



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Vayakhel- Pekudei: The Gift of Second Chances

*Parshat Pekudei* opens with an intriguing name for the *Mishkan* or Tabernacle. It is called *Mishkan Ha-Eidut* – The Tabernacle of Testimony (38:20). What is indicated by this phrase? What is the “testimony” referred to? Here are two interpretations.

#### 1. The Tabernacle of the Tablets

Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Ramban all suggest that the “testimony” refers to the two tablets of stone, designated as *Luchot Ha-Eidut* – Tablets of Testimony (25:16,21; 31:18). This is because the tablets function as “documentary evidence of the covenant” between God and Israel (Ibn Ezra to 25:16). When the People of Israel abrogate the covenant by dancing around a calf, Moses smashes the tablets, essentially saying that covenant has been broken.

By giving the *Mishkan* this name, we are saying that the central aspect of the *Mishkan* is that it houses the Tablets and functions as a living testimony to the pact between Israel and God.

It is interesting that the Tablets, more than the cloud of God (see 40:38) resting upon the sanctuary, is the central feature and the enduring witness to the covenant. Why is that?

#### 2. Tabernacle of Forgiveness

The Tabernacle was a testimony to Israel that God forgave them for the transgression of the golden calf, for through the Temple He made His *Shechina* (presence) reside among them. (Rashi)

Rashi sees this title – Tabernacle of Testimony – as a new title, particularly applicable in this historical context, **after** the sin of the golden calf. Israel’s great breach of the covenant might have made the Tabernacle an impossibility. But when

God welcomes the establishment of the *Mishkan* after the golden calf, it is evidence – Testimony – of Israel’s absolute forgiveness.

Furthermore, the mode of collection for the Tabernacle almost seems like a rerun of the events that led to the sin of the calf; instead, they serve as a *tikkun* or act of repair:

With the calf:

“Aaron said to them, ‘Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’...This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf.’ (Ex. 32:2-4)

With the Mishkan:

Everyone whose spirit moved him came, brought the donation of the Lord for the work of the Tent of Meeting...Men and women...came bringing brooches, earrings, rings, and pendants—gold objects of all kinds. (Ex 35:21-22)

It was called the Sanctuary of the Testimony, for it bore witness to the nations of the world that the Holy One, blessed be He, dwelt within their Sanctuary.

The Holy One, blessed be He, declared: Let gold be placed within the Sanctuary to atone for the gold with which the golden calf was fashioned. (Tanhuma Teruma #8)

**So please discuss:**

We have presented two ways in which the *Mishkan* functions as a “testimony” — a witness or an *eidut*.

1. It represents the God-Israel relationship.
  - Do we have a sign today of the God-Israel relationship? Some suggestions...a *Magen David* (or Jewish star), a *kippa* (or yarmulke), *tefillin*, the Israeli flag.
  - Are any of these a testimony to a God-Israel relationship?
2. It is a sign that the People of Israel have been forgiven for their great sin. God forgives Israel, absolutely and totally, for the sin of the golden calf. Furthermore, He affords them a second chance, to bring gold a second time, this time for a positive, Godly purpose.
  - Have you ever given anyone a second chance like this?
  - Has anyone ever afforded you the opportunity to make amends in this way?
  - Can you imagine repairing a relationship with another person in the way that God healed the relationship with Israel?

- In this light, what emotions might have been evoked when an Israelite, after the golden calf, gazed at the *Mishkan*?

Shabbat Shalom!