Reykam Al T'shiveinu: Do Not Bring Us Back Empty:
Narratives of Spiritual Resilience in TaNaKh, Prayer and Living Practice

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ABSTRACT

The Hebrew Bible/TaNaKh bears witness to human and holy resilience. Yet it does more than witness. It also teems with resources for us to draw from to find expansiveness in the work of *Tikkun Olam,* the repair of the world, even when circumstances appear constricting. The endurance of the Jewish people for centuries demonstrates the capacity of this layered, multivalent literature to empower those on the margins to sustain and thrive, often in the face of immense adversity. Taken collectively, its narratives and poetry contain infinite access points for individuals and groups seeking solace and courage in their own stories of rebuilding from trauma, and emerging more whole.

This thesis mines core texts from the TaNaKh for their expertise in teaching us to see resilience as an unfolding narrative of transformation, from trauma and scarcity, to expansiveness and sustainability. In addition to the traditional voices of TaNaKh, this thesis shares the wisdom of contemporary voices of poets, prophetic spiritual leaders, and prayer practitioners, who see their personal resilience journeys linked to those of our ancestors.

In the Introduction, I define a three-part narrative arc of resilience that I use to frame all of the texts and interviews that follow. In Chapter One, Resilience in TaNaKh, I analyze four distinct TaNaKh narratives that illustrate nuanced paths towards finding resilience in the face of loss, leadership challenges and identity transformation. In Chapter Two, Psalms, Poetry, Prayers of Solace and Sustenance, I explore selected Hebrew psalms, poetry, and prayer practices uniquely well-suited for individuals looking to cultivate a resilience routine. Chapter Three, Wisdom from the Field, features interviews with rabbi-activists on the frontlines of social change. In Chapter Four, Awakening a Resilient Community, I share a detailed account of a successful spiritual leadership convening on resilience as modeled by T'ruah. Finally, I include a Supplemental Resources section, with additional suggested resources for building a personal resilience tool-kit and pressing questions.

What do the venerated works of TaNaKh, poetry, and prayer say to the challenges of today? How do they model the resilience that enabled an ancient people to surmount the crises of the past and to produce a vision of a just future worth striving toward? What can the stories, prayers, and practices embedded in the TaNaKh teach those of us committed to persist with integrity in the work of Tikkun for this world? The purpose of the present work is to provide some answers to these weighty questions. By embracing a diversity of resources and approaches, this work aims to illustrate the multi-faceted nature of opportunities for resilience building in the hope that this will open up new vistas when pressures seem to preclude or limit options.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Min hametzar karati Yah, Anani vamerchav Yah.

From the Narrow place I called out to God, who answered me with Divine Expanse. [1]

(Psalm 118:5)

I held this verse in my heart as I held hands this summer with a Southern Baptist community organizer from Atlanta in a moment of shared, silent prayer. We brought our hands together during a Millennial Leaders Conference for preachers, poets and activists from across diverse religious, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The goal: uncover shared tools for spiritual resilience. We'd been selected particularly for strong faith backgrounds, which the conveners hoped would spark dialogue on the rituals, prayers and mindfulness practices that inspired us to be leaders of our generation. Yet we spoke like weary warriors, not energetic 20 and 30 somethings. Somewhat disillusioned with sexual, racial and economic battles we couldn't believe were still ours to fight, we brought our battle scars to the table. One young black theology student walked out of a mindfulness session meant to help us manage stress; walking meditation to him meant pause, breathe, scan the street to see if police might stop him just for existing.

Hearing the confused, impassioned tropes of my peers, I couldn't help but think about Parshat Toledot, the Torah portion in which our ancestor Rebekah cries as she labors in challenging pregnancy "*Lama ze anochi*?" Why am I?" Why am I, alone in this world to destined

[1] Translation by Rabbi Shefa Gold.

to withstand this particular moment?[2] Rebekah cries not only in physical pain, but in bewildered wonder. The *anochi,* "I" connotes, a strong sense of self. Rebekah yearns to find out what her purpose is in this unprecedented time.[3] Apparently she could not find anyone to take her hand, to assure her that women before have survived the liminality of her condition, no one to advise her in the responsibility of raising children in a state of conflict. Rebekah, whose name ironically means 'to join" or connect, is a literal embodiment of generational isolation and confusion.

We too experience isolation, and consternation when we cry out "Why us?" without sensing our connection to a larger, intergenerational story of resilience. We risk losing the larger picture as we drown in the present-day struggle to prioritize, when nearly every demand, personal or professional, feels urgent. We deplete before we can build a foundation to stand on, especially when we do not reach beyond our life experience. I realized, on my way back from the millenials convening, that we had neglected, in that well-intentioned peer community, to draw on ancestral texts and traditions that were readily available wells of wisdom on resilience. I understood that in order to be activists over a lifetime, I and my aspiring peer clergy needed these tools to address spiritual sustenance from the inside-out. Reflecting on the experience, I resolved as I approached rabbinic ordination, to root my own journey of spiritual leadership in the time-tested sources of sacred narrative that have sustained the Jewish people for millennia. The unfolding thesis is the result of that realization/resolve.

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[2] Parshat Toledot 25:22.
[3] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Hara Person offer this interpretation of "*Lama ze anochi"* in *The Torah, A Women's Commentary,* p. 138.

The Hebrew Bible/TaNaKh bears witness to human and holy resilience. But it does more than witness. It also teems with resources for us to draw from to find expansiveness in the work of *Tikkun Olam,* the repair of the world, even when circumstances appear constricting. The endurance of the Jewish people for centuries demonstrates the capacity of this layered, multivalent literature to empower those on the margins to sustain and thrive, often in the face of immense adversity. Taken collectively, its narratives and poetry contain infinite access points for individuals and groups. Those seeking solace and those needing courage can find in it their own stories of rebuilding from trauma and challenge.

The Hebrew designation of the sacred writings, namely *TaNaKh*, bears an important distinction from the common English term, "Bible." This matters especially when we consider its wisdom on resilience. While Bible, or Torah, connotes a single, singular voice, TaNaKh, a three part acronym for Torah/Teaching/Five Books of Moses – Neviim/Prophets – Ketuvim/Writings rings more like a symphony. It encompasses the large collection of biblical stories, psalms, prayers and writings that have shaped the Jewish communal narrative. The TaNaKh offers us an awesome diversity of perspectives for exploring the topic at hand.

What do these rightly esteemed works say to the challenges of today? How do they model the resilience that enabled an ancient people to surmount the crises of the past and to produce a vision of a just future worth striving toward? What can the stories, prayers, and practices embedded in the TaNaKh teach those of us today, committed to persist with integrity in

the work of Tikkun for this world? The purpose of the present work is to provide some important responses to these weighty and pressing questions.

This thesis mines core texts parts of TaNaKh for their expertise in teaching us to see resilience as an unfolding narrative of transformation, from trauma and scarcity, to an expansive, sustainable state of being. In addition to the traditional voices of TaNaKh, this thesis shares the wisdom of contemporary voices of poets, prophetic spiritual leaders, and prayer practitioners, who see their personal resilience journeys linked to those of our ancestors.

No two resilience narratives are alike, just as no two experiences of brokenness and regeneration may be conflated with one another. While appreciating this truth, this thesis identifies three crucial patterns that emerge within the arc of any narrative of resilience. It examines each of them within our sources:

1. **Resisting silence in order to act as an agent in one's own transformation.**
2. **Seeking partnership to re-form an identity that transcends victimhood.**
3. **Having one's transformed identity reflected back by partners and other witnesses.**

Each major section of this thesis follows a resilience arc, and expands on the resilience themes identified here through a variety of different mediums. These include: biblical textual analysis, study and practice of prayer, psalm and poetry, personal interviews with experienced rabbis in the field. It concludes with an analysis of a contemporary convening on resilience for clergy on the front-lines of justice work in this world. By embracing a diversity of resources and

approaches, this work aims to illustrate the multi-faceted nature of opportunities for resilience building. I hope that this will open up new vistas when pressures seem to preclude or limit options.

In this work, I address the following: Chapter One: Resilience in TaNaKh, examines four distinct TaNaKh narratives that illustrate nuanced paths towards finding resilience in the face of loss, leadership challenges, and identity transformation. Chapter Two: Psalms, Poetry, and Prayers of Sustenance, analyzes biblical Psalms, poetry, and prayer practices uniquely well-suited for individuals looking to cultivate a textually-grounded resilience routine. Chapter Three: Wisdom from the Field, offers interviews with rabbi-activists on the frontlines of social change. It focuses on those who have unique views on what it takes to sustain one's vision and vitality over a lifetime. Finally, Chapter Four: Awakening a Resilient Community, provides a detailed account of a successful spiritual leadership convening on resilience, as modeled by T'ruah, the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights.

We all need guidance to renew ourselves when confronted with the inevitable challenges of balancing vocational demands, personal relationships, and life uncertainties. May the following thesis prove useful as a link to tools and practices of resilience. May they also aid in personally answering the question: What *torah,* what teaching, will replenish my well, to enable me to do the work of *tikkun* in this world?

TaNaKh Narratives of Resilience

As we rise to take the Torah from the ark, we chant the refrain *Chadesh Yameinu K'Kedem*-"renew our days as of old" (Lam 5:21). This verse affirms TaNaKh's ability to revitalize and invigorate us through the study of enduring sacred narratives that feel at once ancient and timely. Resilience journeys abound in TaNaKh, which serve as living teachers for our own navigation of experiences varying from identity transformation, to loss of love and security, to resistance to social and political oppression. In this chapter I expound on four pivotal biblical narratives, illuminating in brief how each story follows the narrative arc of resilience I defined in my introduction. Though each narrative lends unique wisdom to the topic of resilience, three types of action emerge as common threads in the development of each story:

1. **Resisting silence in order to act as an agent in one's own transformation.**
2. **Seeking partnership to re-form an identity that transcends victimhood.**
3. **Having one's transformed identity reflected back by partners and other witnesses.**

Resilience in Creation

Ha Ozer Yisrael B'gvurah: The One Who Imbues Israel With Strength[4]

[4] This name for God, found in the daily *brachot hashachar* or morning blessings, elevates God as "eternal helper" in relation to humanity, whom God cares for. The word *ezer,* "helpmate", plays a pivotal role in the creation story, as it is the first word God uses to describe Chava/Eve in relation to Adam. This link between God's vocation as holy helpmate and Eve's as human helpmate emphasizes her parity and significance relative to Adam.

The birthing of humanity and the first couple's subsequent expulsion from Gan Eden/the Garden of Eden in the opening chapters of Breishit/Genesis, awakens us to resilience as a necessary component of generative relationship. In evolving partnership, God and the first human protagonists reconceive life-giving in the wake of irreparable loss and disappointment. They transform Gan Eden's trauma into an affirming legacy of creative potential, that shapes all generations which follow.

Within the span of but a few verses of Breishit/Genesis (Gen 2:7-3:7), the human condition evolves from holy, naked wonder and anonymity, (Gen 2:25), to a lucid awareness that life can irreparably change as a consequence of their actions. Told they have but one rule to follow:"Of the Tree of Knowledge you may not eat" (Gen 2:17), the humans almost instantly disobey. The female, who is thus far nameless in the narrative, initiates eating from the Tree. The man readily follows suit, invoking God's grave disappointment. A series of punishments follow for each party involved, climaxing in the humans' banishment from the Garden of Eden, and their destiny to live as mortals toiling on the earth (Gen 3:14-19).

We can fairly describe this incident as irreversibly shocking to the humans, and to the God who conceived them. The first couple must suddenly confront a world marked by fragile self-awareness, hardship, and exile. As investigators of resilience, our responsibility with the help of biblical scholarship, is to appreciate the way this narrative moves from a shattering of preconceived human roles and expectations, to a vibrant rebuilding and revisioning in partnership.

Step One: Resisting Silence, Recovering Agency

Immediately after eating from the forbidden tree, the humans perceive vulnerability, aware that there is no going back to "before knowledge." Their first impulses resemble a flight or fight response to panic: they cover themselves and hide. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles" (Gen.3:7). Both initially shrink from an angry God, but the woman is the first to recover her agency. This should not surprise us. From the moment woman is created as an equal life-mate for the existing Adam[5], she shows proactive curiosity about the life around her. She dialogues with the serpent (Gen 3:1-6) candidly assessing the benefits and costs of eating from the tree, offering a window into her thought process. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). From the outset, Eve values knowledge, and moves to pursue it through experience.

The man remains passive, and voiceless as they eat, and then hide. He opens his mouth only to deny responsibility for disobeying God when they are finally found. When God says, "Did you eat from the fruit of the tree I forbade you?" the man responds with a self-isolating answer: "The women whom You gave me, she gave me the fruit of the tree" (Gen 3:11-12). The woman instead answers directly for her actions, albeit implicating others with her. "The serpent tricked me into eating it,"she admits (Gen 3:13).

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[5] The term ezer *c'negdo* which describes the first woman's role in relationship can best be translated as a helper equal to man, while God is an 'ozer' superior to humans.
Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretations" p. 36.

What happens next is a series of unfortunate, and parallel consequences of a mistake that we are meant to learn from, but not take as eternally condemning. God moves to judge the humans separately by sex. God assigns the woman toil in labor, and her husband to command her sexual desires while the man is primarily burdened by toil of the earth (Gen. 3:15-19). We tragically misread the text if we understand God to be mandating woman to a permanent status of inferiority, sexually or otherwise. Instead, as biblical scholar Phyllis Trible asserts, both humans suffer the blow of knowing a world where harmony and equity can be disturbed by ill-guided choices.[6] Both genders suffer the experience of disparity that isolates and distorts power and corrupts God's original design for humanity. God, in this harsh decree, laments a perversion of justice that comes out a scenario God blames neither Adam or Eve/Chava for. Each protagonist, in a state of despair and disappointment, yearns to repair the brokenness wrought by mistake. In acknowledging that they share brokenness, each begins to identify each other as the resilience partner the other needs to feel whole onecemore.

Step Two: Choosing Partnership, Transcending Failure

How do we know the human couple sees each other as resilience partners? Adam's very first act upon leaving the garden and entering a mortal world is to turn toward the woman, calling her by name for the first time. "The man called his wife's name Chava (Eve), for she would be the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). Names bear great significance in Torah, often revealing the hopes and potentials of the named party. Adam calls his wife *Chavah*, a word which in Hebrew connotes life-giver. Thus, he reveals his appreciation of the woman as a source of life,

[6] Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretations" p. 41.

precisely at the moment that he comes to understand the prospect of death. Faced with disintegration and human fragility, he celebrates her life-giving ability.[7]

Chava too turns towards Adam, and not backwards towards life "before knowing." She embraces the intimate potential between them and revels in her own creative capacity when their intimacy results in her pregnancy. (The Torah uses the word "know" to connote both intimate awareness and sexual relations) (Gen. 4:1). When she names her first son Cain, she takes steps toward repairing ruptured relations with God, proclaiming, "Both I and Adonai have made a man" (Gen.4:1). Chava/Eve is the first to use God's most personal name out loud, a declaration of her own intimate connection to one whom she sees as a partner in creation. In hearing this intimate name aloud,[8] God finds healing, and renewed strength to participate in human life.

Step Three: Naming Blessings

What many characterize as the first curse of Genesis becomes a life-affirming opportunity for each protagonist to learn, and name life's blessings. The alienation each experiences in Eden is bridged through loving relationships which endure ample heartache over the humans' lifetimes.

Though Eve's first sons lives are marred by conflict and violence, she does not abandon her role as nurturer and life giver, nor does Adam abandon her. When her final son Seth is born, Eve calls him a name associated with re-planting seed, "God has given me another seed instead of Abel; for Cain slew him" (Gen. 4:26). The Torah informs us that every generation of humans

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[7] *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, p. 18.
[8] Ibid.,, p. 19 The commentary also notes that Chava is the first to mention God, in Gen. 3:3.

after her will follow her example, and praise Adonai's name when new life is born. "Then it was that people began to invoke Adonai" (Gen. 4:26). By teaching her lineage to evoke the name of God as co-creator, Chava bequeaths a narrative of holy partnership to all future humans. She transforms a misunderstood condemnation of the birth process into a celebrated ability, and a testament to intimacy.

Finally, what do we make of the knowledge that set off this transformation? Appreciating the narrative in its entirety, we see God, Chava/Eve, and Adam all evolve to a nuanced understanding of the pursuit knowledge that is critical for our own learning process. While the initial rupture of relationship stemmed from an ignorant understanding of knowledge as something able to be plucked and consumed,[9] their experience of relationship building after Eden redeems the pursuit of knowledge as a course of resilience. Crisis turns into an opportunity to rebuild, reclaim and reassert the gifts of life. This story affirms that we learn best from choosing mutual interdependence. We thrive in engaging in the fullest process of love, loss, curiosity and commitment we can embody while alive.

Resilience in Visionary Leadership: Eheyeh Asher Ehiyeh (I am that I will be)[10]

As the Torah moves from Genesis to Exodus, resilience unfolds not only in the intimate, relational context of family, but on the collective scale of liberation and covenant formation. Collectively, the people Israel must draw strength from one another to journey from slavery in Egypt to redemptive freedom. The Hebrew word for Egypt, *mitzrayim,* suggests a confined,

[9] From private communication with Tamara Cohn Eskenazi.
[10] This phrase God uses as a name in this singular instance suggests "pure existence" that is present, though impossible to see or touch. (*The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, p. 315).

narrow space. Thus the iconic story speaks not only to the experience of landed exile, but to the suffering we experience when we encounter emotional states of constriction and stuckness in our routines.[11] This liberation journey is not a linear one. Along the way, the community and its leaders, including God, confront enormous external and internal challenges, including self-doubt, anger, and disappointment. All emerge more resilient for choosing to see their liberation integrated with others, and their sacred purpose entwined in a larger community's well-being. God and Moses, the figures who most consistently spearhead this epic saga, model the constancy of communication, and painstaking trial and error necessary to transform a vision of liberation into a lived reality.

