

Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Parashat Bamidbar – The Whisper of the Wilderness

(This article is inspired by student articles written by Aharona Ganz and Chaya Berdugo)

Hearing the Sound of Silence – the Divine Voice Within

Here in Bat Ayin we live at the edge of the wilderness. We have green springs and yellow summers. Just a 20 minute drive southeast will take us to the Judean desert where it is yellow most of the year with wisps of green. Here in Bat Ayin we enjoy the benefits of the dry rather than moist heat and the cool summer desert nights. Yet, we also enjoy the cleansing rain and soothing dew that caresses growing plants, from wild weeds to fertile fruit trees. While I love the lush green blooming fruitfulness of the Judean hills, I can appreciate the serene, silent, sandy, desert. The desert is a place so seemingly silent, and yet Hashem knows that it says so much. Therefore, He chose it as the backdrop from the giving of the living Torah, which is compared to black fire upon white fire (*Midrash Tanchuma, Bereishit 1*). The Hebrew word מִדְבָּר/*midbar* – desert is related to מְדַבֵּר/*medaber*, which means ‘to speak.’ The wilderness speaks – When we enter the vast open empty space of the wilderness, we are able to hear the sound of silence. Without the humdrum distractions of technical devices, mundane chores that need to get done, the constant background noises of cars driving by, we can turn inwardly to the Divine voice within. We can re-evaluate who we really are and learn to live more meaningful lives. When we tune into ourselves we may become aware of some of the deeper processes we are going through which we often repress through overeating and “workcoholism.” In the desert we can experience the detachment needed to be able to speak to G-d from the heart, and attain the clarity of hearing His answers. The desert speaks to us if we can silent the ongoing chatter inside of us for long enough to hear the words that Hashem has been crying out to us for years, while we have been too afraid to listen. The desert gives us a glimpse of the infinite, the timelessness of Hashem’s beauty and the vastness of open space, which is so needed for those of us who have been swarmed with the commercial jingles of fluorescent lighting, traffic jams, billboards and skyscrapers that obscure the view of getting in touch with our core. Our souls are infinite yet trapped inside a finite body with restrictions of time and space. It is the spiritual and emotional baggage that blocks our souls from coming out to full expression, and our ears from hearing the silent song of our souls. Leaving behind all the flicker of our surrounding electronics from computer monitors to smartphones and going out into the wilderness can help us melt away any spiritual and emotional blocks and thus enable us to reconnect and recharge our souls. Now, before the giving of the Torah Hashem takes us by the hand, leading us to the empty space, which serves as a clean white piece of paper, where we can take time to contemplate let go of any attachments and prepare ourselves for receiving the black letters of the Torah. It is always so much pressure when Shabbat flows into the holiday. Yet on the other hand, it is a gift to enter Shavuot directly from Shabbat, the Shabbat of *Parashat Bamidbar* – “In the Desert.” This Shabbat give us the opportunity to take the time to listen to the silent whisper of the wilderness that pierces the soul.



Midreshet
B'erot Bat Ayin

Holistic Torah Study for Women

(011-972-2) 995-4945

info@bzerotbatayin.org

www.bzerotbatayin.org

Becoming Desolate like the Desert to Deserve Torah

ספר במדבר פרק א פסוק א וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי...

“Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai...” (*Bamidbar* 1:1).

