

**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!