Step One: Recovering a Voice in Exile

The story of the Exodus opens with the people Israel in crises.[12] A ruthless Egyptian pharaoh rises to power, who has no intimate knowledge of the Israelites. Seeing their "otherness" as a threat, the pharaoh not only enslaves them, but demands the death of their sons so that they may not grow "too numerous" (Exodus 1:8). "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstoll: if it is a boy, kill him," he demands (Exodus 1:16). Fortunately, some among the community, most notably the midwives, resist the oppression by defying Pharoah's orders and saving male babies from certain death. Sadly, the effort is hardly enough.

The people reach a breaking point that breaches the silence of bondage. For the first time, the Torah describes the people uniting as a collective to demand attention in their suffering.

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[11] Estelle Frankel, *The Myth of the Exodus, Sacred Therapy*, p.102.
[12] This is the first time the Torah refers to *am bnei Israel*, or Israelite people, marking a transition from being "children of Israel", or an extended family clan, to being a people.

"Their cry from the bondage rose up to God," (Exodus 2:23), catalyzing God to take active notice of their plight. This cry sets off the Israelites' deliverance. God wakes swiftly to respond, pivoting to see God-self as an agent not only of creation, but of liberation. "God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...and saw them, and took notice of them" (Exodus 2:25). As in the Creation story, intimate noticing transforms this narrative from an experience of exile and isolation, to one of shared resilience.

Immediately after God hears the people's cry, God in turn makes a critical call to a human leader to be a helpmate. Of all the humans to choose from, Moses appears an unlikely candidate. We meet him in hiding, having fled a violent altercation in Egypt. He appears unmotivated to return to the people he left behind. (Exodus 2:11-15) Yet just before God's call, Moses reveals a quality shared with God that makes him unequivocally qualified to lead. God sends a messenger in the form of a bush on fire, but not burning up. A strange sight, without a doubt, yet there is no explanation, and in fact no dialogue at all when Moses first comes across the bush. Moses, critically, makes the first move: "I must turn, to look at this marvelous sight." he says. "Why doesn't the bush burn up?" (Exod. 3:3).

Only when God sees that Moses has turned to look, transformative dialogue takes place. "When Adonai saw that he had turned to look, God called out to him from the bush: "Moses! Moses!" And he answered, "I am here" (Exodus 3:4). Moses earns God's trust in that moment that he too, can awaken with empathy to a call beyond himself. Midrash understands Moses

turning to look as a sign that he recalls the pain of his kin, and cannot bear it, even if it means turning away from the comfortable life God finds him in.[13]

Still, when God implores that Moses be a conduit for change, Moses is reticent to accept the mantle of leadership. God appeals to Moses by invoking the power of relationship, sharing "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob...I have witnessed the distress of my people...Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people" (Ex. 3:6-10). "*Bi, Adonai, lo ish devarim anochi*" – Moses protests, "Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words – – I am heavy of speech and heavy of tongue...Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" (Ex. 4:10, 3:11). As many of us can relate to, Moses feels constricted by his own shortcomings, and reticent to step into a role that will expose them. He continues to resist leadership several more times before God can convince him that God wants this partnership with Moses as Moses truly is, flaws and all. Finally, Moses consents when God reiterates a vision that promises God's active presence, and expresses sensitivity to Moses' concerns. "There is your brother Aaron the Levite, notes God. "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth-I will be with you and with him as you speak, and tell both of you what to do" (Ex. 4:15-16). As the two part from the burning bush, we are left with it's crucial symbolism. As Moses notices from the outset, the bush neither consumes, nor is consumed, despite being engulfed in flames.[14] So too, God and Moses must fuel their mission

[13] Exodus Rabbah 2:6, as interpreted by Rabbi David Kasher.
[14] Exodus 3:3.

with passion, without falling victim to burn-out, or consuming those around them in perilous flames. Partnership, as we shall see, proves critical to upholding this "burning bush" ideal. [15]

Step Two: Kedoshim Tihiyu-Naming Partners in Holy Leadership

After the people leave Egypt, Moses and God must switch gears and goals. We witness them transition from a top-down model of crisis management, to a community organizing model of sustainable, grassroots nation-building. As many leaders experience, Moses and God brave the transition with difficulty, confronting disappointment and an inexhaustible list of demands from the people they serve. Fortunately, the clear-sighted perspective of an outside partner, Moses' father-in-law Yitro, alerts Moses to the danger of slipping into a,self-isolating leadership style. He witnesses Moses exhaust himself caring for the people's' needs at all hours, and begs: "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" (Exodus 18:14). Yitro's words hint at the danger Moses does to himself, and to the people, by refusing help in guiding the community.

*"*You will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone," Yitro exclaims (Exodus 18:18). His compassionate rebuke wakes Moses to the inefficiency and danger of a governance that disempowers those it aims to serve. He sets about forming a delegated leadership body from among the community, so that he alone need not arbitrate collective decisions. Crucially, this transformative conversation enables God and Moses' nation-building vision to sustain beyond the lifetime of a single human. Moses

[15] I thank Dr. Tamara Eskenazi Cohn for this interpretation, in private communication.

himself feels revitalized by a lighter burden, and the people rise to the occasion when called. This alacrity demonstrates willing ability to work towards a vision that transcends their lifetimes.

Perhaps it is this remarkable human initiative toward sustainable leadership which prompts the unprecedented democratic way in which God delivers the Commandments and holiness laws which follow.[16] We read as Parsha Yitro continues, that God gathers the entire community at Sinai to hear the Commandments that form the moral backbone of the community. In preparation, God extends a radically intimate covenantal offer that calls on the people to demonstrate their commitment to community: "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully, and keep My covenant...you shall be to Me a sovereignty of priests and a holy Nation" (Exodus 19:4-5). Professor Michael Waltzer notes, God entrusts humans with the power and free will to cooperate in the long-term work of maintaining a nation governed by moral law.[17] Each and every human being, from the moment God addresses them at Sinai, becomes empowered with the ability to choose partnership in covenantal life, and to act as agents of God's *kavod*, or holy presence, on Earth.

Moses and God inevitably experience consequences in ceding control to a democratic community model. Both suffer grave disappointments when the Israelites time and again fail to uphold expectations set before them. This is apparent in the many ways the people murmur against them in the wilderness throughout the Book of Numbers.[18] Critically, God and Moses

[16] Exodus 19.
[17] Michael Waltzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 81-82
[18] The Torah captures multiple incidents of civil disobedience and insolence from the people, including most prominently, the melting of the Golden Calf in Exodus 31-32.

trade off boosting each other's resolve when either leader wavers from trusting that the vision they share can include an imperfect, but worthy people.[19]

Step Three: L'dor V'dor, From Generation to Generation

A Vision That Endures Beyond You and Me

The foresight that God and Moses demonstrate in naming partners in visionary leadership proves critical as the people draw nearer to the promised land. As many leaders experience in the twilights of their careers, Moses faces aging with profound questions about his legacy, and fear for his own mortality. Throughout the book of Numbers, Moses struggles not to see his inevitable death before making it to the Promise Land as anything but failure. He bargains multiple times with God to be forgiven for earlier mistakes, and to be allowed to see the vision through to the Israelites' arrival in the land.[20] Yet, by the final book of Torah, Moses transforms his anger, and resentment over his human limitations into a new way of eternalizing his charge. Moses resolves to lead through teaching the people in such a way that they not only remember the terms of covenantal partnership, but they in turn teach it to every generation which follows. In Deuteronomy 1:5, the Torah gifts us with another image of resilience, this time at the end of Moses' life: *"Ho'il Moshe be'er et hatorah hazot.*" The plain meaning of this verse is, "Moses undertook to explain this Torah." The verb *be'er* means "explain, expound, elucidate." But the

[19] Exodus Chapter 33-4 details Moses' moving intercession on behalf of the people to a God so angry he threatens to destroy them. God, thanks to Moses' insistence, joins Moses as they reaffirm their own intimate commitment to each other on Mt. Sinai through the re-crafting of the sacred tablets which seal the unity between Israel and God which endures the rest of the Torah.

[20] Moses receives notice from God in 20:11-12 that, after a fateful blow to a rock that belies his lack of faith and patience in God, he will not live to see the people into the land they have been envisioning together. Though he continues to dedicate himself to the people, he struggles repeatedly to accept that he won't be with them as their eternal guide (Deut. 3:23).

noun *be'er* also means "a well". Thus a creative alternate meaning dances in the background of this final scene: "Moses undertook to well up this Torah."[21]

I appreciate this image of a well inside Moses, or a deep, inner channel from which sustenance can be drawn up. The rabbis explain: a well is an open system; it taps into a rechargeable, invisible, ever-flowing water source, and siphons it to the surface. A good well brims over with water, and never runs dry. To be a well is to ever-renew that sense of deep, innate inspiration that can afford to be shared with others, because inspiration begets more inspiration. Moses demonstrates a transformed identity, from a burning bush that initiates radical departure, to a renewing wellspring of wisdom, that can transform generations to come without depleting. In a sense, the Torah he expounds is also to be a *be'er*, a well, a deep and perpetuating source of precious water, sustaining generations to come.

Adonai and all the people bear witness to Moses' transformation with loving reverence. They not only heed Moses' final words in life, but honor his death with a ceremonial transition of leadership to the next generation, exactly as he and God/Adonai request. The very last lines of Torah celebrate the remarkable, irreplaceable relationship between God and Moses, and the journey they forge with b'nei Israel from exile to enduring covenantal peoplehood:[22] "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the Adonai singled out, face to face…"

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[21] From the Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger.

[22] Deut 34:10-12 Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom Adonai singled out, face to face: for the various signs and portents that Adonai sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country: and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.

The Book of Ruth: Resilience in Identity Transformation

It is no accident that we traditionally read The Book of Ruth when recalling our inheritance of Torah at Mt. Sinai on Shavuot. This extraordinary scroll traces three unique protagonists' determined inner and outer transformation through sheer *chesed*, loving devotion, in relationship. As the narrative unfolds, each of the primary figures we meet, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, transform through their willingness to invest in relationship, and through their ability to see their redemption linked to that of others. The intertwining lives of these individuals with distinct backgrounds and life circumstances offers points of access for many. They can guide those seeking to heal from personal grief, those seeking to move from the margins, and forge new identities in community, to those, as well, who seek to transform communities.

Step One: Reikam al t'shiveini "Do not bring me back empty": Audacious Initiation

The opening chapter of the Book of Ruth finds the main protagonists--the recently widowed Ruth and Orpah, and their mother-in-law Naomi, preparing to leave Moab for Judah. Naomi, the first to speak, urges her daughters-in-law, who accompany her, to turn away and leave her to go the journey to Judah alone.[23] "Turn back, my daughters," she says. "Why should you go with me, Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you?" (Ruth 1:11). Lamenting her diminished state, Naomi expresses a need to shrink from relationship.

Ruth's response to Naomi's repeated imploring to be left alone throughout Chapter One of the narrative are instructive to anyone witnessing the totalizing grief of a loved one. Without

[23] Ruth 1:8-9.

arguing or making light of her devastating circumstances, Ruth moves to assure Naomi that she's not going to abandon her at this time of need. When Naomi urges them both to move on, "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell, but Ruth clung to her" (Ruth 1:14). The Hebrew verb 'd-b-q' that is translated 'clung' here, connotes a kind of permanent bonding, or devotional love that is often reserved in Torah for God. Ruth reiterates her devotion with lines that crystallize her resolve to journey with Naomi, rather than away from her, in this time of suffering. "Do not to urge me to forsake you," she says. "Do not go back and not follow after you; For wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Jolted by this bold assertion of kinship, Naomi tacitly accepts the accompaniment, unable in the moment to express gratitude. She arrives in Bethlehem, the site of her former happiness, carrying the heavy emotional weight of her trauma, which she wears like a new identity. "Do not call me Naomi, call me Marah; for Adonai has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and Adonai has brought me back empty, " Naomi insists to the community who greets her arrival (Ruth 1:20-21). In voicing this audacious indictment of God, Naomi calls all who are present to notice her grief as an emotional and spiritual crisis. With Ruth, she has already taken the first step towards her own recovering, in leaving Moab. Now, Naomi, initiates her own recovery--by articulating her present conditions as unacceptable, bitter, and painful, and calling on God and her community to notice how her circumstances have impacted her.[24]

Despite the harsh tone of Naomi's lament, the opening chapter of Ruth ends on an

[24] The JPS Biblical Commentary on Ruth, p.18.

auspicious note of potential for growth. The women arrive in Bethlehem, at the beginning of the harvest season (Ruth 1:22), a time that will renew each of their sense of purpose. In the second chapter, Ruth proves instrumental to their ability to sustain them in their transition, by going out to glean from Boaz, their kinsman's land. There, she discovers an enduring connection that provokes Boaz' generosity, and reinvigorates Naomi to see her own utility in their survival. When Naomi hears of Ruth's encounter with Boaz, her indictment of God turns to praise: "Blessed be Adonai, who has not failed in kindness to the living or the dead!" she exclaims (Ruth 2:20). The seeds of relationship planted early in their fragile transition lay the groundwork for the unique growth and love that will spring between them as the story evolves and each transforms anew.

Step Two: For You are a Redeeming Kinsman: Partners in Building Home

Both Ruth and Naomi reveal remarkable knack for leveraging the power of relationship to transform their circumstances as the narrative unfolds. Hearing that Ruth and Boaz have met, Naomi's wheels spin towards the future. "My daughter, I must seek a secure home for you, that it may be well with you," Naomi declares, as she encourages her daughter in law to pursue relations with Boaz .[25] In contrast to her initial insistence that Ruth abandon her to find a secure home on her own, Naomi now indicates understanding that their futures could be bound up together, and that they are stronger for sharing the effort of finding stable home secured by a male heir. Naomi wills a system that once relegated her to a voiceless, marginalized position of widowhood to work to her advantage, by naming the partners and the plan that will reposition

[25] Ruth 3:1.

her in a landed family. "The possibility of considering things from a different angle or new perspective," notes Adriane Leveen, "is a sign that recovery is underway."[26]

Ruth, in kind, displays exceptional relational intelligence when identifying partners in her own transformation. This is apparent not only in her interaction with Naomi, but in her unfolding relationship with Boaz, a landowner in a position of power whom she understands to be integral to her future well-being.[27] The evolving character of Boaz attests to the impact that relationships of resilience can have even on individuals who do not identify as primary victims in the face of loss. From a place of narrowly understanding his role and obligations, Boaz transforms. He had at first extended himself somewhat, by offering to ease her work of gleaning. But, through Ruth's outreach and invitation, he learns to notice her suffering, and become someone who is invested in the resilience of others.

Let's take a look at how this process unfolds. In many ways, we can see the scene between Ruth and Boaz in Chapter Three as a climax of the resilience narrative. In the previous chapter, Ruth acts demurely towards Boaz when he shows her kindness in the field, prostrating herself humbly before him (Ruth 2:10). She expresses disbelief, and a sense of unworthiness that he chooses to treat her well, exclaiming, "Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:10). His reassurance of goodwill, and awareness of her ties to Naomi (2:11-15) buoys her confidence to step courageously into a more intimate, mutual partnership in the following scene.

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[26] Commentary on Ruth 3:1, Adriane Leveen,"Call me Bitterness": Individual Responses to Despair," in *Healing and the Jewish Imagination*.
[27] Ruth 4:9-10 Eskenazi/Frymer Kensky, *JPS Bible Commentary Ruth*, p.59.

In Ruth Chapter 3, Ruth approaches Boaz in the middle of the night. At Naomi's suggestion, she meets him on the threshing floor, where Boaz is sure to be at alone and disarmed. She approaches him while he's asleep, and kneels before his feet, uncovering them. The Hebrew root for uncover, or "reveal" in this scene, *g.l.h*., hints at an audacious nature to her approach, whether sexual or otherwise, that leaves no doubt in the reader's' mind that she intends him to be vulnerable (Ruth 3:8)[28]

When Boaz awakens startled, and asks her to identify herself, her words are remarkably assertive; they indicate of a clear sense of purpose in her mission. "'I am Ruth your handmaid;" she says.[29] "Spread your wing [heb.*your kanaf*] over your handmaid; for you are a redeeming kinsman *(Goel)*." [30] Her word choice is critical on several accounts. First, by asking him to spread his *kanaf*, a word meaning robe, or wing, Ruth emphasizes that she is seeking his protection, and enduring support, not the short-term gains of sexual advance. Second, she calls him *goel*, or redeemer, a word the Bible uses to refer to one who protects vulnerable relatives, and acts in God's stead to ensure the welfare of those in need.[31] Here Ruth both exposes her vulnerability, and appeals to Boaz's magnanimity and responsibility, to make a compelling case for him to act on her behalf .

