

Parsha Ponders

Vayakhel / Pekudei | March 16, 2023 | 25 Adar 5783

Kindling traits of passion¹

לא-תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת

Do not kindle a flame on the Sabbath day in any of your dwelling places²

Of all of the 39 forbidden categories of creative activities which are forbidden on Shabbos, the Torah finds the need to specify one of them. It says that it is forbidden to kindle a flame. Why was this activity singled out? Rashi brings³ that it's a dispute amongst our sages⁴. One opinion is that it's to teach us that kindling a fire is for whatever reason considered a lower-level prohibition in comparison to the other forbidden creative activities. It gets downgraded to a regular transgression. The other opinion says it's to teach us that even someone who performed one creative labor has desecrated Shabbos, as opposed to thinking it takes performing all of them to be guilty. This latter opinion still requires analysis. If this is the intent of the Torah, why was specifically the activity of kindling a flame chosen to teach this lesson? Seemingly the Torah could have chosen any other of the 38 forbidden activities.

The Zohar⁵ gives an interesting interpretation of our verse. It says: "Meritorious is the one who safeguards his abode on Shabbos, i.e. his heart. He does this by not bringing close [to his heart] sadness, which comes from the spleen⁶, or anger, which comes from the gallbladder⁷; for anger is the fire of hell. Upon this it is said: don't kindle a flame on the Sabbath day. For one who gets angry is as if they kindled the flames of hell."⁸ This hellish fire is a reference to the three main negative traits of passion: jealousy, lusts, and honor/arrogance⁹. These three are all symbolized by fire.

We see this with jealousy and anger, as it says: "His anger burned within him"¹⁰. This trait is personified by Eisav, who was considered the waste product of Yitzchak. He took Yitzchak's trait of *gevurah*, might and justice, and turned it into fire. We see this with lusts, as it says: "They all were adulterous like an oven burning from baking"¹¹. Our sages also described¹² lusts as a pillar of fire. This trait is personified by Yishmael, who was considered the waste product of Avraham. He took Avraham's trait of *chessed*, loving kindness, and corrupted it¹³ into fire. We even find love described as fire, as it says: "many waters

¹ Based on Pri Tzaddik II Vayakhel § 9, by Rav Tzaddok HaKohen

² Exodus 35:3

³ *Ad. loc.*

⁴ Shabbos 70a

⁵ Tikkunei Zohar § 48

⁶ חטול

⁷ מרה

⁸ See also Zohar II parshas Vayakhel p. 203b

⁹ The three sins which take a person out of the world (Avos 4:21)

¹⁰ Esther 1:12. I'm not sure how we see jealousy from this verse, which is about Achashverosh's insult that Vashti didn't show up to his party wearing just her crown

¹¹ Hosea 7:4

¹² Kiddushin 81a

¹³ This seems to be a common theme in the writings of Rav Tzaddok. See also Pri Tzaddik I Kedushas Shabbos § 4. Rav Dessler builds on this theme as well in Michtav M'Eliahu II p. 164-165. See also

<https://parshaponders.com/kedoshim-5779/>

cannot extinguish the love”¹⁴. While there’s no verse describing arrogance as fire, the symbolism of fire rising upwards is clear¹⁵.

Opposite these negative traits are those of the forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Avraham’s trait is love, the opposite of lusts. Yitzchak trait is awe, the opposite of jealousy. Yaakov’s trait is meekness¹⁶, the opposite of arrogance. We see that one should especially be careful on Shabbos, which Kabbalistically is associated with the forefathers¹⁷, not to kindle a fire. Meaning, the Torah is telling us not to ignite the negative traits of passion, those directly opposite those of our holy forefathers¹⁸.

Good Shabbos

¹⁴ Song of Songs 8:6,7

¹⁵ Rav Tzaddok adds that he proved in Pri Tzaddik IV *Parah* § 8 that arrogance is connected to idol worship, which is also symbolized by fire (Yoma 69b)

¹⁶ As we see in Genesis 32:31, Yaakov called himself small. I haven’t seen this trait attributed to Yaakov in any other source

¹⁷ See Zohar *loc. cit.* p. 204a

¹⁸ Rav Tzaddok goes on to connect this idea to the verse’s stress of not kindling a fire *in any of your dwelling places*