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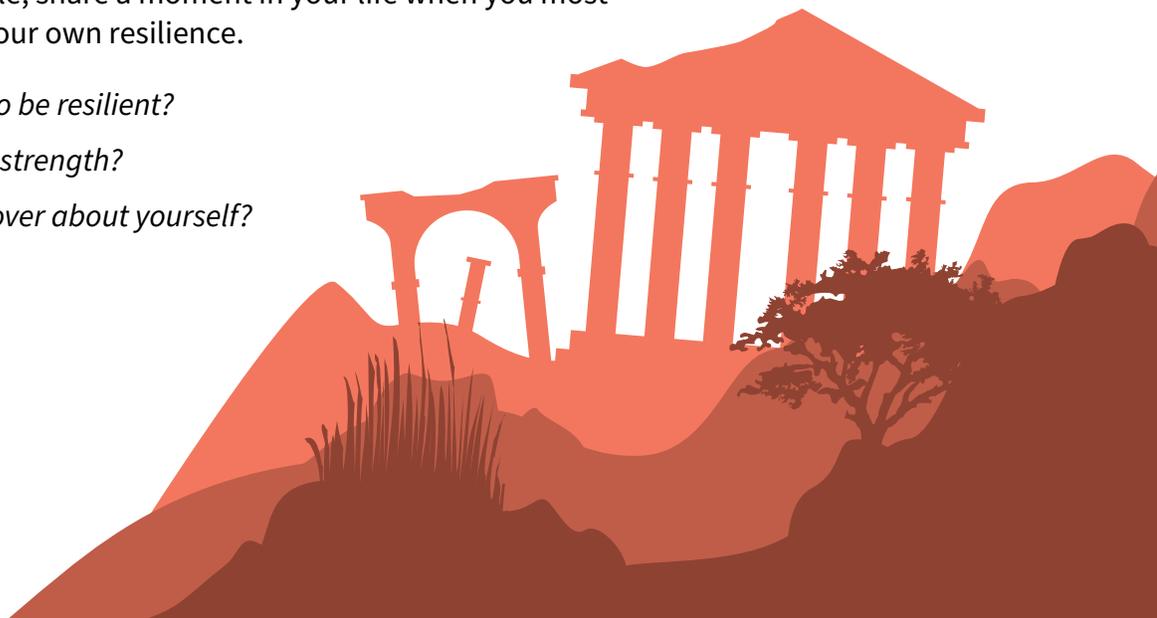
Out of the Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience

Rabbi Avi Strausberg

THROUGHOUT JEWISH HISTORY, THE JEWISH PEOPLE FACED A NUMBER OF SITUATIONS that demanded resilience in the face of great difficulty. From our beginnings as a people enslaved in Egypt to years spent wandering in the wilderness, from the destruction of not only one but two of our spiritual homes, to exile after exile under foreign rule, much of Jewish history has required the ability to persevere in the face of uncertainty and loss, and difficulty. In our four sessions together, we're going to focus on four specific moments in Jewish history that demanded resilience.

Take a moment to share with your *havruta* what resilience means to you. If you feel comfortable, share a moment in your life when you most needed to draw on your own resilience.

1. *What helped you to be resilient?*
2. *Where do you find strength?*
3. *What did you discover about yourself?*





Out of the Ruins: Jewish Wisdom on Resilience

Rabbi Avi Strasuberg

SESSION 1 Noah and the Flood: Emerging to a Changed World

LEAVING THE ARK

In our exploration of Jewish sources on resilience, we turn to one of our very first stories of resilience: the resilience to begin again after the flood that nearly destroyed the entire world.

When God saw that a wickedness had spread throughout the world, God regretted creating the world, and set out to destroy it (Genesis 6:5-7).

God told Noah of God's plan; Noah alone was deemed righteous in his generation. God told Noah of the rain and God instructed Noah to build an ark in which he was to shelter with his family and a select group of animals. Noah did as he was told and the rains, as promised, came. For forty days and forty nights, "the floodgates of the sky burst open" (Genesis 7:11) until "all existence on earth was blotted out" (Genesis 7:23). The Torah tells us, "all flesh that stirred on earth perished—birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind. All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died" (Genesis 7:21-22).

Noah and his family were spared. A small group of animals was saved. And the world they knew was utterly destroyed.

Take a look at the continuation of our story from Genesis 8 and take special notice of the dove and raven. Think about:

1. *What role do they serve in this story?*
2. *What happens to them in the story? How are their paths different?*
3. *What do you imagine it was like to be the dove or the raven?*

SOURCE #1

בראשית ח:א-יח

¹וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל-הַחַיָּה וְאֶת-כָּל-
הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ
עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם:

Genesis 8:1-18

¹God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided.

