

The Love Revolution

This week, we read the double portion *Vayakhel-Pikudei* to finish the 2nd book of the Torah, the book of Exodus. The portion is largely a review of the plans to construct the Tabernacle. However, this is the theory and design put into practice.

On our calendar cycle, we are a few weeks from Passover. The construction of the Tabernacle connects us to the exodus event in an unlikely way. Among the many vessels that are constructed in the Tabernacle, there is a basin which the priest will use for washing as he enters the sanctuary for worship. That description of the construction of that vessel, the *Kior*, is unique. The basin is adorned with hammered, flattened pieces of reflective bronze.

The Midrash on that verse, cited by Rashi, recalls the use of the reflective material from a different era. When the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt, the men worked until the point of exhaustion. The husbands and fathers came home from their labor and collapsed.

However, the wives would use their reflective bronze as mirrors to beautify themselves and tempt and tease their husbands. Without the chiding of their wives, the men would have worked themselves to death over the course of one generation and would have faded from history. But the foresight and optimism of the women enabled there to be a communal continuity. The wives reminded the slaves–husbands to look past the immediate suffering and servitude and to hope for redemption.

The basin in the Tabernacle would be a symbolic reminder of the importance of affection and marital love as an irrepressible revolutionary force. The basin would be used to mend the relationship between a husband who is suspicious of his wife, *Sotah*. She would drink the waters from the basin which would affirm her innocence and, thereby, reunite the family.

The turning point in the Exodus account begins in chapter 2. Pharaoh decrees death to all male Israelites. The decree frightens families from having children. But chapter 2 opens with a man from the tribe of Levi taking a wife and having a child. The Midrash wonders what would have compelled this man to risk the life of his unborn child? How could he and his wife dare having children? And the Midrash conceives of a discussion between that man and his daughter, Miriam. Miriam accuses her father of being worse than Pharaoh, whose decree was aimed only at the boys. But Miriam's father's refusal to have children was a death sentence on the boys *and* the girls. This highlights the point that the decision to have children is a revolutionary turn.

Perhaps that would explain why the Tabernacle would feature the reflective basin. The entire structure of the Tabernacle can be viewed a revolutionary institution. The Tabernacle represented the worship of the One God and it contained in it as the centerpiece of the building – the Ten Commandments – the constitution for the development of a new society.

The message of the power of love to produce social change is not new and it has not grown old.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach,
Rabbi Menashe East