

## **Brit Moav & Teshuvah Me'Ahava (*Parshat Ki Tavo*)**

*Parshat Ki Tavo* delineates the terms of the covenant which were forged between God and Bnei Yisrael once the people crossed over into the Land of Israel, stating that **“these are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moshe to make with Bnei Yisrael in the land of Moav, alongside the covenant that He had made with them at Horev”** (Devarim 28:69).

Naturally, reading about this second covenant leads us to examine its relationship with the covenant forged at Sinai/Horev, and it is this question which the Malbim systematically addresses (in his commentary to Devarim 27:9 & Devarim 27:26) where he writes:

**‘At *Ma’amad Har Sinai*, there was no spiritual awakening (*hit’orerut*) amongst the Bnei Yisrael to receive the Torah. Instead, it was God who sent Moshe to instruct them - as we find in *Parshat Yitro* (Shemot 19:16) where we read how ‘God appeared to them at Mount Sinai with thunder and lightning and with a dense cloud’. This was done in order to embed a sense of fear (*Yir’ah*) amongst the people, as it says, ‘so the awe of God will be with you always, keeping you from sin’ (Shemot 20:17). This is why the people limited themselves at this point when they declared, ‘all that the Lord has spoken we shall do (*Na’aseh*)’ (Shemot 19:8) - which is something that someone would say when performing a task out of fear while showing no interest in the actual purpose of the action that they’ve been called upon to do. In fact, [further evidence to support the contention that the covenant at Sinai stemmed from *Yir’ah* (fear) is the fact that] it was only after the people heard the *Asseret HaDibrot*, and only once they were given the laws found in *Parshat Mishpatim*, and only after Moshe spoke the contents of scroll of the covenant into the ears of the people, that the people then proclaimed, ‘we shall do and we shall heed (*Na’aseh VeNishma*)’ (Shemot 24:7). This is because their initial commitment to the covenant stemmed from fear (*Yir’ah*)...In contrast to this, the covenant that was later affirmed in the plains of Moav, after Moshe shared all the words of the Torah, emerged from a kindling of the people’s souls to cleave to God. Accordingly, at this point they accepted the entire Torah with a great desire and in response to an active spiritual awakening... Thus until this point they were considered to be ‘children of God’, whereas now they reached a higher level of being ‘with God’... and they accepted the yoke of God’s kingship with *Ahava* (love).’**

To distill this idea, what this means is that the covenant at Sinai (*Brit Har Sinai*) stemmed from a feeling of fear (*Yir’ah*) towards God, while the covenant in Moav (*Brit Arvot Moav*) stemmed from a feeling of love (*Ahava*) towards God.

As we know, these two concepts of *Yir’ah* (fear) and *Ahava* (love) are often compared and contrasted in rabbinic literature, and this is particularly the case when it comes to the topic of teshuvah (repentance) where our Sages (see *Yoma* 86a-b) speak about ‘repentance out of fear’ (*Teshuvah M’Yir’ah*), and ‘repentance out of love’ (*Teshuvah Me’Ahava*).

With this in mind, I believe that a clear connection can be made between *Brit Har Sinai* and *Teshuvah M’Yir’ah*, and *Brit Arvot Moav* and *Teshuvah Me’Ahava*, such that an enriched understanding of *Brit Arvot Moav* can help us better comprehend the nature of *Teshuvah Me’Ahava*.

We’ve previously explained that *Brit Moav* reflected a willing and passionate commitment to partake in God’s covenant, and that it stemmed from an active desire to feel a sense of ‘ownership’ of that covenant. And how is that related to *Teshuvah Me’Ahava*? It is because someone who truly undergoes *Teshuvah Me’Ahava* is called a ‘*Ba’al*’ or ‘*Ba’alat*’ *Teshuvah* which, as Rabbi Moshe

Shternbuch explains (*Teshuvot VeHanbagot* Vol. 4 OC 148), reflects someone who has a sense of 'ownership' of their new Jewish life having since undergone a process of repentance. However, teshuvah doesn't always work that way.

When individuals are inspired to return to a more committed Jewish life but they do so under the influence of others or for the sake of others, then they lack a sense of *Ba'alut* (ownership) of this new version of themselves. In such a situation, their journey has been motivated by *Yir'ah* (fear), and it reflects the commitment that was made at Mount Sinai where the people simply proclaimed, 'all that the Lord has spoken we shall do (*Na'aseh*)' (Shemot 19:8).

In contrast, when someone becomes a true *Ba'al* or *Ba'alat Teshuvah*, and they feel a sense of ownership of their new Jewish life, then this parallels the commitment which was made in *Arvat Moav* out of *Ahava* (love).

Having explained all this we can now see a deep connection between *Parshat Ki Tavo* and the month of Ellul, because just as Ellul is often explained to be an acrostic of the words '*Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li* – I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me' (*Shir HaShirim* 6:3), and just as the month of Ellul is meant to encourage us to undertake steps towards *Teshuvah Me'Ahava*, so too, Parshat Ki Tavo records the terms of the covenant to be forged in Moav – a covenant forged in *Ahava* (love).

*Shabbat Shalom!*