YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**PARASHAT BECHUKOTAI**

**Who Comes to Whom?**

**By Rav Shimon Klein**

**Introduction**

In this *shiur*, we will focus on the first part of our *parasha*, which sets forth what will happen “if you follow My statutes” and what will happen “if you do not obey Me, and do not perform all of these commandments.” We will begin with a preliminary comparison between this unit and the blessings and curses listed in *Sefer Devarim*. We will note the fundamental discrepancy between them in relation to the fundamental question, “Who comes to whom?” In other words, is it man who approaches and enters the boundaries of the Divine command, fulfilling and obeying His word, or is it God Who enters man’s boundaries, impacting his life and his will? We will examine the two processes that serve as the central axis of our parasha: growth and punishment.

**The View from *Sefer Vayikra***

If you follow My statutes and keep My commandments and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach to the vintage, and the vintage shall reach to the sowing time, and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. (*Vayikra* 26:3-5)

“If you follow My statutes and keep My commandments and do them” – these are the most elementary and primal statutes, pertaining to the foundation of existence; they are “My statutes,” which I have placed before you.[[1]](#footnote-1) This introduction suits the orientation of *Sefer Vayikra*, in which it is clearly God who sets down statutes. The statutes are Mine, the commandments are Mine, and you will follow them and observe them. Which statutes and which commandments are referred to here? In the most basic sense, this description is part of a unit that began in *Parashat Behar* and was given at Sinai: “And the Lord spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai, saying: Speak *to Bnei Yisrael* and say to them: When you come to the land which I am giving to you, then the land shall observe a Shabbat unto the Lord” (25:1-2). This unit concludes at the end of the *sefer* with the words, “These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moshe for *Bnei Yisrael* at Mount Sinai” (27:34). The first part of this unit establishes commandments that include fundamental statements such as, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with Me” and “for unto Me *Bnei Yisrael* are servants; they are My servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God” – your brother cannot truly be your servant, for he is My servant, since I brought him out of Egypt. Later on, there are other fundamental principles: “You shall not fashion idols for yourselves, nor shall you erect for yourself a carved idol, nor a pillar, nor shall you install a figured stone in your land, to bow down upon it, for I am the Lord your God. You shall observe My *shabbatot* and revere My Sanctuary; I am the Lord” (26:1-2) – a negation of any other divinity, for “I am the Lord your God,” and the obligations of observing Shabbat and of showing reverence for the Temple.

Each of these realms, then – the land, man, time, and the Sanctuary – belongs to God. More broadly, the Torah presents a view that focuses on the fact that God is Sovereign; the world is His, and man is required to “step out” of his place and to come to God, to be illuminated by that which is Divine and elevated. This view is actually the undercurrent to the entire *sefer*, and in this sense we might extend the meaning of the terms “My statutes” and “My commandments” at the beginning of our *parasha* to include all the statutes and commandments included in *Sefer Vayikra*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Let us now return to our *parasha*. God describes what will happen “if you follow My statutes” and observe the commandments. It is not self-evident that the subject here is “following My statutes,” “observance,” and “performing the commandments,” nor even obeying God. The reason for this is that the subject is not man himself and what is happening in his inner world. The subject is the behavioral statutes and commandments upon which man’s existence is based. If you “enter the boundaries” of these rules and behave in accordance with their truth, then your existence will be firm and stable, like the natural phenomena that follow the law of Creation, and you will enjoy the resulting Divine abundance: “I will give you rain in due seas, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.” God will shower His goodness, and the laws of Creation will follow their course; the earth will give of its increase, and the trees will produce their fruit. Another step in this process relates to man’s ability to absorb all this goodness: “And your threshing shall reach to the vintage, and the vintage shall reach to the sowing time.” The produce will be so abundant that the threshing will continue until the time of the vintage, and the vintage will last until it is time to sow again. “And you shall eat your bread to the full” – bread is already the product of man’s efforts; his human efforts, too, are inspired by this Divine abundance. Finally, “and dwell in your land safely” – the cleaving to that which is Godly and whole will assure you a secure dwelling – both physically and economically – in your land.