Boaz' response to her honest initiative is an outburst of heartfelt gratitude that leads the reader to suspect that perhaps he's not accustomed to being regarded so intimately, and as

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[28] Ruth 3:8 Eskenazi/Frymer Kensky, *JPS Bible Commentary Ruth*, p.57.
[29] Previously, Ruth has not called herself *amatekha,* a word for a maidservant of a higher status, eligible for marriage.
[30] Ruth 3:9
[31] Ruth 4:9-10 Eskenazi/Frymer Kensky, *JPS Bible Commentary Ruth*, p. 60.

someone with such generous character. “Blessed are you to Adonai, my daughter;” he exclaims. “Your latest showing of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you did not turn to follow younger men, whether poor or rich” (Ruth 3:10).

Boaz immediately follows her lead and expresses his loyalty in kind, to live up to the identity *goel,* redeemer. “Have no fear, I will do on your behalf whatever you you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are,” he assures (Ruth 3:11). Boaz’ heartfelt commitment indicates not only a promise to provide for Ruth’s material needs, but a responsibility to ensure that her reputation remains valorous amongst the community they are now both a part of. The Hebrew term he uses to call her a “fine woman”, *eshet hayil*, echoes the esteemed place he occupies throughout the narrative as an ‘ish gibor’, a man of honor, assuring that he sees her as equally worthy.[32]

The scene closes with Boaz and Ruth taking concrete steps to demonstrate their mutual respect for each other (Ruth 3: 12-15). Boaz assures that no one finds out about the audacious way Ruth approached him, to avoid rumors, by imploring her to stay through the morning. He provides her with material sustenance to take back to her mother-in-law, so that she will be received well, and able to demonstrate his esteem for her. Together, they build a more resilient foundation for their future partnership, both intimately, and in a communally recognized way. In the next chapter Boaz will expand this partnership by enlisting communal buy-in, as it were.

Step Three: Earning a Transformed Identity

[32] Ruth 3:11 Eskenazi/Frymer Kensky, Ibid., p 63.

By the final chapter of the Book of Ruth, the groundwork in relationship has been laid for each protagonist, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. They can now reclaim a narrative that was once constrictive. Before a public audience at the town gate, Boaz declares their commitment to one another, taking pains to ensure that their transformation endures and receives notice. The presence of ten elders (Ruth 4:2) adds a layer of formality and legitimacy to the proclamation which follows.[33] Boaz deftly exercises his authority as a man of substance. He uses a legal language that compels to the elders to approve of a plan that will secure Ruth and Naomi's future. "I am acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate," he proclaims (Ruth 4:10). His justification for the marriage establishes his motives as ones the community will appreciate, namely, perpetuating the lineage of a respected deceased man. He goes to great lengths to assure that Ruth will be welcomed as his wife, with full legal status in the public eyes. Evidently, her intimate approach moved him to a deeply trusting, committed place, with a magnanimous sense of obligation.

The community in turn affirms his request to have Ruth recognized as an esteemed woman who belongs among them. They shower the couple with blessings, declaring, "May Adonai make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom build up the House of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). The embrace of an "outsider" in this manner sets a transformative precedent for community that will impact all of Ruth's line to come. As a Moabite, she represents a people who've had a longstanding rift with the Israelites. The

[33] Ruth 4:3 Eskenazi/Frymer Kensky, Ibid., p. 72.

declaration of goodwill toward her goes a long way to healing a rift between communities, and opening possible avenues to future partnership.

Ruth's own telling final words in the narrative take place at the end of Chapter Three, just before Boaz publicly declares their marriage. Returning to her mother-in law from her night with Boaz, she bears the barley bequeathed by him. She tells Naomi that he gave it to her so she would not return to Naomi *reykam*, empty. Naomi used that very same word, *reykam*, in Chapter One to describe her devastation. It is now employed to express the abundance and generosity that she and Ruth experience in their transformed state. Ruth's use of the word is a deliberate, compassionate final note to Naomi to herald the fullness of their lives together, after the challenges both have faced.

Though Ruth does not speak publicly in the final scene, her resilience is expressed most directly through her body. It becomes fertile after years of widowhood and of not bearing children in her previous marriage. The text tells us *"Adonai bestowed pregnancy on Ruth"*(Ruth 4:13). This implies that God proactively blesses Ruth with offspring, a recognition of her celebrated integration with the community. The reader is left to infer that Ruth's narrative will continue to grow expansively through the transmission of life and legacy to her offspring. As the book's conclusion boldly states, David, Israel's most favored king, is the result of Ruth's story.

What about Naomi? The most drastic narrative arc of resilience and reclamation at the story's end involves Naomi. She has been the character most acutely paralyzed, and constricted in her suffering. In the opening scene, she proclaims herself empty and renames herself, "Bitter".

In this last chapter, the same community that witnessed Naomi's despair and emptiness now shares in her abundance of blessing and relationship: "And the women said to Naomi: 'Blessed be Adonai, who has not left you without a redeemer today! Let his name be renowned in Israel. He will be a restorer of life for you, and sustain your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, bore him*"*(Ruth 4-14-15).

The power of witness in Naomi's transformation rings from this communal blessing. These words express repairing even more fully her broken relationship with God while simultaneously honoring the role of human agency in her transition to fullness, love, and security amongst her newly recognized kin. The final scene furthermore harks back to Naomi's earlier lament; the women contextualize Ruth's conception of a son in terms of the sustenance and renewal that the birth brings to Naomi. The community women identify Ruth not only as Naomi's family, but as the daughter-in-law "who loves you." They declare her a more worthy companion than seven male children. In doing so, the women defy patriarchal norms to celebrate the female friendship Ruth and Naomi have cultivated. They show they have continued to notice, and invest in Naomi's resilience. Perhaps they even found it influential in the evolution of their own identities. What is evident beyond a doubt, however, are Naomi, Ruth and Boaz' transformed senses of self. An arc of discernment, sacred partnership, and finally, the reclamation of a narrative of fullness and abundance make their story and the book of Ruth an exceptional text for study of resilience in relationship.

The Book of Esther: Movement from the Margins

The Book of Esther shares a paradigm with the Book of Ruth: a woman on the margins moving strategically, and in partnership, to a place of power. In addition, Esther, with Mordecai's mentorship, empowers a marginalized community through her own internal transformation, and her willingness to see her own suffering bound up with a people who need her. In this book, Esther strategically charts a course that not only liberates her, but saves her community as well. This narrative offers inspiration to those resisting oppression, and organizing from the margins to effect systemic change on behalf of a wider collective.

Step One: Taking a Stand-Embodying Malchut

The primary protagonists in this story, Mordecai and Esther, let their bodies speak first in resistance to oppression. Mordecai, who in many ways functions as Esther's mentor throughout the narrative, catalyzes the crises that will lead to the Jews subversion: he refuses to bow to Haman, the king's chief advisor.[34] He refuses to bow down to tyranny. Haman seizes on the source of Mordecai's dignity and power, his religious faith, and instigates a legal campaign to annihilate the Jews, the threat to his own perception of supremacy. Haman's privileged access to power creates the conditions for wide-scale destruction of a "threatening other," in this case, the Jews. "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in your Majesty's interest to tolerate them," he implores (Esther

[34] Esther 3:4-6 Mordecai refuses to bow low to Haman, explaining "he was a Jew". As a result, "Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people."

3:8). Almost instantaneously, Haman is granted permission to victimize, and annihilate an entire population.

It is under these dire circumstances that Mordecai calls Esther to embody her own power invested in her *malchut,* or regality. She is the new beloved queen. Therefore, he implores, she must advocate on behalf of the Jews. Haman is not the only one with a privileged access to authoritative power. We learn early in the narrative that Esther, a young, beautiful Jewish woman, has "won the admiration" of the royal court, has been taken to the *bet malchut,* or palace, to live, and that "the King loved Esther more than all other women" (Esther 2:15-16). As a queen, she lives in luxury, yet her fate still rests with a condemned class, a fact Mordecai is quick to remind her of.

Upon first hearing that Mordecai has come wailing and in sackcloth to seek her help in speaking to the King, Esther rejects his beseeching. She is not yet ready to see her own identity associated with the devastation that has befallen the Jews (Esther 4:9-12). She shrinks from risky responsibility for the situation, diminishing her potential influence before the court. Esther protests, reasonably, that she may die if she comes forward. Mordecai overcomes her reluctance to move from her position of privilege to act. He appeals to her sense of security, reminding her that it intertwines with that of her people, and pointing to an even greater sense of duty and opportunity beyond it:

> *Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace.On the contrary, if you*

keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis (Esther 4:13-14).

Here, Mordecai appeals on multiple fronts to Esther's sense of resilience. First he reiterates that the status quo is not a safe one, and that devastation is inevitable for her as well if she does not act. He makes clear that the consequences of her remaining silent are immanent, ending her life, and that of her families. After establishing these stakes, his message turns to reinforce her unique position and potential. The Hebrew *mi yodea* or "who knows", that Mordecai posits to Esther, not only threatens "what if", but also opens possibilities for transformation, if Esther assumes her *malchut,* "regality", to act.[35]

The appeal, both to her family's safety, and her appreciation of the uniqueness of her circumstances, work in tandem to help Esther overcome herr reluctance and break her own silence to act. First, in a gesture of solidarity, and shared faith with her Jewish kinfolk, she demands a three-day fast for all the Jews of Shushan, an extreme form of resistance to oppression (Esther 4:16). In fasting, she reclaims control over her own being. Though physically weaker, she anticipates feeling greater resolve to take the courageous act she must take next. Then she declares, "I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish" (Esther 4:16). She characterizes the stakes of action as transcending her own safety and livelihood--calling us to understand one embodiment of resilience as the choice to act as if there were no other choice. This pivotal point in the narrative reverses the power dynamic

[35] From private conversation with Tamara Eskenazi Cohn.

between Esther and Mordecai. In the scenes that follow, it is Esther who will steer the course of strategic partnership and effective rhetorical advocacy. In transforming herself, she will be able also to transform the position of the Jews in the system of power at play.

Step Two: Party as Power Play

Esther next prepares herself in several critical ways to address the king. After preparing her body spiritually for transformation through extensive fasting, she "dresses in her royalty" (Esther 5:1). She comes before the king embodying her own regality. The same hebrew *malchut,* regality*,* that Mordecai encouraged her to assume previously, she now initiatives herself wearing both internally and externally.[36] Wisely, in her approach to the King, she appeals first to his ego, and his love for her, before making the request that will render her most vulnerable. Like Ruth, she senses that disarming a man in power with intimate kindness, and a setting that puts him at ease will be more effective than attempting to force her bidding outright. Here, she shows a sensibility that both Vashti and Mordecai failed to understand as subjects of the king. As subjects of the king who opted to contradict him, they unleashed harmful consequences for themselves and others. Esther knows better the type of man and type of system she faces, and navigates this with consummate skill. Thus, when the King grants Esther an audience, beholds her lovingly, and asks "What troubles you Queen Esther? What is your request?" (Esther 5:2), she knows what to do. Her initial response is to suggest consecutive private feasts for the King and Haman, with no pretense that she desires more.

[36] I thank Tamara Cohn Eskenazi for this observation. Most translators state that Esther donned royal garments or robes, obscuring the fact that what she puts on is her royal position.

She only divulges what she wants when the King has been plied with wine and rich foods, and asked multiple times what he can do to please her. At this crucial moment, Esther, fully embodying her position as queen, makes the personal appeal that seals the fate of the Jews, and that of the man who sought to destroy them: "If I have found favour in your sight, your Majesty, and if it pleases your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people at my request," she says (Esther 7:3). Despite the formality of the language, it is clear from Esther's choice to name herself, and then her people, that her appeal to the king is deeply personal. It is based on his affection for her.[37] In one swift phrase, Esther both reveals her true identity, and commits the King to caring about a people he has hereto neglected. Esther continues by revealing in detail the way that Haman's plot has condemned her own kin to be massacred and destroyed. "We have been sold, my people and I," she proclaims. "To be destroyed, massacred and exterminated" (Esther 7:4). Her sharp, precise words enrage the king and instantly win him as an ally, who enacts swift vengeance on Haman, the perpetrator of such a violent threat against his beloved queen.[38] Here, Esther underscores the efficacy of cultivating intimate relationship as a step toward invoking wider systemic change. But she does not stop there. She then deftly introduces her partner outside of the power system, Mordecai, to the King. This is, after all, the exact right moment to fill a power vacuum that will seal the security of the Jews and transform their place in society, for all to witness.[39]

[37] Berlin JPS Commentary on Esther, p. 66
[38] Esther 7:9 Haman is impaled violently at the king's behest for daring to "ravish" the queen. The king makes clear he takes the plot deeply personally, and will not be appeased until blood is shed.
[39] Esther 8:1-2

Step Three: Public Victory Sealed

The final chapter of the Book of Esther portrays a resounding reversal of fortunes of unfathomable proportions. Displaying instantaneous trust in Esther's kin, the king designates and empowers Mordecai to become his new highest officer. He even equips him with the visible trappings of authority in the form of his signet ring.[40] At Esther's final impassioned behest, the decree against the Jews is entirely reversed. It reverberates in every script and language, including the language of the Jews, so that the Jews' transformation from victims to victors is unmistakable.[41] The Jews themselves rejoice publicly in spaces they were once invisible, and appear to be received with reverence, or even fear by non-Jews in the land.[42] Finally, in a move that is disturbing to many modern readers, the Jews enact vengeance on a massive scale against their would-be destroyers, killing over 75,000 people in their new-found position of authority.[43] The book of Esther describes these victims as those who planned to kill the Jews. While some regard this as a justifiable respond to danger from those who plan to kill you, others regard this as a shockingly violent response. The book should offer warning of the potential for power to be abused even by those who know oppression dearly themselves. As such, this outcome is not included in the vision of resilience that an activist might aspire to. But in Esther, revenge is not the final message.

The real, enduring victory for the protagonists lies in the reputations that follow Esther

[40] Esther 8:7-8
[41] Esther 8:10.
[42] Esther 8:16-17.
[43] Esther 9:16-9:32.

and Mordecai to the end of the scroll. We read that “Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar every year-the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes,”and as days which “transformed them from grief and mourning to festive joy” (Esther 9:21-22), The recording immortalizes this narrative and enshrines a celebration that includes both the anguish and triumph of the resilience journey of the Jews of Shushan. These steps ensure that future generations will learn from, and perhaps draw inspiration from the courageous communal leadership Esther and Mordecai display.

Psalms, Poetry, Prayers of Solace and Sustenance

Psalms: The Inner Narrative Unfolding

Unique among the many potent biblical texts that speak to resilience, is the Book of Psalms (Tehillim in Hebrew). The 150 sacred poems in it connect readers to a wide range of human voices, from the wail of lament, to whispered fear in the face of unknown, to the jubilant exultation of gratitude for God's presence[44]. The psalmist shifts lyrically between inner and outer realms of consciousness-anchoring the most interior meditation of the individual in exterior experience and challenge, and in dialogue with a holy "other".[45] The voice of the lyrics remains largely anonymous, though different psalms are dedicated to different biblical figures, including Moses, King David, and King Solomon. This lyrical genre has captured the creative imagination of modern artists, poets, activists, and leaders for generations, precisely due to the texts' fluid interplay between inner dialogue and external reality, and the utterly human depth of feeling captured in verse.

How do we approach these texts from a lens of resilience? While the narratives of TaNaKh offer us concrete characters and plot points in which to locate our own stories and challenges, the psalms invite us into a narrative arc of resilience that otherwise leaves much in the emotional abstract. The psalms chart a journey through the roller-coaster of responses to often overwhelming circumstances. We can find resonance in the language and scenery

[44] Rabbi Peretz Rodman, "The Book of Psalms".
[45] Harold Fisch, "Poetry with a Purpose", *Psalms-the Limit of Subjectivity*. p. 111.

described without relating to any specific author or context. That said, to create a personalized relationship with psalms, it helps to at least be exposed to the entirety of a psalm before parsing bits and pieces for spiritual practice. The study of each psalm in depth give us language and insight in order to navigate our own most challenging circumstances, and to identify ways of soothing our souls in the process. The following three psalms will be explored for their wisdom in moving through the phases of resilience we have been exploring, with specific verses highlighted that lend themselves to creative application in practice. The study of each psalm in depth gives us language and insight in order to navigate our own most challenging circumstances, and to identify ways of soothing our souls in the process. It also illustrates a process we can implement in our own practices.

Psalm 42: Calling Out from the Deep

Psalm 42 voices an individual's anguished sense of physical and spiritual exile and charts that person's journey through the emotional throws of isolation and recovery of sense of self. The speaker begins with acute longing to feel God's presence depicting this yearning metaphorically as a craving for basic sustenance, a matter of life and death: "As a hind that cries out for water channels, so my being cries out for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living Divine." [46] The verse's connection to food and water illustrate the urgency of God's nearness, expressed as the most vital necessities for life. The author then escalates her sense of abandonment, noting how she is taunted by others in her state: "I am addressed all day, "Where

[46] Psalm 42:2-3.

is your God?"[47] This crisis of faith prompts the psalmist to reflect on a past that felt isolating. In the recovery of happier memories, an inner dialogue is triggered which moves the poet to question her present circumstance anew: "Why so downcast, O my soul, and so so disquieted within me?" This word "downcast" (Heb. תִּשְׁתּוֹחֲחִי) brings to mind an image of a surfer pelted by waves, struggling to emerge from a watery swirl that keeps them down.[48] Yet, the poet also begins in this line to access hope in God's return, and pivots from speaking about God to addressing God directly. "My God, my soul is downcast within me; therefore I recall you from the land of Jordan and the Hermon mountains, from Mount Mizar."[49]

The psalmist's predicament is now laid out directly before God and the reader. "Deep calls to deep…all your breakers and waves have passed over me."[50] The Hebrew word '*tehom*', translated as 'deep,' refers in Genesis 1 to the primordial chaos through which God creates the world. [51] This reference certainly captures the sense of deep overwhelm that engulfs the poet, and again recalls the reader to an image of a surfer tossed relentlessly about; but the word also touches a deeply intimate, internal place from which the poet derives meaning. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel takes '*tehom*' out of its biblical context and considers it as a place of intimate meeting: When we are in touch with our depth, we can reach out to meet the depth of another-be it God, or another being with whom we are in relationship.

