take," Rabbi Benay Lappe, Eli Talk, May 29, 2014, accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBWIEAR_GQY).

Lappe argued that after the fall of the Second Temple, the Jews of the time had three choices: to keep practicing a form of Judaism that saw the Temple as central (even as they now lacked the Temple itself), to give up Judaism entirely and take on a different religion (and thus, a totally new meaning-making system), or to adapt Judaism to their new reality. She said that the problem the Jews faced after the fall of the Second Temple was not just a technical problem, but that their "master story" (which centered the Temple) had "crashed." Adapting Judaism meant "accept(ing) the crash" and making "radical change." In her 2014 "Crash Talk," Rabbi Lappe compared the "crash" out of which rabbinic Judaism was born to some of the changes happening in the American Jewish world in the early 21st century. For the most part, the sermons that cited her "Crash Talk" were focused on a "crash" in the "master story" of how *America* works, and within that, a "crash" in the "master story" of how and why justice work should be done by the American Jewish community. As is likely evident, Rabbi Lappe's "Crash Talk" has a high degree of conceptual overlap with the field of Post Traumatic Growth (and specifically, studies of how people make meaning after their previous meaning-making systems were fundamentally challenged). As is discussed briefly in Chapter 2, most sermons that utilized the Crash Talk were primarily expressing faith that one day, meaning and growth *would* come out of the present moment. But as these sermons framed it, in the meantime, the authors and their audiences were living through a Crash. By telling stories of what it was like for the rabbis to live through a different Crash, the sermons (and other texts) sought to answer questions like: how can we go on? And how can we cultivate hope?

One rabbinic strategy that several of these texts extolled (and in some cases embodied) was lament. There is a rich and evolving body of research on the power of lament in situations of

traumatic loss and moral injury: it can help a person name what has been lost (and/or which values have been violated), reaffirm the importance of that which has been lost or violated, and (in the case of moral injury) begin a process of "interrogating causes" and "reinvesting hope."[229] Much of what is powerful about lament can be seen in rabbinic and other exilic texts dealing with the loss of the Temple,[230] and several sermons told rabbinic stories that highlighted lament's importance. For example, the first five pages of Rabbi Sharon Brous' Rosh HaShanah 2020 sermon ("A world is dying, a world is being born") are dedicated to extolling (and demonstrating, through a litany of names of some of those lost to COVID and anti-black violence) the power and importance of public lament in the context of the rabbis' lives and the lives of her listeners. ("The message from our ancestors: weep, child. Your body needs to crack a little. You can't carry all this weight. Let the tears flow. Today, let the tears flow."[231]) She tells the story of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, whose followers (according to legend) snuck him out of Jerusalem in a coffin after the Temple was overtaken so that in a small outpost called Yavneh, he could (according to legend) begin the project that would come to be called Rabbinic Judaism. She notes that once they had escaped Jerusalem, one of the first things they did was mourn.[232]

However, Rabbi Brous argued, mourning wasn't the only thing the rabbis did post-destruction that we can learn from. She noted that their next step was to assess their own responsibility for what had befallen them, and that after that, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai issued

---

[229] Larry Kent Graham, "The Healing Power of Public Lamentation," p.8.
[230] For exploration of the power of lament in the biblical Book of Lamentations (which was composed as a lament for the destruction of the First Temple, but which the rabbis used as a base for some of their own literature, like Eicha Rabba, grappling with the destruction of the Second Temple), see for example Rachel Adler, "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament."
[231] Rabbi Sharon Brous, "A World Is Dying, A World is Being Born," Rosh HaShanah 5781, sermon delivered to the Ikar community in Los Angeles, CA, and accessed online at: https://ikar.org/wp-content/uploads/RH1-World-Dying-World-Being-Born-1-1.pdf.
[232] ibid, citing Avot d'Rabbi Natan 4:5.

nine *takanot* (rabbinic rulings/lit. "fixes") meant to help bring about a redeemed world.[233] She argued that America, too, needed not just to mourn but also to assess our own responsibility and then begin to imagine a better world (and the steps to get there). But, she added, we were not there quite yet; and she ended her sermon with an image that bears striking similarities to the way Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum would conceptualize Noah's ark (and Moses') a few months later:

> In the days ahead, I will take comfort in the image of a great Rabbi, wrapped in a coffin, sneaking past the walls of a mighty city that had been weakened by hatred. A teacher, at once broken-hearted and already dreaming of a new, love-driven reality. We're not there yet. Before we come out of this, there will be more anguish, more loss. We'll be pushed to our limits in the months ahead. Hold on, beloveds. Listen closely, and you'll hear the whispers of the past: from our shared loss and dislocation, our brokenness and grief, we'll be given the opportunity to transform this time of collective heartache into an era of collective rebirth. Our world is dying right now. After all the destruction, we will build a new world, in which each of us will be called to the sacred task of tipping the scales toward love. And that, friends, will be something truly beautiful.[234]

Just like the *teivot* of Noah and Moses (which Rabbi Kleinbaum would liken to the communal life of her synagogue) preserved the possibility that future generations could build a better world, the coffin that carried Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai out of Jerusalem not only saved his life, it also saved a possible future. (The symbolism here is potent too: even that which seems to be a marker of total loss - a coffin, or a destroyed holy city - can carry the seeds of a new reality.) Rabbi Brous urged her listeners to see themselves, perhaps like Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai *while he was inside of the coffin*, as mourners whose mourning could one day turn to accountability, and generativity. She did not demand this generativity of them (or herself) in the moment - only suggested that the present moment, of deep sorrow, might one day be part of a story with a more redemptive end.

---

[233] ibid, p. 8.
[234] ibid, p.10.

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai figured prominently in other sermons, as well. In "Our Yavneh," a sermon that was also delivered on Rosh HaShanah 2020/5781 (at Chicago Sinai Temple in Chicago, Illinois), Rabbi Todd Zinn argued that many COVID-era adaptations (to worship, to the way the synagogue did justice work, etc) were examples of a Yavneh-level change already in action. He argued that just as early Reform Movement leaders had wanted to celebrate on Tisha B'Av (a traditional day of mourning, associated with a number of calamities including the destruction of the First and Second Temples) because they valued all of the achievements of the Yavneh generation, so too might future generations come to celebrate the work of Jewish communities to expand the parameters of communal life in the early months of the pandemic. Rabbi Zinn's sermon, then, in part encouraged listeners to shift their perspective on the present (to a perspective more focused on a responsibility to future generations, and more open to the possibility of healing and growth, not immediately, but over time), which is something he had in common with Rabbi Brous, Rabbi Kail, and a number of authors whose work will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.[235] He also acknowledged some of the challenges of his audience's present moment both by reflecting on the ways the rabbis mourned for the Temple (even if later, the Reform movement went in a different way) and through an evocative repeated image, that the Jewish world's current work (as in the years after the Temple's fall) was to "learn to live underwater." He introduced this image with a story he called an "old joke:"

> It starts with a sudden news report: the greatest scientists in the world have determined that, in two weeks, the earth is going to be destroyed by catastrophic flooding. Not one inch, the scientists say, of dry land will remain. The earth will be totally and completely submerged under water. … An international panel of scientists, politicians, religious

[235] These authors include David Evan Markus, Sharon Kleinbaum, and Michelle Missagheih, among others – all have a strong focus on imagining the present from the perspective of people living in the future (and the idea that this could help us find hope and purpose, and the will to continue through hard times).

> leaders, thought leaders, and creative thinkers was convened to weigh and debate options. "Send people up into space," some suggested. Others proposed building massive ships, like a fleet of modern day Noah's Arks, huge floating cities. Others objected, "These ideas will only save a tiny fraction of the population of the earth!" The room filled with a cacophony of voices, opinions, suggestions, and ideas. In the back of the room sat a Rabbi. She quietly turned to her wife and said simply, "In two weeks the world will flood: there will be no dry land left to live on. So, we have two weeks to learn how to live underwater."[236]

Rabbi Zinn told his community that they hadn't even had two weeks – they were just thrust underwater suddenly, with shutdowns in March 2020. And then he celebrated all they had learned about "living underwater" so far, and expressed confidence that this learning would one day be to future generations what Yavneh is to us. *Sometimes you can't escape disaster,* he argued with his image of a flood that no ark or even space ship could outrun, *sometimes you just have to adapt to it. And we have been adapting.*

Two years (and a few months) before Rabbi Zinn evocatively described Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's work at Yavneh (and our work during the pandemic) as *learning to live underwater,* Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson also named Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai as an exemplar, in a speech for newly ordained rabbis called "Leadership for Troubled Times."[237] But Rabbi Artson did not tell the stories of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's escape from Jerusalem or his early work in Yavneh – rather, he picked a story from Avot d'Rabbi Natan[238] that takes place at a later point.[239]

---

[236]Rabbi Todd Zinn, "Our Yavneh (Rosh HaShanah Evening 5781 Sermon)" https://www.chicagosinai.org/worship/sermons/our-yavneh.

[237] Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, "Leadership for Troubled Times," Ordination Address at Ziegler School of Rabbinical Studies, Los Angeles, California, May 9, 2018. Reprinted in *No Time for Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from An Era of Upheaval* (Ed. Michael Rose Knopf and Miriam Aniel, 2021), pp.57-62.

[238] A compilation of rabbinic teachings and stories framed as a commentary on Pirkei Avot. The story Rabbi Artson used is imbedded within a commentary on the teaching (originally found in Mishan Avot 1:2, and reproduced in Avot D'Rabbi Natan 4), that *the world stands on three things: on torah, on avodah* (worship – probably originally at the Temple), *and on g'imilut hassadim* (acts of *hesed,* usually translated as "loving kindness," and sometimes also as "piety"). The story Rabbi Artson sites comes as part of a larger discussion of the ways in which the world might be said to stand on *hesed.*

[239] Although in Avot d'Rabbi Natan itself, the stories Rabbi Brous and Rabbi Zinn told are recounted immediately after the story Rabbi Artson told.

In this story, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and his student, Rabbi Joshua, are walking by Jerusalem and see the destroyed Temple. Rabbi Joshua begins to mourn and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai comforts him, saying: "'Be not grieved, my child. There is another way of gaining atonement even though the Temple is destroyed. What is it? We must now gain atonement through deeds of lovingkindness. For it is written: 'I desire lovingkindness, not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6)."[240] Rabbi Artson argued that Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's words "offer restoration of hope" [241] to Rabbi Joshua, and to us, because they: "broaden our vision of what is possible … roots this idea in the power of relationship … [and] expand the realm of meaning making."[242]Rabbi Artson argued that "Broader vision, strengthened relationships, [and] rooting ourselves in sacred texts and transformational learning … are the treasures that Judaism offers … [and] the sources of resilience and healing that we and all humanity need … to weather the storm."[243]

All three of the "treasures [of] Judaism" that Rabbi Artson names were also extolled by a number of other authors (as we have seen above and will continue to see below), but the story of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua casts them in a slightly different light. First, in this story, Rabbi Yohanan' ben Zakkai's "broader vision" is not necessarily a vision that takes in a longer span of time – it is not the vision of a person escaping a flooded world in an ark or a person being carried in a coffin from a city on the verge of collapse, who knows a new life can be built after the disaster, either by themselves or their (literal or spiritual/intellectual) descendants. Rather, it is a "broader vision" of the way human beings can act right now, in the

[240] This is Rabbi Bradley Artson's translation of (part of) Avot d'Rabbi Natan 4:5, found within his sermon "Leadership for Troubled Times" (p.59).
[241] ibid, p.60
[242] ibid.
[243] ibid, p.61.

present, to achieve the goals they believe to be of utmost importance. In the world of the story, one of these goals is proper atonement.

Second, Rabbi Artson saw Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's approach as "rooted in … relationship" not just because he was in conversation with his student (though this was very important) but also because he called that student בני, "my son." As we saw above, בני is actually also what Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Akiva each called *their* students (the ones who miraculously returned from waters in which their teachers thought they had died) in the stories on Yevamot 121a. Likely, it was a less salient detail for the sermons that used Yevamot 121a to mention (even though these sermons also emphasized the power of relationship) because those sermons saw the "teacher" characters on Yevamot 121a (if they mentioned these characters at all) merely as the interlocutors of the people dispensing wisdom – the students. In contrast, Rabbi Artson saw Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai (the teacher) as the character dispensing wisdom worth emulating. And indeed, on Yevamot 121a, the teachers – and we, the readers – do learn from the students, who remind their teachers of the wisdom of an old principle, from "the words of the sages," that they had clearly not heeded. In contrast, in the story of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua, the dynamic is flipped: a teacher reassures his student that even in the face of great calamity, the Tanakh – the oldest source of Jewish wisdom, from which Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's proof text about *hesed* comes – can still be relied upon to provide a path forward. So where on Yevamot 121a the word בני dramatizes an older generation's fears of losing the generation(s) that will follow them, in Avot d'Rabbi Natan 4:5, the word בני emphasizes not just

the power of relationship in general, but specifically the way older generations can help younger generations find meaning and direction in Torah even when they are afraid or dispirited.[244]

Third, it is worth noting that while many of the sermons we have explored so far focus on what it is like to be in (and survive, and cultivate resilience in) an *ongoing* disaster (or other exigent situations), Rabbi Artson's sermon is a little different. Rabbi Artson does speak of a need to "weather the storm," but the story of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua that Rabbi Artson uses takes place *after* a terrible disaster, as Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua gaze out on the ruins of a Temple that has already been destroyed. The destruction of the Temple is, in fact, an *ongoing* challenge for them (as Rabbi Joshua's words remind us, they were born into a society that used the Temple for a number of essential functions, including atonement), but the calamity that precipitated the challenge is now in the past. They are living in the times after the calamity. Rabbi Artson did not specify whether he believed the destroyed Temple had a precise analog in our times (and by extension, whether he believed himself and his audience to be living in a period after a moment of great destruction). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the image of the two rabbis gazing at ruins (fearing no new changes or imminent threats to their lives) and discussing their next steps puts them in the most reflective posture of any of the characters we have met so far.[245]

---

[244] Talking about emotions in rabbinic texts is tricky. The English word that is tempting to assign to both the teachers' mistaken assumptions (on Yevamot 121a) that their students were dead, and Rabbi Joshua's mistaken assumption that without the Temple, there could be no path to atonement, is "despair." And yet the word "despair" does not appear in either of these stories (and there is a growing body of scholarship exploring whether the rabbis even meant the same things as modern readers when they used words about feelings). The words "afraid" and "dispirited," which I used above, do not appear either.

