

Dear Chavraya,

Some years ago, I was moved to introduce a new “ritual” item to the Pesach Seder, a mirror. Deeply rooted in the story of our redemption, that which was and that which is yet to be, there is precedent for the use of mirrors as instruments of the sacred. On that Pesach night, to the surprise of guests, a small mirror was placed at each setting. At various points, the mirrors were taken in hand as part of telling the story. The moment most central to seeing as telling in the Haggadah, needing to see in order to understand, in order to fulfill the entire mitzvah of Pesach, is in the verse in which past and future merge, beheld as one in the mirrored depth of our own eyes, *b'chol dor va'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mi'mitzrayim/in every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as if having personally come out from Egypt*. Seeing our own selves in the mirror, we know that the story is about us. So too, it is about the person sitting next to us, on both sides and across from us. The mirror tells a certain inescapable truth, reflecting the presence and reality of each one, each one as the image of God, each one a reflection of all. We turn the mirror that is in our own hand, allowing the image of our neighbor to shimmer where ours had just been, one to hold and one to behold.

In a verse so easily missed for its significance, the mirror becomes sacred object in this week's Torah portion, a double portion, *Parashat Vayakhel-P'kudei*. So hard to translate in any way that conveys the layered depth of its meaning and possibility, it is the verse that tells of the basin in which the *kohanim* were to wash their hands and feet before approaching the altar. The *kiyor/basin* is to be made *from the mirrors of the women/b'mar'ot ha'tzovot who gathered at the entrance of the Tent of Appointed Meeting*. Significant enough for its emphasis on women serving in a spiritual capacity in the sanctuary, women who came every day to gather in prayerful vigil, there is even more. In the face of Moses' outrage that such instruments of the physical, of the body, would be offered for sacred service, God speaks through the gathered wisdom of our people's life and lore, telling Moses, commanding Moses, *kibel!/receive them!, for they are more beloved to Me than all else*.

We are told of these very mirrors, the only elements brought for the building of the sanctuary that retain in their ritual use a pre-existing form and purpose, that they were instruments of our very survival as a people. When Pharaoh condemned the baby boys of Israel to death, couples separated, not willing to risk the horror of bearing children in such a time. Beginning with Miriam's challenge to her own parents, that they were worse than Pharaoh, insuring that there would be neither boys nor girls born, women went out into the fields to visit their exhausted husbands slaving for Pharaoh. They brought whatever food and drink they could gather..., and they brought their mirrors. There in the fields, beneath the apple trees of which we sing in Song of Songs on the Shabbos of Pesach, the women would hold up the mirrors and engage in sexual banter with their husbands, *I am more comely than you, no, I am more comely than you*. Love and love-making become civil disobedience, the women conceived and later returned to the fields to give birth, insuring the future.

Returning to our verse, the words tantalize, as did the mirrors themselves. The words *b'mar'ot ha'tzovot* can be translated not only as *the mirrors of the women who gathered*, but perhaps even more accurately in verbal form, as Rashi seems to understand the phrase, *the mirrors of the women who raised up multitudes / tz'va'ot*. The multitudes are those children born in the fields of Egypt, who, once delivered, were cared for by God. Pointing toward the ultimate redemption, God becomes for these children, not a "man of war," but a tender nurturer of little children.

Of love so expansive and hope so deep, the vault of heaven reflected in the smallest mirror raised to the sky, the *kiyor/basin* made of the women's mirrors is the only item in the *mishkan* for which no dimensions are given to guide its construction. The basin made by King Solomon generations later is vast in its defined dimensions, even called *ha'yam/the sea*. In the reflective depth of the simple basin of the desert sanctuary there is an infinity of possibility, unbounded by human dimension and finitude, a gathering of living waters of hope and of each one's way of reflecting God's image. So vast in possibility, the rabbis say the basin became the vessel of Miriam's well, carrying water to sustain the people in the desert. Not only a vessel from which to purify the *kohanim* to their service, it became a *mikvah*, sanctifying sexuality, insuring the continuity of life itself, as the mirrors themselves did once before in the fields of Egypt.

From the mirrors, we learn of the use and abuse of the material world, of people, of things, of the world itself, of sanctifying the material in the way of our relationship with it. This is what the women and the Holy One knew, that Moses did not. Receiving the gifts that each one brings, we see our own reflection mirrored in the face of another. The letters that form the word *kiyor/basin* are reflected in the word *hikir/to recognize*, as in to know another. Whether at the Pesach Seder, reminding of each one's place in the telling of freedom, or in each day's mundane use, mirrors reflect the sacred. So may we see ourselves.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor