

Sinai and Zion

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

We were a wandering people but with a direction — headed toward a place. In his brilliant book, *Sinai & Zion* biblical scholar Jon D. Levenson contrasts the legacy of the two mountains. Sinai is the peak of the wilderness, the time of desert wandering. It was a miraculous time, plagues and revelations, splitting seas and early discoveries of God.

Zion is the mountain of David, symbolic of the state. There the Temple stands in contrast to the law of Sinai. The wilderness is the prophetic tradition, Zion the tradition of priests and of kings. Judaism embraces the lessons of both mountains, the law that was given at Sinai and the creation of a stable society that was the legacy of Zion.

Throughout Jewish history we have benefitted from the dual legacy. In wanderings Jews could look to Sinai for the law that was portable and accompanied us through our exile. But our eyes were fixed on Zion, knowing that Sinai was a stop along the way to Israel. The return to Zion was a chance to realize the lessons of both mountains: the law and the land, the prophet and priest, the pilgrim and the citizen. Our wandering was really a journey.