[245] The teacher/student dyads on Yevamot 121a are arguably in an equally reflective (post-destruction, post-survival) moment, but because all of the sermons that used Yevamot 121a used it to suggest that we can emulate the behavior of Akiva and/or Meir *in the water,* it would not be fair to say that those *sermons* conceptualize their audience as living through a post-destruction moment. An argument could also be made that perhaps the raven and the dove in the Rabbi Avi Strausberg's text study are, at the end of their lives, in a post-destruction moment, but if so, they are certainly not engaged in a relational conversation about it.

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua are joined in their reflective posture, at least to an extent, by the characters in another rabbinic story, found on BT Makkot 24b (the final *daf*, or page, of tractate Makkot in the Babylonian Talmud). The story, which tells of Rabbi Akiva and other sages climbing up to the ruins where the Temple once stood, comes in the midst of a longer discussion of the challenges of holding onto hopes of future (messianic) redemption while living through terrible loss and destruction. In the story, the rabbis witness the total destruction of the Temple (including a fox exiting the area that had once been the holy of holies) and begin to cry, but Rabbi Akiva starts laughing. They ask why he is laughing, and Rabbi Akiva asks why they are weeping. They explain that they are weeping because the holy of holies, meant to be kept separate from all living beings except the high priest, has just been visited by a fox. (In other words, its desecration - and the distance between its intended function and its current function - is total.) Rabbi Akiva then replies that he is laughing because a prophecy of redemption that he is aware of could not come true until the prophecy of destruction had come true first - but now that the destruction has happened, he knows the redemption will come one day too. The story (and tractate Makkot as a whole) ends with the other rabbis responding, "Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva, you have comforted us."[246]

[246] BT Makkot 24b. One of the interesting things about this ending is that the story of Rabbi Akiva laughing amidst the ruins of the Temple is actually directly preceded by another story in which Rabbi Akiva laughs when he hears the Romans causing great harm, and the rabbis he is with (who are mourning the destruction of the Temple, and of the city they can hear being attacked) ask him why he is laughing. Rabbi Akiva explains that if people doing wrong (literally "transgressing [God's] will") are rewarded so richly, all the moreso will people who follow [God's] will be rewarded. (BT Makkot 24a-b; the concept of a reward is implied but only made explicit in commentary.) And this is where the first story ends - we never learn how the rabbis Akiva was with responded to his interpretation. What is consistent in both stories is Rabbi Akiva's unshakeable faith in a future that is much better than the present, and his sense that perhaps counterintuitively, calamity confirms the good future that is coming to those who follow God's will (even though the grief of his compatriots is a very human response). But for whatever reason (perhaps because he is able to cite prophecies?), it is only in the second story that the people he is with tell Rabbi Akiva that he has comforted them.

Like Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva was exceptional in this story for his ability to bear witness to the destruction and desecration of the Temple (a past calamity that continued to have serious ramifications in his present) but also use Tanakh (in this case, prophecies) to find his way to what Rabbi Artson would call a "broader vision," which he could share with his contemporaries. An important difference is that Rabbi Akiva's "broader vision" (in this story) was not necessarily focused on a different way to act in the present (while Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's "broader vision" certainly was). Rather, Akiva took a different (and perhaps[247] more hopeful, but certainly more expansive) view of time than the other rabbis who were with him, seeing the present moment as part of an arc that would end in redemption. In this way, he had more in common with the builders of *teivot*, in both Genesis and Exodus, than with Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai at the moment he spoke with Rabbi Joshua. (Though Rabbi Akiva's approach, within this story, was a bit more passive than that of the builders of *teivot* - or of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai escaping to Yavneh. Rabbi Akiva was not engaged in concrete work to ensure a better future, but rather expressing his renewed faith in a better future.[248])

Four texts (two sermons and two text studies) used this story from Makkot 24b, each in a slightly different way. One of the basic divides between sources was about whether or not these sources considered Rabbi Akiva an exemplar. In a 2017 text study called "Keeping the Faith: Hope and Resilience in Times of Despair," Rabbi Kelilah Miller excerpted the story on Makkot

[247] Rabbi Akiva is certainly *happier* that the other rabbis he is with, but it is not necessarily clear from the text that they see the future differently from him (or are having any thoughts about the future at all, before he speaks). They are mourning a tragic recent event (as well as, perhaps, the challenging present), and he offers them the option of instead turning their attention towards the future, and the possibility that the present, hard as it is, is not the end of the story.

[248] It could be argued that because his expression of faith brought comfort the people he was with, Rabbi Akiva actually *was* engaged in work to build a better future (by helping his contemporaries feel less anguish in the present). If so, this work is still somewhat more indirect than the work in some of the other stories.

24b, and then asked a series of questions that framed Rabbi Akiva as a potential exemplar (while acknowledging some potential differences between his worldview and our own). These questions included: "What are some strategies for hope used by Rabbi Akiva here? Do they entirely depend on a literal belief in prophecy? Are there aspects of these strategies that we might be able to adapt for our own times?"[249] Three and a half years later, as part of her "Out of the Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience" text study series,[250] Rabbi Avi Weiss told a few stories about rabbinic responses to the fall of the Temple,[251] and one of these stories was Makkot 24b. However, her questions pointed not only to some of Rabbi Akiva's strengths, but also to some potential drawbacks of his approach. She asked in part: "Rabbi Akiva seems to have a unique perspective … what allowed him to see hope when his colleagues only saw despair? How do you understand the role of hope in resilience? Is hope always possible? Maybe what Rabbi Akiva's colleagues needed from him is to share their tears … what are the disadvantages of his optimism?"[252]

In two different Rosh HaShanah sermons (one for Rosh HaShanah 5780/2019, and the other for Rosh HaShanah 5781/2020), Rabbis Lauren Holtzblatt and Miriam Margles each retold the story in Makkot 24b in ways that lifted up aspects of Rabbi Akiva's behavior, *and the behavior of the people he was with,* as models for cultivating resilience in community. In 2019, Rabbi Holtzblatt drew her community's attention to the way the rabbis who were with Rabbi

[249] Rabbi Kelilah Miller, "Keeping the faith: Hope and resilience in Times of Despair," October 27, 2017, accessed online at: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/84430?lang=bi.
[250] This series, which was about resilience more broadly (rather than resilience in justice work specifically), is the same course/series in which the text study about the raven and the dove in the Noah's ark story appeared.
[251] Including the story of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Joshua, discussed above; like Rabbi Artson, Rabbi Weiss also seemed to view Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai as a positive role model.
[252] Rabbi Avi Weiss, "Out of the Ashes: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience; Session 3: The Fall of the Temple - Where Do We Go From Here?," p.7-8. This series ran for the first time in the spring and summer of 2021, as part of Hadar's Project Zug.

Akiva responded to his laughter. They could have simply taken offense, or told him that he was disrespectful to laugh in a place of so much loss, but instead they asked a question. Rabbi Holtzblatt argued that this question demonstrated a kind of curiosity and openness important to the cultivation of resilience; she wrote: "resilience is more available to people curious about their own line of thinking and behavior."[253] A year later, Rabbi Miriam Margles also drew *her* community's attention to the rabbis with Akiva. She started the story earlier, noting that the entire reason the rabbis got to the Temple (ruins) in the first place is that they went on an intentional pilgrimage: "I want to invite these rabbis to stand beside us and teach us how to make the essential pilgrimage into our own loss."[254] Rabbi Margles honored her community's efforts to be "diligent seekers of goodness and joy" through the challenges of the early months of the COVID-19 Pandemic and some of the injustice (particularly racial injustice) the world was experiencing at the same time, but added that she thought expressions of grief had an important place in moving forward, too, and the rabbis on Makkot 24b were a potential model for grieving "without getting lost in despair."[255] She noted that their most important decision was to travel on their journey of grief together: "these rabbis offered each other the simplest acts of generosity, connection, love. They asked, why are you weeping? They asked, why are you laughing?" Turning to her audience, she continued:

> ask people how they are. … And be ready to listen. We are each moving through different experiences, moments of resilience and joy worth sharing, and moments of tremendous struggle worth sharing.[256]

---

[253] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, "Rosh HaShanah 5780: Facing the World," sermon delivered to Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, D.C.
[254] Rabbi Miriam Margles, "Dismantling (and building anew)," Erev Rosh HaShanah 5781 sermon delivered to the Danforth Jewish Circle in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, accessed online at: https://djctoronto.com/erev-rosh-hashana-5781-dismantling-and-building-anew/ .
[255] ibid.
[256] ibid.

Rabbi Margles speculated that perhaps Rabbi Akiva's laughter, later in the story, came out of the particular joy of being in community with others. In her reading of the story, even though the sugya in the Talmud ends with the other rabbis telling Rabbi Akiva that he has comforted them (and he says nothing parallel to them), the gifts the rabbis offered each other were reciprocal. Their different emotional experiences were not right or wrong, they were just understandably varied responses to an ongoing shared-yet-personal experience of loss and change (analogous to the loss and change many were experiencing in early fall 2020). And they all had something to learn and something to gain from asking each other how they were doing, and listening to each other. Who knows? Perhaps the other rabbis were comforted by Rabbi Akiva not (only) because of the hope he shared with them, but also because he started a dialogue.

As was the case with several of the other sermons that relied heavily upon Rabbinic texts, Rabbi Margles concluded her sermon by indicating to her audience, not that they were *currently* living in a time "after" a great calamity, but that the present moment might be a good time to start to think about "after" (and seeing "after" as a time in which positive change would be possible, not just a time which would lack some of the people and ways of life that had been lost). However, unlike the authors whose primary example of creativity-after-disaster was the rabbinic project itself, Rabbi Margles jumped to the 20th century - and to an era that was visited by many of these sermons, World War II. Or, in her case, the immediate post-war period:

> As Winston Churchill was working to form the United Nations after the devastation of WWII, he famously said, 'never let a good crisis go to waste.' Let's use this crisis well … Let's grieve together and let's laugh together to meet all this new year brings.[257]

To what could the year ahead be comparable? On the eve of 5781, seven months into a pandemic, Rabbi Miriam Margles acknowledged the tremendous losses of the previous year

[257] ibid.

(which she implicitly compared to both the era of the destruction of the Second Temple and World War II), and suggested that together, listeners could make the coming year into a time of tremendous creativity and positive change (as Winston Churchill and others did in the wake of World War Two) – if they were open to acknowledging their own grief, and listening to one another.

Part 3: To What is Our Moment Comparable? Subjugation Under Roman Rule.

In addition to the many sermons that told stories about the rabbinic response to the destruction of the Second Temple, a few sermons also used Talmudic stories set in the time of Roman rule in order to draw comparisons between the ways the rabbis responded to oppression (and specifically, restrictions on Torah study) and the ways 21st century (American) Jews were responding to injustice. One of the interesting aspects of these sermons is that while they have overlapping themes (they all extol the virtues of courage, for example), they each interact with the stories they are telling in a slightly different way.

One of the stories the Talmud tells about a Jewish response to Roman restrictions on Torah learning is the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar.[258] When the restrictions became very serious, they fled to a cave and lived there for twelve years, studying except when they were praying, and keeping themselves alive with water and a carob tree that had miraculously appeared within the cave. When they left, after twelve years (because Elijah the prophet came to tell them the emperor had died and his decree had been canceled), they judged the people in the world (who were working, not studying Torah) harshly, and everyone

[258] On BT Shabbat 33b. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was, like Rabbi Meir, a student of Rabbi Akiva - so this story is set in the generation who lived and learned immediately *after* the fall of the Second Temple. The story may or may not be set after Rabbi Akiva's execution by the Roman Empire. It is one of the only rabbinic stories analyzed in this chapter that is written in Aramaic.

and everything they looked at burned. The *bat kol*[259]called out to them, telling them to return to the cave so as not to destroy God's world. They did return to the cave, and emerged again a year later, when the *bat kol* told them to. Initially, Rabbi Elazar's eyes continued to burn everything he saw, but Rabbi Shimon healed everything his son had burned. Then they saw a man who, though not engaged in study, was taking care to honor Shabbat, and "their minds rested."[260] " In other words, they were able to take a less judgmental stance towards non-scholars, because they saw evidence that the non-scholars were still following the mitzvot.