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[47] Psalm 42:4.
[48] I am grateful to Dr. Tamara Eskenazi for sharing this interpretation with me.
[49] Psalm 42:7a
[50] 42:8.
[51] Gen. 1:2.

In finding a voice from this swirling watery deep place, the psalmist reaches forward to a beginning of an answer. The psalmist finds strength to pray to a God who is remembered as loving. Now the dialogue becomes more direct, bold, explicit. “I declare to you God, my rock, “Why have You forgotten me? Why must I walk in gloom, oppressed by my enemy?”[52]
The poet reclaims dignity in this voice, and recruits God as partner with whom to face life. In the concluding verse, we hear an echo the early verse “Why so downcast; however, now there is a tone of compassionate self-inquiry, not challenge or rebuke. The poet acknowledges that sorrow and despair may still be present, there is also now assurance. “Have hope in God; whom I will yet praise, my saving presence.” [53] The language of ‘my saving presence’ unites the self, the soul and God to become one voice, who resolve to be active partners in facing the challenges ahead.

Perhaps the words recall a reader to a time and place of their own exile from the material and spiritual resources they needed to compel them to a difficult calling. With this the psalm offers the reader language to voice both alienation and abandonment. But it moves on as well to anchoring oneself in the possibility of recovery from the depths of aloneness--critical preliminary steps on the journey from silent suffering, to the fullness of partnered transformation.

[52] Psalm 42:10a.
[53] Psalm 42:12.

Full Text of Psalm 42[54]:

א לַמְנַצֵּחַ, מַשְׂכִּיל לִבְנֵי-קֹרַח.	1.For the leader. A maskil. Of the Korachites.[56]
ב כְּאַיָּל, תַּעֲרֹג עַל-אֲפִיקֵי-מָיִם-- כֵּן נַפְשִׁי תַעֲרֹג אֵלֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים.	2.As a hind that cries out for water channels, so my being[57] cries out[58] for you, O God.
ג צָמְאָה נַפְשִׁי, לֵאלֹהִים-- לְאֵל חָי: מָתַי אָבוֹא; וְאֵרָאֶה, פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים.	3. My soul thirsts for God, the living Divine: When will I come and be seen in God's presence?
ד הָיְתָה-לִּי דִמְעָתִי לֶחֶם, יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה; בֶּאֱמֹר אֵלַי כָּל-הַיּוֹם, אַיֵּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ.	4. My weeping has been my bread, day and night. I am addressed all day, "Where is your God?"
ה אֵלֶּה אֶזְכְּרָה, וְאֶשְׁפְּכָה עָלַי נַפְשִׁי-- כִּי אֶעֱבֹר בַּסָּךְ, אֲדַדֵּם עַד-בֵּית אֱלֹהִים: בְּקוֹל-רִנָּה וְתוֹדָה; הָמוֹן חוֹגֵג.	5. These things I remember, and I pour out my soul: How I passed with the crowds, moved with them, the celebrant throng, to the house of God, voicing gladness and gratitude.
ו מַה-תִּשְׁתּוֹחֲחִי, נַפְשִׁי-- וַתֶּהֱמִי עָלָי:	

[54] Translation largely drawn from *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature,* with exceptions noted in subsequent footnotes.

[56] Psalm 42 is the first of several psalms associated with the Korahites, a group of Levitical singers. Given the song's themes, it is possible the author is a Korahite poet, living in exile from Jerusalem.

[57] *Nefesh* can be understood both as one's entire 'being', in living corporeal form, and as soul, one's metaphysical lifeforce beyond the material realm. In this translation, I use both English words, to evoke a sense of yearning for God that is at once physically embodied, and transcending the material realm.

[58] "Cries out" can also be translated as "yearning", or the stretching out of the neck. Whether audible or not, the author extends themselves vulnerably.

הוֹחִלִי לֵאלֹהִים, כִּי-עוֹד אוֹדֶנּוּ-- יְשׁוּעוֹת פָּנָיו.	6.Why so downcast, my soul, so disquieted within me? Have hope in God, for I will yet
ז אֱלֹהַי-- עָלַי, נַפְשִׁי תִשְׁתּוֹחָח:	praise God's saving presence.
עַל-כֵּן--אֶזְכָּרְךָ, מֵאֶרֶץ יַרְדֵּן; וְחֶרְמוֹנִים, מֵהַר מִצְעָר.	7. My God, my soul is downcast within me; therefore I recall you from the land of Jordan
ח תְּהוֹם-אֶל-תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא[55], לְקוֹל צִנּוֹרֶיךָ;	and the Hermon mountains, from Mount
כָּל-מִשְׁבָּרֶיךָ וְגַלֶּיךָ, עָלַי עָבָרוּ.	Mizar.[59]
	8. Deep calls to deep at the voice of your
ט יוֹמָם, יְצַוֶּה יְהוָה חַסְדּוֹ, וּבַלַּיְלָה, שִׁירֹה עִמִּי--	cataracts, all your breakers and waves have
תְּפִלָּה, לְאֵל חַיָּי.	swept over me.
	9. By day, may Adonai command devoted
י אוֹמְרָה, לְאֵל סַלְעִי-- לָמָּה שְׁכַחְתָּנִי:	kindness, and by night may God's song be
לָמָּה-קֹדֵר אֵלֵךְ-- בְּלַחַץ אוֹיֵב.	with me, a prayer to the Deity of my life.
יא בְּרֶצַח, בְּעַצְמוֹתַי-- חֵרְפוּנִי צוֹרְרָי;	10. I declare to God, my rock, " Why have
בְּאָמְרָם אֵלַי כָּל-הַיּוֹם, אַיֵּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ.	You forgotten me? Why must I walk in
	gloom, oppressed by my enemy?
יב מַה-תִּשְׁתּוֹחֲחִי, נַפְשִׁי-- וּמַה-תֶּהֱמִי עָלָי:	11. Like murder in my bones, my adversaries
הוֹחִילִי לֵאלֹהִים, כִּי-עוֹד אוֹדֶנּוּ-- יְשׁוּעֹת פָּנַי, וֵאלֹהָי.	revile me, as they daily address me, "Where

[55] Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel takes *tahom* out of context and considers it as a place of intimate meeting: When we are in touch with our depth, we can reach out to meet the depth of another.

[59] The author brings God to mind through memory, from a place of lonely exile.

	is your God?" 12. Why do downcast, my soul, why so disquieted within me? Have hope in God, who I will yet praise, my saving presence, my God.

Lyrics in Practice: This Psalm contains several recurring themes that point to daily practices of resilience cultivation, particularly in vulnerable, challenging times. The soul's longing for God takes shape in primal metaphors of thirst and hunger for holy companionship. In taking the Hebrew definition of "*nefesh*" to its broadest understanding, the throat/neck becomes the locus of longing for God, which makes chant and vocalization of yearning a powerful, applicable medium for connection. [60] The following practice, centered on the refrain from verse 8, תְּהוֹם-אֶל-תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא, *Deep calls to Deep*, moves from silence into meditative chant into hitbodedut, drawing the inner voice of the practitioner from their inner depths into the depth of relationship to God:

Suggested 10 Minute Daily Morning Practice: (Solo or group)

*3 minute silent meditation to sink into primordial self, with option to use the word ***Tehom,*** depth, as an anchoring image for settling into intimate space.

[60] *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature p. 195*

*3 minute chant: *תְּהוֹם-אֶל-תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא,* moving from silence into speech, yearning to reach a divine depth beyond self.

*3 minute *hitbodedut* experience: adding specific shape and texture to the yearning one needs to express to God, or to the depth of an 'Other' from the inner depth one has accessed.

*1 minute return to chant to seal practice: *תְּהוֹם-אֶל-תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא*

Psalm 90: Intimate Interdependence

Psalm 90 addresses the uniqueness of partnership between mortal and divine that our tradition calls us to, tracing one human's experience over a lifetime. This psalm is bold and unique in its attribution to Moses, a figure we have already explored as God's intimate partner in resilience.[61] Though the reader need not assume that the poet is Moses, we can draw great insight from what we know of Moses' relationship to God through this lens. In the opening ascription, the author calls particular attention to Moses' humanness, as well as our own, as descendants of this lineage: "A prayer of Moses, the man of God. You, O God, have been a refuge for us from generation to generation." The poet then acknowledges God's awesomeness, and "larger than life" presence, which surpasses any human ability to conceive creation. "Before the mountains were born and before you formed the earth…from eternity to eternity, You are the Divine."[62] Humanity, in contrast is but one element of God's creation, vulnerable to expiration, and return

[61] This is the only psalm of the entire 150 that references Moses in it's ascription. Though we cannot be certain that the ascription was part of the original psalm, it is worth noting the parallels to Moses' last speech in Deuteronomy, where he reflects on his lifetime of leadership. (Segal 432).
[62] Psalm 90:1-2.

to dust. “You turn humankind back to dust, decreeing ‘Turn back you children of humankind.’ The author voices a natural bewilderment that accompanies a human being’s awareness of mortality, and temporal existence, in contrast to God’s awesome eternality.[63] “For in your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has passed, like a watch in the night…Indeed we are consumed by Your anger and terror-struck by Your fury.”[64] In light of that contrast, the author is both humbled by God’s impact on us, and daring in the way he calls God into meaningful relationship. The challenging reflections on God’s anger in verses 7-9, and acknowledgement of extreme power imbalance between humans and God, do not keep the author from petitioning God to be the best possible partner in living a human, mortal life.

The psalmist goes on to describe to God the bewilderment of the aging process, and the challenge that most humans face to be able to enjoy life while living it - particularly when one is in one’s most active years. “The days of our years are all of seventy or...eighty; but the best of them are trouble and sorrow. Indeed they go by speedily, and we fly away,” the psalmist laments. [65] Then the psalmist turns to ask God directly for the help he seeks: the wisdom to live life mindfully, and with gratitude, a quality that holds a key to resilience. [66] “Bring us to know how to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart…satisfy us at daybreak with your steadfast love that we may sing for joy all our days” (Psalm 90:12-14). The psalmist yearns to live with gratitude, and to trust that the toil of human life has meaning, and purpose at the end of

[63] Segal, 426.
[64] Psalm 90: 4-7.
[65] Psalm 90:10.
[66] Psalm 90:12.

the day. The psalmist seems here to comment on a frustration many of us experience throughout our lives—to feel that we are working towards a higher, more gratifying purpose than the daily grind of to-dos, the details that can often bring us to feeling drained.

The last line reveals the psalmist's sense of purpose being oriented towards tangible, physical labor: "Establish with us the work of our hands; yes, the word of our hands, establish it!" (Psalm 90:17). The psalmist pronounces a desire to build in partnership with God, and to find purpose in the role they play in this life, however God sees fit. Thinking back to Moses' frustration at the end of his life, when he is told he cannot enter the Promise Land, one can sense the real yearning and hunger of the psalmist for God's reassurance that his life's work matters. Despite feeling humbly apart from God, the human author seeks God's partnership in a shared purpose. This acknowledgement opens the door for practices of relationship cultivation that enhance our highest sense of purpose, despite the challenges those efforts bring, knowing ultimately, we will learn from the partners who make those efforts possible.

Psalm 90 Full Text and Translation[67]

א תְּפִלָּה, לְמֹשֶׁה אִישׁ-הָאֱלֹהִים: אֲדֹנָי--מָעוֹן אַתָּה, הָיִיתָ לָּנוּ; בְּדֹר וָדֹר.	1.A prayer of Moses, the man of God: You, O master, you have been a refuge[68] for us from generation to generation.
ב בְּטֶרֶם, הָרִים יֻלָּדוּ-- וַתְּחוֹלֵל אֶרֶץ וְתֵבֵל; וּמֵעוֹלָם עַד-עוֹלָם, אַתָּה אֵל\	2.Before the mountains were born, and before You formed the earth and the world, and from eternity to eternity, you are the Divine.[69]
ג תָּשֵׁב אֱנוֹשׁ, עַד-דַּכָּא; וַתֹּאמֶר, שׁוּבוּ בְנֵי-אָדָם.	3.You turn humankind back to dust, decreeing, "Turn back you children of humankind!"
ד כִּי אֶלֶף שָׁנִים, בְּעֵינֶיךָ-- כְּיוֹם אֶתְמוֹל, כִּי יַעֲבֹר; וְאַשְׁמוּרָה בַּלָּיְלָה.	4.For in Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has passed, and like a watch in the night.[70]
ה זְרַמְתָּם, שֵׁנָה יִהְיוּ; בַּבֹּקֶר, כָּחָצִיר יַחֲלֹף.	
ו בַּבֹּקֶר, יָצִיץ וְחָלָף; לָעֶרֶב, יְמוֹלֵל וְיָבֵשׁ. כִּי-כָלִינוּ בְאַפֶּךָ; וּבַחֲמָתְךָ נִבְהָלְנוּ.	5.You cause them to flow by. They are sleep. At daybreak they are like grass that renews itself;

[67] Translation largely drawn from *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalm as Literature*.
[68] The reference to God as Refuge borrows directly from the language of Deut. 27. Ma'on is also a biblical reference to heaven.
[69] This verse emphasizes God's eternality and existence beyond and before all of Creation, not solely human beings.
[70] The brevity of human life starkly contrasts the depiction of God's ever-presentness. The "watch in the night" is the briefest time division found in the Torah. Segal, 427.

ח שת (שַׁתָּה) עֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ לְנֶגְדֶּךָ; עֲלֻמֵנוּ, לִמְאוֹר פָּנֶיךָ.	6. at daybreak it flourishes, renewed' by dusk it withers and dries up.
ט כִּי כָל-יָמֵינוּ, פָּנוּ בְעֶבְרָתֶךָ; כִּלִּינוּ שָׁנֵינוּ כְמוֹ-הֶגֶה.	7. Indeed we are consumed by your anger and terror-struck by your fury.
י יְמֵי-שְׁנוֹתֵינוּ בָהֶם שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה, וְאִם בִּגְבוּרֹת שְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה--	8. You have set our iniquities before You, our hidden sins in the light of your face.
וְרָהְבָם, עָמָל וָאָוֶן:	9.Indeed, all our days pass away under your
כִּי-גָז חִישׁ, וַנָּעֻפָה.	wrath; we consume our years like a sigh.
יא מִי-יוֹדֵעַ, עֹז אַפֶּךָ; וּכְיִרְאָתְךָ, עֶבְרָתֶךָ.	10.The days of our years are all of seventy or, given the strength, eighty years; but the best of them are trouble and sorrow. Indeed
יב לִמְנוֹת יָמֵינוּ, כֵּן הוֹדַע; וְנָבֵא, לְבַב חָכְמָה.	they go speedily, and we fly away.
יג שׁוּבָה יְהוָה, עַד-מָתָי; וְהִנָּחֵם, עַל-עֲבָדֶיךָ.	11. Who can know Your furious anger, and Your wrath, which matches the fear of You? [71]
יד שַׂבְּעֵנוּ בַבֹּקֶר חַסְדֶּךָ; וּנְרַנְּנָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה, בְּכָל-יָמֵינוּ.	12.Bring us to know how to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart.
טו שַׂמְּחֵנוּ, כִּימוֹת עִנִּיתָנוּ: שְׁנוֹת, רָאִינוּ רָעָה.	13. Turn,[72] oh God! How long?! Show mercy

[71] Here, the anger of the author may harken to Moses' anger and disappointment over God's harsh punishment in striking the rock, and Moses' inability to enter the promise land at the end of his life.

[72] In verse 3, the author notes God's power to turn humans back to the dust. Now, the human demands that God turn us, with compassion.

	to your servants.
טז יֵרָאֶה אֶל-עֲבָדֶיךָ פָּעֳלֶךָ; וַהֲדָרְךָ, עַל-בְּנֵיהֶם.	14. Satisfy us at daybreak with Your steadfast love that we may sing for joy all our days.
יז וִיהִי, נֹעַם אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ--עָלֵינוּ:	15. Give us joy for as many days as You have afflicted us, for the years we have seen calamity.
וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ, כּוֹנְנָה עָלֵינוּ; וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ, כּוֹנְנֵהוּ.	16. Let your deeds be seen by Your servants, and Your glory by their children.
	17. And may the favor of Adonai, our God, be with us, and establish with us the work of our hands, yes, the work of our hands, establish it! [73]

Suggested 10 Minute Daily Morning Practice: (Solo or group)

*Two minute silent meditation with fists closed-turning inward to reflect on the smallness, and mortality of life.

*Three minute stream of conscious journalising reflecting on the feelings that arose in the meditation: *What fears come up as you contemplate life's passing? Where is God in your fear?*

[73] The final prayer to God centers on our daily purpose, rather than a broad, sweeping crisis intervention. Human happiness is redefined as day to day satisfaction with the way we live, and the work we do.

*Two minute silent meditation with hands open and receptive-reflecting on the positive purpose and meaning you would like to derive from your daily actions and relationships.

Three- minute write: How can my actions and interactions today align more with satisfying purpose?*

*Final gesture of resilient partnership: Either in a group holding hands, or, if alone, holding hands out to meet an imagined 'Other", affirming outloud one word or thought about the kind of relationship you want to be a part of that relates to your work/purpose.

