

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion: *B'hukotai*

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִהֵיטֵת לָהֶם עֲבָדִים
וְאֲשַׁבֵּר מִטַּת עַלְכֶם וְאֹלֶךְ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמֵיּוֹת:

I am the Lord 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.. [Leviticus 26:13]

1. 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.

[Ha'amek Davar by Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin]

QUESTIONS: What does this verse and the accompanying interpretation teach in general about the effects of oppression?

What do they teach about God's role as a liberator? Is the task of liberation finished when the oppressive conditions are removed? If not, what else is required?

As people whose whole spiritual, moral and political lives are shaped by a mandate to imitate God's behavior, what are implications of the teachings above for our own work on social justice issues?