There is a lot going on in this story, which is in wide circulation in the contemporary English-speaking Jewish world,[261] and different interpreters tell the story to make different points. And certainly, inasmuch as this story has a number of supernatural elements and is written in a language (Babylonian Aramaic) that its characters (Eretz Israel based tannaim, or early sages) did not speak, we can imagine that it was probably also allegorical (or at least symbolic) for its original authors - in ways we may or may not come close to guessing correctly today. So too, two sermons used this story to illustrate points about resilience in justice work, and the focus of each sermon was very different.

The first sermon, delivered by Rabbi Sharon Brous on Rosh HaShanah 5779 (2018), used Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar's flight to the cave as a metaphor for the ways that

[259] *Bat Kol* literally means "daughter of a voice." It is a term used in a number of stories in the Talmud (in which various sages hear the *Bat Kol,* and either do or do not listen to it), and it is sometimes translated as "a divine voice" or "the divine voice."
[260] BT Shabbat 33b.
[261] As of late February 2022, the website Sefaria (which hosts a number of Jewish texts, including the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds) registered that 102 source sheets made on their website used the story (most were in English, though a few were in Hebrew and one was in Spanish), and 552 external web pages had hyperlinked to their copy of the story. (Most of these web pages were blog posts, divrei Torah, and other short Jewish teachings. 76 were Hebrew-language web pages, and the rest were English-language web pages.) For a point of comparison, the stories of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir "riding the waves" on Yevamot 121a were cited by far fewer external sources: 5 Sefaria-based source sheets and 38 external web pages, in the case of the story of Rabbi Akiva riding the waves, and 2 sefaria-based source sheets and 38 external web pages, in the case of the story of Rabbi Meir.

many of us, overwhelmed by all of the injustice in the world, may long to retreat from the wider world.[262] She also connected their decision to retreat to the cave to Noah's decision to build and then retreat to an ark, and was one of the only authors to uniformly condemn Noah - she said that he may have been righteous relative to his generation, but the present moment required a different kind of righteousness. Where a few years later Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt compared Noah's time on the ark to "cocooning," noting that important and sometimes painful transformations can happen in cocoons, Rabbi Brous connected Noah's retreat to the ark, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's retreat to the cave, and our own potential desire to stop engaging with change work (or the wider world, period) to the Hebrew verb "להשתבלל," to (become a) snail (by retreating into one's shell).

These two different images of small, soft creatures retreating into hard, protective cases - one to radically transform, and one to protect itself from harm (and essentially stay in stasis while it does so) - raise interesting questions. When are we cocooning, and when are we snailing? How can we tell the difference?[263] To be sure, a very important difference between these sermons was that Rabbi Holtzblatt was describing both psychological and physical retreats from the wider world that took place during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. But snails live in shells (when they can) for an important reason: sometimes shells are the only thing that can keep

[262] Rabbi Sharon Brous, "Building a New America," sermon delivered to Ikar (Los Angeles) for Rosh HaShanah 5779 (2018). Accessed online at: https://ikar.org/wp-content/uploads/RH-Brous-5779-Building-a-New-America.pdf

[263] Another question we might ask based on Shabbat 33b is, when are we changing in ways that are unhelpful? The cocoon metaphor implies (based on human enthusiasm for butterflies, at least) that the person emerging from a cocoon will be positively transformed. The snail metaphor implies that a person emerging from their shell will be the same as they were when they entered the shell. But on Shabbat 33b, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son do *change* - they learn a lot of Torah, and they gain the ability to burn the world with their eyes. (Thankfully, eventually, during his second retreat to the cave, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai also seems to have gained the ability to heal.) Based on the extreme judgment with which they initially regard the people living and working in the world beyond their cave, they may have initially thought that their own transformation had been positive - but they were not correct.

them safe from danger. (The world is full of so many creatures and objects that are so much bigger, stronger, and quicker than them - there is so much a snail can't run from or fight.) How can we determine when such a retreat is necessary, and how can we determine when it is driven by emotions (like fear or overwhelm) that we should not be allowing to guide our decisions?

Rabbi Brous addresses this question by bringing her audience's attention to another character in the cave story: the *bat kol,* which she translates as the "prophetic voice." She argues that the *bat kol* in our lives - reminding us not to harm others, but also not to retreat from the world forever - is our children. (Her explicit critique is not of the way Shimon bar Yochai and his son hid when they had no other choice, it is of the way they stayed hidden - and also harmed others - when they did have a choice, after the decree that forced them into hiding was lifted.) When adults are weary or hopeless, children remind us of the urgency of working for change in the present moment (and Rabbi Brous gives the example of youth and teen activism against gun violence to make her point). She concludes: "there is a new America being born, and it is fierce, gorgeous and fair. It is built on justice and mercy, and it makes room for everyone. To usher this new America into the world, we - every one of us - will need to be brave, brave brave."[264]

Three years later, on a Yom Kippur that fell more than a year and a half into the COVID-19 pandemic, Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh also told the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar, with a focus not on whether or not to retreat to a cave (she declaratively stated that the story was likely relatable *because* of the element of retreat[265]) but rather, on how to emerge. In her sermon, which was addressed as a prayer to God, she prayed

---

[264] ibid, p. 7.

[265] "I'm guessing many of us have felt like Rabbi Shimon and his son these past twenty months - hiding in our caves. Scared to emerge. Terrified of risking our lives." (Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh, "Now What? Resilience During and After COVID 19," YK Sermon 2021, Temple Israel of Hollywood, California, accessed online at: https://www.tioh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/YK-Sermon-2021-Final.pdf. p.6. Underline in the original text.)

that she and her community would be able to emerge from their own caves with "humility" and the ability to "hear beyond the walls of our caves" – and she prayed that the lessons about the dangers of "toxic harshness" that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar had learned so painfully could be remembered, rather than relived, by her community in the present.[266] One of the things that is interesting about Rabbi Missaghieh's framing is that she may be advocating for slightly more openness to different perspectives than Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar came to embrace after they stopped burning people with their eyes. For them, the key thing they needed to realize was that even though the people they saw out in the world were not engaged in as much study as they would have liked, the people *were* committed to the mitzvot - they just had a different (non-studying) way of expressing that commitment. Rabbi Missaghieh drew a parallel between the way the rabbis first acted after they left the cave and the way people with different opinions in American society were treating each other. This might imply the perspective that it could also be possible for Americans with radically different worldviews to find some sort of shared values system (like the mitzvot in the story) on which they realized they agreed, and could pursue in different ways (some studying, some buying Shabbos candles …) without harming each other. In 21st century American life (and amongst the different sermons these thesis analyzes), this perspective is currently a matter of some debate.

That said, Rabbi Missaghieh's central thesis was not that she thought it was important to be tolerant of other people's perspectives. Her central thesis was that she was asking God, who (she wrote) has a much more expansive perspective (across both time and space) than human beings, to help her and her community to widen their own perspectives (across both time and

[266] ibid, p.7.

space) beyond the challenging (and uncertain) moment they were currently living through. Much of Rabbi Missaghieh's sermon dealt with different ways the Jewish community adapted to exile: she lifted up both Jeremiah's work to encourage people to make homes for themselves in the Babylonian exile (which, she noted, might have initially been a very surprising suggestion), and the rabbinic project after the destruction of the second Temple, as examples of times when people were able to think creatively about how to live well in their present moment, even in the wake of disaster. (This part of her sermon was making roughly the same argument as the sermons that celebrated the story of the founding of Yavneh, and/or Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's teachings about *gimilut hassadim*, as positive examples for our day.) But she also prayed for the kind of intergenerational perspective that reminds us that even in moments of great loss, new possibilities are always being created: new people are being born, new ideas are coming into the world. And for this part of her prayer, she chose to focus on the story of Rabbi Akiva, and the Jewish community's response to his death.

An important part of Rabbi Akiva's biography that was *not* mentioned in any of the sermons discussed above (but that, depending on the general knowledge of the community in question, might have been known to some of the sermons' listeners) is that because he openly defied decrees banning engagement in Jewish study (taking an opposite approach to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son), Rabbi Akiva was eventually executed by the Romans. His death is held up within the Talmud itself as an example of an inexplicable and unjust tragedy (the kind with the potential to defy even attempts at theodicy).[267] And, given that the Talmud was codified long after his death, it is probably fair to assume that an awareness of Rabbi Akiva's eventual

[267] See for example Menachot 29a.

fate hangs over many of the stories in which he offers advice to others about how to navigate loss, oppression, and fears that people who follow the mitzvot may never be rewarded for so doing.

In her sermon, a prayer for wider perspective, Rabbi Missaghieh invoked a teaching on BT Kiddushin 72b, which reads in part: "When Rabbi Akiva died, Rabi was born; when Rabi died, Rav Yehuda was born; when Rav Yehuda died, Rava was born; when Rava died, Rav Ashi was born; (this comes) to teach you that a *tzaddik* (righteous person) does not die from the world until another *tzaddik* like him is created (נברא - the root ברא implies divine creation)." And Rabbi Missaghieh wrote of this teaching:

> Like Rabbi Akiva's generation, who witnessed his violent death with unimaginable horror and helplessness, we've also looked on as so many souls have passed unexpectedly and suddenly. Do we have the imagination to learn from and lean on Jewish tradition while creating novel rituals to mourn and celebrate across the country, and by ourselves? … Do we have the humility to accept that impossibly, painfully, sometimes tragically death will eventually lead to new life?[268]

In other words: to whom are we comparable in this moment? To the generation bereft of Rabbi Akiva. (And perhaps, also, to the generations after that. Although the passage in Kiddushin 72b is in Hebrew, it teaches of people who lived long, long after Rabbi Akiva, and is perhaps a hopeful statement for his distant descendants (though not so distant as us today): just as another *tzaddik* rose up after Rabbi Akiva, so too will we survive the loss of some of our *tzaddikim* today.)

The last sermon to invoke a Talmudic story about studying Torah in a time of restrictions imposed by the Roman government also focused on Rabbi Akiva - and specifically, on his decision to defy Roman bans on public study (the same decision that eventually led to his death).

[268] Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh, p.8.

That sermon,[269] by Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, came a week after the people praying in person at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas were taken hostage by an attacker informed by the antisemitic belief that Jews had powerful sway in government and could use their influence to free someone from federal prison. Rabbi Holtzblatt's sermon was about why, in spite of everything, Torah (in the broad sense) was "worth the risk."[270] She named Torah's ethical principles, the way it guides us to focus on and celebrate life, and more. And she also told a story of the way Rabbi Akiva responded when he was asked by a contemporary why he continued to defy Roman regulations, which comes from tractate Berakhot of the Babylonian Talmud:

> Our rabbis taught: one time, the evil empire decreed that Israel could not busy itself with Torah. Pappos son of Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva, who was getting groups together in public and [studying] Torah. [Pappos] said to him: Akiva, aren't you afraid of the empire? [And Akiva] said to him: Let me tell you a *mashal.* To what is this matter similar? To a fox that was walking along the edge of a river, and saw fish that were gathering from place to place. [The fox] said to [the fish]: before what are you fleeing? They said to him: from the nets that human beings bring upon us. He said to them: Do you want to come up to the dry land, and we will live together, like our ancestors did? They said to him: you are he who is called 'the cleverest of animals'?! You are not clever, you are stupid! If in a place that gives us life [i.e., water], we are afraid, in a place that brings us death [i.e., dry land] - all the more so will we be afraid. [And Rabbi Akiva concluded,] So too for us now – we are sitting and busying ourselves with Torah, in which it is written, "It is your life and the length of your days." If we were to give [Torah] up, all the moreso [would we be afraid/in danger].[271]

One of the most chilling parts of Rabbi Holtzblatt's sermon, relative to many of the other sermons studied in this thesis, is that she did not have to explain to her audience who the different characters in the story represented. The fear that Pappos son of Yehuda and Rabbi Akiva were discussing, of being killed for "busying themselves with Torah," was not *like* a different fear that the 21st century American Jewish community was grappling with - it was

---

[269] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, sermon on January 23, 2022, Adas Israel, Washington, D.C. Accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2JXpMeTpjI.
[270] ibid.
[271] BT Berakhot 61b. This is my own translation - Rabbi Holtzblatt told the story in a more extended manner.

precisely the same fear. The circumstances were, of course, quite different - in January 2022, anti-Jewish politicians were not in control of the American government (and the local government in Texas worked with the Jewish community to help end the hostage crisis). But the fear, of being murdered for choosing to publicly engage in Jewish communal life, was the same.

Rabbi Akiva's parable is also interesting to consider in light of the many other water-related parables (from the Talmud and from the Torah) that were used in sermons. Here, as opposed to in all of the other parables, water is unambiguously a source of life, and a place of relative safety. It also represents Torah, which it does in many other rabbinic texts, as well. Water in this story is not a *completely* safe place: it is dangerous because of the human beings and foxes who want to reach into the water and kill us. But it is the *safest* of all of the possible places for the fish to be. For the fish, some of the danger of the water seems to come from its translucence - the fox and the people can *see* them, they can't be in the water invisibly, just as it would be hard to study and live by Torah in complete secrecy. The fish are also limited in their movement by the parameters of the body of water they are in - even if they would be safer somewhere else, they cannot travel across land to get there, which puts them at a disadvantage relative to their predators, who can both reach into the water *and* travel on land. (The human beings persecuting the followers of Torah in Rabbi Akiva's time presumably also had a wider variety of actions available to them, because they would not have been bound by the same code of behavior.) And yet, water is their source of life – or, as Rabbi Holtzblatt said, their "home."[272] Sometimes, many of these sermons suggest, "home" (and life itself) can be a fragile, uncertain place. The fragility and uncertainty are not a reason to give up.

