



The Parasha with Rabbi Dweck

Highlights for

Vayakhel-Pekude: The Indestructible Jewish Heart

SUMMARY

Vayakhel-Pekude returns to the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) with a central focus on *Nedib Leb*—a heart that gives voluntarily. This emphasis on the ‘willing heart’ serves as a prerequisite for creating a sanctuary for God’s presence. Following the spiritual crisis of the Golden Calf, the building of the *Mishkan* demonstrates that despite human failings and fear, the core of the Jewish heart remains fundamentally connected to God and defined by the legacy of the Patriarchs.

The Concept of *Nedib Leb*

The core requirement for the materials brought to fashion the *Mishkan*—the gold, silver, and textiles—is that they be volunteered by the heart. This means there are no ulterior motives; one does not give to have their name engraved on the project.

It is akin to the *Na’aseh Venishma* (‘we will do and we will listen’) at Sinai, which was a declaration that the people were ‘in it for the relationship’ rather than subservience or personal gain.

The Core Self

The *Hakhamim* teach that *Leb* (heart) is code for the ‘core self’ and the fundamental way we relate to the world. In *Pirke Abot* (2:9), *Leb Tob* (a good heart) is identified as the most important attribute because it serves as the foundation for all other virtues.

A good heart aims for relationship and sharing from one’s truest identity rather than seeking what can be extracted from the world.

‘Deep in the heart of the Jewish people... is that memory of God being present amongst them, loving them, connecting to them.’

The Sealed Heart

The Torah uses the term *Orlah* (foreskin) to describe a heart that is ‘sealed’ or closed. This state occurs when a person is more interested in personal gain than relationship, often feigning connection for ulterior motives.

The Golden Calf was a manifestation of this closed heart, triggered by fear and uncertainty. In such moments, instead of being open-hearted, people attempt to control the Divine to secure themselves.

An Indestructible Core

Despite the failure of the Golden Calf, Moshe argued that beneath the ‘seal’ of the people’s fear lay the heart of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This indestructible core is illustrated by the story of Yosef Meshita, a selfish man who was

transformed when he entered the Temple and realized the gravity of his actions. On the deepest layer of consciousness, the Jewish people maintain a self-affirming belief in God's love that survives even centuries of persecution.

Questions for the Table

1. **Giving from the Heart:** How can we ensure our contributions to our community are motivated by *Nedib Leb* (willingness) rather than a desire for recognition?
2. **Fear and Closure:** When we feel uncertain or frightened, like the generation of the Golden Calf, how can we prevent our hearts from 'sealing' up and turning away from relationships?
3. **The Patriarchal Legacy:** Rabbi Dweck suggests we have the 'heart of the Patriarchs' at our core. How does this ancestral connection influence your sense of self-worth today?

About Rabbi Joseph Dweck: Rabbi Dweck has held rabbinic leadership roles in the US and the UK. He is the Rosh Bet Midrash of TheHabura.com and the Rabbi Levy Chair of Jewish Wisdom at the London School of Jewish Studies. For more check out The Office of Rabbi Dweck (rabbijosephdweck.com).

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