◆ he

The dove and raven become important characters below. Grammatically, the raven in Hebrew is male and the dove is female; the translation here uses gendered pronouns (rather than “it”) to give them more character!

וַיִּסְכְּרוּ מְעִינֵי תְהוֹם וְאַרְבֹּת
 הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּבְלֹא הַגֶּשֶׁם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:
 וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַלֹּךְ
 וַיָּשׁוּב וַיִּחְסְרוּ הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה חֳמָשִׁים
 וּמֵאֵת יוֹם: ⁴וַתֵּנַח הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ
 הַשְּׁבִיעִי בִשְׁבַע־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
 עַל הַרֵי אָרָרָט:

²The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up, and the rain from the sky was held back; ³the waters then receded steadily from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished, ⁴so that in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

וַיֵּהָמִים הָיוּ הַלֹּךְ וַחֲסוֹר עַד
 הַחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בְּעֲשִׂירֵי בְּאֶחָד
 לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ רֵאשֵׁי הַהָרִים:

⁵The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח
 נֹחַ אֶת־חַלּוֹן הַתֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:
 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־הָעֹרֵב וַיֵּצֵא יֵצוּא
 וַיָּשׁוּב עַד־יִבֹּשֶׁת הַמַּיִם מֵעַל
 הָאָרֶץ: ⁸וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה מֵאַתָּו
 לִרְאוֹת הַקָּלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי
 הָאֲדָמָה: ⁹וְלֹא־מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ
 לְכַף־רַגְלָהּ וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה
 כִּי־מַיִם עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח
 יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֶל־
 הַתֵּבָה:

⁶At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷and sent out the raven; he ◆ went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. ⁸He sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground. ⁹But the dove could not find a resting place for her foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water over all the earth. So putting out his hand, he took her into the ark with him.

וַיִּחַל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אַחֲרַיִם
 וַיִּסֹּף שְׁלַח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה מִן־הַתֵּבָה:
 וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לָעֵת עֹרֵב
 וְהָנְה עֲלֶה־זֵית טָרֵף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע
 נֹחַ כִּי־קָלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:
 וַיִּיחַל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אַחֲרַיִם
 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה וְלֹא־יָסְפָה
 שׁוּב־אֵלָיו עוֹד:

¹⁰He waited another seven days, and again sent out the dove from the ark. ¹¹The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in her bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. ¹²He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and she did not return to him any more.

13וַיְהִי בַּאֲחַת וָשֶׁשׁ-מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹן
בַּאֲחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ חָרְבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ וַיִּסַּר
נֹחַ אֶת-מִכְסֵה הַתֵּבָה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה חָרְבוּ פְּנֵי
הָאָדָמָה: 14וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּשִׁבְעָה וָעֶשְׂרִים
יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יָבֶשֶׁה הָאָרֶץ:

15וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-נֹחַ לֵאמֹר: 16צֵא מִן-
הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ וּנְשֵׁי-בְנֶיךָ
אִתְּךָ: 17כָּל-חַיָּה חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-אִתְּךָ מִכָּל-בֶּשֶׂר
בָּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל-
הָאָרֶץ הֵיצֵא אִתְּךָ וּשְׂרָצוּ בְּאָרֶץ וּפְרוּ וּרְבוּ
עַל-הָאָרֶץ: 18וַיֵּצֵא-נֹחַ וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי-
בְנָיו אִתּוֹ:

¹³In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry from the earth; and when Noah removed the covering of the ark, he saw that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

¹⁵God spoke to Noah, saying, ¹⁶“Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons’ wives. ¹⁷Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds, animals, and everything that creeps on earth; and let them swarm on the earth and be fertile and increase on earth.”

¹⁸So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives.

Questions from Rabbi Avi Strausberg

1. *What do you imagine it was like for Noah and his family to shelter in the ark as the world around them was subjected to cataclysmic flooding?*
2. *What do you imagine it was like for them when the rains finally stopped?*
3. *What do you imagine it would have been like to emerge from the ark and what would have been the world they found?*
4. Notice that, even after the dove returns with the olive leaf, Noah remains in the ark. It’s only when God tells Noah to go out that Noah finally leaves the ark.
Why do you think Noah waits? Why does God need to command Noah to leave?
5. The raven is sent forth first, and does not return. In verse 7, the Torah tells us that the raven “went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth.” The text never says that he settled on dry ground.
What do you think about this? What do you think you would have felt as the raven?
6. The dove is sent out and, finding no dry land, returns. She’s sent out again, and, this time, returns with an olive leaf. She’s then sent out a third time, and, this time, she doesn’t return.
What do you think you would have felt as the dove each time, knowing that the raven never returned?