Lyrics in Practice: This psalm's resounding call to evolving human-divine partnership lends itself well to contemplative reflection on purpose, and sacred relationships that help us manifest our purpose day-to-day with greater clarity and satisfaction. As noted above, generative relationships demand that the parties involved voice the challenges, as well as the awesomeness of working together, in a vulnerable manner. The following practice of hand-centered meditation, and journaling, inspired by arc and final verse of the psalm serves either an individual or a collective in clarifying inte

ntions for partnership in resilience.

Psalm 30: Embodied Praise

Psalm 30, "a dedication of the house," attributed to King David, follows the inner thoughts of a poet who evolves in loving, complex relationship with God, self and community. The author finds transformation from hardship and hopelessness into loving devotion, and shares the transformation publicly through embodied expression of gratitude. The exuberant praise of God with which the author opens and closes the psalm contrasts with the fearful desperation for an absent God the author confesses to know later in the verses.

Psalm 30 Hebrew and Translation[74]:

א מִזְמוֹר: שִׁיר-חֲנֻכַּת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד.	1.A psalm of David. A song for the dedication of the house.[75]
ב אֲרוֹמִמְךָ יְהוָה, כִּי דִלִּיתָנִי; וְלֹא-שִׂמַּחְתָּ אֹיְבַי לִי	2.I will exalt you Adonai, for you drew me up as if from a well, and
ג יְהוָה אֱלֹהָי-- שִׁוַּעְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ, וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי.	my enemies could not gloat over me.
ד יְהוָה--הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן-שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי; חִיִּיתַנִי, מיורדי-	3.Oh, Adonai, my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me.
(מִיָּרְדִי-) בוֹר.	4. Adonai, you have drawn my entire being up from Sheoul, sustained my

[74] Translation largely drawn from *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature,* with exceptions noted in subsequent footnotes.

[75] In the context of King David, the 'house' refers to the Temple, which David intended to build as was never able to. The imagery of 'house' works well as a metaphor for that which we commit to building over a lifetime, whether or not we get to see the work completed.

ה זַמְּרוּ לַיהוָה חֲסִידָיו; וְהוֹדוּ, לְזֵכֶר קָדְשׁוֹ.	life, (kept me) from descending into a pit.
ו כִּי רֶגַע, בְּאַפּוֹ-- חַיִּים בִּרְצוֹנוֹ: בָּעֶרֶב, יָלִין בֶּכִי; וְלַבֹּקֶר רִנָּה.	5. Sing to Adonai, you devoted ones, and give thanks to God's renowned holiness.[76]
ז וַאֲנִי, אָמַרְתִּי בְשַׁלְוִי-- בַּל-אֶמּוֹט לְעוֹלָם.	6. For (God's) anger is momentary, but God's favor is for a lifetime. One may weep by night, and by morning, rejoice.
ח יְהוָה-- בִּרְצוֹנְךָ, הֶעֱמַדְתָּה לְהַרְרִי-עֹז: הִסְתַּרְתָּ פָנֶיךָ; הָיִיתִי נִבְהָל.	7. I used to say, in my untroubled security, I shall never be shaken.
ט אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֶקְרָא; וְאֶל-אֲדֹנָי, אֶתְחַנָּן.	8. Adonai, when you pleased, you made me stand sturdy as a mountain; when you hid your face, I was terrified.
י מַה-בֶּצַע בְּדָמִי, בְּרִדְתִּי אֶל-שָׁחַת: הֲיוֹדְךָ עָפָר; הֲיַגִּיד אֲמִתֶּךָ.	
יא שְׁמַע-יְהוָה וְחָנֵּנִי; יְהוָה, הֱיֵה-עֹזֵר לִי.	9.To you, Adonai, I call out, and to you, I plead for mercy.

[76] The psalmist implores others to join him in praise, implying a desire for human, as well as holy partnership.

יב הָפַכְתָּ מִסְפְּדִי, לִמָחוֹל לִי: פִּתַּחְתָּ שַׂקִּי; וַתְּאַזְּרֵנִי שִׂמְחָה.	10.What profit is there in my blood, from my descent into the Deep?[77] Can dust praise You? Can it proclaim your steadfastness?
יג לְמַעַן, יְזַמֶּרְךָ כָבוֹד-- וְלֹא יִדֹּם: יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי, לְעוֹלָם אוֹדֶךָּ.	11. Listen, Adonai, and be merciful to me, Adonai,be my helper. 12. You have turned my mourning into dancing, have undone my sackcloth and girded me with rejoicing. 13. That my being might chant psalms to You, and not keep silent, Oh Adonai, my God, I will ever praise you.

When we first encounter the poet, God is a direct active presence in his life, drawing the poet up from a low place, hearing the poet's cry, and immediately responding with divine grace. "Oh God, my God, I cried out to you, and you healed me. You brought my soul up from Sheol…"[78]

[77] The hebrew '*dam'* can also mean one's life.
[78] Psalm 30:2-4.

"The poet then moves from addressing God directly to sharing this assurance of God's steadfastness with others, and encouraging them to join in praise, so they too may feel the joy of knowing God. "Chant psalms to Adonai, all you faithful ones…God's wrath is momentary, but God's pleasure is for a lifetime."[79]

Now the psalmist turns to disclose about a time in his life when he took for granted God's grace, and learned the hard way that, at times, one suffers despite God's goodness. "I used to say, in my untroubled security, I shall never be shaken,"[80] the psalmist admits. "When you were pleased, I stood strong as a mountain; when You hid your face, I was terrified." These contrasting experiences of God's presence and absence, and the author's reaction to both reveal to the reader that the author does not live in a reality where God instantly abates hardship. Instead, the author cries out to God sometimes at a desperate pitch, and must weather the suffering of the present, not knowing precisely when he will feel better. "To you God, I call, I beg for mercy…Hear O God, be my helper!"[81]

As the readers, we do not know precisely when or how God returns to the author, but sense in the final lines that faith in God does once again transform the author's state from despair into the exuberance we first encountered. "You have turned my mourning into dancing for me, have undone my sackcloth and girded me with rejoicing, that my being might chant psalms to You, and not keep silent, Oh Adonai, my God, I will ever praise you."[82] The psalmist concludes with a

[79] Psalm 30:5-6.
[80] Psalm 30:7-8.
[81] Psalm 30:9-11.
[82] Psalm 30: 2-13.

full-bodied expression of thanks that we know comes not only from the pleasure of knowing God when life is good, but from weathering the challenges of life when God seems less present, and emerging resilient, with soul intact.

The extremes capture a sense that the author's gratitude to God is not naively borne of a charmed life, but developed over a lifetime of ups and downs. The author seems to be affirming that, in one's personal history, despite ups and downs, through sheer determination, one can transform one's narrative to center on praising, and partnering with God, rather than despairing. [83]

Commentators posit that this psalm has been assigned as liturgy for the holiday of Hanukkah, and designated for daily recitation precisely because it demands affirmation of goodness despite hardships and setbacks.[84] Though the voice is singular, the tone of the psalm seems to inspire a community to transform through this faith-centered practice of singing, dancing, and praising God's name.

The psalm fits particularly well with the third piece of the 'arc of resilience' we are exploring, as the author proclaims his or her transformation publicly, after doing the internal work of affirming faith. This transformation is proudly witnessed in body and voice, and inspires others to join the chorus of gratitude.

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[83] Segal, *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature p. 140.*

[84] The connection between the Psalm and Hanukkah is both a natural connection to the Hebrew in the first line "*Hanukat ha bayit*", and a reference to a historical point of great struggle and re-emergence, and determination to praise God despite obstacles to doing so.
Benjamin Segal, *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature*. 138.

Lyrics into Practice: The vivid physicality in this psalm begs to be choreographed for embodied practice. As noted above, the psalm is often recited daily in traditional minyanim, or on Hannukah, and select verses have been set to music for communities to sing on Shabbat.[85] As a daily morning or evening home practice, the following ritual draws on the lyrics to bring the individual back into grateful awareness of the body as a locus of holiness, and an instrument for praising God:

Suggested Ten Minute Daily Practice (Solo or Group)

**3 Min Guided Body Scan Meditation: Dedicating the Body-House to God.*

**3 Min Interpretive Stretching Inspired by the Lyric "You have brought my soul up from the Deep"*

**3 Min Expressive Improv Dancing Inspired by the Lyric "You have turned my mourning into dancing."*

**1 Min: Symbolic movements of 'girding' or readying the body for rejoicing in its existence.*

[85] Verse 5 "Sing psalms to God" is often sung in communities on Shabbat.

Prayer as a Pillar of Resilience:

Building the Practice that Your Soul Needs

"We call out that God is one, and rarely notice that God is the very one sitting next to us, and in front of us and behind us," writes Rami Shapiro. "We say that God's love is unending yet never let it sear away the self-pity that fuels the false self we insist upon calling 'me.' I value synagogue and liturgy for the community they offer, but when it is God I seek, my prayer is the unscripted dialogue of Psalm 42:7: deep calling to deep."[86]

Shapiro's words call us, reaching for our own depths, inviting us to consider the vital and vulnerable possibilities of healing and transformation that arise when we make time to craft a personal prayer practice. Spiritual leaders and communal activists from ancient biblical times to the present moment have consistently expressed the need to engage in a private, authentic prayer life. Such practice is especially essential in order to face the many challenges to resilience discussed in this thesis - from loneliness and personal loss, to exhaustion, to overwhelming hope and yearning.

Particularly when personal reserves feel tapped, and the work of healing the wider world's brokenness leaves an activist in need of her own solace and companionship, prayer offers itself as an accessible, ever-present tool of resilience. Building upon our study of psalms, which models one medium for engaging in a self-disclosing conversation with God, the following prayer practices aim to guide and ground activists and communal leaders through

[86] Rami Shapiro, Making Prayer Real, p. 29.

trying times. They are meant to supplement, rather than supplant a more traditional prayer practice with a siddur. Those who already find solace in traditional davening will hopefully find their practices only enhanced with these contemplative exercises included. Others might regard this as a beginning or even a stepping stone for composing their own prayer routines in light of their specific needs and opportunities.

Please note: the practices offered follow the arc of a day, based on the Jewish custom of praying at morning, afternoon, and night, though they may be employed at any time that fits the needs and schedule of the pray-er.

Modah Ani L'fanecha:

Morning Prayer Practice of Gratitude and Devotion in Relationship

Morning offers itself as an ideal time to align one's priorities for the day with sacred purpose. For busy activists and communal leaders, the awareness of returning consciously to body and breath after sleep can prompt a natural outpouring of gratitude, or just as easily prompt an immediate attachment to to-do lists, external obligations and fears of insurmountable tasks anticipated ahead. The following morning prayer practice, inspired by Rabbis Shefa Gold and Karen Fox, is meant to help the pray-er orient towards purposeful gratitude, without squelching the inner voice that needs to know it is not alone in facing the obstacles ahead.

1. Immediately upon waking, even before opening the eyes, let the Hebrew refrain '*Modeh Ani* (if a man) or *modah ani* (if a woman)',[87], "I am grateful", or "I acknowledge", wash over you repetitively, and allow yourself to attend to the feelings that arise in response.
2. As specific things you are grateful for come to your consciousness, note them as a blessing. When your awareness turns to stressors, note those as well without judgement, returning to the phrase "I acknowledge". Continue with this practice until at least five things you can name with gratitude arise, addressing the thanks to God or to the greater force you connect to.
3. After centering yourself in gratitude, turn your attention to your heart and begin a compassionate blessing practice for entering into relationship, first with yourself, moving to beloved family and friends, extending to neutral relationships, and finally for those who are struggling to relate to. For each person of focus, visualize them in your mind, and then offer a blessing based on the following formula:

On the inhale: *Please Adonai/God/Shechinah*

On the exhale: *May you* _____

(Ex. include May you feel loved, May you be healthy, May you find comfort……)

Repeat this blessing up to five times with each person.[88]

4. Conclude your prayer with these open-ended questions to self:

*"How can I be a conduit of love, and gratitude today?"

[87] The literal hebrew translation of *Modeh* for a man, or *Modah* for a woman, can also be "acknowledge"
[88] Rabbi Mike Commins, *Making Prayer Real,* p. 217.

* What support do I need to maintain my awareness of a grateful heart today?

*How can my to-do list align with this greater purpose?

If helpful, take a moment to journal your answers, or simply note them mentally, before moving into an active state of planning for the day.[89]

Dear God,

Afternoon Prayer Practice for Unburdening, Sharing the Load

Prayer can take many forms, from personal to private, audible to silent, celebratory to downright indignant. Making space for your soul's honest outpouring of need and concern in the thick of a demanding day can help reorient you to the sense of gratitude and interconnectedness that might have felt more possible before fifty urgent emails arrived in your inbox, or a particularly hard-fought effort did not go your way. Gratitude is not simply an attempt to mask difficulties, or see the world with rosy glasses. Rather, as the psalmist picks up on in the works we explored previously, gratitude is an essential source for renewing vitality and motivation, and a way to hold disappointment, anger, or sorrow without feeling oneself break in response to the burden. Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz suggests that one effective way to unburden the soul and practice discernment in the midst of external chaos and stress is to write a letter addressed to God , (or the name for God you best resonate with), that also allows God a chance to respond. Rabbi Spitz suggests the following model for addressing God in written prayer:

1. In a place of quiet and solitude, take a moment to settle with a blank page

[89] Rabbi Karen Fox, *Making Prayer Real,* p. 210.

2. When ready, open a prayer journal (specifically designated for spiritual writing) and write the most honest address to God you can-naming things you most yearn for yourself personally, and for others; express struggles you may be having, guidance that you seek.
3. When you are finished, take a moment or two for silence, and recenter yourself in your body and breath.
4. Using your imagination, write yourself a response from God's perspective, appreciating that there is no wrong way to hear from the God you imagine-either what you sense God would say, or what you wish God would say.
5. Conclude with a vocalized personal prayer, for what you need, and gratitude for what you have.[90]
6.

Hitbodedut:

An Evening Prayer Practice for Deep Honesty and Insight

Rav Nachman of Breslav in the 19th century popularized the prayer practice of speaking in uninterrupted flow to God from a place of solitude. This challenging practice can bring inhibitions and subconscious yearnings to the surface and help ease the mind from worrying late into the night about unresolved tensions. Though the process is deceptively simple, it can be deeply impactful for pray-ers to address God in this way. It is recommended to build up to doing

[90] Rabbi Elie Spitz, "Making Prayer Real", p 223

this as a regular practice when seeking resilience in a particularly challenging time, given that one can feel quite vulnerable when calling out with this honest bearing of the soul..

1. Find a place where you can be alone and speak audibly without detection others.

2. Designate a set period of time in which to talk to God without interruption, or extended pause. Experts recommend starting with 5-10 minutes of this practice until you get used to stream of conscious speaking for longer periods of time. You can open your address with the Hebrew phrase "Adonai, s'fatai tiftach u'fi yagid thilatecha," an excerpt from Psalm 51:17, which translates to "Adonai, (My God) open up my lips and my mouth will declare your praise." This phrase opens the traditional Amidah, or 'standing prayer' that features in every Hebrew worship service. The rabbis of the Talmud understood this phrase to be a declaration of intention to approach God that was essential before requesting specific guidance for spiritual and physical well-being. [91]However you open your prayer, allow your words to flow freely to wants, hopes, fears, addressed to God, without pause to censor or analyze.

3. Close your practice with a prayer acknowledging God, and the time you've spent sharing together. One possible refrain that also comes from the traditional Hebrew siddur is the blessing: "Baruch Atah Adonai, Shomea T'filah" (Blessed are you, the one who listens to prayer"). As with any of the practices, you can adapt the opening and closing refrains to fit your natural language of address and understanding of God.

Extending Prayer Practice in Shabbat: Resting the Soul

[91] Mishkan Tefillah, p. 205.

Above and beyond the daily practice of acknowledging spiritual yearnings and gratitudes that a regular prayer practice affords, Shabbat, the Jewish people's designated day of rest, contains a host of rituals, prayers, songs, and themes that make it one of the most basic biblical tools of resilience that any activists can cultivate. "Shabbat trains out eyes and souls to sense holiness and connection, orienting us and making it possible to bring this into our activism all week long," notes rabbi and social worker David Jaffe. "When grounded in awareness of these connections, our daily efforts to get one more restaurant to establish ethical labor or environmental practices, or convince three more legislators to sign onto a letter, fit into a greater vision of a world complete. [92]

A full-time activist and Jewish teacher, Jaffe and many other busy communal leaders find solace and relief in choosing to observe the Torah's laws of Shabbat[93] by setting the day apart not to engage in daily work, chores or shopping, to refrain from spending money, and instead, prioritize the time to rest, eat, be with friends in unrushed ways, and generally restore the soul.

For those of us (clergy particularly) already sputtering with reasons why a full day of not working and restraining from commerce is entirely un-feasible, Jaffe encourages a gradual build up of trust in the boundaries of Shabbat to build spaciousness and holy connection into your life. "Shabbat is a test of trust because it is a day we need to accept that what we have is enough,"

[92] David Jaffe, *Changing the World From the Inside Out*, p.220.
[93] These laws are based on refraining from the creative work used to build and maintain the Tabernacle in the Desert, Exodus Parshiot Yitro and Mishpatim.

notes Jaffe. “Protecting Shabbat with boundaries helps us grow in trust because it forces us to acknowledge that, ultimately, this world is much bigger than any of us. Despite how much we want it, control is elusive.”[94]

As a full-time rabbinical student who often has some professional responsibilities on Shabbat, I find it helpful to remember that honoring Shabbat observance need not be an ‘all or nothing’ experience. Taking a few extra hours for a luxuriously slow homemade meal, or reading a book just for the fun of it can fill me with a sense of inner renewal that the working week reaps the benefits of, particularly when that week is a stressful one.