**Moving from Physical Abundance to Spiritual Abundance**

The text goes on to describe a second area in which God promises goodness:

And I will give peace in the land and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid; and I will remove evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. (vv. 6-8)

Following the promise of physical security, there follows the promise of existential safety and tranquility: “I will give peace in the land” – in the most basic sense, meaning, “You shall lie down and none shall make you afraid,” “I will remove evil beasts out of the land,” “neither shall the sword go through your land.” There will be quiet, with no fear, no evil beasts, and no sword to disturb your peace. The verses are not describing the value of peace in its dimensions of connection with the other, nor as something that enriches one’s inner life. The perspective is more basic: tranquility and security. A spiritual, higher existence on your part will give you protection. The next level is, “And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword” – not only will they not attack you, but your strength will grow in relation to theirs, when they fall before you by the sword.[[3]](#footnote-3) Your strength will grow exponentially as you unite to chase your enemies: “And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight.”

A third sphere is then addressed:

For I will turn Myself to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and establish My covenant with you. And you shall eat old store, and remove the old because of the new. (vv. 9-10)

Now God turns His attention, as it were, to *Am Yisrael*, and this turning itself brings blessing. “And make you fruitful” – in the physical sense, perhaps also spiritually; “and multiply you” – a physical multiplicity of the nation; “and establish My covenant with you” – God will fulfill His part of the covenant with His nation. “And you shall eat old store, and remove the old because of the new” – this is a special promise concerning the “old store,” which will last and remain fresh. A breath of eternity will touch your food as a result of God’s turning to you.[[4]](#footnote-4)

A fourth sphere of blessing is that God causes His Presence to dwell amongst the nation, in the midst of the land:

And I will set My Sanctuary among you and My soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be My people. I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their bondmen, and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and caused you to walk upright. (vv. 11-13)

Once the reality of the environment is ripe – in the physical sense of tranquility and fertility – it is ready for exposure to the highest level of all: the tangible presence of God dwelling in its midst. “And I will set My Sanctuary among you” – God has an actual place in reality; He is part of the reality in the land. “And My soul shall not abhor you” – why should His soul abhor? What great message is this verse conveying? Seemingly, this description conveys a hint to the lowliness of life when severed from Divinity. That which is Divine is perceived as lofty, worthy, and whole, while whatever is separate from it belongs to the “shadows of life,” and God therefore abhors it.

“And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be My people” – God’s Presence is palpable. The very midst of life contains His Presence, and everything is illuminated by this central reality. “I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their bondmen, and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk upright” – God’s centrality is defined in terms of His having brought the nation out of Egypt, breaking the bars of their yoke, and giving dignity.

We will now examine the introduction to the unit of the blessings and curses in *Sefer Devarim* and consider the significant difference between the two texts.

The View from *Sefer Devarim*

And it shall be, if you obey diligently the voice of the Lord your God, to observe and to perform all His commandments which I command you this day, that the Lord your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep. Blessed shall be your basket and your store. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

The Lord shall cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before your face; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. The Lord shall command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you set your hand to, and He shall bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you. The Lord shall establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He has sworn to you, if you shall observe the commandments of the Lord your God and follow His ways. And all people of the earth shall see that you are called by the Name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. (*Devarim* 28:1-10)

These verses are spoken by Moshe as part of his speeches that comprise *Sefer Devarim*. This *sefer* represents not God’s word, but rather the words and thoughts of Moshe, who processes God’s word, adapting it to the situation that the nation will face as it enters the land. The point of departure in this *sefer* is the arena of life in this world. It is to this arena that God will come and attach Himself, when the nation finds favor in His eyes. The focus here is man, both in the blessings and in the curses.

