

## ***Behukkotai – Walking the Freedom Walk***

*If you will walk in My laws and keep my mitzvot, to do them...I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and you will be My people* (Lev. 26:3, 12)

**Rashi:** I will walk with you in the Garden of Eden as though I were one of you, and you will not be frightened...

**Samson Raphael Hirsch:** I will be intimately close—not only to the life and destiny of the community, but also to each individual and to every family. I will reveal Myself in the life and destiny of every individual and of every home...

*I am Adonai your God, who brought you out of the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more, who broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk upright* (Lev. 2:13)

**Hirsch:** The redemption from Egypt broke off the Egyptian yoke from upon us, but the shafts of the yoke were still upon our necks. We still carried with us the instruments of slavery; and although we were freed forever from the yoke of Egyptian slavery, it was possible that this yoke would be replaced by another. We still had the tendency to bear—instead of the Egyptian yoke—the yoke of moral, social, and political slavery.

**Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, *Ha'emek Davar*:** This verse is metaphorical, and the image it presents is one of an ox that is accustomed to wearing the yoke made for it. The ox keeps its head bowed [even when it is not wearing the yoke], as though it knows that the yoke will be placed upon it [at any moment]. Even when the yoke is taken off, the ox is ready to accept it again after a short while has passed. [The ox is so accustomed to the yoke that] even if he sees his master break the yoke and understands from this that he will not be required to plow ever again, he nevertheless keeps his head bowed from force of habit, until his master comes and trains him to lift up his head and walk upright.

### **For discussion:**

The word for “walking” is used here to mean a few different things—to follow a Godly path (“walking in My *mitzvot*”), to somehow be in God’s presence or feel Godly power in one’s life (“I will walk among you”), and to experience true, complete, inner and outer freedom (“made you walk upright”). The commentaries by both Hirsch and Berlin on Leviticus 26:13 suggest that merely being physically liberated from an oppressive situation is not adequate for true freedom to be achieved.

- ❖ How can a person, or a group of people, be “trained” to “walk upright,” to be fully free, as Berlin writes? Presuming that the “trainer” here—God—is not a big supernatural Being, then what exactly is this process of “training”? How does it happen, and who does it?
- ❖ What, in your experience, are the obstacles to being fully free, in the sense that the Torah is describing here? What do these texts suggest about what it might mean to work not only for our own liberation, but the liberation of others as well?