There is an entire liturgy of Shabbat psalms, prayers and blessings meant to elevate the day of rest, and sanctify it apart from all others. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to share many of them, but I offer that the blessings accompanying the lighting of candles as night falls on Friday night offer a beautiful, full-sensory extended moment of pause to set an intention for rest, and renewal of body and spirit. In addition to offering the traditional candle lighting blessing, (*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha Olam, Asher Kidshanu B’mitzvotav, Vtzivanu lhadlik ner, Shel Shabbat,* Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Who Blesses us with the Mitzvah of Lighting Candles), one can pause, alone or with beloved company, to offer a personal prayer for the rest you need at the end of a full week.

[94] Jaffe, p.221.

Poetry: The Inner World Read Outloud

"Poetry is not an expression of the party line," writes Alan Ginsberg. "It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking what you really think, making the private world public, that's what the poet does."[95] This expansive, fluid medium serves many voices yearning to express their inner lives creatively; yet it also alienates nearly as many voices, who perceive poetry to be 'beyond their grasp' or frustratingly untethered to reality. For activists seeking to build resilience, poetry affords the opportunity to verbalize feelings without the constraints of common political discourse or linear format, and can be liberating, no matter how amateur a person might feel as a creative writer. Models from Jewish poets who speak to resilience abound, extending as far back as the psalmists of the Tanakh, through to the present moment. Their verses offer wisdom specifically rooted in one era, yet timelessly applicable for resilient individuals (or those who aspire to resilience) at any time. Often, the poetry of Jewish authors address religious themes either subtly or overtly. Yet the poet, unlike the psalmist or the pray-er, need not necessarily create a religious text in order to describe a journey of seeking, questioning or rebuilding inner resilience. Primarily, the poet models a vulnerability that might serve anyone seeking to plumb their inner depths for a greater sense of solace, purpose or clarity.

For the purposes of this limited exploration, the following resource offers a peek into one renowned Jewish poet's life and her expression of resilience. It includes guided questions for

[95] Alan Ginsberg.

study, and finally, a prompt for a novice activist to begin to explore their own resilient narrative through the poetic medium.

The poet Zelda, one of Israel's most celebrated modern writers, embodies and articulates themes of resilience that unlock mysterious emotional pathways, and ignite the imagination.Her personal story, abundant with challenges and creative triumphs, deeply informs the verses she offers, though one need not relate directly to the plot points of her life in order to draw inspiration from the texts she offers.

Zelda Schneurson Mishkovsky, who preferred simply "Zelda'" to her readers, was born in Russia in 1914, the daughter and granddaughter of prominent hasidic rabbis from the Chabad dynasty. When she was twelve, she immigrated with her family to Palestine where, shortly thereafter, her father and grandfather died. Over the next decades, she lived in Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv, amassing an eclectic educational background of religious schooling, painting, and teaching. She drew much inspiration for her early writing while living with her mother and husband Hayim, in Kerem Avraham, a religiously mixed neighborhood in Jerusalem. When she was widowed early in her marriage, she turned to her poetry to voice the intense grief she felt at Hayim's absence, and her attempts to reach him across a "chasm of silence". After his death, she also began to take in boarders in her Jerusalem home, from across all walks of life, and drew much joy and inspiration from the individuals whose lives she touched with this generosity. Her diverse fan base in Israel and abroad reflects the openness with which she extended herself in relationship, despite her own strictly maintained Orthodoxy. Zelda's legacy, both in life, and in

written word, testifies beautifully to the themes of resilience we've explored thus far. The following poem guide offers only a taste of the rich library of writings she has gifted to generations since.

You Call Out Silence to Me: Remaking a World Within Loss

In this brief, evocative poem, Zelda engages in a defiant conversation with nothingness, attempting, through acts of creation to remake a world that has been shattered by loss. Her opening line recalls Psalm 42's cry of, "deep calling to deep," yet here, the author responds to a deep sense of nothing with desperate attempts at something. Images of letters, sounds, and creatures animate a void that the voice of silence has created. Like the psalmist, she admits she needs help to act creatively, seeking to regard anything she can find a candle that will shed light where she fears there is only "tehom" or primordial chaos (the abyss of Genesis 1:2). Her determination to emerge from the chaos in partnership with creation seems to be a step of resilience that maintains its awareness of the unspeakable pain of loss.

You Call Out Silence to Me[97]

אתה שותק אליי	You call out silence[98] to me
אתה שותק אליי מין העולם הכמוס	from the hidden world.
בלע ההר את כל המקומות	The mountain has swallowed all the places
אשר התהלכת שם חי	Where you once walked alive.

[97] English translation by Marcia Falk, in her work *The Spectacular Difference: Selected Poems Zelda*, Hebrew Union College Press, 2004.
[98] In the Hebrew, the "you" of the poem exerts a palpable silent quality on the author as an active verb, and the author responds to it.

אני מכסה את שתיקתך	I cover up your silence
באותיות ובקולן	with the letters and their sounds,
אני מכסה את האין	I cover up the Nothingness
בציפורים שבאות לשתות מים	with birds that come to sip water
ובנחשים, כן בנחשים	and with snakes,
	yes, with snakes.
לא היה דבר אשר לא קראתיו נר	There is no thing I have not called a candle-
כי אפחד,	for I fear that in the dark
פן בחושך לא אבחין בין מים חיים	I will not distinguish living water from empty
לבורות נשברים[96]	wells.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What words, images, or emotions jump out at you from these lines? Who is the "you calling out silence" that you connect to personally in the poem?
2. What is uncomfortable or catalyzing about the silence and the nothing? What do you make of the attempt to cover them up?
3. What have you called a candle in your life and for what purpose? How are naming and creating from nothing forms of resilience?

[96] In the Hebrew, a more literal translation would be "broken wells".

Facing the Sea: Daring to be Vulnerable with a Great Other

From breaking the silence of grief, loss, and absence, we move to a poem that explores the relief of finding intimate company with whom to share one's challenges. The translator Marcia Falk, in analyzing this poem notes: "The speaker lets something go —"the golden fish," whatever that is —and she is embraced. Then the speaker and the sea sing together, but their voices are very different."[99] The lively, exuberant energy of the sea contrasts radically the poet's own sadness, yet they manage to sing a unified song that brings them both a greater sense of vitality. The two singers need not feel the same to find they need each other to express how they truly feel. Similarly, an individual struggling to feel resilient seeks relationship with intimate "others" who can share the burden precisely because their stories and challenges are not identical.

	Facing the Sea
כאשר שחררתי את דג הזהב	When I set free
צחק הים	the golden fish,
ואימץ[100] אותי	the sea laughed
אל ליבו החופשי[101],	and held me close
אל ליבו הזורם.	to his open heart,
אז שרנו יחד	to his streaming heart.
(אני והוא):	Then we sang together,

[99] Falk, *The Spectacular Difference.*
[100] The Hebrew here connotes that the sea strengthens, or fortifies the writer, as he holds her.
[101] חופש here invokes a sense of being 'free', un-constricted.

לא תמות נפשי. הישלוט רקב	he and I:
בזרם חי?	My soul will not die.
הוא שר כך	Can decay rule a living stream?
על נפשו הסואנת,	So he sang
ואנוכי שרתי	of his clamoring soul
על נפשי הכואבת.	and I sang
	of my soul in pain.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do you understand the release of the goldfish, and the sea's response of laughter?

2. What role does water play in your relationship to healing?

3. What song is your soul yearning to sing with the natural world?

When Yearnings

This brief, deceptively simple poem reveals the author responding with conviction, and clarity, to destabilizing forces of longing or temptation. The source of her strength and resolve is once again embodied by water, specifically, the "river called compassion." By describing herself in the language of betrothal, the poet seems to be declaring her abiding commitment to compassion, finding this force to sustain and fulfill her as yearnings seem to have not. The poet appears proud

of this newfound relationship, and buoyed by it to respond decisively to external forces that once burdened or shamed her.

כאשר געגועים	**When Yearnings**
כאשר געגועים פורעים	When yearnings dishevel[102]
את שערה הבהיר	her light hair,
היא לוחשת להם:	she whispers to them,
חִדלו	"Stop"
הייתם עלי לטרח,	You have burdened me.
מארשת אני	I am betrothed
לנהר לילי	to a nocturnal river
שנורא מן הים	more awesome than the sea,
הנהר ששמו רחמִים.	the river called compassion.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do you imagine 'yearnings' to be a dishevling force? What feelings or images do you associate with this phrase?
2. What do you make of the language of betrothal to the river 'compassion'?
3. What might you 'betroth yourself to' as a force of resilience in your life?

[102] The Hebrew word used here connotes the biblical sense of "uncovering"' one's nakedness as well.

Personal Resilience Poetry Practice

Reading poetry often provides nuance, perspective, or innovative suggestions of emotional pathways one might follow that would otherwise not be obvious. There is nothing like penning your own creative expression, however, to derive insight or clarity from your own lived experience. The following exercise offers one model for beginning to put some of your most formative experiences onto the page in a poetic, perspective- altering way. [103]

1. Make a list of five pivotal moments or decisions in your life. Experiment with reliving each of these as an observer and writing down every sensory detail you can conjure from that moment in time. (Temperatures, sounds, details in the wall pattern, tastes, idle conversations.)
2. Choose an image or sensory description from your list that feels the most powerful to you. Use that as the starting point or central metaphor for a poem.
3. Without telling the actual story of what happened, write a poem that thoroughly explores the moment you selected with as much sensory description as possible.
4. Notice how the images you have chosen are imbued with the thoughts, feelings, and discoveries that were triggered by this choice or experience, but without directly reporting about them.
5. Choose a name for the poem that represents the emotional truth of the moment.

[103] Poetry prompt drawn from Sage Cohen, *Writing the Life Poetic,* p. 60.

6. Reflect on the process with a trusted confidant, or in your personal journal. What did you learn about yourself from describing your experience this way? What surprised you? How do you feel after writing it?

Concluding Poetry Reflection

Attempting your own exploration of resilience poetry/writing may evoke very different feelings or reactions than the study of a professional poet's work. There is no need to compare your work to that of Zelda, or any other published author whose work inspires your resilience practice. Both reading and writing poetry are worthy, vulnerable forms of self-exploration that may serve you at a variety of times, and spaces. In both processes, clues to your own growing resilience lie in the questions that arise as you reflect on the process-not on an external judgement about whether the poem is "good".

Wisdom from the Field:

Rabbis and Activists Weigh In On Their Own Resilience Journeys

Throughout my thesis research, I sat down with rabbis and activists across a wide range of professional callings and life experiences, to hear how they define 'resilience' in spiritual context, and find it in the narratives of their own stories. The following interview excerpts illustrate a great depth and breadth of understandings of resilience. The experience inspired my own appreciation of conversation as a tool of resilience -- particularly with trusted mentors and courageous colleagues. Including these personal reflections and insights is my invitation to the reader to join the conversation.

Rabbi Lisa Goldstein, Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality[104]

Texts of Resilience into Practice

Rabbi Lisa Goldstein is the Executive Director of the Institute; prior to that, she spent 15 years as Executive Director of Hillel of San Diego where she garnered local and national recognition for her devotion to students and her leadership. She has been a service learning group leader for the American Jewish World Service and as a Mandel Jerusalem Fellow in 2009-2010, she designed a new methodology for combining local justice work and contemplative practice within a Jewish framework.[105]

[104] Interview took place 4/6/2017.
[105] http://www.jewishspirituality.org/about-us/leadership-faculty-board-staff/.

Laura: How would you define resilience (in English and in Hebrew)?

Lisa: I think of resilience as the working on the capacity - when you're in a place of constriction, - to have the tools to create a little bit of space so you can respond instead of react, in the wisest way possible, with an emphasis on "possible," because it's not always possible.

In Hebrew, the word *Merchav Ya*-the sense of spaciousness, the opposite of *Ha Metzar*, (Hebrew for 'narrow place") comes to mind. [106]

Laura: How do you relate to and apply resilience in your daily life?

Lisa: There are always problems that come up-big and small, from program that doesn't go as well as you want, to negative feedback, to "we just don't have the capacity to do the things we want to do," or as serious as "We have a $100,000 budget deficit". In each moment, there is the opportunity to respond with *chesed*. (Hebrew for "loving-kindness"). In the moment, resilience can manifest as, I'm having a conversation with a Board Chair, and notice we're both super frazzled, so we sit, for 3 minutes, before or after we've started, to be with breath, note what's present, then come back to whatever the issue is. At the Institute (IJS) we talk about resilience as "part of the practice", shorthand for "resilience needed here".

Regardless of circumstances, I have a daily and weekly practice of resilience: a combination of about a half hour of meditation and prayer most days, and a weekly chevruta, a partner who is

[106] Here, Rabbi Goldstein refers to the refrain from Psalm 118:5, *Min hametzar karati Yah, Anani vamerchav Yah. Translation:* From the Narrow place I called out to God, who answered me with Divine Expanse.

outside of the orbit of my regular life and serves as a spiritual confidant with whom I can explore - through shared texts - the different things going on in spiritual realm for each of us..

Shabbat is also part of my weekly practice in cultivating capacity for resilience: good food, community, being outside, all those different pieces create a deep reserve.

Laura: Is there a specific text/collection of texts or prayers that help you maintain or reclaim resiliency? Any specific to working for social justice and transformation?

Lisa: The last paragraph of Adon Olam-specifically the refrain, *Adonai li v lo ira* [translation: Adonai is for me, and I will not fear], helps me to cultivate a sense of trust that things will be ok. I remember that I'm not alone in this, I don't have to be in a place of such constriction. The psalms of Kabbalat Shabbat play in my head as background music that I can tap into when I feel myself slipping into constriction.

In terms of biblical texts, when things were really hard at institute, and there was a real chance of our mission completely flopping, I had a regular weekly chevruta with a young man who worked at Goldman Sachs. Together, we'd study the Zohar on Lech Lecha. I remember a specific passage, where the Zohar describes Abraham as embodiment of *Chesed,* and the south as the place of *Chesed*, but needing to travel to Egypt when famine came. There, Abraham was able to look at delusion but not cling to it...and able to return from the narrow place with new perspective. From this text, I learned that places of constriction are places to refine your pure-est self. I asked myself, what is the piece of truth I can take from this and return to a place of greater

stability and spaciousness? It was helpful to clarify with questions such as: what's my insecurity, what's my ego, what's not worth clinging to?

Laura: How do you approach text study, particular as a tool of resilience?

Lisa: Each time I study a text, I ask, "Is this a mirror that holds up something about my experience, my life?" For example, in the Zohar text, if Abraham is in his element, and that's what he needs to refine, what do I need to refine in my life?

Laura: How does creativity and ritual play a role in the way you maintain or reclaim resilience?

Lisa: Rituals often mark a particular turning point. For me, "practice" is more fitting of my approach toward resilience because it's an ongoing dedication, and a diligent commitment to cultivating quality of heart and mind.

The key is finding a form for that practice, and working with that form overtime, noticing when the form isn't as helpful, and when to adapt. I've needed to cultivate different practices for different times, and on occasion, have used mikveh, prayer, and other 'ritual' containers for practice. My capacity for creativity in my practice is actually a helpful indicative symptom of where I am in my 'spectrum of resilience'. When I feel most expansive, I also feel most able to be creative.

Laura: Is there a particular moment/experience in your life for which you wish you'd had a ritual/text/Jewish spiritual tool that you didn't? What might that have been?

Lisa: I would say that, personal loss of many kinds has brought up the need to evolve my

relationship to ritual and text. Before I discovered some of the practices I'm so immersed in now, so much of the Jewish ritual I engaged in was around action and ideas, but didn't address the heart. I focused on the mind and whether I'm doing things right. When I was in a place of grief, mourning, despair, or disillusionment, I didn't feel like I knew what to do with all of that difficult emotion, and I'd go outside it, because I didn't know how to go within a spiritual framework.

Laura: What language do you use to re-frame the practice you're engaging in now, so that it invites you and those you share with to be more heart-centered, particularly in justice work?

Lisa: There are so many ways of talking about these practices, that avoid the term "spirituality" which can be so vague or off-putting to many people, especially in the justice world. I often speak of quieting, centering, grounding, softening, and creating space for change.

I also think the way we talk about God helps to bring more people into resilient practice - by speaking of divinity, mystery, interconnectedness, unfolding. I also speak from my body:

I feel like I have right here, (points to top of chest) a spring of joy that I can access when I'm resilient, that's where I most access divinity as well. Sometimes that gets clogged like leaves on a gutter, and part of the practice is clearing the detritus so the flow can happen.

Laura: Who are your primary partners in resilience? How do you advise seeking partners in resilience?

Lisa: A huge part of resilience is the recognition that we are so profoundly interconnected. I take seriously the refrain of *"aseh lecha rav, v'kaneh lecha chaver"*[107] *[Translation: Make for oneself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend],* and value the relationships that guide me to a place of greater inner wisdom.

Have a chaver, someone you really trust who may not be a regular part of your life. In fact, it's especially helpful if they aren't, so the relationship can stay in that context of cultivating inner wisdom.

