

Parshat Pekudei, *Hagesher*, Schechter Westchester/ Leffell School Newsletter

Disciplining students is tricky business. On the one hand, as educators and parents, we are committed to building character, developing ethical behavior, and teaching young people how to behave well in the world. At the same time, though, modern psychology has taught us the importance of imbuing youth with confidence and self-esteem. It seems a fine art to offer a consequence without shaming those who have disappointed us.

Is there a way to do both things at once: to balance rebuke with forgiveness? Can we show our anger at a person's actions and still acknowledge her core goodness? As we struggle to walk this middle ground, we might find a model for best practices in this week's *parsha*, in God's relationship to the Israelite people.

At the beginning of *Parshat Pekudei*, Moshe is putting the finishing touches on the *Mishkan Ha'Edut*, the Tabernacle of Witness. This term *edut*—meaning witness, sign, or evidence—is a strange descriptor for the *mishkan*. We have seen it before; the Tablets of the Covenant were called the *luchot ha'edut* (the Tablets of Witness), and the ark was named *aron ha'edut* (the Ark of Witness). This is the first time the Tabernacle itself claims the title. What does the term represent, especially when it refers to the *mishkan* as a whole?

The 19th century Chassidic rebbe the Sfat Emet suggests that God used the *mishkan* as '*edut*' for the people, a sign that we were worthy to experience God's presence again after the sin of the Golden Calf. "The Holy One gave them *edut* through the *mishkan* to strengthen their hearts and to show them that they had fixed the entire sin of the Golden Calf, until God taught the people that the sin was not their *etzem* [their core] but rather simply a *mikreh* [an event]."

In the eyes of the Sfat Emet, the *mishkan* represented a beautiful and loving act on the part of God. First, we were forgiven--entirely—for the sin of the Golden Calf. Second, there was a deep understanding of our goodness as a people. The sin was merely an act we had done; it was not who we were at the core. In this regard, the Torah was sharing a universal message. As the Sfat Emet continues, "this was to teach everyone who wants to do *tshuvah* that he should not fall too far in his own eyes."

Imperfect as we are, human beings do require discipline at times, but, fragile as we are, we need forgiveness just as much. What if we understood ourselves as God does, recognizing that even our worst actions do not define us and that there is always room for *tshuvah*? God's educational model-- discipline with a heavy dose of forgiveness and love-- is a powerful one. May we merit the equanimity to practice this model in our own work and in our own lives. Shabbat Shalom.