

# Numbers

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

It seems strange that a crucial book of the Torah should be called BaMidbar, in the desert. The simple answer is that the books of the Torah were not originally given names and when somewhere some two thousand years ago, the rabbis decided to do so, they simply used the first Hebrew noun of the book as an easy handle. By then Christianity had imposed its stamp on what they called "The Old Testament."

The book is called Numbers in the Christian world because it contains the numbers of the people, the tribes, the army, the priests, the princes, all the administrative details necessary to advance directly into the Land of Canaan. But as we know, it didn't happen. Numbers are important but they only tell part of the story. They do not tell us about morale, conviction or commitment.

We on the other hand call the book 'The Desert.' What happened during the 40 years in the desert that laid the foundation for the people. They clearly were not ready when they came out of Egypt. They needed a whole generation to turn around the humiliation, the psychological damage of slavery. On one level, it reminds us that whatever happens in political and social rebellions, it takes a very long time and another generation at least before the hatred and barbarities are expunged.

But what interests me is that it needs a 'Desert' to create a therapeutic environment. Sometimes we need to get out of the world we are used to. Sometimes we need a retreat, a cure, a moment of peace and self-examination. The beauty of Judaism is that provides us all the time with little 'Deserts' so that we don't have to retire or retreat altogether. A few moments of prayer throughout the day, Shabbat and Festivals, if we use them properly enable us to take breaks, to step back and to re-evaluate our positions.