Pursue as many different ways as you can to experience love - whether from family, friends, partner, teachers, characters in books, particular places that fill you, music, etc. Whatever helps you open your heart and feel interconnectedness, and that you are precious, seen and beloved - go with that, because if you know that, everything else is fine. One of the greatest gift of not getting married until I was almost 50 was finding other ways to love and be loved.

Laura: What feels specifically important about resilience in this time? How would you advise people to begin collecting resources of personal resilience?

Lisa: Where we're in right now is going to be a long haul. Sometimes the impulse is to go out and change everything about yourself at once. Small sustainable steps are much more significant than big dramatic ones. I always remember the teaching that if you're on an airplane and change your course one degree, you end up in an entirely different place.

I also recommend exploring a core teaching of mindfulness - the balance of *chesed/loving-kindness* and *emet/truth*, and constantly seeking to create an environment of support and

[107] Pirkei Avot 1:6.

compassion that can hold the sometimes difficult task of telling the truth, knowing you can hold that truth both internally and externally.

Laura: What advice do you have for those seeking to be agents of transformation?

Lisa: Transformation is a long, painful, exhilarating journey, and resilience is a necessary component of sticking with transformation, and making it sustainable.

Resilience has a lot to do with sustainability and ongoing daily practice. Week-long meditation retreats, or big, immersive trainings are great, but if you have these great one-off experiences without scaffolding, they don't stick. It's the smaller, ongoing things that you make a conscious diligent commitment to that are in fact sustainable that lead to transformation.

Rabbi Sarah Bassin, Associate Rabbi, Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills[108]

Asei lecha rav u' knei lecha chaver[109]: Resilience in Relationship

Prior to joining Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, Rabbi Bassin served as Executive Director of LA–based NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change. Under Rabbi Bassin's leadership, NewGround was named one of the 50 Most Innovative and Inspiring Organizations in the Jewish Community by the Slingshot Guide. An avid leader in Jewish innovation, Rabbi Bassin is a member of the ROI Community of Jewish innovators, and she is an alumna of the prestigious Joshua Venture Group Fellowship. She currently serves on the Boards of UpStart,

[108] Interview took place 4/6/2017.
[109] Referencing Pirkei Avot 1:6 once more.

the Board of Rabbis of Southern California and NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change.[110]

Laura: How would you define resilience, both English, and in Hebrew?

Sarah: I think resilience is about *yesod*: having a foundation and a lot of clarity in that foundation, not letting external circumstances define you because you are internally rooted.
I also think of the Hebrew word *matzpen (Heb.* compass*),* a strong internal moral compass, that is rooted in Jewish theology. (The word for compass in Hebrew very closely resembles the word 'matzpun', meaning conscience. Both compass and conscience in Hebrew come from the same root Tz-P-N, which means both hidden *(tzafun*) and north (*tzafon*).)

Laura:How do you experience resilience in your life?

Sarah: A huge part of resilience for me is agitational, I am strengthened by proving conventional wisdom wrong, and driven by that long-term goal. The sense that I am going to prove wrong the person who's telling me my career is a waste fuels me. I'm also fueled to know that the way that the world as is isn't the way it should be.
As a personal resilience practice, I complain about what is making me angry to the core three or four people I trust, and get that injustice acknowledged, in order to move on to the work. I also rely on self faith. It's part of my midwestern sensibility that when there's something broken in the house, and it needs to be fixed, I draw on my own ability to figure this out myself.

Laura:What tools of resilience do you reach for in trying times throughout your career?

[110] http://www.tebh.org/2013-02-05-22-34-25/clergy

Sarah: Mentors are without question the tools I reach for when I'm feeling brokenness. The smartest thing I've done in my career is surrounding myself with mentors that have my back.

I need a mentor who I know is also going to tell me when I'm screwing up, not only when I'm awesome. I take people more seriously when there's truthfulness and pushback. My leadership is a byproduct of surrounding myself with mentors that steered me in ways I didn't realize I needed.

Laura: What do you make of the resilience of the rising leadership generation of Millennials? How do we need to seek resilience differently today?

Sarah: There's a delicate nature to the Millenial. We aren't equipped with resilience in the same way, maybe can't handle the critique. On the one hand, the Millennial generation has a much stronger sense of the world as it should be and our aspirations are higher. We just need a little more help making those aspirations real, vision is real, and we need to refine the tools to cope better on our way to getting there.

Interview with Rabbi Joel Thal Simonds, Executive Director, Jewish Center for Justice[111]

Resilience on the Long Road

Rabbi Joel Thal Simonds is the founding executive director of the Jewish Center for Justice, where he envisioned the need for a Jewish justice organization to reach the unaffiliated and expand the breadth and scope of wider Jewish community. Before this position, he was the West

[111] Interview took place 1/22/2018

Coast Legislative Director for the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Rabbis Simonds also serves as Rabbi of the Synagogue for the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, CA. For the past eight years, he has served as the Associate Rabbi at University Synagogue in Los Angeles.[112]

Laura: How would you define resilience, and how do you relate to resilience in your current work? Is there a Hebrew word you most closely associated with resilience?

Joel: I define resilience as the ability to expand our capacity to weather various storms and responsibilities that come our way. Resilience is cultivating the strength to look beyond the trenches to the larger vision.

In Hebrew the word that comes to mind is *kadimah*. I translate this both via the ancient and modern sense of moving forward, I have a vision of someone physically moving against a storm, and however slow, weathering that course.

Laura: How do you relate to resilience in the work that you do?

Joel: Speaking as a rabbi and the new executive director of the Jewish Center for Justice (JCJ), justice is not fast, justice is slow. It takes discernment, budgets negotiations, reconciliation, etc. Resilience, in my work, is the strength to move forward slowly. This mindset has been a part of everything I've been doing. Maintaining a vision of justice, spirituality and holiness while having to pound the pavement is a challenge . . . anyone that has to direct anything that raises funds has to have a resilience that helps them focus on the true mission-otherwise you're just

[112] Biography shared by the interviewee.

making deals. I need the constant vision of "what we're doing is important, what we're doing matters." It's everything.

On a very personal note, the creation of JCJ allows me the work-life balance that I always craved. I'm working just as hard, but my hours compare more to my community and family. It allows me to feel normal, connected, with close family and friends who remind me who I am.

Laura: What is a text or sacred story you connect to as a story of resilience?

Joel: I'm thinking of this week's Torah portion-*B'shallach*-particularly the scene where Moses raises his hands to fight w/ Amalek. When his hands are up, Israel prevails, when his hands are down, Israel is defeated. We read in the text that, as is natural for anybody, he cannot sustain with his arms raised the entire time. He needs help from others (specifically Joshua) to keep his arms up.

For me resilience is not being Moses in that story, but the one who holds the stones under Moses. Moses embodies the image of the people moving forward, making progress. The work of being rabbinic professionals is to hold up the people, the lay leaders, the community, etc, in order that they are able to keep moving forward. Together, rabbis and lay leadership create an effect of going counter to the natural need to stop moving forward.

Laura: How do you draw on the text you mentioned, and others, as resources of resilience?

Joel:I've found that if you don't have a strong, individual prayer life, you're going to have a very short term prayer life in the pulpit or other rabbinate. Personal prayer sustains me. I also

appreciate the command to be guided by the calendar, Shabbat and the practice of the holidays, and halacha, as I interpret it, reminds me of what I'm doing and who I am.

As a non-pulpit rabbi, I'm finding that we are really tested in our Judaism when we don't get paid for it. I don't have to be anywhere for Yom Tov services, how do I ensure that Sukkot isn't just for one or two advocacy alerts?

Laura: Is there a particular moment/experience in your life/career for which you wish you'd had a ritual/text/Jewish spiritual tool of resilience that you didn't?

Joel: Everyday, to be honest, I wish I had the capacity to live out the vision that I dictate. I want my prayer life to make me calmer, to make my personal life inspire and sustain me, I want to live the way we all preach on sermons. I want to be a little more open and susceptible to receiving the tools I already have

Laura: Who are your primary partners in resilience, and how do you communicate with them when you need strength?

Joel: My staff and board are wonderful. I picked my board from scratch, based on friendship, surrounding myself with people I trust. Of course I also look to my family, and really good friends, who I lean on to make my life feel a little more normal, and remind me there's a game on. One can be a rabbi and live a normal life, map your own future, and not let it be mapped for you. Then, life feels more resilient. Your life, your friends, your Judaism is not defined for you.

Resilience has to be true to each one of us-it cannot be defined for us. You make your own tool box.

Laura: What feels specifically important about resilience in this time? How would you advise people to begin collecting resources of personal resilience?

Joel: We're too much in it to even define what's needed for this time. We're at the very beginning of a major cultural shift. Too much has been exposed for our society to handle and deal with. It is going to take a generation or two to recover from laws and cultural norms that have been entirely changed. You cannot disrupt a society this fast and put it back together with an election or two.

The most optimistic among us need to be the ones to guide us-namely, the next generation. Diversity is on our side-liberalism and progress are on our side-even in this moment. Even in this moment I would still not want to live in any other time.

Interview with Rabbi Shelly Marder, Head of Jewish Life, Jewish Home of San Francisco[113]

Resilience in Retaining Connection

Rabbi Sheldon Marder is the co-editor, translator, writer, and commentator of Mishkan HaNefesh: Machzor for the Days of Awe, published by CCAR Press in 2015. He is also the contributor to other publications, such as Divrei Mishkan HaNefesh: A Guide to the CCAR Machzor, published by CCAR Press in 2016; and CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly,

[113] Interview took place 1/25/2018.

Summer 2013 issue. He is currently the Rabbi and Department Head of Jewish Life at the Jewish Home of San Francisco.[114]

Laura: How would you define resilience, and how do you relate to resilience in your current work?

R' Marder: I would say in one sense it is the ability to bounce back quickly from misfortune adversity, failure; and to recover from hardship. It's also really more of an emotional/psychological problem solving rather than an intellectual one. Allowing the whole emotional being to come into play to address the issue. It's the ability to reorient oneself to new circumstances, new reality. I think about it all the time with the people I work with. People find resilience they didn't know they had.

Laura: Is there a Hebrew word you most closely associated with resilience?

R'Marder: Yes, I tried to find a direct translation from Hebrew and the only word I could find was a rare word, *lihitoshesh, alef, shin, shin*, in hitpael, means to regain one's strength or courage or to pull oneself together,

A word that comes to me *ashrei,* meaning a happiness that's quite different from any momentary or transient feeling of happiness. *Ashrei* is an ongoing, continuous inner contentment in one's life. I think my metaphor is that *ashrei* is like an innertube within a tire, keeping you buoyant. A kind of happiness that exists whether you are sad this week, or happy. That's what resilience is-an ongoing feeling that life is fundamentally good, even when its not. This word is key to the Book of Psalms. (It is the opening line of Psalm One).

[114] http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2016/09/meet-editors-mishkan-hanefesh-rabbi-sheldon-marder/.

Laura: Is there a specific text/collection of texts or prayers that help you maintain or reclaim resiliency? What is the context you use them in?

R'Marder: The first is not a collection of texts, but something that helps me maintain resiliency is to reflect on Jewish history. I find that to be a source of resiliency. In terms of texts and prayers, I do think of the book of Psalms, there's a beautiful Walter Brueggemann writing about psalms introduces the notion of seeing the psalms as roughly divided into categories of psalms of orientation, disorientation, and re-orientation.[115]

Reorientation requires the quality of resilience. Psalms of lament or thanksgiving are psalms that I turn to and think about. Psalm 77 and Psalm 137 stand out.

Laura: How does creativity feature into your practice of resilience?

R' Marder: Creativity plays a big role in my resilience-the ability to be creative makes you resilient, because resilience is about recreating after some mishap or failure. A really important part of that for me is maintaining continuity with the past, a combination of being creative and being rooted-bring the strength of the past into the new creativity.

People who come into nursing homes are in a sense rootless. They've lost a lot, and left a lot behind, from possessions to relationship, places, etc, so I think their resilience depends a lot on being helped to identify things in their past that are still with them, that are the soil to grow from, in new ways. Friendship can be a creative act. What are you building on? Everyone has something to build on, and the kind of resilience people I work with have depends on the

[115] Original statement by Paul Ricour.

material of the past that can be present to feel a sense of continuity with who you've always been.

Laura: Is there a particular moment/experience in your life/career for which you wish you'd had a ritual/text/Jewish spiritual tool of resilience that you didn't? What might that have been?

R' Marder: I've had a ritual for a long time (not particularly Jewish) that before visiting people in the hospital and going out to do my work here, I read a poem. It slows me down, gives me an idea to start the day with, or a feeling. Often poetry challenges me to enter conversations with new understanding....

People leap the way poems do from thought to thought; rhythm and alliteration connect what would otherwise be disconnected to concrete ideas. People give you clues about what's connected, even when they skip around. It makes you a better listener for what really matters. What's drawn me to work on prayer books as a project is not quite being satisfied with the rituals and services we've had for certain occasions. That's been a way to create something I like to use myself. My governing principle is to ask: Is this a service that would inspire me?

Laura: Have you ever invented or re-imagined a ritual creatively to fit your specific need for resilience?

R' Marder: When I light a yardhseit candle, which I do for both my parents, one day isn't enough for me. I'm usually not home long enough for it to burn in its entirety, so I blow it out each time I leave, and relight it when I return, which draws the ritual out a number of days.

Laura: Who are your primary partners in resilience, and how do you communicate with them when you need strength?

R' Marder: I communicate with my parents through memory, as well as mentors who died a while ago. The extra days of the yardhseit allow for a deeper kind of communication through memory, thinking about lessons I learned from them, and it needs more than a day to do that. I think resilience is one of the qualities i get from them in different ways.

Laura: What feels specifically important about resilience in this time? How would you advise people to begin collecting resources of personal resilience?

R'Marder: It feels to me more important than ever to work on having a philosophy of life that is to always be clarifying what one believes-beliefs that define meaning, direction, purpose, to have a methodology for how to live-a personal 'halacha' or way to live. When I think of important decisions I've made, I can see a consistency. No matter what's going now, I'm still acting according to my guiding principles, for solving day to day problems. I can grow and do things better, but I can base them in personal values that give my life purpose. In the important ways I relate to people, I know they are based on my highest values for myself.

Awakening a Resilient Community

T'ruah Models Contemporary Resilience Building Among Activist Clergy

Early one August evening, hours before Rosh Hodesh Elul, a group of forty rabbis, cantors, and rabbinical students from across North America gathered in a shul library in Berkeley, CA, littered with art supplies. We'd been invited by T'ruah, a Jewish non-profit organization committed to placing clergy and lay leaders at the vanguard of the human rights movement.[116] The gathering, entitled "No Time For Neutrality: Building Rabbinic Resistance and Resilience" had been inspired by cries from Jewish communities across the country, lamenting a steady stream of attacks on the civil rights and dignity of vulnerable populations in America. That cry escalated to a resounding wail just before the conference began, as Americans witnessed one of the most horrific mass demonstrations of white supremacy and anti-Semitism in recent history, in Charlottesville, VA on August 12th, 2017. [117]

The clergy in attendance, many of whom identified as frontlines activists as well as congregational leaders, expressed despair, and emotional fatigue in the opening convening

[116] http://www.truah.org/about/our-name-and-history/.
[117] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/opinion/jewish-charlottesville-anti-semitism.html?mcubz=0&_r=0.

check-in. The weight of being contemporary prophets felt back-breaking. I suspected that any agenda able to address such anguish adequately would be a tall order. What I witnessed far surpassed creating space to lament. The gathering modeled a way of taking activists on a creative, communal journey of resilience-building. It capitalized on the wisdom of those present, invoked powerful prophetic voices from our tradition as teachers, and employed the tools of art, music and ritual, to move each community leader present from a place of siloed suffering, to one of expansive re-visioning.

In recounting this event, I hope to illustrate the issues that undergird the need for discovering shared sources for resilience, communal and individual. I also trust that we can glean effective resilience strategies applicable for any number of groups from studying the success of this particular, focused gathering.

As I describe the conference in sequence, I will highlight the ways in which, in a span of two and a half days, we traveled the three-part resilience-building journey described throughout this thesis, following this narrative arc of resilience:

1. Resisting silence to act as an agent in response to suffering
2. Mobilizing allies and resources to reclaim identity
3. Actualizing transformation of personal/communal narrative through witnessed action.

Sunday Evening: Making a Mess

"Allow me to explain the art supplies." Before any formal addresses to the conference delegates, T'ruah invited Rabbi Adina Allen, co-founder of the Jewish Studio Project, to lead a two-hour workshop on 'the Creative Process of Teshuva'. The Jewish Studio Project (JSP) boldly professes a mission to "activate creativity in individuals and communities to make life more meaningful, our tradition more vibrant and the world more just.[118]" Working across diverse, multi-generational communities, Rabbi Allen fuses text-based Jewish learning with arts exploration to address division, suffering, and stifling of the spirit within communities.

The circle of rabbis gathered Sunday night followed Adina's lead, and embarked on our own dive into creative expression. "What are you returning to with real awareness and non-reactivity?" Allen asked as she introduced the exercise. "How can we use our imaginations so that our 'return', our *teshuvah* from the narrow, painful place we're in, is actually a more vibrant place than we ever thought possible?" Before we could answer verbally, we were led first with niggun, a rich wordless melody. The Hasidic Breslov tradition teaches that the essence of song comes from finding and collecting the good from within the darkness. Communal song is the manifestation of the good that exists within each member lending a voice, and reveals a hidden wholeness even in the midst of fractured feelings and scenarios. [119]

With one collective song, we set a tone in the room of trust, and unity in beginning to address the splintering we each felt compelled to respond to. With materials before us, we first set an intention in writing on one side of a blank page. "What feels alive for you in this

[118] https://www.jewishstudioproject.org/
[119] David Jaffe, *Changing the World from the Inside Out: A Jewish Approach to Personal and Social Change*. p.78.

moment?" she suggested by way of prompt. "What emotions are surfacing in your response to the present? Together, after writing on this prompt, we flipped the page over, and began to express it visually, "no comments or explanations needed." Our materials ranged from gold and red gauze, to black markers, to NY Times headline cut-outs and Hebrew letter stamps.

