

MIRROR IMAGE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week we read Vayakhel-Pekudei, the final portions that detail the construction of the Mishkan. Amongst the vessel discussed is the kiyor - the laver used by the kohanim to wash.

The Torah tells us "He made the Laver of copper and its base of copper, from the mirrors of (women who reared) the legions who massed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (Exodus 38:8).

Mirrors? Where did they get mirrors from? And why would women's mirrors, which clearly are a symbol of vanity, if not indulgence, become the very essence of the utensil used to prepare the kohanim for sanctity?

Rashi tells us that Moshe had those exact reservations. He too, was hesitant to accept mirrors as part of the Mishkan's makeup. How did they become an integral part of the holy Mishkan?

After my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, had officially retired from his position as Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath and had moved to Monsey, New York, he still remained very active not only in the needs of Klal Yisrael as a whole but in discussing Torah with almost any student of Torah who would cross his threshold.

One afternoon a young scholar came to speak to my grandfather and share his novella on the Talmud with him. As he sat at the table and was about to begin sharing his self-concocted discourse, my grandmother entered the room with a freshly baked piece of cake for my grandfather and the guest.

Before my grandfather had a chance to thank the Rebbitzin, the young man, obviously steeped in his own thoughts, flippantly discarded her generous offering. "That's all right," he said, "but I already ate. I really don't need another shtikel (piece) of cake."

My grandfather remained silently shocked. He said nothing. The rebbitzen returned to the kitchen and then the young man began to speak.

"I would like to share with the Rosh Yeshiva a shtikel (piece of) Torah thought that I formulated relating to a sugya in the Gemara in Yevamos."

My grandfather was quiet and then responded. "That's all right," he said, "but I already heard Torah on that sugya. I really don't need another shtikel Torah on that sugya."

When my grandfather saw that the boy realized that Rav Yaakov was chiding him on his reckless

indifference to the Rebbitzin, he went on to explain: "You see, that piece of cake was her shtikel Torah. That was something that she prided herself in. That is how she wanted to make me and you feel comfortable. One has to appreciate that as well!"

Rashi explains in the name of the Midrash how Moshe was instructed by Hashem to use the mirrors: "The Israelite women possessed mirrors of copper into which they used to look when they adorned themselves. They not hesitate to bring these mirrors as a contribution towards the Tabernacle. Moshe wanted to reject them since they were made to pander to their vanity, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'Accept them; these are dearer to Me than all the other contributions, because through them the women reared those huge hosts in Egypt. When their husbands were tired through the crushing labor they used to bring them food and drink and induced them to eat; Then they would use the mirrors to endear themselves to their husbands and awaken their husbands' affection. They subsequently became the mothers of many children, as it is said, (Shir haShirim :8:5) 'I awakened thy love under the apple tree'; This is what it refers to when refers to when it states, Maros Hatzovst "the mirrors of the women who reared the legions."

The Ribono Shel Olam saw the greatness of those mirrors. They were used to enhance the harmony of the home and induce the love and appreciation of husbands and wives. We have the power to transform the most mundane object - even a most vain object into an item of immense value.

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