

Weekly Teaching

May 18, 2018

The Hebrew word *Bamidbar* translates as “in the wilderness,” and is the name of the 4th Book of our Torah, also known as the Book of Numbers.

Bamidbar also is the name of the 1st Torah portion of the Book of Numbers, and it is usually read prior to our celebration of the Festival of Shavuot, which celebrates God’s gift of Torah to our People at Mount Sinai.

The first verse of *Bamidbar* states: “And the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai...”

The rabbis perceive a connection between “wilderness” and “revelation”.

We received God’s Torah even before we entered into our Promised Land.

Usually the opposite would be the case: land first, laws second. People plant themselves in a land, and then the societal laws develop over time.

But, for the Jewish People, our Social Contract planted God’s laws within our collective peoplehood, and then our land was occupied.

This inversion of normative practice of most nations explains the “secret” of the Jews’ survival.

The origin of our “Constitution” was portable; even landless. Our Jewish societies could always take root wherever Jews would reside.

We do possess our formal Jewish State. And, during the historical eras where we lacked national self-autonomy, we were exposed to greater physical dangers.

However, for Jews — no matter our geographic location — our spiritual selves were always made secure because we possessed with our Torah the eternal moral compass by which we can always navigate whatever wilderness environment where we might reside.

Our declaration of “Not by Might, Nor by Power, but by Spirit alone” is the historical reality of our People.

We survive; we thrive; because we stand eternally committed to living our individual and communal lives by the guiding principle of God’s Laws.

God resides within our midst, no matter where we might be geographically located.

Today, we continue to march through the wilderness of our lives. It’s no accident that the Torah was given to us *Bamidbar* — “in the wilderness.”

Let’s firmly re-grasp the gift that is God’s Torah.

Eitz Chayim — “Torah is a tree of life to those who cling to it; Blessed are they who uphold it.”

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templesholom.com