

— ♦ Parasha ♦ —

Permanence and Inheritance in Behar-Bechukosai

In the parshiyos of Behar and Bechukosai, the Torah deals with matters of permanence: land, inheritance, home, servant, a family sitting in its place, a person who has something to lean on. It is the picture of a whole world, where life does not hang in the air, but stands upon a place, a home, a field, a family, and the memory of an original root.

Shemittah and Yovel are part of this permanence. The Torah tells a person: build a home, plant a field, acquire a hold, dwell in the land, have an inheritance. Then it tells him: from within your permanence, give room to the poor man. From within your inheritance, do not forget the one who fell from his inheritance. From within your settled life, do not build your stability upon forgetting another.

The parshah is full of words that speak of standing and lasting. “And the land shall not be sold forever, for the land is Mine, for you are strangers and residents with Me” (Vayikra 25:23). “And you shall return, each man to his inheritance, and each man to his family shall you return” (ibid. 25:10). “And in all the land of your inheritance, you shall give redemption to the land” (ibid. 25:24). “And he shall return to his inheritance” (ibid. 25:28). “And the house shall be established... forever to the one who bought it, for his generations” (ibid. 25:30). “And the cities of the Leviim, the houses of the cities of their inheritance, shall have eternal redemption for the Leviim” (ibid. 25:32). “And if your brother becomes poor... you shall strengthen him, a stranger and a resident, and he shall live with you” (ibid. 25:35). “And your brother shall live with you” (ibid. 25:36). “And you shall make them an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit as a possession” (ibid. 25:44–46).

All these expressions draw one world. A person sits in his place. He has an inheritance, a home, a family, a line of life that continues for generations. Even when he falls, the fall is not meant to be an uprooting. The Torah leaves open a way back. If he sold from his inheritance, his redeemer comes. If he cannot redeem it, there is Yovel. “And it shall go out in the Yovel, and he shall return to his inheritance” (ibid. 25:28). Even in descent, the first place is not forgotten. A path of return remains. A longing remains that a person should come back to his own permanence.

When a person lives in a stable world, he carries a duty to lift up the one who has fallen. If in one family there is a brother who has, and a brother who does not have, the one must hold the other. “You shall strengthen him... and he shall live with you” (ibid. 25:35). Not only to give him something, but to strengthen him, to set him on his feet, to make it possible for him to live with you. A man may need money to marry off his children, and around him stands a family that is more established. When they hold him up, it is not only charity. It strengthens the home and the family. He knows that someone is ready to hold him. He has a place. He is not abandoned. “And your brother shall live with you” (ibid. 25:36). Not distant kindness, but life together, in a feeling of permanence and security.

In land, permanence is seen most strongly. Movable objects have no lasting hold. An object comes and goes. Today it is



here, tomorrow it is not. But a house, a field, a portion, an inheritance, these are permanence. As the Torah says about a house in a walled city: “And the house shall be established... forever to the one who bought it, for his generations” (ibid. 25:30). “Established,” “forever,” “for his generations.” In land, the power of standing for generations is revealed.

So too with servants. There too the Torah speaks in a language of permanence and security. “And you shall make them an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit as a possession” (ibid. 25:46). The old world was a world of fixed structures: fixed lands, fixed families, fixed households, fixed servants. A person of our generation may pull back from this picture, because he lives in a very different world, a world of movement, change, renting, mobility, and instability. But the Torah is speaking in a form built upon hold and belonging. A person belonged to a place. A house belonged to a family. A field belonged to an inheritance. A servant belonged to his master’s house. It was a world whose structure was permanence.

At the end of Parshas Behar the Torah warns about idolatry: “You shall not make for yourselves idols, and a graven image or a pillar you shall not set up for yourselves” (Vayikra 26:1). A graven image and a pillar mean taking something fixed and making it absolute, as though it has power of its own. Therefore, here of all places, in these parshiyos, the Torah reminds us: do not make a pillar. Do not take the power of permanence and cut it off from its Source. All the permanence of the land and the inheritance stands only under the hand of Hashem. “For the land is Mine” (ibid. 25:23). A person must remember that this is not full independence. There is permanence here, but one must not turn permanence into a kind of godhood.

In Parshas Bechukosai, the Torah warns that if the mitzvos are not kept, they will go into exile. This warning follows the matter of permanence. If permanence comes without Shemittah and Yovel, if a person says: the permanence is mine, the house is mine, the order is mine, the inheritance is mine, and I do not release, I do not return, I do not give room to the poor man, I do not remember that all belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He, then that very permanence becomes the cause of wandering. Then exile comes.

Exile is not only an outer punishment. Exile is being shaken away from permanence. A person who lived on his land, in his home, in his field, with his family, in his fixed world, and stopped living the holiness within that permanence, is shaken from it all. Suddenly there is no inheritance, no standing home, no simple return to his field, no settled land.

In its place come wanderings. The memory of place remains. A Jew remains bound to Eretz Yisrael and to holiness. But the actual sitting in his place is missing.

