

Parshat Va'etchanan
When We can Only Glimpse Redemption
Yali Szulanski - Class of 2025

Parshat Va'etchanan starts with Moses pleading with G-d to allow him to cross the Jordan River, to set foot in the land that has been promised to him and to the people who followed him. It is a heart wrenching moment, where we see Moses speaking to G-d from a place of true vulnerability, and where he lays his longing bare. Moshe tries to appeal to G-d's compassionate nature with praise - opening the parsha with the simple, "and I pleaded with G-d." (Devarim 3:22).

ה' יְקוּק אֱתָהּ הַחִלּוֹת לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת-עַבְדְּךָ אֶת-גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת-יְדֹת הַחֲזָקָה אֲשֶׁר מִי-אֵיל בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה
כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ וְכַגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ:

O Lord G-d, You who let Your servant see the first works of Your greatness and Your mighty hand, You whose powerful deeds no god in heaven or on earth can equal! (Devarim 3:24)

Moses calls out to the heart of G-d's power, "so powerful that no god in heaven can match" – and begs, one final time, to see the Promised Land.

The desert wind caresses his back as he ascends the mountain, but for him all is stillness within. His mind is focused on the great longing that fills his heart, that spreads through his mortal body like a slow burning fire. He has carried a nation on his back, and their many hopes, fears, and transgressions flow through the blood in his veins. Through his hand, he has performed miracles, nurtured generations, and carved the way through fields of impossible odds, of literal mountains stacked against him. He has been a trusted prophet, a faithful servant, and a humble leader. He has made mistakes – and paid dearly for them. He has fallen to his face in despair, crushed God's tablets in anger, and climbed from the depths again and again. Now, as he climbs, he holds within him a final plea for mercy – to be allowed, just once, to see the Promised Land.

Sadly, as we all know, Moses's plea is met by wrathful refusal, and with the mere allowance of a glimpse of the Promised Land. While Moses has spent generations carrying the People of Israel from slavery to freedom, from bonds to bounty, from despair to hope, he does not get to cross over with them, instead transferring his knowledge, his strength, and his courage to Yehoshua, who will lead in his place.

Moses's plea, which poignantly opens the parsha, is familiar to those who have tried, again and again, to find full healing, only to be teased with its glimmer and sent back down again.

The process of long term recovery from a chronic physical or mental illness is arduous, winding, tiring, and does not always end with the promise of healing. The discovery of illness, whether through medical tests or the realization that something is simply not right with us, contains within it the opposing forces of fear and hope. Finding out that something is not working as it should, or perhaps even conspiring against us, in our mind or body, can be

crushing. It can also be relieving – finally, finding an answer for the endless questions we have lived with, most significantly – “what is wrong with me?”

Moses has been the keeper of the questions throughout his life, holding within him the pleas of the Israelites – their fears, their hopes, and their growing skepticism when so much goes wrong. Over generations, he has worked to pull the people out of rock bottom, protecting them from starvation, from mutiny, and from destruction. He alone has been in the confidence of G-d, hearing the promise of redemption in the end, and conveying it to his long suffering people. Moses – he who identifies the illness: slavery in Egypt – is the one that spends his whole life working to bring it to healing: freedom as a people in the Promised Land.

While we may work our whole lives towards the goal of full recovery, there will always be a part of us that can only glimpse it from the mountain. Treatments, in whatever shape they take, will always leave a part of us slightly changed. Throughout recovery, as with Moses throughout his journey, we may have moments where we experience euphoria – a glimmer of hope that we will one day be whole in the promised land of healing. However, many spend their whole lives chasing these moments, only to glimpse them at the end – when they are just out of reach.

Moses passes on his strength and courage to Yehoshua when it is clear that he will not get to experience his redemption. Yehoshua, representing hope and future generations, does get to cross the threshold. When we work to heal, we may not be aware of the people around us who are impacted by our work. When they see us showing up day after arduous day, despite the collective weight of illness and the scars of battle, they imbibe our strength, and our courage.

So – to those of us in journeys of healing, whatever they may be at this time: perhaps you will not see the full glory of the Promised Land. Do not despair – your work is not without glory and merit, for the lessons of your strength will live on in generations to come.



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