


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**  
 שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש  
 Friday 22 May 2009 - 28 Iyar 5769  
 Sedra Bemidbar

**WE WILL DO AND WE WILL HEAR**

**SUNDAY IS THE NEW MOON, THE BEGINNING OF THE JEWISH month of Sivan. The Rabbis tell us that it was on this day that the Jewish people, travelling from Egypt, came to the Sinai desert. Here they were to receive the Torah in an extraordinary experience at Mount Sinai, an event which we will celebrate next week on Friday and Shabbat, in the festival of Shavuot. A key moment at Sinai was when we declared: "We will do, and we will hear". Through this we truly agreed to accept the Torah.**

The idea that we received the Torah in a desert is intriguing. Surely, like every detail in the Torah, that must teach us something? Further, the concept of a desert seems to be emphasised by the fact that on this Shabbat we read the Sedra<sup>1</sup> called Bemidbar, which means 'In the Desert'. This Sedra is always read before the festival of Shavuot.

Another point, while we are asking questions about details: is there any meaning in the fact that the day we reached the desert of Sinai was the New Moon, the day when the moon is smallest -but is beginning to grow?



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin װװ , to the memory and merit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus lfsrcn װ װ j "vrv

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF  
[cru@lubavitchuk.com](mailto:cru@lubavitchuk.com) - [www.chabadresearch.org](http://www.chabadresearch.org)

The Sages point out that in order for us to receive the Torah there had to be a certain preliminary step on our part. Somehow we had to declare not only to G-d, but also to ourselves, that we would obey the teachings of the Torah, or at least, try to obey. To achieve this we needed an inner movement of submission and acceptance.

This is the significance of the desert. A desert expresses the idea of non-being; it is empty of farms, houses, or even forests. The desert of Sinai represents our own state of suspension of the will, so that we could truly listen to the Divine Will which was going to be revealed.

This is one aspect of our attitude at Mount Sinai. It was expressed by our statement to Moses that “we will do” all that G-d commands.

However, there was also another aspect to this. Not only did we say “we will do”, we also said “we will hear”. Hearing implies understanding. We committed ourselves to obeying, but we also said that we will study and find out and try to understand as much as is possible for a limited human being.

This means, being like a desert is not enough. There is therefore an additional concept: the New Moon. When it is the New Moon the moon is very small: but there is a moon. And will slowly get bigger.

We arrived at the Desert of Sinai on the New Moon, expressing the idea that not only do we accept, we are also going to discover. We will learn, and absorb, and question, and grow.

By combining both qualities, that of the empty desert and that of the growing moon, expressed through our two famous statements “we will do” and “we will hear”, we prepared ourselves to receive G-d’s infinite teaching at the Giving of the Torah - and to live and grow with it for thousands of generations<sup>2</sup>.

1. Numbers 1:14:20. 2. Freely based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Kuntres Rosh Chodesh Sivan* 5750.

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SEDRA BEMIDBAR

**LEARNING TO SEE THE TORAH**

Shira put her pencil down and squinted at her drawing. She turned it upside down and squinted again. Then she stood up and climbed onto her chair. That didn't seem to improve the drawing much. It was supposed to be a hand, *her* hand, but from here it looked more like a spider squashed onto the page. She tilted her head slightly to the right. Maybe if she looked at it from another angle....

Shira sighed. The page was already smudged all over where she had erased. She was ready to give up. Maybe she wasn't cut out to be an artist after all.

"What *are* you doing, Shira?" Shira turned to see her art instructor looking up at her with raised eyebrows.

"Oh! I'm sorry Mrs. Ganz. "I just can't do this drawing right!"

"Come sit next to me for a minute, Shira." Shira climbed down from her chair and sat next to her teacher.

"Ok, Shira. Let's try again. Put your hand on the table ready to draw it. What do you see?"

"A hand?" said Shira. "No! It is not a hand!" said Mrs Ganz. Shira looked again. It definitely looked like a hand. It even felt like a hand.

“Well,” Mrs. Ganz continued, “it *is* a hand, but as an artist you must forget that. Just look carefully. Forget that you know it is a hand, Shira. Look at shapes and shadows. What shape is the space between your thumb and your finger? Look at how all the shapes come together. And try again.”

Mrs. Ganz slid a clean sheet of paper towards Shira.

Shira thought she understood. “It’s a bit like the Sedra, Mrs. Ganz!”

“Yes?”

“Well, normally, a hand is a hand, and it’s important to know that, right? But when I’m drawing and I think, *this is a hand*, I end up not paying attention to what I see. I end up just drawing from my head. And, well, you can see how that goes.” Shira pointed to the fat flat spider on her paper. “I can only really know what it looks like when I forget what it is! So that’s like the giving of the Torah, right?”

“Go on.” Mrs. Ganz nodded, smiling.

Shira continued. “Why was the Torah given in the desert? The desert has nothing in it. No one lives there. In order to really accept the Torah, we have to let go of any ideas we have about life. We have to forget what other societies tell us. Then we can really be open to receiving the truth from G-d Himself!”

“That’s a wonderful analogy, Shira.” Mrs. Ganz smiled.

Shira leaned over to pick up her pencil and the fresh sheet of paper. This time it was going to work!

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