[272] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, sermon on January 23, 2022.

Chapter 5: "Resisting Tyrants Since Pharoah"[273]

The final Jewish story that a number of authors analogized to their present moment was the Exodus story – but not, for the most part, the part of the story where the Israelites have already left Egypt. The desert wanderings, which comprise the bulk of the Torah, did feature in some sermons (especially sermons based on the weekly Torah portion, or related to a holiday like Shavuot that commemorates an event in the desert), but these mentions were dwarfed in comparison to sermons that focused on life in Egypt. Some of these mentions may have been happenstance - for example, the January 6, 2021 attack on the United States Capitol (which was an attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 elections) coincided with Parshat Shemot, the first Torah portion in the book of Exodus. But taken as a whole (and particularly given that a number of High Holy Days sermons held up characters like the midwives Shifra and Puah as exemplars, when there is no liturgical need to mention Shifra and Puah on the High Holy Days), the pattern is striking.

In many of these sermons, one of the major connections between the author's present and the experiences of the Ancient Israelites in Egypt seems to be a direct comparison between Donald Trump and the Pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites. (*To whom is our leader similar?*) However, the equivalency between Donald Trump and Pharoah is not a universal feature of sermons that compare their audience's present to a story from Ancient Egypt, and even when Pharaoh is mentioned, the central question that seems to occupy the authors' attention seems to be: *how did the Ancient Israelites (and their supporters) respond to what was happening to them, and how can we?* (How did they turn themselves from people experiencing moral injury because

[273] This chapter takes its title from a slogan popularized by the organization *T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights.*

of their status as victims, witnesses, and even perpetrators of oppression into people who were working proactively for justice, against terrible odds?) This is the case even when the Ancient Israelites were not mentioned by name. For example, after the 2016 elections, the rabbinic human rights organization T'ruah began offering protest signs, t-shirts, and even bumper stickers bearing the slogan "Resisting Tyrants Since Pharoah." The main point of this slogan was not to call Donald Trump Pharaoh (otherwise the merchandise could have just said "Donald Trump is Pharaoh"); it was to identify the person wearing, carrying or otherwise displaying the slogan as part of a People who had resisted *many* tyrants, and survived. It was to identify the resistance[274] of the present as part of a continuous action (resisting), and the person/people engaged in that "resisting" as taking up a mantle that was being passed to them by the generations who had come before. (In this way, it was of a piece with another Jewish protest slogan that was very popular (in both English and its original Yiddish) in the early years of the Trump presidency in particular, "We will outlive them." "We will outlive them" was a rallying cry taken up by a group of Jews about to be executed by SS officers in 1939 that was turned into a Yiddish folk song.[275])

So, how did the Ancient Israelites (and their Egyptian neighbors) resist, and what precisely was the mantle that Jews in late 2016 (and beyond) were taking up? According to a 2017 T'ruah text study, it was the mantle of pursuing lives of holiness even in the face of

[274] The verb "resist" and nouns based on it were very popular in the protest language of the American Left in late 2016 and 2017 in particular, and that is reflected in a few of these sermons.

[275] https://www.jta.org/jewniverse/2017/the-Holocaust-history-of-nycs-yiddish-trump-protest-banner. This article discusses one protest banner in early 2017; by late 2017, the slogan was widespread. To identify with the originators of this slogan is to identify with people condemned to death, who believed that the collective they were a part of would survive a calamity which they, individually, would not. Whether or not everyone who carried a "we will outlive them" sign (or button) to a rally was identifying with the slogan's originators on a literal level, it should be said that some of the sermons (discussed below, in this section) that draw on imagery from the Israelite's time in Egypt make the point that we as individuals might not survive the present, but we as a collective can.

injustice.[276] And on Rosh HaShanah 2017 (5778), in an epistolary sermon entitled "Letter to My Children," Rabbi Jill Perlman argued that it was the mantle of people who hadn't chosen their circumstances, but *could* choose how to respond. She wrote:

> It was Shimon Peres who said the Jews' greatest contribution to the world was dissatisfaction! … Use that dissatisfaction with the world as it is and your anger and your pain and your fear and your courage and do something just as our forebears did before us. Be like Abraham when he stood up for the innocent at Sodom. Be like Shifra and Puah who defied a Pharaoh. Be like Moses who refused to be a bystander as he watched a slave being beaten by those in authority. Be dissatisfied. The truth is that sometimes life's trials are thrust upon us or we are thrust upon them. We're like that seed that takes root on a lonely cliffside. We know we shouldn't be here; the wind has blown us out of our comfort zone. We look around, startled, and ask ourselves, how in the world did we get *here?* I know a lot of us have been asking that question lately. And yet … and yet all we have left is to deal with it. It may not have been our choice to take on the trial but it is always our choice in how we respond.[277]

One of the life experiences that each of the biblical characters Rabbi Perlman names had in common with each other (and presumably, with Rabbi Perlman's audience) was that in the moments in their story that she identifies, they were each faced with a challenge (and a responsibility to stand up for others) that they likely never would have imagined, and that challenge came in the context of a preexisting relationship. As far as we readers know, before Genesis 18:20, Abraham had no idea that God (with whom he had a covenant) might one day decide to destroy an entire city. Shifra and Puah had presumably been successfully delivering babies for years before they were commanded by their ruler to participate in a genocide (Exodus 1:15-16). Moses had a comfortable upbringing in a palace, and seems to have been indifferent to the treatment of his fellow Hebrews (or at least, not motivated to kill any overseers) until the moment he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew (Exodus 2:11). So too, Rabbi Perlman

[276] Rabbi Lev Meirowitz Nelson, "Bringing Holiness To The Front Lines," accessed online at: http://www.truah.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Bringing_Holiness_to_the_Front_Lines.pdf
[277] Rabbi Jill Perlman, Rosh HaShanah 2017/5778, "A Letter to My Children."

emphasized that many in her community were "look(ing) around … and ask[ing] 'how in the world did we get *here?*'" They were grappling with trouble in their country that they never could have imagined.

Another interesting characteristic all of these biblical role models have in common is that they are all (what we would now call) allies. Abraham was not, himself, in danger because of God's desire to destroy Sodom - he just thought that destroying Sodom would be wrong.[278] Shifra and Puah were not being asked to kill their own family members - they were being asked to kill children who were part of a different ethnic group. And Moses was himself a Hebrew, but he was not made to work (and he was not beaten) as others were. In inviting her audience to emulate these characters, then, Rabbi Perlman is inviting them to identify with characters who took real risks by standing up for their beliefs (if God could destroy Sodom, God could certainly kill Abraham; meanwhile, Shifra, Puah, and Moses lived under the rule of a cruel Pharaoh whose power was absolute), but were also in positions of relative power (and what we would now call privilege) in their societies. This is not particularly surprising,[279] but it is a point of difference from many of the other sermons that also invoked the (pre-freedom) Exodus narrative.

[278] There are a number of literary parallels between the story of the destruction of Sodom and the flood story, and this is one reason that Abraham (who argued with God) is sometimes held up as a better version of Noah. But I actually have not yet encountered a commentary (classical or modern) that explores a significant difference between them, which is that Noah was in danger, and Abraham was not.

[279] Likely, Rabbi Perlman's community *was* both worried about what was happening in America in the fall of 2017 *and* in positions of greater power than some of the other communities she named, like undocumented immigrants being targeted for deportation and people in other cities who had been put under water by storms. It is also worth noting that this identification with people in relative (but not absolute) positions of power was mitigated by the story she used as a central metaphor in her sermon (a children's book about a seed that thinks it is alone on the edge of a cliff but it is actually connected to many life forms around it - we are the seed, and our task is to know we're not alone even when we find ourselves on the edge of a cliff). Her sermon acknowledged the powerlessness and disorientation that her audience felt - her message was just that they did still have power (and connections to others).

Four years later, on the Yom Kippur preceding the 2020 elections, Rabbi Sharon Brous also named Shifra and Puah as role models (along with Pharaoh's daughter); she told their stories briefly and added,

> We will do well to remember these women in the days ahead. And remember that Torah, our source of Divine law, is deeply concerned with communicating to us the conditions under which an unjust law must be broken. Honor your moral intuition, the book is screaming. When there is misalignment between what is legal and what is moral, we lift our voices and place our bodies on the side of what is just and right. Just as they did then, so must we now.[280]

However, following Midrash, Rabbi Brous also named a fourth heroine in the Exodus story: Miriam, Moses' sister. Miriam also plays an important role in the Torah itself, but midrash tells an additional story about her, in answer to two implicit questions: *1) How was it that Miriam came to be known as a prophet?* and *2) How was it that Moses' parents even came to have a child, given that they knew any baby born to them might be in terrible danger?* The midrash imagines that Miriam's parents divorced after Pharaoh's decree, but Miriam had a vision of how important Moses would be in the future, and she convinced her parents to get back together and give birth to him. Rabbi Brous calls this "not just an act of prophecy [but also] an act of resistance," and an example of "future orienting."[281] She compares Miriam to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (who had recently died), noting that Justice Ginsburg wrote her dissents for the future, and then praised the actions of both women using a framework that could be applied to many of the stories quoted in sermons about resilience in justice work:

> the most audacious thing we can do, when the walls are closing in on us, is future orient. Because casting our gaze to the future from within the depth of darkness is an audacious act of hope and an expression of human agency … Even when hungry ourselves, we plant the seeds for the world we want our grandchildren to inherit tomorrow. Future orienting requires tremendous faith—faith that the world as it is, is not the world as it's intended to

[280] Rabbi Sharon Brous, "Sometimes Love is a Call to Action," Kol Nidre 5781/2020, Sermon for Ikar (Los Angeles, CA). Accessed online at: https://ikar.org/wp-content/uploads/KN-Love-is-a-Call-to-Action.docx.pdf.
[281] ibid.

> be. Faith that love is far more powerful than hatred, that compassion will prevail over cruelty. Faith that each of us has a role in realizing a more just and loving world, and that redemption will come—even if not in our lifetime. This long view is not a concession to evil—it is a clear-eyed recognition that to achieve the just world we seek, we will need to fight on two fronts simultaneously: in the here and now, with the fierce urgency of now before it's too late. And at the very same time, establishing the foundation for the realization of our dreams in a distant tomorrow, because transformative change takes generations.[282]

Several months later, in the wake of an attack on the U.S. Capitol, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum would say something very similar about Miriam (and her mother), with a focus on their decision to put Moses into a *teivah* in the water – she saw their actions (just like Noah's actions in building a *teivah*, discussed above) as ensuring a possible future beyond their extremely challenging present, and compared those actions to the *teivah* of the CBST community.[283] On the same Shabbat, Rabbi Diane Cohler-Esses also lifted up the examples of the midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, Yocheved, and most of all Miriam, saying that they were all examples of choosing "hope" over "horror" and "despair."[284] To identify with Miriam encouraging her parents to have a child, or with Miriam (and her mother) standing at the edge of the water, pushing baby Moses off from the shore, *or* with Miriam still at the edge of the water, bargaining with Pharaoh's daughter over the fate of her brother,[285] is to identify with people who were not sure if they would themselves survive an oppressive regime, and knew they could not necessarily completely protect the next generation (Moses had to enter the water alone, while Miriam watched from the shore), but were nonetheless committed to doing what they could.

---

[282] ibid, p.4.
[283] Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, "Two Days After the U.S. Capitol Is Attacked," p. 234.
[284] Rabbi Dianne Cohler-Esses, "Between the Horror and The Hope." Sermon delivered to Romemu in New York City on January 9, 2021 and reprinted in *No Time For Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from An Era of Upheaval* (Ed. Michael Rose Knopf and Miriam Aniel, 2021), pp.215-228.
[285] It is this last action that Rabbi Cohler-Esses especially celebrated.

Rabbi Kleinbaum drew a number of other parallels between the Exodus story and January 2021 America, as well. She compared Pharoah to Trump quite explicitly, noting that like Pharoah, Trump had gotten progressively more oppressive over time. But she also noted that at the end of the story, Pharoah lost. From the (Egypt parts of the) Exodus story as a whole, she drew the lesson that anti-oppression work is often non-linear. From the stories of Miriam (and Yocheved, Shifra, and Puah), as well as from the example of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's life, she drew the grim lesson that "neither Dr. King nor the authors of Exodus held allusions that the presence of heroes nor even the intervention of the Divine would guarantee everyone's survival,"[286] and so we must conceptualize our work for change not as a guarantee of our individual longevity, but as a bid for a better society. And from Moses' behavior (in Exodus 3 onward), she drew the lesson that one must *both* notice the miracles around them (as Moses noticed the burning bush) and act to change the oppression around them - she argued that too often, people fall too easily into only celebrating miracles, or only noticing injustice.[287] Ultimately, she called on her community to identify with almost everyone in the Exodus story (except for Pharaoh), and to fight "silence and complicity:" "silence and complicity are not the sins of Pharaoh … silence and complicity are the sins of the people."[288]

Rather than drawing connections between the present moment and the lives of characters in the opening chapters of the Book of Exodus, a few sermons (and other texts) instead made connections between the time of the ten plagues (as experienced by the Ancient Israelites, the Egyptians, or both) and their present moment. For example, in her 2019 sermon "Overturning an Unjust Regime? This Week's Torah Portion Has a Lot to Say," Rabbi Amy Ellberg wrote that in

[286] Kleinbaum, "Two Days After the U.S. Capitol is Attacked," p.234.
[287] ibid, 235-236.
[288] ibid, 237.