"I will soften my internal barriers of resistance to front-lines activism," I silently told the blank page. For twenty minutes of friendly silence, forty adults ripped, colored, pasted, and crumpled our feelings about the present moment onto the page, letting our inner selves break out of linear or verbal constraints.

Finally, still in silence, we were invited to witness, and put words to what we had created, discovering what this medium of free expression had moved us to. I found my piece spoke to a bolder, more wild rendering of my feelings about the present political climate than I might have expressed had we begun in dialogue. I was surprised by both the despair and hope I saw intermingling on the page, noticing that art could hold a complicated layering of feeling that verbal discourse cannot always access. Witnessing my page, I began to address a volume of suffering I'd internalized that I had not yet found an outlet for in a saturated public sphere. When we came to sharing of our pieces, I found I was not alone in my need to voice something more drastic, messy, and impassioned than the role of clergy often condones. The sentiment in the room grew to become one of solace, and solidarity, as well as relief, in being able to be honest about how our emotional selves felt impacted by the balancing act of activist and clergy callings.

We closed the evening with a reflection on the experience, in which many self-professed "art-despisers" exclaimed at the joy and surprise they found in being able to create in this way. Finally, we closed by singing Olam Chesed Yibaneh, which felt like the most resilient response to sharing a vulnerable creative experience we could imagine. We let the lyrics that sealed our practice start to remake a vision of a world that we wanted to be a part of. Our hearts had broken open to the internal and external injustice of suffering , and the weight of participating in activism. The evening primed us to be deeply honest when journeying the following day into the next step on the arc of resilience: mobilizing allies and resources in transformation.

Monday: Rooting In Resilience Resources

The convening opened more 'traditionally' for a rabbinic conference on Monday, with a welcome keynote address from Truah's Executive Director, Jill Jacobs, followed by several moderated panels drawing social justice advocates, race-relations experts, community organizers and mindfulness practitioners together into discourse. The goals articulated by conference leaders included discovering tools and opportunities, as well as learning some essential facts about the current political climate. We began by reflecting on the past, present and future of Jewish justice work-from the TaNaKh's model of the early prophets confronting exilic woe, to the real-time, present-day rifts rabbis navigated within their urban and rural communities. By widening the scope of teachings and examples we could draw from, the conversation shifted from one of 'crisis management in a vacuum' to one of best practices for steering a longer, more resilient course of moral action.

Every issue a presenter raised from the bima, in the lunchroom, or in chevruta throughout the day, from the rights of handicapped individuals in schools, to the state of racism and anti-semitism in the wake of Charlottesville, drew upon a range of sources from TaNaKh, and from pivotal moments in Jewish communal history. In one session, we explored the texts of the Book of Samuel as a lens through which to define hope as a collective. In another session, we studied the Book of Esther to be able to speak candidly about fears of anti-semitism.Each session illustrated that what we were seeing now is not wholly unique to the time, and that resources exist within our own texts for honing clarity and insight. Between the collaborative, candid spirit of the activists in the room, and voices echoing from the pages we studied, I felt lifted by a sense that I was far from alone in a yearning for a course to sustain Jewishly-rooted justice work over a lifetime. I drew solace from the knowledge that at each time period, Jews were able to overcome the obstacles and hardships before them, as we bear witness to by being present.

The agenda also included time to develop the tools that would make each of us more resilient resources ourselves, as clergy and activists. Rabbi Margie Jacobs of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality led a break-out meditation session in which exhausted community organizers dared to sit in stillness for longer than they had in months. We practiced cultivating inner and outer compassion through a guided practice exploring the 'slow' that helps heal the soul. We opened and closed our meditation by sitting with a chant inspired by Leviticus 19:18: "*Hareini M'kabel/et alai, et mitzvat HaBorei- Vehahavtah l'reiakha kamokha/I am ready to accept upon myself the mitzvah of the Blessed one-love your neighbor as yourself."*

Between heavy-hitting sessions entitled 'Resurgent Anti-Semitism on the Left and Right Today', and 'Sanctuary: A Conversation for Committed Communities', we made time for a creative, participatory Minchah service, in which participants offered spontaneous blessings interspersed with the 18 Benedictions-a welcome, renewing opportunity to express gratitude, hope, forgiveness, and peace amidst the mental stimulation demanded in the agenda.

This day, dedicated primarily to learning and relationship building, helped to fortify each of us with a sense that our support networks were wide enough to bear the load of community leadership without breaking under its weight. By replenishing our wells of Torah knowledge, and reconnecting with others seeking renewal, we began to move constructively from the place of messy silence-breaking, to constructive, collaborative planning for a just response to suffering, trusting that we need not burn-out in the process.

Tuesday: Refusing to Remain Broken- Resilience in Action

Tuesday, August 22nd, Rosh Hodesh Elul, our final day of the conference, was a time to experience resistance and resilience intertwine. I woke up energized and prepared thanks to the work of the previous days. Our cohort boarded a bus carrying boxed lunches, musical instruments, a Torah scroll and tallitot for a Rosh Hodesh morning service. We would pray before a heavily-guarded ICE[120] detention facility in Richmond Ca.

We gathered on an unassuming stubby grass hill and assembled a makeshift bima. Above us, American and California state flags flapped proudly in bustling wind. To our right, in a cement building surrounded by barbed wire, over three hundred immigrants awaited uncertain

[120] US Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

fates, severed from family and community contact. We'd heard a few of the immigrants' harrowing stories of splintered parents from children, spouses from loved ones, imparted to us as we rode the bus, but I knew we wouldn't be meeting them in person today; Visiting hours are few and far between.

The complicated personal and political realities facing undocumented immigrants in this country today cannot be summarized or contextualized in a single narrative. T'ruah chooses to prioritize this issue, inspired by our own extensive Jewish remembrance of being an oppressed "other," vulnerable in diaspora. Our Torah calls impassionately "The ger (immigrant) who sojourns with you shall be like a citizen unto you, and you shall love this person as yourself, for you were gerim in the land of Egypt. I am Adonai, your God." (Leviticus 19:34). Further, the Talmudic rabbis taught (based on Genesis 19) that the city of Sodom was considered the epitome of evil because the residents made laws prohibiting kindness to strangers. [121] Thus, T'ruah affirms, welcoming immigrants and strangers remains a core Jewish value, as well as an American one. One way to show that welcoming, noted Rabbi Jill Jacobs, is to show up in spaces where we can be a fearless, compassionate voice alongside those whose voices have been temporarily silenced. She knew that many of the detained individuals at the center found strength and solace in prayer, and encouraged us to find our own strength in prayer that morning.

As I wrapped myself in the prayer shawl I lovingly call God's wings, I opened my mouth to sing *Modah Ani*, and found the words caught like sandpaper in my throat. Could I really sing *'How grateful I am to stand before you God'* when in fact my feet stood before a prison structure

[121] http://www.truah.org/about/news/.

housing souls starved for sanctuary and connection?" And yet, as I sunk into prayer, the words of the siddur felt made for this time and place. Blessing *'Zokef kefufim'*, the one who lifts up the bent, *matir asurim*-the one who frees the captive-called us to partner with God not in abstract, private ways, but in courageous, moral action. "There will be no freeing the captives without stepping up", remarked Rabbi Lisa Edwards, who stood beside me on the grass. "Standing with you right now helps me remember that."

I felt the freedom of my own body and soul more viscerally surrounded by barbed wire than I ever do rising alone in my bedroom to my daily alarm clock. The collective voices of cantors and rabbis across all denominations proclaimed a vision for justice and sanctuary full of raw, lively love, hope, and longing that rippled far beyond the boundaries of our small circle. By the time we reached the words of Mi Chamocha-recalling our ancestors freedom by the shores of the sea, our prayer rose fiercely determined to permeate the thick cement walls before us and reach those who could not raise their voices to advocate for their own freedom this morning. As we fell into the private Amidah prayer, we joined their silence with a gravity that reverberated equally with our cacophonous melodies.

This unique Rosh Hodesh prayer circle concluded with the Shofar's blast-the first of 30 times we'd be called to hear it over the month of Elul. The sacred ram's horn sounded a searing wake-up call, simultaneously to our inner spirits and to our embodied commitment to the justice work of the moment, and the many moments to come in the year ahead. In that space of soulful activism, we entered Rosh Hodesh with our hearts singing for a freedom that would demand

relentless showing up in spaces of narrowness and detention. Our voices reverberated with resilience.

In the debrief which followed, rabbis and cantors spoke to multiple generations of experience incorporating activism and worship, ritual and resistance. Though they too struggled sometimes with the dissonance between the joy and freedom of song, and the reality of witnessing oppression, they reiterated what this experience affirmed for me that morning: the moral courage to take a stand against injustice must be buoyed by the inner well of strength I find in partnering with God in prayer, study, ritual, and sacred community. "Being shoulder to shoulder with other activist rabbis who I consider to be "Trail Blazers" and teachers for me in the synthesis of Jewish praxis and social justice praxis heartened me, strengthened me, and gave me a sense of pride as to where Judaism is going," noted Tirzah Firestone, one of Truah's long-time activist leaders.

Beyond the Convening: The Resilience of Daily Activism

Following this immersive three day experience, the words of Rabbi Lisa Goldstein, whom I had just interviewed on resilience, rang in my ear. "Resilience has a lot to do with sustainability and ongoing daily practice. "Week-long retreats, or big, immersive trainings are great, but if you have these great one-off experiences without scaffolding, they don't stick," she cautioned wisely. "It's the smaller, ongoing things that you make a conscious diligent commitment to that are in fact sustainable that lead to transformation."[122]

[122] See full interview in previous chapter.

With that in mind, I set to thinking about the scaffolding that would support my being a diligent activist on a day-to-day basis as I enter the rabbinate with an abundance of worthy causes vying for attention. I drew encouragement from the several seasoned clergy activists who approached me after the conference with the same questions about scaffolding on their mind. Together, we conferred that some of the next steps needed would involve personal, private spiritual practices and chevruta with colleagues for spiritual nourishment, and some scaffolding would involve calendaring and collaborating with wider circles of activists and lay leaders to draw strength and insight.

On the personal front, I have committed to daily meditation and prayer in the mornings. I follow this with an immediate crafting of my daily to-do list, asking for guidance that my commitments align, as well as possible, with the larger *tzedek* and *Tikkun Olam* priorities I've articulated. I find that this infusion of holy into my mundane routine of structuring the day reorients my energy towards necessary to-dos, so that I'm less prone to burnout and compassion fatigue.

On a larger, collaborative level, I've come to appreciate the thorough, relational attunement of my synagogue's community organizing lay leadership team at Leo Baeck Temple. The team is tasked with setting the congregation's agenda for social action throughout the year. Lay leaders works diligently to infuse monthly meetings with topical Jewish teachings, make space for group members to share personally about the issues we tackle as a body, and spends at least a few minutes at each convening in meditation or reflection, to allow all present to

internalize their efforts and outputs. We also seek meaningful, varied partnerships with leaders of many communities outside of Judaism, and follow their direction on actions that more intimately affect their communities, particularly around immigration. Sharing of ritual, prayer, and sacred texts provide a beautiful bridge to connect us to community partners, particularly when political conditions are fraughts. We are stronger as allies when we take time to speak the soul language of one another.

Conclusion

As I complete this thesis, my own heart and mind seek courage and resolve. This past month, I traveled with twelve synagogue tenth graders and our senior rabbi to Washington D.C. Joining four hundred others at the Religious Action Center[123], our teens lobbied their congressional leaders, and delivered impassioned personal statements concerning immigrants rights, health care, and gun violence. I surged with pride to hear them speak eloquently, full of hope. When we returned to Los Angeles, no sooner had we stepped off the plane than our screens were bombarded with news of one of the most devastating school shootings in American history, in Parkland, Fl.[124] My senior rabbi and I met each others' gazes, which crinkled in despair. How were we to explain to these teens, who had just tasted their first real participation in our democratic system, that such atrocities could still wreak havoc on communities? How could we explain that adults would struggle to address this injustice, knowing some political obstacles to change would prove insurmountable? How were each of us to remain fully present with this new crisis, knowing he had a funeral of a beloved congregant to lead the next day, and I had Tot Shabbat services to prepare?

I know we are not alone among clergy and lay leaders in confronting the enormity of widespread injustice, juxtaposed with the everyday avalanche of personal and professional obligations. We are not alone in yearning for the inner and external resources that will keep us

[123] The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (The RAC) mobilizes around federal, state, and local legislation; supports and develops congregational leaders; and organizes communities to create a world overflowing with justice, compassion, and peace. It represents the largest, most diverse Jewish movement in North America.
[124] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/us/florida-shooting.html.

from buckling under the pressure of demands on our time and energy. The everyday callings of our vocations and loving relationships deserve caring and nurture that we cannot neglect, even when the brokenness of the world keeps us awake at night. It is for this reason that we must cultivate tools of resilience, to help us live in a tension between priorities, and to renew ourselves between challenging moments of loss, transition and change. The rabbis wisely state: *Lo alecha hamlacha ligmor, v'lo atah ben chorin l'hivatel mimena.* "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it" (Pirkei Avot 2:21). How do we honor that wisdom in our daily practices, and where do we get what we need in order to give what is needed to our communities?

As the many voices contributing to this thesis have attested to, resilience unfolds for each of us over a lifetime, weaving into the fabric of a many-layered narrative. Thus, this thesis does not aim at a definitive statement about how to find resilience. There is no single recipe for responding to genuine human challenges. Instead, this thesis highlights the symphony of distinctively Jewish sources we have for cultivating an inner well.

First, there are the primary sources of the tradition. In the TaNaKh narratives, we have gleaned four ancient, yet timeless foundational stories. Each of them affirms human being's ability to defy their own shortcomings, and renew love, partnership and trust in the face of failure. We saw how this begins with the very first story about human beings. We traced the capacity of Adam and Eve to renew broken relationships with each other and with God, after the debacle in the garden. We followed Moses, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, as well as Queen Esther in

their commitments to communal transformation, informed by deep internal exploration of potential. With each we have witnessed individuals emerge more connected to sacred purpose from experiences of immense hardship. These stories illustrate before us different situations and different responses. In them we can draw solace when our own experiences seek companionship from a text. With them we can also find pathways to strength and wisdom in order to confront our challenges. We join generations of Jews who struggled with, as well as celebrated, these texts in their life journeys when we do so.

The psalms, poetry, and prayers presented augment further resources and strategies for resilience. In analyzing them as I do, I hope to show how they serve as vital resources. Compact and readily accessible, psalms, poems and prayers avail themselves to any group or individual seeking a script for the unscriptable moments that life brings. They also serve those wanting an everyday practice in strengthening or constructing a source of resilience outside oneself. Each short piece of text or liturgy opens up a door for another human voice to join the conversation that the psalmist, or poet began. The diversity of speakers across time and medium illustrate how "un-alone" we are no matter how unique, or isolating our experience may be in a moment, or how great our load to bear.

Finally, moving from timeless text into present-day, the thesis brings in living examples of how Jewish leaders build or reclaim resilience in the face of adversity and exhaustion. The rabbinic interviews and the Truah conference testimony lift up the wisdom being generated in this generation, to address the challenges of our time. They also show us how to address a

modern context without severing our connection to what has come before. Each rabbinic voice featured in this work reaches into our treasured TaNaKh to draw the strength necessary to be on the frontlines of social transformation. Each finds spiritual integrity in consulting those sources. Their sharing brings to life for me the image offered by the Psalmist in the very first entry in the Book of Psalms, as interpreted creatively by my teacher, Rabbi Richard Levy:

> "Finding delight in the Torah of Adonai, reflecting on that Torah by day and in the dark, like such a human is a tree planted by a stream of water, offering its fruit when the time is ripe, leafy at all times, never withering. Whatever it produces, lasts."[125]

In these pages we listen to rabbis who find different ways to nourish others without withering. Even though each rabbi speaks from a unique personal and professional context, they share in common a regular, ongoing effort to cultivate text practices that remind them to consult their inner moral compass. This enables them to move forward with a sense of discernment, rooted in sacred vocation.

Each of us has an inner reservoir of *torah*, a well of teaching, that we must replenish routinely, to draw from in times of scarcity, loss, transition and yearning. This thesis centered its study on narratives and verbal practices within the Jewish tradition, that make such replenishing available. Many individuals find solace, resilience and reformation in dance, music, art or other mediums that help to break the silence of oppression. These mediums too may help us transcend victimhood in our circumstances, and harness partnership moving forward. May this work inspire your own cultivation of *torah*, teaching, both of an inner well-spring of resilient torah, as

[125] Rabbi Richard Levy, Songs Ascending: The Book of Psalms A New Translation. Psalm 1 p. 2

well as your access to the many Jewish sources that can serve you. As the Psalmist sings, "*Mikolot Mayim Rabim"*,[126] from the voices of many waters, we each learn to sing our own song of connection to an ever-renewing source.

[126] From Psalm 93:4.

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