

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

The Torah was given to us in the wilderness. Obviously, this was by design, because Hashem could have arranged the Revelation anywhere. Apparently, He chose the wilderness for a reason. *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*, posits that Hashem was delivering a message to us concerning the nature of the Torah and the attitude which should prevail when we study it. The wilderness is not a place designated for human habitation. Deadly serpents and scorpions inhabit it. The climate is certainly not conducive to human settlement. Nonetheless, all the powers of *Briah*, Creation – through the media of water, fire and loud noises – accompanied the giving of the Torah. The desolation of the wilderness did not inhibit this seminal experience. The lesson we can glean from this phenomenon is: Just as the Torah was given to us under conditions that were fraught with danger, adversity and challenge, so, too, are we obliged to devote ourselves to Torah study regardless of the conditions. We must do our part; Hashem will do His part, by sustaining us in the same manner in which He stood by and protected our ancestors in the wilderness. Indeed, one who dedicates himself to Torah, despite deprivation and adversity, will be Heavenly-blessed and succeed in Torah beyond anyone's expectations.

An example of the above was *Horav Aharon Walkin, zl*, *Rav* of Pinsk, one of the premier rabbinic leaders of pre-World War II Europe. His many *sefarim*, volumes of Talmudic and *halachic* commentary, demonstrate his brilliance and depth of knowledge in all areas of Torah. In his *hakdamah*, preface, to the *Bais Aharon*, his commentary to *Bava Kamma* (a *sefer* which truly reflects his *Talmudic* genius), he writes: "What can I say? What can I speak? I have lived through a period of terror that has gripped all of Europe, affecting my city (Pinsk) and notably myself. Eight years have passed during which we have been subjected to being the chattels/refugees of a raging war around us. We have been hounded, persecuted and driven from our homes; men, women and children have been persecuted and murdered, exiled to all four corners of the earth. Yet, despite this and the mounting hunger and evil decrees, although our people are drowning in a sea of fire and water, we continue to survive and study Torah..."

"Who would believe that at a time like this, when every semblance of order and survival was just about gone, that Hashem would be so kind, so generous, to enable me to learn Torah? It is this Torah that has sustained me. I thank Hashem for granting me the ability and the presence of mind to author and print three volumes of commentary. Also, I have two more volumes that are in manuscript form. I have no words with which to express my gratitude to Hashem for enabling me to achieve this milestone. He released me from captivity by allowing me to learn His Torah. May I continue to be the beneficiary of His generosity and to remain steadfast in my commitment to His Torah." [free translation]