

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps  
Torah Portion: *Pekudei*

*REVOLUTIONARY MIRRORS*

In the middle of a long description of the items fashioned by the craftsman Betzalel for use in the desert sanctuary, we read:

הַכִּיֹּזֵר נְחֹשֶׁת וְאֵת כֶּנֶן נְחֹשֶׁת בְּמִרְאֵת הַצְּבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר צָבְאוּ פָתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:  
וַיַּעַשׂ אֹתָהּ

And [Betzalel] made the washbasin of copper and its stand of copper, from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks (*ha-tzovot*) at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.  
-- Exodus 38:8

Who are these women, and why are their mirrors used to make a part of the holy tabernacle, the place that serves as the focal point for the community's worship? The following midrash offers one explanation:

You find that when the Israelites suffered hard labor in Egypt that Pharaoh decreed that they should not sleep at home or have sexual relations with their wives. Rabbi Shimon ben Halaftha said: What did the Israelite women do? They would go down to draw water from the river, whereupon the Holy One prepared small fish for them inside their pitchers. They would sell some of them, cook some of them and buy with them wine and go out into the work fields to feed their husbands.

After they had eaten, they took their mirrors and looked into them together with their husbands. The wife would say: I am better looking than you. The husband would say: I am better looking! And in this way they aroused their sexual desire and became fruitful and multiplied, as it says *And the children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and multiplied and became exceedingly mighty.* (Exodus 1:7)

It was through the merits of these mirrors that the Israelites were able to continue to have children even under the demands of harsh labor.

As soon as the Holy One told Moses to make the tabernacle, all of the men came to contribute. Some brought silver, some brought gold or brass, onyx and other gems to be set. They readily brought everything. Whereupon the women said, "What have we to contribute to the offerings for the tabernacle?" They came and brought the mirrors and presented them to Moses. When Moses saw the mirrors, he was furious with them. He said: "Go and punish whoever brought these mirrors! What possible use could they have here?!"

The Holy One said: "Moses! You look down on these, but it was these mirrors that raised up all of the hosts of children born in Egypt. Take them and make from them the washbasin and its base for the priests..."

-- *Midrash Tanhuma, Pekudei* #9

**QUESTION:** Why did Moses rejected the mirrors as contributions for the building of the tabernacle? Why did God admonish Moses and insist that the mirrors be given a special place in the tabernacle? What can we learn from the actions of the Israelite women about strategies for resistance against oppression?