

TORAH SPARKS

FROM WEARINESS TO THANKS

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Dvar Parashah

Moses tells the same story twice, but something has broken between the tellings. At the beginning of the journey, when the sea had only just closed behind them, he told it to Yitro, his father-in-law. Moses recounted **הַתְּלָאָה** אשר מצאתם בדרך ויצילים ה' "all the hardship that found them on the way, and how God delivered them." The word is tucked into a tale of triumph. Trouble, yes—but trouble overcome. Difficulty redeemed. It is early enough still to believe that suffering clarifies purpose, that affliction yields awe.

But now, at the end of the journey, Moses speaks again. Once more he uses that same word, **הַתְּלָאָה**, this time to Edom, to a brother who will not let him pass. אתה ידעת את כל התלֵאָה אשר מצאתנו, "You know all the hardship that has befallen us." No God mentioned. No deliverance. Just weariness, and the plea to be allowed through.

What happened between those two tellings? What happened to Moses, that which was once framed as נִס, miracle, is now confessed as תְּלָאָה, affliction? That which was once a narrative of salvation is now a quiet indictment of the journey itself?

Ibn Ezra notices something in this word: תְּלָאָה, he writes, shares its root with וִילָאוּ, they were wearied. It is an affliction which a person is unable to bear or verbalize. The kind of hardship that drains you of the will to even name it. Not dramatic pain, not noble suffering, but exhaustion. A trouble that strips language down to ache. Ibn Ezra traces it to Egypt's waters stinking with blood, to the blindness of the men in Sodom, to the hunger and thirst in the wilderness. And whether he names her or not, he points toward לֵאָה, Leah, whose very name means weariness, whose soft eyes knew this kind of affliction, the unwanted one who kept on bearing.

The Torah gives us Leah's eyes before it gives us her voice. It tells us she was unloved, that her eyes were רַכּוֹת, tender, weak, aching. But in her naming of her children, she reveals a spiritual vocabulary born of disappointment. רָאָה ה' בְּעֵינַי. שמע ה' כי שְׁנוּאָה אֲנִכִי. הפעם ילֹוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי. Each name a cry, each child a wound stitched into meaning. By the time she names Judah, it is

no longer a plea. It is **praise**. Not because the pain is gone, but because she has learned how to speak from within it. This is what Moses must learn: not to speak despite תלאה, but from within it.

Moses, at the rock, has not yet learned this. Miriam has died, and he says nothing. Aaron will die, and Moses will strip his brother's garments himself. He has watched an entire generation pass away. He has been told that he too will pass away. There is no ritual for his own grief. No psalm. No lament. Just התלאה, that unutterable weight he finally speaks aloud to Edom. Not to God. Not to Israel. To Esau's descendants, who will not receive it.

And yet this naming matters. Because the truth of the journey is not just that God delivered. It is that we were afflicted. That the path from Egypt to Canaan was not only about miracles, but about mortality. That water came, but also ran out. That leadership was given, but also stripped away. That the covenant was not just received, but borne, through fatigue.

In this parashah, everything crumbles: Moses strikes, Miriam disappears, Aaron is gathered to his people. The promise remains, but the ones who carried it are falling. And it is here, of all places, that the people learn to sing again.

Moses cannot find words for his own תלאה. But the people have been watching. They remember Leah's progression from cry to praise, they have learned that affliction can birth its own vocabulary—they remember how to speak from within weariness rather than wait for it to end. They sing to a well: עלי באר ענו לה. Rise, well. Answer her. No prophet commands them. No God intervenes. They speak, and water rises. They dig with their staffs, the very same instruments that once parted seas and struck stones. This is not triumphant speech. It is response. Call. Echo. Answer. It is the kind of speech that only emerges after תלאה, when you've been emptied of every other way of knowing.

This, then, is the turning point. Not Moses's failure. But the people's soft turning. The realization that water no longer comes through spectacle or fury, but through presence and persistence. Through memory and movement. Through digging and song.

Moses will not enter the land. But he will speak again. Not now, but later, when his own תלאה has turned into blessing. When he can see that the people do not need his staff or his voice to

summon God. They need wells. They need one another. They need language shaped by Leah, by loss, by the long road made holy not through escape, but through endurance.

OUT OF BOUNDS

Jonathan Lipnick

Exploring the Parashah



*In this video series, we will explore an often neglected aspect of the parashah: geography. Each week we will focus on a physical location mentioned in the parashah and examine its historical significance. Of course not every parashah contains a narrative situated in a place; for these weeks we will select a word from the parashah that relates to the material culture of ancient Israel.