In contrast to *Parashat Bechukotai*, where the blessings and curses are formulated in the plural, here the Torah adopts the singular. The appeal is made to the nation as a single entity, and parts of it are addressed to the individual within the nation. This is a more intimate approach, targeting the more inward levels of the nation and of the individual.[[5]](#footnote-5) In contrast to *Sefer Vayikra*, where the unit begins with following God’s statutes and observing His commandments, the point of departure in *Sefer Devarim* is “hearing His voice,” an inner stance. The command is “this day,” suited to the present, not as a fixed law underlying Creation. From the very first verse, there is Divine feedback, and it focuses on man: “The Lord your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth.”[[6]](#footnote-6) This does not promise some or other action or quality, but rather an inner status relative to all the nations of the world. From this point on, there follows an assortment of blessings, expressing the abundance that can fill a person’s world and the goodness that surrounds him.[[7]](#footnote-7) At the same time, there are the curses. Here, too, the heading speaks of a person responding in a certain way to God’s voice: “And it shall be, if you shall not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day, that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you…” (15). From this point on, the subject is the individual or the nation and the status or position that they will occupy: “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field…” (v. 16); “The Lord shall cause you to be smitten before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them, and shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth” (v. 25), and more.

Affirmation of the Divine, Negation of the Human

We have already noted how the opening verses of *Parashat Bechukotai* (3-13) invite man to enter into God’s statutes and His commandments, and these will be his support. We have also commented that the subject here is the practical observance of the laws, rather than the actual connection between man and God. In addition, we pointed out the process that is gradually coming into being, from a starting point of physical and economic security, via tranquility with no fear and fertility, all the way to the Divine Presence going about amongst the nation. All of these elements belong to the same essence, in which a person accepts the Divine statutes as the basis for his life, and the result is that an edifice is built up with layer upon layer of Divine Presence and blessing.

Let us now consider the opposite side of the coin in *Sefer Vayikra* – a reality in which man goes astray, failing to accept God’s statutes and commandments:

But if you will not obey Me, and will not do all these commands, and if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you will not do all My commandments, but that you break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will appoint over you terror, consumption, and fever, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart, and you shall sow our seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set My face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies; they who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. (*Vayikra* 26:14-17)

As a first stage, the subject is, “If you will not obey [or “listen to”] Me and will not perform all these commands.” We note that the beginning of *Parashat* *Bechukotai* stated, “If you follow My statutes…” There was no mention of “obeying” or “listening to God’s voice.” The perspective here is a behavioral one – the observance and obeying of God’s statutes and commandments, as set down in *Sefer Vayikra*, serving as man’s basis and support. Why, then, does the Torah now shift to “not listening” to God? A review of the stages that follow reveals that this is a most significant idea, and the text uses it to introduce each stage of the deterioration.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This would seem to reflect the difference between positivist action and the avoidance of wrongdoing. When a person performs actions that are essentially the fulfillment of Divine commands, embodying God’s Presence, then the dynamics of the situation concern the actions themselves. The actions entail a reality and presence of holiness that is not the product of the person’s own heart, and it gathers the sanctity that is active in his life, elevating his life and giving it stability. Such is the situation in the first unit, where no mention is made of the psychological movement accompanying the observance of the commandments. In contrast, when a person cuts himself off from this Divine Presence and reality, then he loses the sanctity that had supported him and given him so much. He is left just a regular person, and he cannot ignore his inner motivations and the process that he is undergoing. In this context, the “not listening to God’s voice” makes its presence felt as the subject; it is a sort of awakening of an inner rebellion that sets off on its way.

There are two other expressions of the same phenomenon. Following mention of “not listening” to God, the verse continues:

And if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you will not perform all of My commandments, but that you violate My covenant… (v. 15)

The verse describes three distinct psychological stances: in relation to the statutes there is “despising”; in relation to judgments there is “abhorrence”; and in relation to the covenant there is “violation,” representing a sort of betrayal. What is the background to this focus on these subtle inner movements, in contrast to the earlier description? Why does the text not suffice with a description of “not listening” to God, or avoidance/failure to follow His statutes and perform His commandments? It would seem that the text is pointing to a particular phenomenon: in the absence of Divinely-oriented action, a vacuum is formed, and as a result, a person’s inner inclination will begin to have its own say. Unlike the commandments of *Sefer Devarim*, many of which are related to the various circles of social life, and in this sense are more naturally accepted by the human mind, the commandments of *Sefer Vayikra* are God’s statutes and judgments, which do not necessarily make sense to the human mind. If a person cuts himself off from God’s statutes and judgments, he may discover within himself a sense of abhorrence towards them, leading him to violate the covenant.

