

**The Torah of Resilience:
Why our Revelation comes from wilderness, not paradise
Rabbi Shira Wallach
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Revelation in Eden

Genesis 2:16-17

And the Lord God commanded the man saying: "Of every tree of the Garden you are free to eat, but as for the Tree of knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

Genesis 3:4-7

And the serpent said to the woman: "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked: and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

Revelation in the Wilderness

Bewilderments: Reflections on the Book of Numbers, Avivah Zornberg

The surface of the wilderness proves to hold vertical menace – "Into this wilderness your carcasses shall fall!" the Torah intones repeatedly. This is not simply a walking surface for the traveling people, but a quicksand ready to consume human bodies.

It is an environment that is inimical to human life...the landscape does not yield to human demands: it frustrates the need for food and drink, but also the basic demand for direction, for markings to indicate a human mapping of blank space. No human steps have trod this sand, it stares back at the travel indifferently – pathless, *bewildering*, to the human imagination. A kind of horror besets the mind. Already traumatized by their Egyptian past, the Israelites, one by one, must be swallowed into this senseless place.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Wilderness and the Word"

The Hebrew word *midbar*, wilderness, has the same root as the word *dabar/davar*, meaning "word" or "thing." It has the same letters as *medabber*, "speaking." It is in the wilderness that the Israelites hear revelation, the word or speaking of G-d.



Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 55a

What is the meaning of: "...and from Midbar to Mattanah, and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamot" (Numbers 21:18b-19)

Rava said: Once a person renders her/himself like a wilderness, deserted before all, the Torah is bestowed upon her/him as a gift [*mattanah*]. And once it is given to her/him as a gift, God bequeaths it to her/him [*nahal*=inheritance]. And once God bequeaths it to her/him, she/he rises to greatness [*bamot*=elevated places].

"Lost in the Wilderness" excerpts, Stephen Schwartz, from *Children of Eden*

CAIN:

You follow all the rules
You swallow all the stories
And every night you wish on a star
Dreaming your day will come, trusting in allegories
And every morning boy look where you are

Lost in the wilderness
Lost, slowly dying in the wilderness
With no chance of living boy, until you confess
You're lost in the wilderness

Don't you ever watch the eagle fly to the sun
And wonder how he got to be so free
If you ever have you know your journey's begun
Hey what've we got to lose boy, when already we are
Lost in the wilderness

And where we are headed boy, I couldn't guess but
Off we go without a warning
Running as we hit the ground
Where our future lies a-borning
Where our hearts are outward bound
Till one bright and distant morning
We may stop and look around
And there in the wilderness...
Finally we'll be found!



**Congregation
Shearith Israel**