With Thanksgiving next week, gratitude is on my mind. It's easy to talk about how much good thankfulness does for us, but what happens when we just can't find it? Looking at the Torah this week, I found guidance in an essential part of our matriarch Leah's life—one I had been missing all along.

When teaching about Judah and the Messianic lineage he began, I have been starting the story a beat too late. I used to trace the beginning of redemption to Judah's birth, when Leah declares, *"Hapa'am odeh et Adonai"*—"This time I will thank God." Redemption, I taught, begins when we acknowledge how grateful we are. Yet reading Parshat Vayetzei this week, I was struck by how I had overlooked the most important thing in front of me: the pain Leah lived through *before* she became grateful.

Leah's life was not easy. Marrying a man who openly loved her sister Rachel more must have caused her deep heartache, and her first three sons were named directly out of that sadness: Reuben (*"God has seen my affliction"*), Simeon (*"God has heard that I am unloved"*), and Levi (*"Now my husband will become attached to me"*).

**וַיַּ֤רְא ה֙' כִּֽי־שְׂנוּאָ֣ה לֵאָ֔ה וַיִּפְתַּ֖ח אֶת־רַחְמָ֑הּ:**

God saw that Leah was unloved, and GOD opened her womb. (Genesis 29:31)

God noticed Leah's pain, but for years, I skipped straight past it. This week it hit me: what if Leah's honest naming of what was truly hard was, in fact, the real beginning of redemption? By the time Judah was born, nothing in Leah's external reality had actually changed—Jacob still loved Rachel more. But something inside her had shifted, not because she forced herself to feel thankful, but because she had spoken her hurt three times without censorship until gratitude could emerge on its own.

I wish I could apologize to Leah for cutting out such an essential part of her story. When we let others speak honestly about what hurts—and we really see them, as God did for Leah—their gratitude gets the space it needs to grow on its own. The same is true for ourselves: instead of forcing thankfulness on demand, when we give ourselves permission to feel the pain, gratitude will come in its own time.

Maybe that is why the rabbis in *Masechet Sanhedrin* (97a) insist that we cannot rush the Messiah; redemption arrives like a lost key, only when we stop frantically hunting for it on our own timetable. Gratitude works the exact same way. When we stop demanding thankfulness before its time, we give it space to swell up naturally—and when it finally arrives, it might even feel like redemption.