Another expression of the same idea is to be found in the structure of the unit (vv. 3-13). We have already noted the structure that begins with physical survival, via security and tranquility, then strengthening through fertility and multiplying, all the way to God’s Presence amongst the nation. In this structure, the movement is from the tangible and profane to the abstract and holy. The process begins with physical welfare, moving up stage by stage, and culminating in a spiritual reality: God’s Presence. Accordingly, in the description of the deterioration that happens in the absence of observance of the commandments, there is an opposite movement: a stage-by-stage deterioration, working from the inside outwards. This psychological and spiritual process starts with terror and sorrow, a breaking of “the pride of your power,” and a crumbling of the individual and of the nation until eventually the entire edifice falls.[[9]](#footnote-9) Let us review the stages:

First stage: God will visit you with terror and with diseases that will be soul-destroying. Your work will be in vain: you will sow and your enemies will eat the produce; you will be driven before them; ultimately – you will flee even where there is no pursuer (vv. 14-17). All these elements express weakness and a tenuous hold on life. A grasp of God’s commandments provides a stable, Divine, whole support. If you despise and neglect and reject this position, your very life force will be weakened.

Second stage: “And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your skies like iron and your earth like brass, and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruit” (vv. 18-20). The results of your rejection of God’s laws are now a “breaking of the pride of your power” – the scaffolding of your existence and a cessation of the life-giving blessings of the heavens and the earth. This is not just a weakening of life, but a complete loss and cessation of power. Your strength, too, will be spent in vain; the land will not give produce, nor will the trees give fruit.

Third stage: “I will send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, and your highways shall be desolate” (vv. 21-22). Following the weakening of life in the first two stages, God will now sent wild animals that will leave you bereaved. From weakness we have moved to death, bereavement, and highways that are desolate.

Fourth stage: “I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge My covenant, and when you are gathered together in your cities, I will send the pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall return you your bread by weight, and you shall eat, and not be satisfied” (vv. 23-26). The sword avenges the covenant that was violated. You will gather in your cities with a view to defending yourselves, but the result will be the opposite: there will be pestilence among you.

Fifth stage: This stage describes complete destruction. In the first four stages, the punishments were local, damaging some or other aspect of life. Now the catastrophe is all-encompassing:

And you shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall you eat. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and My soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the savor of your sweet odors. And I will bring the land into desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the nations, and draw out a sword after you, and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. (27-33)

You will consume the flesh of your dead children, your carcasses with lie over the ruins of your abominations, your cities will be laid waste, your sanctuaries will be desolate, and God will not smell the savor of your sweet odors. All will be silent and in ruins.

The text then goes on to explain the process that has taken place: the land will rest and enjoy its *shabbatot* – a reminder of the fact that you did not observe the Shabbat, the testament that the land is Mine. You did not make God manifest in reality, and the result is that you have lost the foundation and support for your existence.

Epilogue

Our *shiur* began with a comparison between our *parasha* and the parallel unit of blessings and curses in *Sefer Devarim*. In both places, observance of the commandments will bring goodness for the individual and for the nation, while abandoning them will bring a series of punishments. However, the two units are quite different: they use different words, threaten different punishments, have a different structure, and more. We have tried above to point out the essential character of each, with attention to the respective contexts – *Sefer Vayikra* and *Sefer Devarim*.

In the former, the world of sanctity is an existing, fixed fact, and man is required to approach it and to make it a permanent fixture in his life, step by step. The room that he makes in his life for the Divine, for that which is holy, will determine the extent of God’s Presence in his life. This presence, which places and elevates the nation before God, is the climax of the process in this unit, and it formulated with the words, “I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their bondmen, and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk upright” (v. 13). The emphasis here is on God’s presence in the picture and His power to uplift man and the nation. In *Sefer* *Devarim*, in contrast, God approaches and enters man’s own boundaries, revealing the blessing that exists in his life and the Infinite that is embedded in it. The focus of this unit is the blessed man, and man at his best, when he obeys the voice of the Lord his God. Conversely, when he does not obey God, his life becomes beset with curses; there is no healing for his soul and he loses his life’s compass and life itself.

