

## Torah Thoughts Vayakhel/Pekudei

5779:

A small detail in this week's parshah caught my eye. Included in the lengthy description of how the furnishings of the mishkan were made is this short explanation of the copper washing stand: "[Betzalel] made the laver of copper and its stand of copper, from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting."

Who were these women? What were they doing at the entrance to that tent? What is the connection between their mirrors and the copper washing stand? The commentators give several fascinating explanations, my favorite being Rashi's. Instead of reading the word 'tzva'ot' as 'tasks,' as our translation does, he reads it as 'armies.' The explanation goes like this: These were the copper mirrors of the women whose husbands had slaved in Egypt. When the men came home exhausted from their work, the women would look at themselves and their husbands in the mirror, saying 'I look a lot better than you!' This would entice the men to have marital relations and thus lead to many children being conceived. Those children were the future army, 'tzva'ot' that would serve God.

This is only one interpretation of several. What they all show is a love for detail and the driving Jewish need to understand Torah's details for all of the truths they can yield. It is only by lovingly examining even the most minute piece of the sacred text that we can grasp the fullness of its meaning. In this case, the same women who saved Israel by conceiving children - even when their husbands were dead tired - supply the materials that will create the sacred washstand for the mishkan. That same washstand would, in turn, provide the water to test future women who had been accused of adultery. Thus the copper of the washstand was a means of safeguarding the marriages of the Israelites two times over, first when they were mirrors and later when they were melted down to be reformed into the wash basin. In other words, Jewish women preserved our people time and again by insisting on marital fidelity and on conceiving children even in the worst of times.

And people say the description of the Tabernacle is dull reading!

Shabbat shalom.