

Children of the Wilderness

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

In his autobiography *Anti-Memoirs*, French writer Andre Malraux tells of running across an old friend with whom he fought in the war. The friend has become a parish Priest, and Malraux, seeing his compatriot anew after two decades, asks him what he has learned from years of listening to people's confessions.

The Priest tells Malraux that he has learned two things: First, that there is more pain in the world than he ever imagined. Everyone has a story. Second, his friend tells him as he "threw his arms up to the star sewn night," that "there is no such thing as a grownup."

These two lessons are encapsulated in a central metaphor of the Torah. The world is a wilderness and the Israelites are called, repeatedly, the children of Israel. It is a wilderness because we all wander, are all somewhat lost, all experience grief and pain. Through the wilderness the Israelites do indeed act like children, complaining, whining, rebelling. We are all of us, children of the wilderness. Therefore we need a map, the Torah; a guide, God; and a community. Each of us with our doubts and dreams, walk through the wilderness together, seeking to grow.