

## *Becoming as the Wilderness*

As we know, according to tradition, the holy Torah was given in the wilderness of Sinai.

Yet one might wonder: "why in the wilderness, why the desert?" Why didn't the Blessed Holy One give the Torah to the Jewish people in the Land of Israel?

Some say this teaches us that the Torah pertains to everyone, and is the property of no one. That, like the wilderness, she is owner-less - like the dust that blows in the desert wind.

Our sages of blessed memory taught that every day, the Torah should be as new in our eyes as on the day she was given.

Ah! But how can such a thing be?

Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl -- a student of the Baal Shem Tov -- lived in the 18th century, and was one of the first teachers of Hasidism.

In his book on the Torah entitled "*Meor Einayim / The Light of the Eyes*", he expands upon the words of our sages. He says that in order to receive Torah in a full and proper way, we must first make ourselves like a wilderness -- that is, to open our hearts and empty our minds, to become a place as open as the desert.

Similarly, Rabbi Alan Lew, of blessed memory - a well-known and beloved teacher of Jewish meditation -- author of the books "One God Clapping" and "This is Real and You Are Totally Unprepared" -- quotes from the writings of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter of Ger, in his book "*Sefat Emet / The Language of Truth*", that we are able to receive the revelations of the Torah of today, only to the extent that we liberate ourselves from the assumptions and presumptions of yesterday.

In the book "*Meor Einayim*", Rabbi Menachem Nachum continues by explaining that that this is the inner meaning of the words of a meditation which is found in the siddur following the prayers of the Amidah:

*Elohaim netzor leshoni mei-ra, us'fatai mi-dabeir mirmah, v'lim-kalelai nafshi tidom, v'nafshi ke'afar la-kol tih'yeh. Petach libi l'toratekha ..* אֱלֹהִים, נִצּוֹר לְשׁוֹנֵי מִרְעָה, וּשְׂפָתַי מִדְּבַר מִרְמָה, וְלִמְקַלְלֵי נַפְשִׁי תִדָּם, וְנַפְשִׁי כְּעָפָר לְכֹל תִּהְיֶה. פְּתַח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרַתְךָ ...

My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. And to those who would slander me, may my spirit be still; may I practice humility [lit: "may my spirit be as dust to all"]. Open my heart to Your Torah ...

Rabbi Menachem Nachum explains that to say "*v'nashi ke'afar lakol tih'yeh / may my spirit be as dust to all*" is to pray to become as open as the wilderness, to receive anew the holy Torah that is unique to *this* day.

This, then, is the *kavannah*, the intention and prayer of the song I am sharing - a reminder to open my heart and mind to receive - with love - each and every day - everyone and everything I encounter ... to remind myself to listen attentively, to learn well, to love well, and to allow myself to be guided along the best of all possible paths - to the very best of my understanding and ability by Divine and Sacred Spirit - *Ruach haAhavah* - the Love that uplifts, breathes Life into us, and blesses us all.