◆ Tamar Biala

Translation adapted from Yehuda Mirsky. From the book of modern *midrashim* by women, *Dirshuni*.

THE RAVEN AND THE DOVE

We turn now to a modern feminist *midrash* (interpretation) written by Tamar Biala called “The Raven and The Dove.”

The midrash opens with the image of the birds of the heavens gathering together in a *beit midrash*, a house of study. What happens when human beings gather together and study the flood? We focus on the people: we focus on what became of Noah and his family. What happens when birds get together and study the story of the flood? They notice the birds in the story and they wonder what became of the dove and the raven. What follows is a story of trauma, resilience, and the individual responses of the dove and the raven to the flood.

SOURCE #2

עורב ויונה, תמר ביאלה

נשאלה להם בבית מדרש של
 עופות השמים: אותם עורב ויונה
 ששילח נח מן החלון - מה עלה
 בגורלם? שעל העורב נאמר:
 'וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הָעֹרֵב וַיֵּצֵא יְצוֹא
 וְשׁוּב עַד יְבֹשֶׁת הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ'
 ולא נאמר מה היה לו, ועל היונה
 נאמר: 'וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל הַתֵּבָה
 כִּי מַיִם עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ' ובתר
 כתיב 'וְלֹא יָסְפָה שׁוּב אֵלָיו עוֹד'
 ולא נאמר לאן פנתה ומה היה
 לה.

שילחו הנשר שהוא מגביה עוף
 והוא יכול לישא עוף אחר בכנפיו
 שילך ויביאם לפניו. יצא הנשר
 יום ויומיים ושב עם יונה ועם
 פמליא שלה, שמשעה שמצאה
 לה בית ועד אותו היום היתה
 עומדת ומולידה, ושורחת ומולידה

The Raven and The Dove, Tamar Biala ◆

A question was asked in the *beit midrash* of the birds of the sky: The raven and the dove which Noah sent out from the window—whatever became of them? After all, of the raven it is written *it went off, going off and returning, until the waters were dried up from upon the earth* but it doesn't say what became of him. As for the dove, it is written, *so she returned to him into the Ark, for there was water upon the face of all the earth* and later on it is said *but she returned to him again no more*, and it doesn't say where she went or what became of her.

They sent the high-flying eagle, who can bear another bird on his wings, to fetch them. The eagle flew away, for a day, and another, and then returned with the dove, and her entire family—since from the moment she found a home, up until that very day, she had been birthing, and

◆ **Shekhinah**

God's presence in the world, often associated with the feminine.

◆ **stork**

In Hebrew, *hasidah*, related to the word *hesed* = love and kindness and one of God's primary characteristics.

בנים ובנות לרוב, אבל עם עורב
לא שב.

שאלוהו: אותו עורב, לא מצאתו?
אמר להם: מצאתיו מעופף בקצווי
ארץ לכאן ולכאן ולא הסכים
לבוא עמי, אמר לי: מאותו היום
ששילחני נח, לא עמדתי ולא
נחתי, ואם לא שבת לי, מה לי
שאבוא אליכם? השבתיו: אותו
נח כבר נפטר ואיננו ביננו, ובניו
ובני בניו אינם עוד בארץ ואין מי
שממתין לך עוד.

אמר לי: מת ועבר מן העולם ואני
לא ידעתי? שמש ראשו לאדמה.
משוקף ראשו, פסק לי: לא אבוא
אצלכם ולא אעמוד ממעופי עד
שתאמר לי כך שכינה, שהארץ,
טמאה היא, ועל שכינה נאמר
שהיא יושבת עם טמאים בתוך
טומאותם.

גמרו ואמרו, נמצא את השכינה
ונביא לה אותו העורב שתדבר
עמו עד שיחדל ממעופו...

נתגלתה להם בדמות חסידה
גדולה מאד.

יצא הנשר והביא עמו אותו עורב
שהיה בא בימים, כנפיו יבשות
ואפורות, ומעופו מקרטע.

אמרו לו יושבי בית המדרש: מה
לך שאתה מתעופף יצוא ושוב

caretaking, breeding a multitude of sons and daughters, but he did not return with the raven.

They asked him: That raven, couldn't you find him? He said: I found him flying here and there at the ends of the earth and he refused to come with me. He said "Ever since the day that Noah sent me out, I haven't stood or rested, and if I didn't return to him, how can I return with you?" I answered: "Noah has long since died and neither his children nor their children are still on the earth, and nobody is still waiting for you."

