



"יֵאוּשׁ וְחוּסַן נַפְשִׁי (Despair and Resilience)

When we think about despair (Hebrew: יֵאוּשׁ) today, we often think about losing hope. Biblical texts deal with this type of despair in many places, especially in connection to feelings that God has abandoned the Jewish people, though these texts rarely name the feeling as יֵאוּשׁ (*yeiush*). However, classic rabbinic texts use the concept of יֵאוּשׁ as a legal term in connection with the laws of lost and found objects (see Bava Metzia, chapter 2). This concept is one of the determining factors in whether someone needs to return a found object. If the owner would experience יֵאוּשׁ because he has lost all hope that he will get the object back, then the object is considered ownerless and can be kept by the finder. Later Jewish texts make a more concrete connection between the word and the psychological feelings that might be associated with it.

- Why do you think the rabbis chose to speak about יֵאוּשׁ to describe how one feels about a lost object?
- Do you think that the rabbis' choice of words was appropriate? Why or why not?
- What situations make you feel יֵאוּשׁ?

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:1-3	דברים טז:א-ג
<p>¹Observe the month of <i>Aviv</i> and make a <i>Pesach</i> offering to YHVH, your God, because in the month of <i>Aviv</i> YHVH, your God, took you out of Egypt at night.</p>	<p>אֲשֶׁמֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב הוֹצִיאֲךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה:</p>
<p>²You shall make a <i>Pesach</i> offering to YHVH, your God, the flock and the herd in the place that YHVH will choose to establish His name there.</p>	<p>בְּזִבְחֹת פֶּסַח לַיהוָה צֹאן וּבָקָר בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְיָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם:</p>
<p>³You shall not eat <i>chametz</i> (leavened food) on it. Seven days you shall eat <i>matzot</i>, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in a hurry in order to remember the day of your departure from Egypt all the days of your life.</p>	<p>לֹא־תֹאכַל עָלָיו חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל־עָלָיו מַצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בַחֲפָזוֹן יָצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ</p>

- How would you describe what life might have been like for *B'nei Yisrael* (the Israelites) while they were enslaved in Egypt? How do you think they felt?



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- How do you think *B'nei Yisrael* felt when God took them out of slavery in Egypt?
- Why does God command *B'nei Yisrael* to remember the Exodus from Egypt each year? What do we remember when we remember the Exodus?
- How can remembering the Exodus from Egypt help us in a time of great despair?

<i>Eichah</i> (Lamentations) 1:1-2	איכה א:א-ב
¹ How she sits alone, the city once large with people. She has become like a widow. Great among the nations, the princess among states, she has become	אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בְדָד הָעִיר רַבַּתִּי עִם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבַּתִּי בְּגוֹיִם שְׂרָתִי בְּמַדִּינוֹת הָיְתָה לְמַסּ:
² She weeps, oh she weeps at night; and her tears are on her cheeks. She has no comforter among her lovers. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.	בָּכּוּ תִבְכֶּה בַלַּיְלָה וְדַמְעָתָה עַל לְחֵיָהּ אֵינָהּ מְנַחֵם מִכָּל־אֲהָבָיָהּ כָּל־רֵעֵיהָ בְּגָדוּ בָּהּ הָיוּ לָהּ לְאֵיבִים

The destruction of the First *Beit HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) was a particularly traumatic experience for the Jewish people. Biblical texts teach that the Babylonians swept through Jerusalem and turned it desolate while exiling the Jewish people to Babylonia. *Eichah* (Lamentations) was written as a way to express the great despair that people felt after their homes were destroyed and their lives were in tumult.

- What metaphor does the author use to demonstrate the devastation of Jerusalem?
- How do these first two *pesukim* (verses) of *Eichah* express the feelings of the author?
- How can writing about a devastating event help a person to deal with that event?



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<i>Tehillim</i> (Psalms) 30:6	תהילים ל:ו
[God's] anger is a moment [God's] favor is a lifetime Weeping may stay the night But joy comes in the morning	כִּי רָגַע בְּאַפּוֹ חַיִּים בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ בְּעֶרְבַּי לַיִן בְּכִי וּלְבֹקֵר רָנָה:

- What is the author trying to convey about difficult times and how long they last?
- Do you feel that despair is fleeting and joy is long lasting as the verse suggests?

On Waking in the Morning	השכמת הבוקר
I thank you, living and eternal Sovereign, that you returned my soul with compassion. Great is your faithfulness.	מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם שֶׁהַחַיּוֹת בֵּי נַשְׁמָתֵי בְּחַמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ

According to tradition, this is the first thing that Jews say when they wake up in the morning.

- What is scary about the night that might have prompted the author to give thanks in the morning?
- This prayer suggests that God has faith in human beings. How does that make you feel?
- In what other situations might you want to say something like this?

<i>Tehillim</i> (Psalms) 121:1-2	תהילים קכא:א-ב
¹ A Song of Ascents I will lift my eyes up to the mountains. From where will my help come?	אֲשִׁיר לַמַּעְלוֹת אֲשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים מֵאֵן יָבֵא עֲזָרִי:
² My help comes from YHVH, the Maker of the Heavens and the Earth	בְּעֲזָרֵי יְהוָה יְיָ עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

- What is the author trying to convey in each verse?
- Where do you find comfort and strength in times of great difficulty?