The parshiyos of Behar and Bechukosai teach both sides together. On one side, the Torah wants settlement. It wants a Jew sitting in his land, holding up his brother, restoring the one who fell, giving redemption to the land, living with Shemittah and Yovel, and knowing that permanence itself is holy. On the other side, if permanence hardens and forgets its Source, exile comes and shakes it.

This is a great lesson for our generation. We live in a world of instability, and it is hard for us to feel the permanence of Behar and Bechukosai. For that very reason, it is good to stand upon these parshiyos. They show us what a world looked like when it was built on permanence. What it means that a house is not only a dwelling, but “the house shall be established... for his generations.” What it means that a field is not only property, but an inheritance. What it means that a brother is not only a poor man who needs a small donation, but a person who must be brought back to his standing, to “and he shall live with you.” And what exile means, not only as pain, but as the lack of that inner ground upon which life stands.

And in these parshiyos there is also comfort. Even if a person sold from his inheritance, there is redemption. Even if he is not redeemed at once, there is Yovel. So too, even if they went into exile, even if the generation was shaken greatly, there still remains “and he shall return to his inheritance.” A Jew has a root of permanence. He has a land, an inheritance, a home, a family, a fixed place by the Holy One, blessed be He. As long as he remembers this, even in exile, even in the shaking of the generations, there remains within him an inner line that says: the main form of life is not wandering. The main form of life is return. Return to the land, return to the inheritance, return to the place where life stands before Hashem.

This is the movement of the parshah. Land, home, field, a person holding up his brother, a world with permanence. And from within this, also awe: do not make permanence into an idol. Do not forget Shemittah and Yovel. Do not forget your brother. Do not forget “for the land is Mine.” When a person remembers all this, permanence itself becomes holy. Not permanence of frozen stillness, but permanence of life. Not permanence of pride, but permanence of brotherhood. Not permanence that closes the heart, but permanence that opens the hand, until even one who fell, even one who sold from his inheritance, can return and stand in his place.

— ♦ Stories ♦ —

In a Shaking World — On the Boat During Chol HaMoed

During Chol HaMoed Pesach, I went with the children on a boat. To be with them, to make them happy, to go out a little. We came near the boarding place, where tickets are bought and people wait for the boat to arrive. They stood there near the water, looking with open eyes. The water was close, closer than a child is used to feeling. There was a fence, but still we could not lose focus. A small child does not always know how to measure distance and danger, and even the older ones, because of excitement, can come too close. One holds another's hand, one reminds another to move back a little, one watches the small child. The joy of Chol HaMoed together with the responsibility of a father and mother.

The children looked at the water. One asked how deep it was. One wanted to know from which side the boat would come. One said he thought he saw fish in the water. The little one held my hand tighter. He felt that water is not like a street and not like a house. It has a pull, it has beauty, and it also has a hidden fear.

After a few minutes they began to see the boat from far away. It came closer slowly, larger than they had thought. In the children's eyes there was something great in it. A large, heavy boat, coming closer, and still it was moving and swaying. One of them became quiet for a moment. One began asking whether the ride was really safe. One became even happier because of the fear, the newness, and the caution. A large thing upon the water brings not only joy, but also the deep feeling that the usual ground ends here.

When we went up, there was one small moment when each one had to find himself. The foot still thought it was standing on dry land, but the boat was already something else. The water around us, the wind on the face, the slight movement. One laughed, one was careful, one ran to stand near the railing. I warned them gently to stand in the right place, not to lean too much, not to think this was like the floor at home. I stood with them, seeing what they saw, hearing their happiness, holding the little ones, looking to every side.

I felt that on dry land a person forgets how much his life stands upon something that is not self-understood. When a person walks in his home or in his street, he hardly thinks about standing itself. The ground is beneath him, and he

rests. But on a boat, the body feels at once that it is in another world. The boat rises and falls, tilts a little here and a little there, and a person places his weight differently. Not with stiffness, but with listening. With the feeling that everything is moving.

In our times, a person becomes used to a life of movements and shakings. When I was a child, the world felt to me much more like it stood on the ground. I do not know if everything was truly simpler, or if that is only how it looked in the eyes of a child, but that is how I remember the feeling. A home was a home, a street was a street, life lay more in its place. Even if there were difficulties, the form of the world was like something standing. A person felt that there was ground beneath him.



But in our times, many things have become shakelig. Wars, livelihoods, shaky shalom bayis, matters of chinuch, everything moves with the wind. Even one who wants to live a simple and straight life feels that the ground itself does not stand as he would wish. Things change quickly, situations turn over, pressures come from many places, and a person has to learn another form of life. Not only how to stand on ground, but how to stand also inside something that moves.

Then the words of the verse came to my heart: "the way of a ship in the heart of the sea." There is a way that is seen on dry land. And there is a way in the heart of the sea, where the way is not seen at all, and still it is a way. There is no visible path there, no arranged stones, no steady earth, and nevertheless the ship travels. It has direction, it has guidance, and it has a way. And I thought that many times a person does not see before him an ordered road as he would like. Everything moves, everything changes, and the way passes through something that does not stand still.