"normal" years, she did not find Parshat Bo particularly relatable, but at present, it was extremely relatable.[289] She explained that she did not see the plagues as literally coming from God, but rather as

> a poetic explication of the process of overturning an unjust regime. This requires a period of time characterized by terrifying change and threats of violence. The Torah dramatically conveys that a collective process of liberation does not come easily. The people's hearts must turn and they must summon their courage, even as the earth seems to move beneath their feet … the Exodus story, read on a metaphorical level, reminds us that times of rapid change, disorientation and fear can give rise to healing and liberation.[290]

Rabbi Ellberg did not leave her readers with concrete action steps, but she did validate and normalize experiences of "disorientation and fear," and injected a note of hope that sometimes tumultuous times "can give rise to healing and liberation."

Another author who used the ten plagues (and in this case, specifically a midrash about the plague of darkness) to normalize some of the challenges his audience might be experiencing was Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein. In a January 2021 teaching for the Avodah Alumni Community called, "Most of Us Didn't Make It Out: The Dark Loneliness of Freedom Fighting,"[291] Rabbi Bernstein invited those who felt lonely in their liberation work (because they perceived other former comrades as "sellouts," etc) to know that they had company amongst the ancient Israelites. To make this point, he shares a midrash that imagines that only one fifth of the Israelites actually wanted to leave Egypt, and that the other four fifths were buried during the plague of darkness. And he concludes:

> Liberation work is lonely and uncertain, shrouded in darkness. Our Rabbis are telling us that when we feel that way and when we feel incredulous that so many people who

[289] Rabbi Amy Ellberg: "Overturning an Unjust Regime? This Week's Torah Portion Has A Lot To Say." January 10, 2019. Accessed online at: https://www.rabbiamyeilberg.com/post/overturning-an-unjust-regime.
[290] ibid.
[291] Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein, "Most of Us Didn't Make It Out: The Dark Loneliness of Freedom Fighting," D'var Torah for Parshat Bo, January 22, 2021. Written for the Avodah Alumni community and posted online at: https://avodah.net/most-of-us-didnt-make-it-out-the-dark-loneliness-of-freedom-fighting-dvar-torah-for-parashat-bo/

> should be on board keep wanting to "see both sides" or worse, we must press ahead. Even in our mythic paradigm for liberation, the freedom fighters felt drowned out by sellouts and apologists. And the Rabbis urgently say to the moderates, the apologists, the sellouts, and turncoats of today: don't let yourself wind up like the Israelites who died unseen in the plague of darkness. Make yourself a part of this story: break with Phara'oh.[292]

Rabbi Bernstein's central message to his readers (delivered through the words of the rabbis as he interpreted them) was both "press on" and something like 'know you are not actually alone.' Even if disappointed by family members or friends who were not engaged in justice work, Rabbi Bernstein suggested, readers should know that they at least had company in history. (One can imagine that the original author(s) of the midrash in question may have been engaged in the project of finding themselves company in history, too.) His is a modification of the "resisting tyrants since pharaoh" message, adapted specifically for those who need a reminder that not only did the Jewish People fight for freedom in many different times and places, but also that at least some of those people felt like they were more alone than they should have been - but they still pressed on.

Rounding out the discussion of the plagues, and returning to the model of holding up the actions of the Ancient Israelites as an example that 21st century Jews could follow, was Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, with her 5780/2019 Rosh HaShanah sermon "Facing the World." (This sermon tells a number of classical and modern stories, and is discussed above for its use of Makkot 24b.) Rabbi Holtzblatt drew her community's attention to a teaching in the Mekhilta about the tenth plague. The Mekhilta asks, why did the Israelites have to mark the *insides* of their

[292] ibid. Of note, Rabbi Bernstein was one of the only authors to refer to "Pharaoh" (as a representative a figure in his audience's lives who they had the option of either resisting or following) after the 2021 inauguration (in his case, two days after the 2021 inauguration). This may reflect a slightly different political orientation than some of the other authors, or, if nothing else, certainly a different range of imaginative possibilities regarding who in our time Pharaoh might be.

doorposts? And it answers: because it was a sign for the Israelites, themselves. Per Rabbi Holtzblatt:

> It was not until these people marked themselves as wanting to be collectively part of a people - part of a redemptive story - that they could be redeemed … they had to see themselves as part of the redemptive story in order to leave slavery.[293]

Rabbi Holtzblatt uses this story to support her thesis that building resilience in a time of "overwhelming" systemic challenges could be supported by "find[ing] hope," "build[ing] kinship," and "ground[ing]" oneself in an "eternal story."[294] The Exodus story, she argued, was one such "eternal story" - of a people coming together and "finding hope," not as individuals, but as a collective who believed in their future redemption.

One year later, with an eye not towards the plagues but instead towards the ways Moses himself could be a "model of perseverance" for all of us to emulate, Rabbi Jonathan Roos made a similar argument.[295] Drawing on a teaching by Dr. Aviva Zorenberg that when a pre-leadership Moses expressed worries that his mouth was "*kaved*" (commonly translated as heavy, but in the case of Pharaoh's heart later in the same story, often translated as "hard" or "impervious"), he was not saying he had a speech impediment, he was saying he too was somewhat "closed off." Rabbi Roos wrote:

> In Dr. Zornberg's reading, Exodus is not just a story of oppression by a cruel Pharaoh. It is about Moses and by extension the entire people who need to drop their kaved-ness, their own closed off-ness, it is about the need of a people to arouse within themselves the capacity to be redeemed." Moses, at the burning bush, represents unwillingness to open oneself up to an alternative reality.[296]

---

[293] Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt, Rosh HaShanah 5780: Facing the World," pp.12-14.
[294] ibid, p.3.
[295] Rabbi Jonathan Roos, "The Torah of Perseverance," Kol Nidre 5781/2020, sermon delivered at Temple Sinai, in Washington, D.C.
[296] ibid, p.2.

Rabbi Roos goes on to say that one of the first things that transforms Moses' life - helps him, and by extension the Israelites, "open … to an alternative reality" - is the arrival of his brother, Aaron. And so part of Rabbi Roos' message to his community that in working to "persevere," they were not alone. He also argued that Moses had tremendous clarity of "mission" throughout his forty years of leadership, frequently mentioning the "divine mission" he was serving.[297] By way of conclusion, Rabbi Roos declared in part: "We must see ourselves as more worthy and more open to our own deliverance."[298]

This sentiment would likely have been shared by Chelsea Feuchs, whose sermon "Compassion and Climate Change" looked to the Exodus story (and particularly, the story of the plagues) not for positive role models but for negative ones. She reflected that Pharaoh had created a whole society of people who were emotionally closed off to the suffering of their neighbors, and compared this to the way many people (and societies) not currently devastated by global climate change are not reacting compassionately to the devastation that others are experiencing. (She described this as almost the inverse of the ten plagues, which did at least afflict the society of people who had been oppressing their neighbors.) And she encouraged her audience to take another path:

> Instead of letting fear and guilt close us off, we can use them to open us up. … We each have experience worrying about our loved ones and the places we call home. We all want to preserve and protect the things that matter to us. The vulnerable place within me can reach out to the vulnerable place in another.[299]

Feuchs concluded by noting that the Torah's repeated injunction that we must not treat others as we were treated in Egypt can be applied to climate change; if we are fortunate to not be living

[297] ibid, p.4.
[298] ibid.
[299] Chelsea Feuchs, "Compassion and Climate Change," Sermon Delivered at Central Synagogue in New York City, NY, December 31, 2021. https://www.centralsynagogue.org/worship/sermons/compassion-and-climate-change.

through natural disasters, then we must not be indifferent to the suffering of those who are. The message that it can be possible to feel "fear and guilt" and be driven not into isolation but into connection, and through that connection into action, was, for Feuchs and for many others, one of the primary gifts of the Exodus story.

Finally, two primary sources moved beyond the ten plagues to argue that the story of the Israelites standing at the edge of the Red Sea, about to leave Egypt, offers an important answer to the question, to what *could* this moment be comparable? In the Biblical text itself, as well as in many midrashim about it, there is a strong emphasis on the idea that the Israelites needed to move forward for themselves (though the sea parting was a miracle, it was a miracle they helped bring about).[300] There is also a strong emphasis on the idea that a vast multitude of people left Egypt together. In a January 2021 d'var torah about *Parshat BeShalach* (in which the crossing of the Red Sea is discussed), Kendell Pinkney argued that the solidarity of all of these people leaving Egypt together could be a model for us too - that if we could stand together as they did, we could have the power to navigate the "fear and uncertainty" of our time as well (and maybe, as they did, take a major collective step towards freedom). Pinkney wrote:

> while the promises of prophets and G-d might be enough to get us to begin a journey, it takes community support - and often an unexpectedly huge amount of community support - to face the immense fear of a situation and still walk forward. My hope and prayer for us as we walk into this new year that will inevitably contain much uncertainty, is that we will find ourselves flanked by community support and care. And through trusting in the support of those standing beside us, may we feel emboldened to walk step by step into the liberation that G-d has set before us.[301]

And in a January 2022 podcast responding to the hostage crisis at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, Rabbi Shira Stutman argued that the key verbs in the story of the Israelites at the Red Sea

[300] See especially Exodus 14:15, and Mekhilta D'Rabi Yishmael on Exodus 14:!5.
[301] Kendell Pinkney, "Into the Unknown."

were ויסעו and ויבאו.[302] (She also drew a connection the the *Mi Chamocha,* a prayer that comes from this Torah portion, which ends with some Jewish communities both telling God to rise - *kuma b'ezrat yirsrael*, and getting up themselves.) She said that as a Jewish people we need to remember that the next step is always, always to get up. For Rabbi Stutman, as for Kendell Pinkney, the Israelites at the sea modeled the ways that solidarity and pro-active collective action can help us not only *survive* tumult, violence, uncertainty, and fear, but also, potentially, take an important step towards a promised land.

***

When I first noticed the frequency with which the pre-liberation Exodus story was appearing in sermons about resilience in justice work (particularly, it is worth noting, when those sermons were composed in the United States after the 2016 elections), I wondered, *were American Jewish communities in the moments these sermons were written really feeling as oppressed - and out of options - as the Ancient Israelites* during slavery*?* And certainly, one thread that connects the three major time periods (two mythic, and one historical) from which many of these sermons drew their stories is that all three - the flood, Egypt, and the time after the Temple's destruction - were periods of terrible loss, fear and upheaval, in which ordinary people had much more limited options than they might have had in another time and place. And identifying with people living under Pharaoh in Egypt, rather than with those same characters in the desert (on their way to the Promised Land) may, indeed, be a way to indicate in part how *far away* one feels from true redemption.

[302] Rabbi Shira Stutman and Joshua Malina, *Chutzpod!*. Episode: "bonus after Colleyville," January 18, 2022. Accessed online at: https://chutzpod.com/blog/bonus-after-colleyville. These verbs appear in Exodus 14:15 and 14:23.

And yet, what really seems to unite the sermons (and text studies) that draw upon the early chapters of the Exodus story (as well as midrashim about it) is their appreciation for its psychological depth and complexity. Exodus 1-14 does not just contain the stories of characters who find ways to move forward in spite of their limited power, it contains stories of characters who find ways to move forward in spite of (or even while holding) their own fear, grief, anger, and more. It also tells the story of other characters who are harmed and even killed by their callousness - negative role models in the extreme. It contains stories of people who follow their moral compass, band together in solidarity (and come to see their lives in collective rather than individual terms), and have the ability (even against great odds) to see and believe in a future that is different from their present. (A future that we, the readers, know will come true - if not for the people themselves than for their descendants.) These stories can serve as powerful models of both individual and collective resilience.

Conclusion

From 2016 to early 2022, scores of people active in Jewish communal life (professionally and otherwise) explored the topic of resilience in justice work in sermons, liturgical poems, blog posts, op-eds, artwork, music, podcasts, and more. This thesis analyzed a subsection of these creative works, searching for patterns in the ways the primary sources talked about (or implicitly encouraged) resilience, and in the ways the primary sources used classical Jewish texts. Although one of the most interesting features of the primary sources was how different they were from each other (in terms of the challenges they identified, the responses they offered, the classical sources they utilized, and more), a few patterns did emerge in the data analyzed:

1) Whether or not they explicitly discussed 20th and 21st century psychological research on resilience, most primary sources did employ or discuss at least one (and often, several) of the strategies that contemporary researchers have found help individuals and groups cultivate and activate resilience. Some strategies (like building and strengthening relationships, and reframing one's perspective) were employed and/or discussed with more frequency than others (like pursuing happiness and seeking help when needed).