The Torah was given with three things: with fire, water and wilderness. With fire as it states, “The entire mountain of Sinai was smoking because Hashem descended upon it with fire (*Shemot* 19:18). With water as it states, “Oh Hashem, when you came forth from Seir, when you marched forth from the field of Edom, the earth trembled; the heavens dripped, yea, the clouds dripped water” (*Shoftim* 5:4). In wilderness as it states, “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai” (*Bamidbar* 1:1). Why was the Torah given through these three things? To teach you that just as these things are free for all people in the world, also the Torah is free for anyone who desires it. Similarly, it states, “Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water” (*Yesha’yahu* 55:1). Why was the Torah given in the wilderness, to teach you that a person cannot acquire Torah until he has made himself **הַפְּקָר**/*hefker* – ownerless like the desert (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:7). The word *hefker* is hard to translate. It seems to me that in this context it refers to being free of attachments, like the empty desolate desert, which consists of nothing but a vast space of emptiness. This is also, why the Torah is compared to water, as water descends from a high to a low place. Similarly the words of Torah pass over the arrogant person and settles with the humble. For the same reason Hashem gave the Torah at Mt. Sinai – the very lowest mountain. Living in the desert or just spending some time there is truly a humbling experience. When we shed all the comforting trappings to be alone with the essentials and ourselves, we realize that money, possessions, career, title are only exterior wrappings. They do not entail any intrinsic value. It takes the humility of the desert to experience the greatness of ‘being’ rather than ‘having.’ Therefore, “the Torah was only given to those who ate manna” (*Mechilta b’Shalach* 17). To those who do not seek luxury, but desire only the minimum to sustain their souls. “Such is the way of Torah: Bread with salt you shall eat, water in small measure you shall drink, and upon the ground you shall sleep; live a life of deprivation and toil in Torah. If so you do, ‘fortunate are you, and good is to you’ (*Tehillim* 128:2): fortunate are you in this world, and it is good to you in the World to Come” (*Pirkei Avot* 6:4).

Decluttering Desert Drive

The Torah was given in the bare wilderness to teach us that in order to become steeped in Torah we need to live simple lives devoid of luxuries. However, today even the bare necessities like good bread without toxic additives and good chlorine-free water has become a luxury! It is hard to return to simplicity in a world where we are so bombarded with advertisement for endless amounts of items, which supposedly will enhance our lives. The secret is to minimize what we buy and bring into our space and just keep a few quality items that we enjoy. For example, instead of all kinds of cosmetic products, I stay with basic staples like coconut oil, which is a perfect makeup remover, body lotion and even face-cream. I use shea-butter as a heavy hand and foot-cream that protects the skin before and after gardening and doubles up as a lip balm for parched and sundried lips. I would love to learn to minimize other areas in my life; being a collector, this is not easy. We tend to collect too many words as well. Who has time to read all of these emails and

articles in our excess overflow society? Each time I sit down at the computer to write my weekly Nature in the Torah, I decide I am going to keep it brief, but somehow the words sneak in. I think my writing is not good enough if I don't add more. Perhaps this insecurity about our own self-worth is the underlying reason why we think we need so much. It is possible that the desire for excess expensive pampering comes to fill the void feeling of unworthiness. Allowing the Torah to fill us with value and meaning may help us appreciate the free pleasures such as taking a brisk walk with our loved ones. When it really comes down to it, we can manage with so much less than what we have. We spend the first half of our lives accumulating things, then the rest of our lives trying to rid ourselves of all the extras. We all know what happens to the things we put in storage. When we find these boxes a year or so later, we can't believe we ever needed any of this stuff. Driving through the desert, we pass numerous Bedouin enclaves where families live in bare minimum tent colonies, a remnant of how people used to live thousands years ago. I'm always amazed and in awe of how these people can live this way today in our modern world. Somehow, the desert is conducive to deep decluttering.

Walking in Avraham's Path of Simplicity

The numerical value of the word מִדְבָּר/*midbar* – desert is 248. This is the number of positive mitzvot in the Torah. The concept of the desert facilitates our receiving the Torah and its mitzvot. It teaches us to be like the desert free of distractions that takes us away from keeping the mitzvot of the Torah. The name אַבְרָהָם/Avraham also shares the *gematria* of 248. Avraham was like the desert because he needed nothing for himself. In this way, he was like the sand of the desert that absorbs nothing, recharging with every day in the sunshine. Avraham became recharged through his constant giving to others. Becoming like the desert is like being an empty channel – a clean conduit without sediments for Hashem's goodness to flow through. Avraham perfected the level of loving Hashem. He had no unrectified fears. It is our fears that makes us hold on to things, like holding on to a rope or a stick that we think may save us from ourselves. Sometimes, we cushion ourselves with layers of excess stuff, because we are afraid to face our naked selves. The desert is a powerful place to discover the pieces inside of our true selves. Here we can strip ourselves of all the non-essentials and allow the daily complexities to settle into simplicity. In the desert, we can reconnect with our soul – the part of us that guides the journey into truth – Avraham's journey of understanding, love, connectivity and healthy relationships.

May we merit to walk in Avraham's path of simplicity feeling perpetual fulfillment through keeping Hashem's Mitzvot. *Shavuot Sameach!*