

This week the Parasha deals with

1. completing the head count of the Children of Israel. A total of 8,580 Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50. A tally of those who will be doing the work of transporting the tabernacle.
2. The law regarding the Sotah, a wife under suspicion of unfaithfulness to her husband. She is taken to the Cohanim and given a potion made of holy water and dust from the temple floor. If she is innocent nothing will happen; if she is guilty her stomach will swell, she will become ill and die.
3. The laws of the Nazir: forbidden to cut his/her hair, drink wine or eat any product of the grape, and is forbidden to come in contact with a corpse, even a member of his own family.
4. Lastly, the Kohanim are instructed on how to bless the people of Israel.

At the inauguration of the Mishkan, the princes of the twelve tribes of Yisrael each brought identical donations. These donations contained within them a symbolic "history lesson" depicting the history of the world from Adam onwards.

The silver bowl that they brought alluded to Adam, the first man, for the *gematria* (numerical value) of the word *kearas kesef* is 930 which equals the years of Adam's life. It was made of silver which hints to the fact that Adam kept six commandments of the Torah, for the Torah is likened to silver. The weight of the bowl was 130 shekels symbolizing the 130 years that Adam lived before his successor.

Apart from this silver bowl, they brought a silver basin. The *gematria* of *mizrak ehad kesef* ("one silver bowl") is 520. Noach did not have children until the age of 500, and 20 years before this event, G-d decreed the Flood. The word *mizrak* is from the same root as "to be thrown out;" Noach was an outsider in a generation that scoffed at his building of the ark. This basin was also silver to represent the Torah, for in addition to the six mitzvot that Adam observed, Noach kept a seventh mitzva not to eat the limbs or the flesh of a living animal. The basin weighed 70 shekels corresponding to the seventy nations that are descended from Noach who are commanded to observe these seven mitzvot to this day.

The offerings of one bullock, one ram and one lamb as *olah* offerings hint to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The bullock symbolizes the hospitality of Avraham when he ran to bring oxen for his guests. The ram is a reminder of Yitzchak's willingness to be bound on the altar even though a ram was offered in his stead. The lamb represents Yaakov who separated his herds from Lavan.

The two oxen which were offered as *shlamim* allude to Moshe and Aharon who made peace (shalom) between the Jewish People and their Father in Heaven.

The *kaf*, spoon, represents the giving of the Torah. The Torah is called a *kaf* because *kaf* can also mean "hand." The Torah was given to us directly by the "Hand" of G-d. The spoon weighed 10 shekels, corresponding to the Ten Commandments. It was gold, also alluding to the Torah. The *kaf* was filled with *ketoret* incense. A creative *gematria*¹ of *ketoret* is 613, the number of mitzvot in the Torah.

¹ using the *At-Bash* system, as explained by Rashi

When Adam sinned the Divine Presence withdrew from this world. The message of the symbolic "history lesson" of the princes' offerings was that with the inauguration of the Mishkan which these offerings honored, the Divine Presence rested on the world once again.

And now I would like to tell a short story. It has nothing to do with our Parasha, but I hope that you will like it.

Once upon a time, there lived a very good but very poor couple, who had a son. When the boy was born a relative sent some expensive and elegant cloth as a birthday present. The mother stored it away and said, "When my son will be a man I will send him into this world with a beautiful robe made of this material."

One day, when the boy grew up, a rich merchant invited all the town's people to a feast. The son came in his usual tattered clothing, and no one made room for him at the table. Broken-hearted at the rejection, he went home.

To console him, his mother gave him a beautiful robe made from the elegant cloth she had stored away all these years. The boy returned to the feast dressed in his new finery.

The rich man saw him, rushed over and bowed, and asked him to sit beside him. The boy took off his elegant robe, holding it by the food and said, "Eat robe, eat as much as you want." "Why are you talking to your coat?" asked the rich man. "Because when I was here before, in poor clothing, no one paid any attention to me. But now I come in a fancy robe and you treat me royally. It is clearly not me you invited to eat beside you, but my robe."

If you love me for my robe, you rob me of my self. But if you love me for myself, you give me a treasure beyond price.

As we consider the ethical teaching of this story, we wonder, is our love for others dependent on external factors or are we open and accepting of another person for exactly who they are?

Shabbat Shalom