2) A number of primary sources expressed that their authors and/or audience were not only finding it challenging to engage in justice work, they were also feeling some degree of distance from classical texts that became tied to Jewish justice work in the 20th century. Several sermons and text study sheets, in particular, invited their readers/listeners to renegotiate their relationships with popular quotes like "it's not up to you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it"[303] and popular phrases like "Tikkun Olam." However, perhaps most telling was that a majority of texts did *not* use any of these popular quotes or phrases. For example, the phrase "Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20), which is ubiquitous in 20th and 21st century Jewish justice discourse, appeared in only one of the sermons I collected.[304]

3) Similarly, those sermons and pieces of creative liturgy that discussed (and occasionally, offered rituals for) Jewish holidays often expressed, and then grappled with, a feeling of alienation from the holiday itself. Rosh HaShanah sermons mentioned a distinct lack of optimism about the year ahead; Yom Kippur sermons (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) grappled with how to make meaning of a day dedicated to a heightened

[303] MishnahAvot 2:16.
[304] This sermon, by Rabbi Jen Gubitz, invited listeners to think of "justice" more expansively than they had in the past. (Rabbi Jen Gubitz, "Immigrant Justice Drash," November 29, 2018).

awareness of mortality during a time period of already-heightened awareness of mortality; Shavuot sermons (and some composed for *Parshat Yitro*, in which the Torah is given) grappled with feelings of alienation from the concept of covenant. One of the major exceptions to this pattern was Tisha B'Av, a traditional day of mourning for various calamities (starting with the destructions of the first and second Temples); a number of creative liturgical pieces very actively embraced the practice of lament.

4) These sermons and other texts cite a wide array of sources, and told a wide variety of stories from classical Jewish texts, but some stories and time periods were invoked more frequently than others. Specifically, the biblical stories of the Ancient Israelites' time spent in slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-14) as well the story of the flood (Genesis 6-9) were analogized to the authors' present moment more than any other biblical stories (even the Israelites' wilderness wanderings, which make up a much larger part of the Torah, and are often used as a metaphor for political struggle). Various Talmudic stories set in the era immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple also made frequent appearances. An interesting recurring motif in many of the sermons that told stories was water.

5) When sermons and other texts held up 20th and 21st century individuals as role models after whom listeners/readers could pattern their behavior, they were most likely to tell the stories of Holocaust survivors (and/or Winston Churchhill), the families of people killed on September 11, 2001, and cancer survivors.

In the introduction, I mentioned that the impetus for this thesis was, in part, a desire to gather wisdom. Before I had collected or read any of the primary sources, I had no real ideas about what this "wisdom" might turn out to be. (Like some of the authors and the communities they addressed, I too was in a moment in which my previously held "mental map" or "assumptive framework" related to resilience in justice work had been challenged, and it had not yet been replaced with a new one.) But if I had had to guess, I think that I might have guessed that the "wisdom" gathered might (partially) come in the form of aphorisms (and interpretations of those aphorisms). I vaguely imagined frequent mentions of Pirkei Avot 2:16 ("It is not up to you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it"),[305] and maybe a few explications of

[305] As it turned out, I anticipated Pirkei Avot's appearance in the primary sources correctly, but it was used much less frequently than I might have imagined, and in different ways than I would have imagined, too.

particularly evocative quotes from the Exodus story.[306] I was wholly unprepared for the modality that many of the primary sources used to explore their topics, which was storytelling. I was also initially surprised that most of the stories that were told again and again - the Flood, Egypt, and life after the fall of the Second Temple - were so dire.

In retrospect, it is possible that in anticipating aphorisms, I was hoping for a quick answer, a way to return to previously held hopes and beliefs about how to make positive change in the world. But as the studies of post-traumatic growth, ambiguous loss, and pastoral care all teach, the way forward in the face of loss - especially the loss of one's previous framework for organizing the world and finding meaning in it - is not through slogans, but often, through stories, and the renegotiation of relationships (including, potentially, one's relationship with one's religious tradition, or one's relationship with other important sources of meaning). Losses (ambiguous or otherwise) need to be named and mourned, and stories of those losses and of the new possibilities that can emerge in their wake need to be told and retold. Many of the primary sources analyzed in this thesis (especially those that tell stories and those that grapple with the ways in which tried-and-true justice slogans and holidays no longer feel like good fits) offer us a window into the processes of individuals and communities who, in the wake of tremendous change and loss, were actively involved in meaning-making and the reconstitution of their narratives explaining how the world works and their own place within it. Perhaps some of these individuals and communities will continue to tell the story of 2016 to early 2022 in the ways they told the story of those years while they were happening, but likely, for most of them, their stories will evolve over time, as they are told and retold in the context of new life experiences, new

[306] Exodus 6:9 (which did not make an appearance in any of the texts) came to mind.

relationships, and ever-evolving personal and communal and identities. There is tremendous specific wisdom about how to remain resilient in justice work offered by many of these primary sources, but their collective wisdom is perhaps best understood not as a specific teaching, but rather as an orientation towards process, inquiry, storytelling, and growth.

Areas for Future Inquiry

In many ways, this thesis only scratches the surface of its topic. Over the past six years, a rich and varied discourse about (and practice of) resilience in justice work has flourished within and beyond the North American Jewish community, and only a slice of it is captured here. Further research could also analyze discourses of resilience in justice work in the following genres:

- Jewish rituals created in this time period;
- Jewish music composed in this time period;[307]
- the history of the emergence, training, and work of "movement chaplaincy" generally, and Jewish movement chaplaincy specifically;[308]
- lesson plans and other materials from trainings offered by Jewish justice organizations;
- the way Mussar is discussed and operationalized in contemporary Jewish discussion of resilience in justice work;
- Publicly available Purim shpiel scripts and/or creative Passover haggadot written in this time period;
- All of the above, in conversation with each other and with the content of this thesis.

[307] This thesis briefly analyzes the lyrics of a few Jewish resilience-in-justice songs composed between 2016-2022 (focusing on a few songs that fit the pattern of most of the sources analyzed in this thesis, which offer or embody strategies for resilience in justice work, and also cite classical Jewish sources to make their point). But this time period has been a time period of tremendous musical creativity, in which many songs and *niggunim* (wordless melodies) connected to resilience in justice work have been composed and sung. An analysis of these new compositions (and the uses to which they have been put by Jewish communities) that took into account aspects of this new music beyond its lyrics could be extremely interesting, both as an independent project and as a project to put in conversation with analyses of other contemporaneous Jewish justice discourses.

[308] For more on movement chaplaincy, see for example "In emerging role, chaplains are providing spiritual care for activists in movement across the nation," by Alejandra Molina, July 23, 2020. Accessed online at: https://religionnews.com/2020/07/23/in-emerging-role-chaplains-are-providing-spiritual-care-for-activists-in-movements-across-the-nation/.

Additionally, future research that limited itself to the genre of creative expression that this thesis analyzes (namely, sermons and other texts that: (1) describe and/or embody strategies for cultivating resilience in justice work and (2) cite at least one classical Jewish text in order to bolster their argument) could still be enriched by seeking out a wider sample set, in several different ways:

- Greater representation of communities around the globe: As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, contemporary discussions of resilience in justice work are by no means *only* happening in Jewish communities in the United States. Future research of rhetorics of resilience in justice in this time period would be greatly enhanced if it incorporated a more sizable sample of sermons and other creative works from Israel and other countries in the diaspora (possibly, in an ideal world, a large enough sample so as to explore the impact of national politics on the authors' worldview, as well as the ways in which ideas about resilience in justice work were and were not traveling between Jewish communities in different countries).
- More exhaustive representation of American Jewish communities. (This is important because all aspects of identity can have a powerful impact on a person's experiences in the world, and by extension, how they make meaning of those experiences.):
    - Movements: The primary sources this thesis analyzes are by no means limited to sources produced by members of the Reform Movement,[309] but as a student at a Reform seminary (and a lifelong member of the Movement), my Jewish networks skew towards liberal Judaism, and that may have impacted the proportions of how many sources (and particularly, sermons) I collected from each movement.
    - Geography: The American Midwest (outside of Chicago) and the American South (outside of Texas) are under-represented in the sources this thesis analyzes. This could reflect a genuine difference in regional discourses, but an exhaustive search of the websites of southern and midwestern Jewish communities (synagogues and other organizations), as well as personal outreach to communities that do not share past sermons on their websites but might have internal archives, would need to take place before any such conclusion could be reached.
    - Texts that reflect the full diversity of the American Jewish community, including in terms of race, gender identity, disability status, and so on: the majority of texts this thesis analyzes were composed by people who identify as white, Ashkenazi and cisgender. (And to my knowledge, a majority of the authors of texts this thesis analyzes also publicly identify as able-bodied.) This is reflective of the current demographics of the liberal North American rabbinate (rabbis wrote most of the primary sources I collected), but it is not representative of the current demographics of the North American Jewish community.

[309] An effect which was achieved in part by asking for sources on a number of multi-denominational organizational listservs and facebook pages, and independently searching for sermons and other sources on the websites of a wide variety of synagogues and other Jewish organizations.

Relatedly, those sermons and other texts I *did* collect could be categorized and analyzed in a variety of ways, and many of the patterns of categorization I did not employ could be interesting to explore in the future. For example, a future work examining the same sources (or an expanded data set, as above) could compare the ways primary sources' rhetorics of resilience varied (or stayed the same) depending on which justice issue(s) they were discussing, who their intended audience was, the precise year in which the source was composed, and the identity and life experiences of the author.

A future work could also delve more deeply into a pattern this thesis noted but did not discuss at length, namely, the preponderance of Holocaust stories that the sermons, in particular, employed. Similarly, if this thesis had had a sixth and seventh chapter, the sixth chapter would have been about the ways in which the primary sources discussed and operationalized the concept of "*hesed*," (lovingkindness), as compared to the way Jewish communities have understood *hesed* in other times and places, and the seventh chapter would have delved more deeply into the ways many of the High Holy Day sermons invoked and reinterpreted aspects of the High Holy Days liturgy. I discuss a few of these acts of invocation and reinterpretation in Chapter Two, but there is room for further analysis. For example, the sermons offer a wide variety of creative definitions and interpretations of *t'shuvah, t'filah,* and *tzedakah,*[310] and it could be fruitful to put these in conversation with one another and with Jewish interpretations of all three words over time. The same could be said for the many different interpretations of the

[310] The three activities that the U'netaneh Tokef states will change "the evil of the decree" (i.e., will either literally change someone's fate or, to paraphrase Alan Lew, will change how someone experiences the challenges that are an inevitable part of life). In a number of 20th and 21st century American Jewish prayerbooks this phrase is translated as "repentance, prayer, and charity," though *tzedakah* can also refer to justice more broadly.

meaning of the Shofar these sermons offer, and, to a lesser extent, their engagement with Genesis 21-22.[311]

Yet another productive avenue for inquiry could be a sustained analysis of the ways in which the primary sources do and do not talk about God (which is related to the question of how the primary sources conceptualize and frame the practice of prayer). God was sometimes a prominent subject or addressee of a given work, and often went completely unmentioned; similarly, those primary sources that discussed or modeled the practice of prayer did so in a wide variety of ways. What seems very clear is that the primary sources contain a vast array of personal theologies (each one conceptualizing God, and God's relationship to humanity, it a slightly different way), and it could be very fruitful to mine them for patterns.

It is also worth noting that the time frame from which these primary sources were drawn (2016-2021, with a few sources that were composed in January 2022 in response to Colleyville) had both intentional and arbitrary elements. 2016 was an intentional starting point, but 2021 was a more arbitrary cut off (which I stretched a bit by also including a few sermons written in January of 2022 in response to Colleyville) primarily driven by the deadline for completing this thesis. As I write these words, Jewish communal conversations about resilience in justice work (as well as related topics, like hope) only seem to be gathering steam. This could be an interesting era for someone to look back on a decade or more in the future (when its start and end times are more clearly defined, and when some of the things that make this time period

[311] These are the chapters of Torah from which the traditional Rosh HaShanah Day 1 and Day 2 morning readings are taken. It was not widely engaged with in the Rosh HaShanah sermons I read, but those that did engage with it tended to focus on Hagar's experience of believing all hope was lost (for the survival of her son in the desert) before God opened her eyes and she saw a well (Genesis 21:19),

distinctive will be more clear to the person doing the research, because they themselves are living in a different time period).

Finally, as discussed in the introduction, this thesis attempts a relatively in-depth engagement with the definition(s) of the concept of "resilience," but it leaves the word "justice" largely undefined (relying heavily on the authors' own operational definitions, in the case of primary sources that were sent to me by their authors in response to my research inquiries, or, in the case of sources that I found independently, relying on the broad criterion that the sources needed to discuss systemic change work in some way). This seems to be a moment in which Jewish communities' accepted methodologies for engaging in "justice" or "change" work *and* their working definitions of "justice" and "systemic change" are in flux, and it could be very interesting for future research to engage in a broader analysis of discussions of justice in contemporary Jewish sermons, creative liturgy, poems, songs, texts studies, rituals, art, etc. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, "resilience" in general (not just in justice work) became the topic of a great deal of the creative output of the global Jewish community. It could be interesting to compare the ways "resilience" is discussed in this thesis' primary sources with the ways "resilience" has been discussed in primary sources from the same time period that do not have an orientation towards systemic change work.