I looked at the children. At first, when they went up, there was in them a movement of not being used to it. One held me more tightly, one looked around carefully, one was very happy but had to learn how to place his feet. When the boat tilted a little, I saw how each one stopped for a moment, as though asking with his body where to put the weight now. And then, slowly, I saw how they became used to it. The one who had held me tightly began to loosen a little. The one who was careful began to walk a small step by himself. The one who had been happy from the beginning learned

how to be happy without losing his standing. The body learns. The foot learns. A person learns how to stand even inside movement.

And I said to myself: perhaps this is one of the great things that people in our time must learn. Not only how to live in a standing world, but how to live in a swaying world.

I thought about the full wisdom found in guiding a boat. A boat does not wait for the water to become dry land. It lives on the water as it is. The water moves, the wind moves, and still there is a way to build life within this. There is a way to sail, a way to anchor, a way to stand, and a way to reach the desired place. Not by removing the movement, but by learning the movement correctly.

On the sea, almost nothing stands by itself. Everything needs connection. There is a rope for the anchor, a rope for docking, a rope for the sail, a rope for the load. Once, the whole world of the ship was almost all visible through ropes. Today, many things are done through larger systems, winches, cleats, bits, and other tools. But the foundation remains. A boat lives through proper connections. It stands on the water not because the water stands, but because it has proper lines, proper knots, and ropes, each one holding its place.

And perhaps this is one of the problems of the generation: we still seek to live as though on ground, while in truth we live much more like on a boat. We want everything to be simple, fixed, unmoving. But the reality is different. Therefore, the answer is not only to complain that the world has become shakeldig, but to learn the wisdom of the boat. That is, how to build life inside movement. How to tie correctly. How to anchor correctly. How to know what must be tight and what must remain flexible. How to know when to tighten and when to loosen.

On a boat, many ropes are needed. There is a rope for this and a rope for that. One thing holds the direction, one holds the anchoring, one holds the load, and one manages the movement. So it is in a person's life. In our times, a general word of chizuk is not enough. Many ropes are needed. A connection to the Holy One, blessed be He, a connection to the Torah, a connection to the home, a connection to the children, a connection to the order of the day, a connection to moments of rest, a connection to the right people, a connection to inner truth. Each one is another rope. And when the world sways, a person without many proper ropes finds it very hard to stand.

In such a moving world, it is not enough to wait until the outside becomes steady. One must build inner permanence, so as not to be swept away by every wave and wind.

In the previous generation, people received stability from the world itself. The world held them. Society held them. The orders of life held them. But in our generation, the world itself does not hold. If a person does not build from within that which holds him, it will be hard for him. On dry land, one can place something down simply. On a boat, there is no simply. Everything must be held. Everything must be in its place.

Pesach is a time of leaving. A Jew leaves Mitzrayim, leaves the place where he was held, and goes out on the way. But the leaving is not the end. There is also a way, and there is also a journey. After the leaving, one must learn how to sail. Not everyone who has left already knows how to live on the water. One must learn a new standing. One must learn how to hold. One must learn how to guide movement. There is leaving, and then there is "the way of a ship in the heart of the sea."

There is the small boat of the individual, where every movement is felt at once. And there is the large boat of a whole community, in which a person almost forgets that it is moving, until some wave or wind comes and reminds him that even large things do not stand by themselves. There is the boat of earlier times, whose whole life was visible in ropes. And there is the boat of today, whose strength is mostly hidden inside large systems, but it too lives through connections. There is a time to open, and a time to fold. A time to untie, and a time to tie. A time to tighten, and a time to loosen.

When we came down from the boat, the children were already running ahead. For them it had been a beautiful Chol HaMoed trip: water, wind, boat, happiness. But when my foot returned to the ground, I felt the dry land differently for a moment. Suddenly I felt what a gift there is in ground, and how much a person becomes used to it until he no longer feels it at all. The children were already speaking about the next thing, and I remained for a moment with the thought, as though the swaying of the boat was still continuing inside.

And perhaps this is what the boat taught me that day. The answer is not to seek a world with no movement at all, for perhaps that is not the world given to us. The answer is to become a person who knows how to live also within movement. To know what he holds on to, what he ties, what he strengthens, and what he guards so it should not become loose. When a person builds his life this way, even a shakeldig world does not break him so easily. It still demands much. It still tires him at times. But it is no longer a sea that cannot be crossed. It becomes a journey.

קול הלשון פרטי – הרב שלום לאנגסאם 1605-313-6803

– אוף אידיש 1, שיעורים מהתקופה האחרונה 1, דיבאטעס 2, נפש (נפש, חיזוק, חינוך, שלום בית) 3, פרשת השבוע 4, חומש רש"י 5, משנה וגמרא 6, הלכה 7, מוסר וחסידות 8, אינטערסאנטע טאפיקס (חכמת התורה, חכמת העולם) 9, שבת 10, מועדים 11, שיעורים 12 | ג"ך 2 – שיעורים על רוב תנ"ך

אם ברצונכם לקבל את הגליון במייל, נא לפנות: shalomlang@gmail.com או לשלוח הודעה: zum-pintel+subscribe@googlegroups.com

לנדב הגליון, או לפרסם בו, וכן להזמין את הרב למסור שיעורים בישיבות ובכוללים, נא להתקשר למכון מישרים 845-274-3516