

LIVING IN LIMINALITY

Learning from the Wilderness



Liminality describes the experience of being in transition. Of being in-between two or more distinct spaces or feelings. This resource explores the liminality that many experienced after the October 7 massacre.

Tali Versano Eisman, "When I Drown"

When I am drowning
I don't need you to describe the water for me
neither its color, nor its depth
After all, I can feel it up to my neck
I have just one request
Don't stop telling me, not even for a moment,
How it looks
On dry land



REFLECTION

- ◆ What does the water represent in this poem? The dry land?
- ◆ Try to imagine the feeling of dry land from the perspective of someone who is drowning. What words come to mind?
- ◆ What is the function of "describing" either the water or the land? How does it affect the speaker?

The speaker in this poem is in a state of liminality. They are caught between life and death. Between present and future. Between the danger and tragedy of the moment and the hope that the future will bring peace and rebuilding.



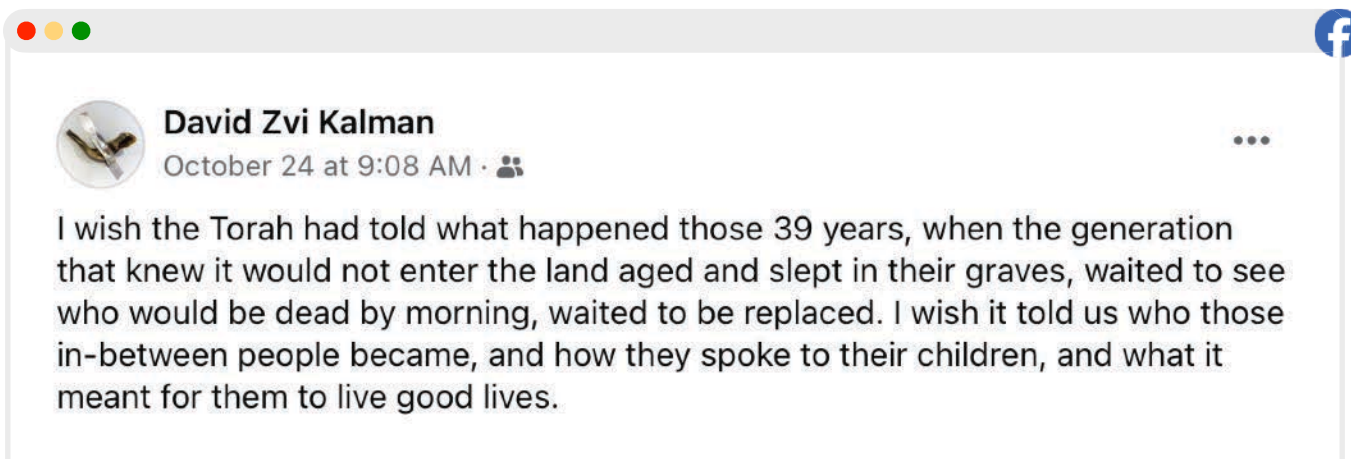
For many, the October 7 attack dramatically altered our sense of timing vis a vis peace in Israel. Whatever hope there was for reconciliation within our lives was all but extinguished, leaving us to contend with the liminality of the moment. Of living after the miraculous birth of the State of Israel but before a time where peace seems even a remote possibility.

For the generation that was freed from slavery in Egypt, the Exodus is a similarly incomplete narrative of liberation. Devarim-Deuteronomy 1:35-39 relates that as a response to complaints and breaches of faith, God prohibited the generation that left Egypt from entering the land of Israel.

This generation, filled with the hope of the Exodus, would be forced to wander the wilderness and exist in limbo for 39 years until a new generation to rise.



Source: Josette Atme,
<https://www.etsy.com/il-en/listing/554347649/desert-scene-jewish-people-exiting-egypt>



The Torah doesn't tell us what happened to the people during those 39 years. This post, written a few weeks after the attack, asks what it must have been like to have been an "in-between" person in the wilderness. How did they go about their lives knowing that they would never reach the promised land? What did they tell their children? What did it mean to live a good life within liminality?



In an essay titled *Entering the Wilderness*, Rabbi Jamie Weisbach brings a text from Shir HaShirim Rabbah - an ancient collection of homilies related to the book, Shir HaShirim-Song of Songs - to provide one perspective on living-in-between.

Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 3:6

Ascent is from the wilderness, organization is from the wilderness, death is from the wilderness... Torah is from the wilderness, the mishkan is from the wilderness, the courts are from the wilderness, the Priesthood and Levites are from the wilderness, royalty is from the wilderness, as it says, "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemot 19:6), and all good gifts that the Blessed Holy One gives Israel come from the wilderness... In short, ascent is from the wilderness.

עלִיָּה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, חֲלוּקָה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, מִיַּתְתָּה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, תּוֹרָה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, מִשְׁכַּן מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, סִנְהֶדְרִין מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, כְּהֵנָּה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, לְוִיָּה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, מַלְכוּת מִן הַמִּדְבָּר, שְׁנֵאָמַר (שְׁמוֹת י"ט, ו): וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כְּהֹנִים, וְכָל מִתְּנוּת טוֹבוֹת שְׁנַתֵּן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, מִן הַמִּדְבָּר.

Rabbi Weisbach elaborates:

"The *midrash* draws our attention to the fact that all of the things that have come to define the Jewish people first emerged in the wilderness—our ascent from a band of fugitive slaves into a fully-fledged people took place not in the settled Land of Israel, but out in the wilderness. The wilderness therefore is not just a place of emptiness and lack: it is a place brimming with possibility, a place of formation and new beginnings, a place of building the world and community that the descendants of the dor ha-midbar will inherit."

- [Entering the Wilderness](#), Jamie Weisbach

REFLECTION

◆ What qualities of the wilderness make it "a place brimming with possibility?"



TIME TO WRITE

- ◆ Write a letter to an ancestor who lived in the wilderness. What would you say to them as someone who exists in a future beyond the wilderness of the desert?
- ◆ What would you ask them as someone writing from your own experience of wilderness?