Bibliography (Primary Sources)

Arlin, Tricia. "A Shavuot Blessing for Essential and Sacred Workers." *Trisha Arlin: Words of Prayer and Intention* (triganza.blogspot.com). May 5, 2021. Accessed online: http://triganza.blogspot.com/2021/05/a-shavuot-blessing-for-essential-and.html.

Arlin, Tricia. "Chag Ha-Atzeret (Day of Stopping)." *Trisha Arlin: Words of Prayer and Intention* (triganza.blogspot.com). May 5, 2021. Accessed online: http://triganza.blogspot.com/2021/05/chag-ha-atzeret-day-of-stopping.html.

Arlin, Tricia. "Fear, Despair (and Faith): The Lily Among the Thorns." *Trisha Arlin: Words of Prayer and Intention* (triganza.blogspot.com). February 14, 2020. Accessed online: https://triganza.blogspot.com/2020/02/the-lily-among-thorns-fear-despair-and.html?m=1.

Artson, Bradley Shavit."Leadership for Troubled Times," Ordination Address at Ziegler School of Rabbinical Studies, Los Angeles, California, May 9, 2018. Reprinted with permission in *No Time for Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from An Era of Upheaval* (Ed. Michael Rose Knopf and Miriam Aniel. Independently Published (2021)), pp.57-62.

Barenblatt, Rachel. "Hefker," in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), p.154.

Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt, "2021/5782: Anew." Accessed online: https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/new-years-poems.html.

Bernstein, Aryeh. "Most of Us Didn't Make It Out: The Dark Loneliness of Freedom Fighting - D'var Torah for Parshat Bo." *Avodah.* January 22, 2021. Accessed online: https://avodah.net/most-of-us-didnt-make-it-out-the-dark-loneliness-of-freedom-fighting-dvar-torah-for-parashat-bo/.

Bernstein, Aryeh. "Today is Pregnant with Eternity: The Dread and Possibility of the New Year." *Jewschool.* September 18, 2020. Accessed online: https://jewschool.com/today-is-pregnant-with-eternity-the-dread-and-the-possibility-of-5781.

Brous, Sharon. "A World Is Dying, A World is Being Born," Rosh HaShanah 5781, posted online September 19, 2020, Ikar, Los Angeles, CA: https://ikar.org/wp-content/uploads/RH1-World-Dying-World-Being-Born-1-1.pdf.

Brous, Sharon. "Building a New America (Rosh HaShanah 5779)." September 10, 2018, Ikar, Los Angeles, CA. Accessed online: https://ikar.org/wp-content/uploads/RH1-Building-a-New-America.pdf.

Rabbi Sharon Brous, "Sometimes Love is a Call to Action," Kol Nidre 5781/2020, September 27, 2020, Ikar, Los Angeles, CA, Accessed online:

https://ikar.org/wp-content/uploads/KN-Love-is-a-Call-to-Action.docx.pdf.

Buchdahl, Angela. "Captives of Hope." January 21, 2022, Central Synagogue, New York, NY. Accessed online:https://www.centralsynagogue.org/worship/sermons/captives-of-hope.

Calamaro, Anna. "Resilience in the Fight for Social Justice based on 'How to Stay Resilient in the Long-Term Fight for Social Justice' by Reina Gattuso." August 1, 2020. Source sheet accessed online: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/254411?lang=bi.

Cohler-Esses, Dianne. "Between the Horror and The Hope." Sermon delivered to Romemu in New York City on January 9, 2021 and reprinted with permission in *No Time For Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from An Era of Upheaval* (Ed. Michael Rose Knopf and Miriam Aniel, 2021), pp.215-228.

Conde, Nathan, Kraut, Rachel, Vallarta, Emilio, and Dulberg, Sophie. "Kehillah High Teens: It's Time for a Green New Deal." *Jewish Herald-Voice* [Houston, Texas,] March 11, 2021, https://jhvonline.com/kehillah-high-teens-its-time-for-a-green-new-deal-p28846-159.htm.

Conover, Shoshana. "Chukat: A Lesson in Trauma-Informed Care." in *The Social Justice Torah Commentary,* Ed. Barry H. Block. New York, NY: *CCAR Press.* (2021), pp.243-248.

Cowans, Deena. "Erev Rosh HaShanah 5781: There Can Be Miracles When You Believe," posted online September 24, 2020. Mishkan Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. Accessed online: https://www.mishkanchicago.org/erev-rosh-hashanah-5781-there-can-be-miracles-when-you-believe/.

DeBlossi, Nikki. "Hope: Grab Hold of the Thread" (Rosh HaShanah 5780/2019). September 30, 2019. Sermon delivered at New York University Hillel, New York, NY and accessed online: https://medium.com/curious/hope-grab-hold-of-the-thread-4aaac7094760.

Eger, Denise. "From Despair to Hope: Facing Our Depths and Lifting Towards Hope" (Rosh HaShanah 5780/2019). September 30, 2019. Sermon Delivered to Congregation Kol Ami in Los Angeles, California, and accessed online: https://rabbieger.com/2019/10/01/from-despair-to-hope-facing-our-depths-and-lifting-toward-hope/.

Ellberg, Amy. "Overturning an Unjust Regime? This Week's Torah Portion Has A Lot To Say." January 10, 2019, https://www.rabbiamyeilberg.com/post/overturning-an-unjust-regime.

Feuchs, Chelsea. "Compassion and Climate Change," Central Synagogue, New York City, NY, December 31, 2021. Accessed online: https://www.centralsynagogue.org/worship/sermons/compassion-and-climate-change.

Freudenstein, Sofia. "Eliyahu HaNavi and Burnout." Sunday, October 11, 2020. Sermon delivered in honor of Simchat Torah, Shaarei Shomayim, Toronto, Ontario.

Frishman, Elise, Ed. *Mishkan Tefilah: A Reform Siddur: Shabbat, Evenings, and Festivals,* New York: CCAR Press (2007). Kindle Edition.

Greene, Amanda. "The Real Kind of Hope (Rosh HaShanah 5777)." Chicago Sinai Congregation, Chicago, Illinois. Posted online October 2, 2016: https://www.chicagosinai.org/worship/sermons/the-real-kind-of-hope.

Goldstein, Hannah. "At The Edge of Destruction and Creation (Rosh HaShanah 5781)." September 19, 2020. Sermon delivered to Temple Sinai, Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2020/09/At-the-Edge-of-Destruction-and-Creation.pdf.

Goldstein, Hannah. "Pitching Tents in the Wilderness (Rosh HaShanah 5782)." September 7, 2021. Sermon delivered to Temple Sinai. Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2021/09/Pitching-Tents-in-the-Wilderness.pdf.

Goldstein, Hannah. "You've Got To Get Up Every Morning (Yom Kippur 5782)." Sermon delivered to Temple Sinai. September 16, 2021. Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2021/09/Youve-Got-to-Get-Up-Every-Morning.pdf.

Gubitz, Jen. "Fighting Complicit Silence: A Rabbi's Commitment." Sermon delivered to Riverway Project and to broader Temple Israel of Boston community. June 2020. Boston, Massachusetts.

Gubitz, Jen. "Immigrant Justice Drash 11/29/18." Sermon delivered to Temple Israel of Boston. November 29, 2018. Boston, Massachusetts.

Gubitz, Jen. "Parshat Shemini: Vayidom: When We Are Silent." Sermon delivered to Riverway Project of Temple Israel of Boston. April 13, 2018. Boston, Massachusetts.

Gubitz, Jen. "Parshat Vayeitze: Ramping Up." Sermon Delivered to Temple Israel of Boston. December 9, 2016. Boston, Massachusetts.

Halpert, Aly, "Beautiful People (Toch Emunei)" (2018), lyrics and recording accessed online: https://soundcloud.com/aly-halpert/beautiful-people-toch-emunei.

Hochberg, Anat Halevy and Halpert, Aly, "I'm Not Alone" (2020), lyrics and recording published on the "Let My People Sing!" YouTube channel, and accessed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKLTDSs_wpg.

Holtzblatt, Lauren. "Rosh HaShanah 5780: Facing the World." Sermon Delivered to Adas Israel Congregation. September 30, 2019. Washington, D.C. Accessed online:

https://images.shulcloud.com/1039/uploads/docs/FacingtheWorld5780.pdf.

Holtzblatt, Lauren. "Rosh HaShanah 5781." Sermon Delivered to Adas Israel Congregation. September 19, 2020. Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://images.shulcloud.com/1039/uploads/RoshHashanah57811.docx

Holtzblatt, Lauren. Sermon on January 23, 2022. Adas Israel Congregation. Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2JXpMeTpjI.

Hughes-Robinson, Margo. "Mishpatim 2020/5780." Shabbat of February 21-22, 2020. Sermon delivered at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, New York, NY.

Katz, Allen. "Noah: A Biblical Model for Contemporary Climate Calamities." *Derech Eretz* blog, October 2, 2021, accessed online: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/350731?lang=bi.

Kail, Cassi. "Riding The Waves (Erev Rosh HaShanah 5782)." Delivered September 5, 2021, and posted online September 23, 2021. Temple Beth El, San Pedro, CA. Accessed online at: https://bethelsp.org/rabbi-cassis-erev-rosh-hashanah-sermon-5782/.

Kleinbaum, Sharon. "Building our Foundation Stone in a Time of Plagues." September 18, 2020. Sermon delivered to Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, New York, NY. Accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKsjLjSlqM0.

Kleinbaum, Sharon. "Rosh HaShanah Day One Morning Sermon 5779." September 10, 2017. Sermon delivered to Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, New York, NY. Accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1aq-yX3Ojc.

Kleinbaum, Sharon. "Two Days After the U.S. Capitol Is Attacked." Sermon delivered to Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in New York City on January 8, 2021, and reprinted in *No Time For Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from An Era of Upheaval* (Ed. Michael Rose Knopf and Miriam Aniel. Independently Published (2021), pp. 229-238.

Lappee, Benay. "An Unrecognizable Jewish Future: A Queer Talmudic Take." Eli Talk, May 29, 2014, accessed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBWIEAR_GQY).

Laufer, Sari. "Resilience Through The Ages: Lessons from Dr. Brene Brown and Honi the Circle Maker." May 12, 2021. Source sheet accessed online: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/322291?lang=bi.

Levine, Batya. "We Are Good, We Are Flawed," on the Album *Karov* (August 20, 2020). Accessed online: https://batyalevine.bandcamp.com/track/we-are-good-we-are-flawed.

Margles, Miriam. "Dismantling (And Building Anew)" (Erev Rosh HaShanah 5781). Sermon delivered to the Danforth Jewish Circle, September 18, 2020. Toronto, Ontario. Accessed online: https://djctoronto.com/erev-rosh-hashana-5781-dismantling-and-building-anew/.

Markus, David Evan. “A Blessing: For Planting the Future,” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), pp.64-65.

Markus, David Evan. “A Duet for Selichot: Our Selichot to God/God’s Selichot to Us” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), pp.212-213.

Markus, David Evan. “After/אחר,” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), pp.192-193.

Markus, David Evan. “Al HaNissim: Future Miracles Unfolding Now,” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), pp.40-41.

Markus, David Evan. “Al HaNissim: Unmasking the Future’s Past,” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), p.103.

Markus, David Evan. “Overhead,” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), p.156.

Marmur, Michael. “Toward a More Complete Return.” Yom Kippur D’var Torah Composed in 2021 for *Rabbis for Human Rights.* Jerusalem, Israel. Accessed online at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MYo6s4t50AS9oGzo2h5zCTaFo9UT2lxA/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=106981278040655643968&rtpof=true&sd=true.

Meirowitz Nelson, Lev. “Bringing Holiness to the Front Lines,” Human Rights Shabbat 2017 Discussion Guide and Text Study, *T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights:* https://truah.org/resources/bringing-holiness-to-the-front-lines/.

Miller, Kelilah. “Keeping the Faith: Hope and Resilience in Times of Despair,” October 27, 2017. Text Study accessed online: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/84430?lang=bi.

Missaghieh, Michelle. “Now What? Resilience During and After COVID 19. (Yom Kippur 2021).” September 16, 2021, Sermon delivered to Temple Israel of Hollywood, Los Angeles, CA. Accessed online: https://www.tioh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/YK-Sermon-2021-Final.pdf.

Nussbaum, Rachel, “Riding the Waves on Planks: Epigenetics, Pin-Pricks, and Tools for Resilience” (Kol Nidre 2017). Sermon delivered to The Kavana Cooperative. September 29, 2017. Seattle, Washington. Accessed online: https://www.kavana.org/notes/kol-nidrei-sermon-riding-the-waves-on-planks.

Perlman, Jill. “Rosh HaShanah 2017/5778 ‘A Letter to My Children.’” September 21, 2017. Accessed online: http://rabbijillperlman.blogspot.com/2017/09/rosh-hashanah-20175778-letter-to-my.html

Perlman, Jill. “We Are the Hope.” September 19, 2020. Accessed online: http://rabbijillperlman.blogspot.com/2020/09/we-are-hope.html

Pesner, Jonah. “Afterword.” in *The Social Justice Torah Commentary,* Ed. Barry H. Block. New York, NY: *CCAR Press.* (2021), pp. 339-334.

