



## **I Remember the Affection of Your Youth**

Our Parsha begins by recording that Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai in the Tent of Meeting, the Ohel Mo'ed. So, we might ask of what import is it to know that this encounter took place in the Midbar, the desert.

Perhaps we might begin by taking the route espoused by the Gaon, R. Shapiro of Lublin, who focusses our attention on the Midrash that proclaimed that our holy Torah was acquired BA'EISH, BAMAYIM UVAMIDBAR - 'Through fire, water, and the desert.'

In principle, the Rebbe informs us that from their earliest days, Am Yisrael made sacrifices on behalf of their beliefs. And, following the Midrash, these three elements - fire, water, and desert - were engaged in the prototype examples of this selfless dedication. Avraham was thrown into the furnace (FIRE); the people jumped into the Sea (WATER), and Bnei Yisrael entered a barren

wilderness, replete with "wild animals, snakes, and scorpions" (DESERT).

No wonder that the prophet Yirmiyahu, when pleading on behalf of a backsliding people, proclaimed in their defense (2:2) -

*I remember the affection of your youth*

*The love of your espousals,*

*How you went after Me in the wilderness*

*In a land that was not sown.*

Thus, in this context, the recollection of the Midbar serves as a source of protection when we most need to atone for our misdeeds.

R. Elimelech of Lizansck (the Noam Elimelech), however, would draw our attention further to the description of the location where the dialogue between G-d and Moshe occurred, namely Midbar Sinai. The acceptance of Torah alone is not sufficient: It has to be accompanied by the appropriate level of humility, of making ourselves small in the eyes of G-d, as represented by the most modest of mountains, Har Sinai.

In the inimitable worldview of the Chassid, R. Elimelech then draws our attention to the encounter taking

place in the Ohel Mo'ed, not to be translated as "The Tent of Meeting" but rather as B'OHEL [SHEL] MO'ED - 'In the tent of the Mo'ed', where MO'ED means one of the religious holidays. Just as our festivals (the Mo'adim) must be celebrated with joy, so must the encounter with Hashem be a joyous experience.

And, following the wise Zera HaKodesh, Naftali Zvi of Ropshitz, we understand that even when we feel abandoned and neglected in a world that is "barren" and that our lives are encroached by "wild animals and scorpions," we should know that Hashem is still there for us and remembers the love of our espousals.

**MP**