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Bereshit Rabbah 39:1	בראשית רבה לט:א
<p>God said to Avram, "Go from your land etc." Rabbi Yitzchak said, "This can be compared to one who was passing from place to place and saw a palace burning. He said, "Could this palace have no caretaker?" The owner of the palace looked out on him. He said to him, "I am the owner of the palace [ba'al ha'birah]." So it was that our father Avraham would say, "Could this world have no caretaker?" The Holy One Blessed Be He looked out on him and said to him, "I am the Sovereign of the world [Ba'al ha'Olam]."</p>	<p>ויאמר ה' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וגו'...אמר רבי יצחק: משל לאחד שהיה עובר ממוקום למוקום וראה בירה אחת דולקת. אמר תאמר שהבירה זו בלא מנהיג? הציץ עליו בעל הבירה אמר לו אני הוא בעל הבירה. כך לפי שהיה אבינו אברהם אומר תאמר שהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג, הציץ עליו הקב"ה ואמר לו. אני הוא בעל העולם.</p>

- This midrash compares the world to a burning house. How can the world be like a burning house? How does Avraham feel about the burning house?
- How do you feel about the world when you see it "burning"?
- What does Avraham realize about the burning house?
- Do you feel there is a caretaker for the world? How does this make you feel?

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 40:6-8	ישעיה מ:ו-ח
<p>⁶...All flesh is grass and all its goodness like the flower of the field.</p>	<p>יְקוּל אֲמַר קָרָא וְאֲמַר מָה אֶקְרָא כָּל־הַבֶּשֶׂר חֲצִיר וְכָל־חֶסְדּוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה</p>
<p>⁷Grass withers, a flower fades when the wind [ruach] of YHVH blows on it. Indeed, the nation is grass.</p>	<p>יִבֶשׂ חֲצִיר וְגַבַל צִיץ כִּי רוּחַ יְקוּק נִשְׁבָּה בּוֹ אֶכּוֹן חֲצִיר הָעַמִּים</p>
<p>⁸Grass withers, a flower fades; and the word of our God will stand forever.</p>	<p>יִבֶשׂ חֲצִיר וְגַבַל צִיץ וְדְבַר־אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם</p>



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This passage from Isaiah is meant to be a comfort to the Jewish people. In the passage, he compares the nations of the world to grass and flowers.

- According to this passage, how do grass and flowers look at first? What happens to them? What does this metaphor say about the nations of the world?
- What will happen to the Jewish people (see verse 8)? Why?
- How could this passage help the Jewish people's resolve?
- Does this text help you feel better or worse? Why?

<i>Pesach Haggadah</i>	הגדה של פסח
A narrative about Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon, who were reclining in B'nei Barak. They were telling the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt all that night until their students came and said to them, "Our teachers, the time for saying the morning Shema has arrived."	מעשה ברבי אליעזר, ורבי יהושע, ורבי אלעזר בן עזריא, ורבי עקיבא, ורבי טרפון, שהיו מסבין בבני ברק. והיו מספרים ביציאת מצרים, כל אותו הלילה, עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם: רבותינו, הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית

There is evidence that this scene played out during a time of Roman oppression and Jewish rebellion after the destruction of the Second *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple), which was the center of Jewish religious life for nearly 600 years. The five rabbis mentioned here might have been hiding out in order to have their Seder or, perhaps, even using the Seder as an occasion to plot against the Romans. Their students needed to alert them to the time of the *Shema* because they were in seclusion.

- The time after the destruction of the Second *Beit Hamikdash* was one of great despair for the Jewish people. Why do you think people felt such despair at this time?



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- How were the rabbis in this passage demonstrating resilience at a time of great despair? Why is it significant that they were telling the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt?
- What helps you to feel resilient when bad things happen around you?
- How can connecting to your faith help you, if at all, as it did for the rabbis?

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov	רבי נחמן מברסלב
There is no despair at all in the world.	אין יאוש כלל בעולם

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) was a great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic movement. He believed that everyone is capable of becoming a righteous person and that one should always be looking inward in order to improve oneself. He also believed in the importance of music in aiding one's spiritual development.

- What do you think Rabbi Nachman means in the above statement?
- Do you agree with Rabbi Nachman?
- How can someone believe that there is no despair in the world?

Joseph Trumpeldor (Quotation found at http://noal.org.il/8112106/articles/162660)	יוסף טרומפלדור (ציטוט נמצא ב-) http://noal.org.il/8112106/articles/162660
I don't know what giving up [same root as despair] is at all. Regarding it, whoever wants to fix something in his life, there is no giving up.	בכלל איני יודע מהי התייאשות. לגבי, מי שרוצה לתקן מה בחייו אין התייאשות.

Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920) was an early Zionist and war hero. Born in Russia, he lost his left arm fighting in the Russian army. Despite missing an arm, he continued to be an active member of the Russian army and then, after making Aliyah, helped to



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found the Zion Mule Corps, an all-Jewish military unit in the British Mandate of Palestine. He died defending the settlement of Tel Hai.

- How did Trumpeldor see the world?
- What does his statement say about how to react when bad things happen in the world?
- How do you relate to this statement? What helps you to be resilient in the face of a particularly difficult situation?

“We will have to learn to sing without you.”

– Rachel Frankael in the eulogy for her murdered son, Naftali (2014)

Naftali Frankael was murdered, along with two of his friends, by terrorists. His mother, Rachel Frankael, became the face of resilience as a result of her reactions to Naftali's death.

- Why would Rachel Frankael mention singing in her eulogy?
- What message was she trying to convey?

The voice speaks to the spirit of prophetic men in singular moments of their lives and cries to the masses through the horror of history. The prophets respond, the masses despair.

– Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, page 171 (1955)

- Heschel writes extensively about the despair that people can feel when they look upon a broken world. What is his message here?
- When do you feel like a part of the masses?
- How do prophets respond? What actions can you take to respond like a prophet?