Pinkney, Kendell. “Into the Unknown” (Parshat BeShalach 2021). *Ammud: Jews of Color Torah Academy Blog.* January 29, 2021. Accessed online: https://www.ammud.org/blogposts/parashat-beshallach.

Reynolds, Mackenzie Zev. “T’rumah: The Heart-Incited Offering - Interdependence, Redistribution, and Community Care.” in *The Social Justice Torah Commentary,* Ed. Barry H. Block. New York, NY: *CCAR Press.* (2021), pp. 111-115.

Romney-Rosa, Imani and Lippmann, Ellen. “B’haalotcha: Shedding Light on Solidarity - A Candle Loses Nothing by Lighting Another Candle.” in *The Social Justice Torah Commentary,* Ed. Barry H. Block. New York, NY: *CCAR Press.* (2021), pp.215-222.

Roos, Jonathan. “The Honest and the Good (Rosh HaShanah 5780).” September 30, 2019. Temple Sinai, Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2019/10/RH-5780-AM-Rabbi-Roos-Ethics-Sermon.pdf.

Roos, Jonathan. “Chesed (and Lawyers) Will Save Us (Yom Kippur 5779).” September 19, 2018. Temple Sinai, Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2018/10/9.19.18-YK-Sanc-Sermon-JSR-2.mp3.

Roos, Jonathan. “The Torah of Perseverance (Yom Kippur 5781).” September 28, 2020. Temple Sinai, Washington, D.C. Accessed online: https://templesinaidc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2020/09/YK-Sermon-5781-Roos.pdf.

Rosenthal, Rebecca. “When The World Swirls Around You.” July 1, 2021. Accessed online: https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/333266.19.

Schwarz, Sid. “Staying Sane in a World Gone Mad” (Kol Nidre 5779). Sermon delivered to Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation, Bethesda Maryland, September 18, 2018, and reprinted with permission in *No Time for Neutrality: American Rabbinic Voices from an Era of Upheaval,* Ed. Michael Rose Knopf and Miriam Aniel. Independently Published (2021), pp.74-84.

Sichel, Ilana. “The Nazi History of This Yiddish Protest Banner,” January 23, 2017, *The Jewish Telegraph Agency,* published online: https://www.jta.org/jewniverse/2017/the-holocaust-history-of-nycs-yiddish-trump-protest-banner.

Silbert, Steve. “Overhead,” in *From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry and Art of the Pandemic Era.* Williamstown, MA: Bayit - Building Jewish (2022), p.157.

Silow-Carroll, Andrew. “Noah’s Ark Is One Weird Bedtime Story,” October 14, 2021, published in the *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent:* https://www.jewishexponent.com/2021/10/14/noahs-ark-is-one-weird-bedtime-story/.

Spitzer, Toba. “Active Hope (Rosh HaShanah 5777).” October 3, 2016, Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, Newton, MA. Sermon accessed online: https://www.dorsheitzedek.org/divrei-torah/rabbi-toba-spitzer?post_id=358264.

Strausberg, Avi. “Out of The Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience,” an asynchronous learning opportunity first offered in the summer of 2021 by Hadar’s Project Zug (www.projectzug.org).

Stutman, Shira and Malina, Joshua, *Chutzpod!.* Episode: “bonus after Colleyville,” January 18, 2022. Accessed online at: https://chutzpod.com/blog/bonus-after-colleyville.

Traylor, Evan. “Rekindling Our Eternal Lights” (Parshat Tetzaveh 2021). *Ammud: Jews of Color Torah Academy Blog.* February 26, 2021. Accessed online: https://www.ammud.org/blogposts/parashat-tetzaveh.

Traylor, Evan. “URJ Biennial 2019 Shabbat Sermon.” December 2019, Chicago, Illinois. Accessed online: https://evantraylor.com/urj-biennial-2019-shabbat-sermon/.

Waskow, Arthur. “Tales of the Spirit Rising,” *The Shalom Center.* July 21, 2021, accessed online at: https://theshalomcenter.org/content/tales-spirit-rising

Weiner, Zusha. “A ‘Daf’ Appeared to Me: Words To Keep Us Afloat,” October 28, 2018, *Evolve: Groundbreaking Jewish Conversations:* https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/daf-appeared/.

Weiss, Dina. “On Being Good Enough: Parshat Noach 5778.” D’var Torah Accessed Online at: https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/being-good-enough.

Whitehead, Kelly. “Pride Shabbat D’var Torah.” June 28, 2021, Beth Emet, Evanston, Illinois. Accessed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9DTCdawkTc.

Yergin, Marina. “High Holy Days Sermon 2017.” Sermon delivered over the 2017 High Holy Days (September 20-30, 2017), Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, Texas.

Yergin, Marina. “Walk Humbly With Your God: High Holy Days 5782.” Sermon Delivered over the 2021 High Holy Days (September 6-16, 2021), Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, Texas. Accessed online: https://www.beth-elsa.org/wp-content/uploads/Walk-Humbly-with-Your-God-5782-Rabbi-Yergin.pdf.

Zamore, Mary. “D’var Torah for WRN Convention (Parshat Korach),” June 7, 2021, Virtual Gathering.

Zamore, Mary. “Moral Injury Case Study Presented by Mary L. Zamore, Executive Director, Women’s Rabbinic Network,” at *Moral Injury and Soul Repair, A Jewish Perspective: A Conference for Clergy and Other Mental Health and Helping Professionals.* June 2-3, 2021, held on zoom, hosted by HUC-JIR.

Zinn, Todd. “Our Yavneh (Rosh HaShanah Evening 5781 Sermon)”, Chicago Sinai Congregation, Chicago, Illinois. Posted online September 20, 2020: https://www.chicagosinai.org/worship/sermons/our-yavneh.

Biblical, Mishnaic, Talmudic, and Select Midrashic Texts Cited In The Thesis

Genesis 1-2
- Genesis 1:26-27
- Genesis 2:7
- Genesis 2:15

Genesis 6-9
- Genesis 6:9
- Genesis 6:11
- Genesis 6:13
- Genesis 6:14-21
- Genesis 8:3
- Genesis 8:21-22
- Genesis 9:9-17

Genesis 17:1
Genesis 18:20
Genesis 18:27
Genesis 21-22
Deuteronomy 16:20
Exodus 1-14
- Exodus 1:15-19
- Exodus 2:3 and 2:6
- Exodus 2:11
- *Parshat Bo* (Exodus 10:1-13:16)
- Exodus 14:15
- Exodus 14:21-22
- Exodus 14:23

Exodus 18:18
Exodus 27:20
*Parshat Korach (*Numbers 16:1-18:32)
Numbers 27:1-11
Deuteronomy 6:18

Jeremiah 20:17
Hosea 6:6
Micah 6:8
Zechariah 9:12
Lamentations

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5
Mishnah Avot 2:16
Mishnah Avot 5:6

BT Berakhot 7a
BT Berakhot 61b
BT Shabbat 33b
BT Taanit 11a
BT Taanit 20a
BT Taanit 23a
BT Yevamot 121a
BT Kiddushin 72b
BT Bava Metzia 30b
BT Bava Batra 73b
BT Sanhedrin 108a
BT Makkot 24a-b
BT Menachot 29a
Avot D'Rabbi Natan 4:5

Mekhilta D'Rabbi Yishmael on Exodus 12
BaMidbar Rabba 1:7
Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:2
Kohelet Rabba 7:13
Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 11:5

Bibliography (Secondary Sources)

Adler, Rachel. "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament," *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly,* New York: Fall 2014.

APA, "Building Your Resilience," January 1, 2012 (Updated February 1, 2020), accessed online at: https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience

Bandura, Albert (1997). *Self Efficacy: The Exercise of Control.* W.H. Freeman & Co.

Boss, Pauline. *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live With Unresolved Grief,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1999).

Boss, Pauline. *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience: Therapeutic Work With Ambiguous Loss.* W.W. Norton & Co. (2018).

Boss, Pauline. *The Myth of Closure: Ambiguous Loss in a Time of Pandemic and Change,* New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company (2021).

Brenner, Grant (2017). "Considering Collective Moral Injury Following the 2016 Election," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis,* 53(4): 547-560.

Brenner, Grant, Bush, Daniel, and Moses, Joshua. (Eds.) *Creating Spiritual and Psychological Resilience: Integrating Care in Disaster Relief Work.* Taylor & Francis. (2010).

Buber, Martin. *Tales of the Hasidim: Book One: The Early Masters and Book Two: The Late Masters,* translated by Olga Marx. New York, NY: Schocken Books (1991).

Calhoun, L., Shakespeare-Finch, J., Taku, K., and Tedeschi, R. *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications.* Taylor & Francis. (2018).

Clayton, S., and Manning, C. Eds.) *Psychology and Climate Change: Human Perceptions, Impacts, and Responses*, Elsevier. (2018)

Davis, Christopher and Nolen-Hoeksema, Susan (2001), "Loss and Meaning: How Do People Make Sense of Loss?" *American Behavioral Scientist,* 44 (5): 726-741.

Doehring, Carrie. "Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress," in *Pastoral Psychology* v. 64 (2015).

Graham, Larry Kent. "The Healing Power of Public Lamentation," talk delivered at *Pathways to Hope Conference,* Soul Repair Center, Kansas City, KS, October 30, 2015. Revised for

Distribution December 29, 2015. Personal communication from author.

Ellison, Koshin Paley and Craig L. Katz, Craig "Rituals, Routines, and Resilience," in Grant H. Brenner, Daniel H. Bush and Joshua Moses. *Creating Spiritual and Psychological Resilience: Integrating Care in Disaster Relief Work,* New York: Routledge (2010), Kindle Edition, pp.181-194.

Firestone, Tirzah (2019). *Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma,* Monkfish Book Publishing.

Frank, Arthur, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (second edition), Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2013).

Frankel, Victor (1959). *Man's Search for Meaning,* Beacon Press.

Geringer, Kim and Wiener, Nancy. "Insights into Moral Injury and Soul Repair from Classical Jewish Texts," *Pastoral Psychology* 68 no.1 (February 2019).

Gillham, Jane (2000). *The Science of Optimism and Hope: Research Essays in Honor of Martin E.P. Seligman.* Templeton Press.

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Oettingen, G. (2019). Goal Attainment. In R. M. Ryan (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of human motivation* (2nd ed., pp. 247–268). Oxford University Press.

Hutcheon, E., & Wolbring, G. (2013). "Cripping" Resilience: Contributions from Disability Studies to Resilience Theory. *M/C Journal*, *16*(5). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.697.

Jacobs, Jill. (2009). *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice through Jewish Law & Tradition,* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing.

Ledoux, Kathleen. "Understanding Compassion Fatigue: Understanding Compassion," in *Journal of Advanced Nursing,* 71:9 (September 2015), pp.2041-2050.

Kirmayer, Sehdev, Whitley, Dandeneau, and Isaac, "Community Resilience: Models, Metaphors and Measures," in *Journal of Aboriginal Health* (November 2009), pp.63-117.

Kushlev, Kostadin, Drummond, Danielle, Heintzelman, Samantha, and Diener, Ed. *Do happy people care about society's problems?,* The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15:4, (2020) 467-477.

Kushlev, Kostadin , Radosic, Nina, and Diener, Ed. "Subjective Well Being and Prosociality Around The Globe: Happy People Give More of Their Time and Money To Others," Social Psychology and Personality Science 20:10 (2021).

Lopez, S., Pedrotti, T.P., and Snyder, C.R. (2018). *Positive Psychology: The Scientific and Practical Explorations of Human Strength.* SAGE Publications.

Ondrejkova, Natalia and Halamova, Julia, "Prevalence of Compassion Fatigue Among Helping Professions and Relationship to Compassion for Others, Self-Compassion, and Self-Criticism" in *Health and Social Care In the Community.* (Published online: February 8, 2022.) Accessed online at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hsc.13741.

Oxford English Dictionary. "perseverance_n.1a-c." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press.

Oxford English Dictionary. "resilience, n." OED online. 2021. Oxford University Press.

Peres, Julio, Moreira-Almeida, Alexander, Nasello, Antonia Gladys and Koenig, Harold. "Spirituality and Resilience in Trauma Victims," in *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Sep., 2007), pp. 343-350. Accessed online at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27513.

Pfefferbaum, B., Reissman, D., Pfefferbaum, R., Klomp, R., and Gurwich, R., "Building Resilience to Mass Trauma Events" (2007), in Doll, Bonzo, Mercy, and Sleet (Eds.) *Handbook of Injury and Violence Prevention,* Springer, 347-358.

Seligman, Martin (2018). *The Hope Circuit: A Psychologist's Journey from Helplessness to Optimism.* PublicAffairs: Hachette Book Group.

Steven M. Southwick, George A. Bonanno, Ann S. Masten, Catherine Panter-Brick & Rachel Yehuda (2014). "Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology,* 5(1), DOI: 10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338

Tedeschi, Richard, Shakespeare-Finch, Jane, Taku, Kanako, and Calhoun, Lawrence G., *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications*. New York: Routledge (2018).

Walsh, Froma. *Strengthening Family Ties and Resilience: Third Edition,* New York: The Guilford Press (2015).

Wiener, Nancy H., and Hirschmann, Jo. *Maps and Meaning: Levitical Models for Contemporary Care,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press (2014).