We then examined a discrepancy between the two processes – growth vs. punishment. The first rests upon the presence of holiness and its power to uplift man, stage by stage, with less emphasis on his own inner processes. In the absence of God’s laws, the text describes a process that is guided by man’s own nature. This deterioration begins with terror, flight where there is no pursuer, a breaking of “the pride of your strength,” an ebbing of strength and a collapse of the entire life system.

This “natural” deterioration rests upon regular life and the processes comprising it, once again testifying to the fundamental fact that underlies all of *Sefer Vayikra*. At the beginning of the *sefer*, God invites Moshe into the Tent of Meeting, and there he hears the Divine words spoken from “there,” from the heights of sanctity, from the Godly perspective, to which Moshe has been called. We might have imagined a Divine perspective that takes man somewhere “else,” that rests upon a different set of rules, with no connection or dialogue with the nature of the world and its laws. Yet, over and over again,[[10]](#footnote-10) the text adopts points of reference that indicate that no other infrastructure exits. The human infrastructure is itself a Divine creation; upon it structures are built and layers are added. When it falls, they, too, will fall; when it shines with glory, they too will be glorified.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. The *midrash* teaches: “Statutes (*chukim*) by which I set down the heavens and the earth, as it is written (*Yirmiyahu* 33), ‘If I have not appointed My covenant with day and night, the statutes (*chukot*) of heaven and earth…’ Statutes by which I set the sun and the moon, as it is written (ibid. 31), ‘So says the Lord, Who gives the sun for a light by day, and the statutes (*chukot*) of the moon and of the stars for a light by night.’ Statutes by which I set down the sea, as it is written (*Mishlei* 8), ‘When He gave the sea its statute (*chuko*)…’ Statues by which I set down the sand, as it is written (*Yirmiyahu* 5), ‘Who has placed the sand as a boundary for the sea [by an eternal statute (*chok olam*].’ Statutes by which I set down the deep, as it is written (*Mishlei* 8), ‘When He established (*be-chuko*) a circle over the surface of the deep’” (*Vayikra Rabba*, *Bechukotai* 35). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The commandments set forth in *Sefer Vayikra* share the same basic assumptions, in different variations. For more on this, see our *shiur* on *Parashat Vayikra*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The text describes the enemies “falling before you,” rather than your chasing them and causing them to fall. The description suggests that it is the special quality that dwells amongst you that causes them to fall. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “A *beraita* was taught reflecting the view of R. Nachman: [It is written], ‘And you shall eat old store’ - one might [think that] *Bnei Yisrael* will be looking out for the new [produce] because the old had been destroyed. Therefore, the text states explicitly, ‘Until its produce comes in’ – that is, until the produce will come [naturally] of itself… Our Rabbis taught: [It is written], ‘And you shall eat old store’ – [this] teaches that the older [the produce] the better. One might assume that this refers only to produce which is commonly stored away; how do we know that it applies also to types of produce that are not usually stored away? From the wording of the verse – ‘old store long kept’ (*yashan noshan*) – implying ‘in all cases.’ [It is written]: ‘And you shall remove the old because of the new’ - [this] teaches that the storehouses would be full of old [produce], and the threshing-floors of new, and *Bnei Yisrael* would say: ‘How shall we remove one before the other?!’ R. Papa said: ‘All things are better [when] old, except dates, beer, and small fish’” (*Bava Batra* 91b). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The *gemara* teaches: “On fast days, [the portion of] blessings and curses is read, and there must be no break in [the reading of] the curses. From where do we deduce this? R. Chiya b. Gamda taught in the name of R. Assi: Because the verse says, ‘My son, do not despise the Lord’s rebuke’. Resh Lakish taught: It is because a blessing is not recited over the rebuke. How, then, should the reader proceed? A *Tanna* taught: He commences his reading with a verse before them and concludes it with a verse after them. Said Abaye: This rule was laid down only for the curses in Leviticus, but in the curses in Deuteronomy a break may be made. What is the reason? In the former, Israel are addressed in the plural, and Moshe uttered them on behalf of the Almighty; the latter address Israel in the singular, and Moshe uttered them in his own name” (*Megilla* 31b). