



### Why the wilderness?

Surely the Torah didn't need to use that term 'Bemidbar'? Yet at the commencement of this week's portion which is at the beginning of a new book of the Torah, we are told 'Bemidbar Sinai'.

It was not just 'in Sinai', but 'in the wilderness of Sinai', that the tent of meeting was constructed and where the Torah was given.

Indeed, nearly every single year Bemidbar is read on the Shabbat prior to the festival of Shavuot, which recalls the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

So why is the wilderness of such great significance for us?

So many of our commentators give beautiful reasons and I want to share with you just two.

The first is that a wilderness is a symbol of humility, it doesn't contain much to boast about, and similarly for us to acquire Torah, to appreciate it, to be able and responsible representatives of a Torah way of life, we need to have humility.

We need to walk in the footsteps of Moses, our greatest teacher, who was 'anav mikol adam' - he was more humble than anyone else.

Then there is a second message conveyed by Bemidbar.

A desert is 'hefker', it belongs to the entire nation. There is no private property within it, it is there for everybody, and so too the Torah was given in a wilderness to let us know Torah belongs to everyone.

It's not the exclusive property of any one segment or group of Jewish people.

And that is such a strong message at this time of the year as we approach the festival of Shavuot.

Just as at the Seder of Pesach, we recognise that the Torah is given to four different types of Jewish people, those who are wise, those who let us down, those who are simple, those who do not even know how to ask - we include everybody.

So too, at this time, we recognise that Torah is there for absolutely every one of us.

So therefore, as we approach Shavuot this year, let us always remember to maintain that deep sense of humility and never to forget that Torah is there for absolutely every one of us.

'Vetein chelkeinu b'toratecha' - let every single person say 'I want my portion in the Torah which belongs to us all'.

Shabbat Shalom.