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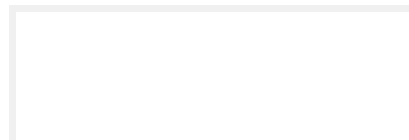
Chag Shavuot Sameach | חג שבועות שמח

Blog Edition



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In the Wilderness and the



Wilderness Within

Parshat Bamidbar (Numbers, 1:1-4:20)

By Rabbi Jordan Braunig, Rab`14

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Four books into the Torah and here we find ourselves mired in wilderness. This book, *Sefer Bamidbar*, though commonly known as the Book of Numbers, would more aptly be translated as *In the Wilderness*. It tells the story of a people stuck; stuck in existential uncertainty, stuck in mundane nametaking, stuck in adolescent rebellion. Stuck...in the wilderness. A generation of Israelites will perish here. Moses will seal his fate with the slap of a stick. Miriam will be cast out and no sooner be healed. If in Exodus/*Shemot* we transition from a family to a people and in Leviticus/*Vayikra* we welcome the Divine to dwell in our midst, it's in Bamidbar that we develop our proclivity as a people for wandering in the wilderness.

A trek that should have taken a matter of days, stretches out for forty years and we, committed readers of these ancient narratives, are left wondering what meaning to derive from this saga of desert wandering. Perhaps we should begin in the same place where the sages started, namely, with the name of the book. The first line of this week's *parashah* reads "And the Holy One spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai..." Immediately, the rabbis home in on the particularity of this setting, asking "Why in the Wilderness of Sinai?"

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