

## Parshat Ki Tavo 5778

**The need for two covenants** The Torah describes two covenants that were forged between Hashem and the Jewish people - the covenant at Sinai and the covenant at the plains of Moav. It is the second covenant which is contained in our parsha: *“These are the words of the covenant which Hashem commanded Moshe to make with Bnei Yisrael in the land of Moav, aside from the covenant which He made with them at Chorev”*. (Devarim 28:69)

Each of the two covenants includes a system of mutual commitments, conditions, and, at the conclusion of each, blessings and curses. For what reason are there two covenants? Why is one covenant not sufficient? We will explore the significance of each covenant, thereby attempting to understand why there were two covenants rather than one. We will see that the focal point and perspective of each covenant are different. Each covenant has a focal point.

Covenant at Sinai (Vayikra 26) The forging of the covenant is recorded in parshat Mishpatim. However, in parshat Bechukotai we see that the focus of the covenant is the promise, *“I will place My Sanctuary among you and My spirit will not reject you. I will walk among you and be your G-d, and you will be My people.”*

The purpose of this covenant is to cause the Shechina to rest amongst the nation of Israel and in the midst of the land.

Covenant at the plains of Moav (Devarim 28) In the description of the covenant at the plains of Moav, the Torah states explicitly that the purpose of this covenant is to select the Jewish people as Hashem’s chosen nation. Expressions of this theme are *“then Hashem, your G-d, will make you supreme over the nations of the earth.....then all the people of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you and they will revere you”*.

In the covenant at the plains of Moav, the Land of Israel is described as *“the Land which the Lord your G-d gives to you”*, whilst in the covenant at Sinai it is described as *“the Land in which G-d dwells”*.

The same difference is reflected in a comparison between the curses connected to the two covenants. In sefer Vayikra, we read that the central element of the punishment is exile. Whereas, in sefer Devarim the central aspect of punishment is Israel’s defeat at

the hands of its enemies.

**Attitude towards the Land** The role of the Land of Israel, from the perspective of the covenant in sefer Vayikra, is to be a dwelling place for the Divine Presence. Sefer Vayikra as a whole is concerned with the Divine Presence: the first part of the sefer is devoted to the focal point of Hashem’s Presence – the Mishkan. The second part of the sefer deals with Hashem’s Presence within the Land. The covenant at the end of the sefer therefore completes this theme by setting down the conditions for Hashem’s Presence in the Land of Israel. This perspective awards the Land of Israel an elevated spiritual status. Only this land is worthy of the presence of the Shechina. Therefore, the Jewish people are only able to live in this land if its behaviour is worthy of it.

In contrast, in sefer Devarim the Land is the reward that the nation receives for fulfilling the covenant. The Land is presented as a gift from Hashem to His chosen people. If the nation of Israel does not fulfil the covenant, other nations will seize the land from them.

Continuing this theme, in the curses of sefer Vayikra, the Land is described as being desolate. Not only will Israel not be living in the land but even other nations will be unable to inhabit it. In order to redeem the Land from its desolation, Israel needs to be redeemed. According to the covenant at the plains of Moav, the Jewish people receive the land as a reward for fulfilling the covenant. The giving over of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people is an expression of the nation being chosen by Hashem. Thus, when the Jewish people sin, the curses describe how the Land is given over to other nations.

**Different world views** The world-view of sefer Vayikra and of the covenant at Sinai is one in which Hashem lies at its centre. This perception is expressed in the defined realms described in the Sefer, consisting of inner and outer circles, with the Mishkan in its midst, and the Holy of Holies and the Shechina itself at the centre of the Mishkan.

In contrast, sefer Devarim adopts the world-view in which the focal point is man, and specifically, the nation. Of course, it is Hashem who took us out of Egypt and who redeems us; however, He does so not for His own sake, but for ours. Divine Providence acts out of loving kindness, and the Land is given as a gift. Sefer Devarim as a whole is built on the foundation *“that it will be good for you”* – personally and nationally. The purpose of the Sefer is to create a nation that lives a good life before Hashem, with kindness and social justice at its heart. Hashem promises the Jewish people that if they maintain this position, they will be raised over the other nations.