He said: "Died and passed from the earth, and I didn't know?" His head drooped earthward. Once he raised it, he concluded: "I won't join all of you, and won't stop flying until the *Shekhinah* tells me to, for the earth is defiled, and of the *Shekhinah* it is written that she dwells among the impure with their defilement."

They voted and decided to go and find the *Shekhinah* and bring her the raven, so that he may cease from his flight...

She revealed herself to them in the image of a very large stork. ◆

The eagle went and brought the raven, who was well on in years, his wings dry and gray, limping in flight.

The dwellers of the *beit midrash* said to him: "Why do you fly back and forth and

◆ **brother's blood**

A reference to the Cain and Abel story, see Genesis 4:10 

ולא מוצא מנוח?

אמר להם: איה אעמוד, והיכן אניח כנפי, שבכל מקום שאני מבקש לעמוד, מביטות אלי עינים מתות של אחי ואחיותי, ובכל מקום שאני מבקש לישב, הומה אדמה ומנהמת וקול דמי אחי הבוכים נמשך ממנה ועולה.

השיבו לו: אבל יונה מצאה אדמה שהעלתה עשב, ונתנה עלה זית טרף בפיה, ובתר הלכה ופרחה לה לבקש חיים חדשים, ועוד היא עומדת וממלטת.

באותה שעה החלה חמה שוקעת ושמים נראו להם אדומים כדם.

נתנו יושבי בית המדרש עיניהם ביונה וראו שהיא עייפה ובוכה, נתנו מבטם באותו עורב וראו שהולכת דעתו ונטרפת.

נתנו עיניהם בשכינה, ראו שהיא פורשת כנפיה והן גדולות ורוח חמימה עולה מהן.

עמדה שכינה ממושבה ובאה לאותם יונה ועורב וסוככה כנפיה עליהם. עמד עורב ממעופו. נחה נפשה של יונה.

ויש אומרים, באותה שעה נשמע מלמול שכינה שהיתה אומרת

find no rest?"

He said: "Where should I stand, and where should I rest my wings? Anywhere I try to stand, the dead eyes of my brothers and sisters are staring at me. And anywhere I try to sit, the earth stirs, and groans, and the weeping voice of my brother's blood  rises upward from it..."

They answered: "But the dove found land on which grass grows, and took an olive branch in its mouth, and then went, and blossomed, and sought out a new life, and she is still giving birth even now..."

At that moment, the sun began to set and the sky seemed to them as red as blood.

The inhabitants of the *beit midrash* looked at the dove, and saw that she was tired and weeping; they looked at the raven and saw that he was losing his mind.

They looked to the *Shekhinah* and saw that she was spreading her wings, and they were large, and a warming wind arose from them.

The *Shekhinah* arose from her place and went over to the dove and the raven and sheltered them with her wings. The raven ceased his flight. The dove's soul was rested.

And some say, that at that moment one could hear the murmuring of the *Shekhinah*, who was saying to those

לאותם עופות יושבי בית המדרש: מה לנו
אצל יונה ועורב, שלא עורב אנו ולא יונה
אנו ולא שילחנו מאותו החלון, לראות.

birds who dwelled in the *beit midrash*: “What do we know about the dove and the raven, we are not doves, or ravens, and it wasn’t we who were sent out from that window, to go and look.”

1. *How does the dove respond to the trauma? In what ways is the dove resilient? What enables the dove to be resilient?*
2. *How does the raven respond to the trauma? In what ways is the raven resilient? What enables the raven to be resilient?*
3. Tamar Biala sees the responses of the dove and the raven through the lens of the experience of Holocaust survivors. *Can you relate to the responses of either the dove or the raven? Have you seen this type of response to trauma in others?*

The dove and the raven have different responses to the trauma of reemerging after the flood. The raven sees the eyes of his dead brothers and sisters everywhere and in doing so, is unable to rest; he continues flying to and fro even generations after the impact of the initial trauma. The dove, once released, begins doing the work of repopulating the world. Since her reentry, she’s been birthing and caring for her young; in a sense, she has also remained in motion, but a different type of motion.

4. *How do the birds of the *beit midrash* view these two different responses to trauma? What do you think?*
5. *How do you understand this line of the midrash:*

“The inhabitants of the *beit midrash* looked at the dove, and saw that she was tired and weeping; they looked at the raven and saw that he was losing his mind”?

6. *How do you understand the Shekhinah’s final line of the midrash:*

“What do we know about the dove and the raven, we are not doves, or ravens, and it wasn’t we who were sent out from that window, to go and look.”

7. *What is the midrash teaching us about the responses of the raven and dove?*
8. *What is this midrash teaching us about resilience?*
9. *How does this midrash influence how you understand the story of Noah and the flood?*