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Attention should be paid to the expression “the Lord your God,” which speaks of God in terms of man’s relation to and perception of Him. The expression appeals in *Sefer Vayikra* four times, in places where the focus is not the personal aspect. In *Sefer Devarim*, it appears 232 times. Similarly, the expression “our God” (*Elokeinu*) appears 22 times in *Sefer Devarim*, and not even once in *Sefer Vayikra*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. He is blessed in different areas: “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field…” (vv. 3-6); his enemies are smitten before him: “The Lord shall cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before your face; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways…” (v. 7); there will be blessing in his barn: “The Lord shall command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you set your hand to, and He shall bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (v. 8); he will be established as part of a holy nation: “The Lord shall establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He has sworn to you, if you shall observe the commandments of the Lord your God and follow His ways” (v. 9); and he will be called by God’s Name: “And all the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the Name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you” (v. 10), and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “And if you will not yet for all this obey [or “listen to”] Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins” (v. 18); “And if you walk contrary to Me, and will not listen to Me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins” (v. 21); “And if you will not be admonished by Me as a result of these things, but will walk contrary to Me….” (23); “And if you will not for all this listen to Me, but walk contrary to Me…” (v. 27). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The discrepancy between the two descriptions reflects the opposite ways in which these processes take place in reality. The process of building starts with physical, outward steps that are taken, and gradually the endeavor assumes an identity and becomes more complex, culminating in the spiritual crowning glory. A process of dissolution starts from within; gradually the destruction reaches further and further outward until the final collapse. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Some examples: In our *shiur* on *Parashat Tzav*, we noted that the unit on the sacrifices is fundamentally a description of reality: “If any man of you brings an offering…,” and the descriptions in *Parashat Vayikra* reflect this position. As a second stage, in *Parashat Tzav*, we find the “teaching of the burnt offering,” the “teaching of the meal offering,” etc., embodying the additional Divine dimension to the sacrificial service. In *Parashat Shemini*, we examined the historical progression in the inauguration of the altar, with a gradual limiting of the “supernatural.” In *Parashat Tazri’a*, we noted the seven days that the newborn remains with its mother, as part of the natural system of life. From the eighth day onwards, it is presented to God: a newborn son is circumcised; a newborn animal remains seven days with its mother, and only from the eighth day is it acceptable as a sacrifice to God (*Vayikra* 22:26-27). In *Parashat Acharei Mot*, we examined two processes that take place simultaneously: the *Kohen Gadol* entering the *Kodesh Ha-Kodashim* and the nation as a whole that is purified before God. The position of “before God” as characterizing an inner stance is applied to the nation; it is less manifest in the *Kodesh Ha-Kodashim*. In the unit on the festivals in *Parashat Emor*, we traced the process of development between the Festival of Matzot and the Festival of Sukkot. The festivals are God’s appointed times; nevertheless, a most significant process takes place in the psyche of the individual and of the nation at these times, with a progression from the first month to the seventh month. In our *shiur* on *Parashat Behar*, we noted the discrepancy between the law pertaining to a field that is part of an estate or a house built upon it, and a house within a walled city. The spiritual principle that applies in the former case is, “for the land is Mine,” “for you are strangers and sojourners with Me”. In the latter case, the owner of the house is authorized to sell it, outright and permanently. We argued that alongside the Divine principle concerning ancestral inheritance, there is another value involved – that of maintaining human society and allowing renewal within it. This value is expressed in the law concerning a city surrounded by a wall, since this is a place where a community exists and where “collective life” becomes a value. A person who is part of a community, part of the “camp of Israel,” is not a “stranger” or “sojourner.” He has the power to sell a house, thereby making his own impact on the status and character of society. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)