

Parshas Vayakhel

Souls on Fire

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This week’s Torah portion includes the prohibition of kindling a flame on Shabbos. Rambam explains the root of this law, yet his presentation of such is not clear. In an analysis of Rambam’s specific language however, the fundamental role of the Jewish soul is brought to light.

In Parshas Vayakhel the Torah presents the prohibition concerning kindling a flame on Shabbos. The verse relates:

Text 1

You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Shabbos day.

Shemos, 35:3

The Torah does not explicitly define how exactly the prohibition is to be classified and the matter is left to dispute. There are two opinions as to how the prohibition regarding kindling a fire is to be classified:

- 1) The prohibition is not to destroy a given material through a flame¹.
- 2) The prohibition is regarding the actual production of the flame.

Rambam’s view

The *halachik* authorities discuss this dispute as to the classification of this law. The following is R. Yosef Rosen’s (commonly referred to as the Rogitchover) conclusion of the matter:

Text 2

There is a great dispute and tremendous depth regarding the classification of the act (of kindling a flame on Shabbos) whether the act is the actual production of a flame....or that through (the flame) is destroyed that which was lit....the opinion of our great teacher the Rambam of blessed memory is that the prohibition is the essential thing (i.e the production of the flame).

Sha-alos U’Tshuvos Tzafnas Paneach, 2:35

¹ *Shu”t Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim, 238*

R. Rosen concludes that although the matter is up for debate, it is Rambam's opinion that the actual prohibition is the production of a flame.

One can recognize that this indeed is the opinion of Rambam, by considering the following:

Rambam, in his laws of Shabbos, explains the cases in which a person would be liable for kindling a flame on Shabbos. Amongst the examples that he brings, he enumerates that when one lights a fire for warmth, light, or to heat iron that they are liable for kindling a light on shabbos.

From the fact that he mentions those example as being ones that one is liable for doing on shabbos it is clear that Rambam believes that one is liable for the act of kindling a flame even when one's intent is not the burning of the material that he lit. For in these examples although one's intent is not for the destruction of the wood one is still liable when one created the fire for the purpose of light or warmth.

The following is the way that Rambam introduces the laws of kindling a fire on Shabbos:

A person who kindles even the smallest fire is liable, provided he needs the ash that it creates. However, should a person kindle a fire with a destructive intent, he is not liable, for he is causing ruin.

Nevertheless, a person who sets fire to a heap of produce or a dwelling belonging to a colleague is liable, because his intent is to take revenge on his enemies. [Through this act,] he calms his feelings and vents his rage. He is comparable to a person who rends his garments over a deceased person or in rage [on the Sabbath], or a person who injures a colleague in an argument. These individuals are all considered to be performing a constructive activity, because of their evil inclinations.

Similarly, a person who lights a candle or wood, whether to generate warmth or light, is liable.

A person who heats iron in order to strengthen it by submerging it in water is liable for [performing] a derivative [of the forbidden labor] of kindling.

Rambam, Laws of Shabbos, 12:1

As observed, Rambam begins his explanation of these laws with the example of kindling a flame for the purpose of its ash, and afterwards goes on to enumerate where one needs the actual flame for its warmth or light.

Text 3

Though Rambam begins his laws with the example of using the flame for its byproduct, upon analyzing the rest of his words it is clear that according to his view, the actual prohibition of kindling a fire on Shabbos is igniting the flame *itself* and not the creation of its byproduct through the destruction of the wood.

The first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady author of the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, demonstrates how one can see that Rambam's opinion is that the fundamental prohibition of kindling a flame is the production of a flame and not the destruction of the wood.

Text 4

Alas, even though the kindler is not liable unless he needs the ash, nevertheless, the primary liability is not because of the burning and destruction of the wood, rather it is because of the increasing of the fire. As is clearly indicative in Rambam Chapter 12 of the laws of Shabbos regarding heating iron in fire... (and from the law) that one who lights a candle, though he does not need the ash is liable...

Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chaim 595, Kuntras Acharon 2

From the fact that Rambam explicitly says that one is liable for kindling a flame, *even* when one does *not* produce ash—as in the case of one who

heats iron in fire—it is clear that according to Rambam, the primary prohibition of kindling a flame does *not* require that there be any destruction of a matter at all for when one heats iron in water, nothing is destroyed yet one is still liable as if he had kindled a flame.

From this it is clear Rambam's opinion. According to Rambam One is not liable because they have *destroyed* wood through fire, but because they have *produced* a flame.

The order of the laws

When Rambam formulates the laws of kindling a flame on Shabbos he first says “a person who kindles even the smallest fire is liable, provided he needs the ash that it creates,” only afterwards does he mention “Similarly, a person who lights a candle or wood, whether to generate warmth or light, is liable.”

According to the above though, that according to Rambam the primary prohibition of kindling fire on Shabbos is the act of creating fire itself, the laws seem to be in the wrong order. In explaining these laws, he *first* mentions lighting the fire for the purpose of the *ash* and only afterwards mentions the kindling of a fire for its own sake.

According to Rambam's opinion though that the primary prohibition is the kindling of the flame itself, he should have *first* mentioned that a person who lights a candle for light is liable and only afterwards should he have mentioned that

even when one lights a fire for the purpose of the ash (and receives no direct benefit from the flame) that they are liable as well.

If his opinion is such that the primary prohibition is benefiting from the actual flame itself, why does he bring the instance of being liable for making use of the ashes first?

The other opinion

Were Rambam to have held as other opinions do, in that the primary prohibition of kindling a fire is in the case of burning wood, then his initial statement regarding the benefit from the ashes would be understood, as ash is caused by the charring of the wood.

Were the primary prohibition of kindling a flame to have been the destruction of wood it would be understood why Rambam would have first mentioned “a person who kindles even the smallest fire is liable, provided he needs the ash that it creates,” and only afterwards would he have mentioned “a person who lights a candle or wood, whether to generate warmth or light, is liable.”

This reading would make sense according to those opinions, as Rambam would have first started with primary classification of the prohibition and only afterwards would he have mentioned its offshoots.

Being that Rambam’s opinion is that the classification of the *malacha* is in the kindling of

a flame for its own use, the order in which he formulates the laws does not seem to make sense. He should have first begun with the example of lighting the flame for warmth or light, where the *actual* flame is used and only *afterwards* should he have mentioned that *even* when one does not make use of the actual flame and only benefits from the ash which is a byproduct of the flame that he is liable as well.

Why then is the kindling and burning of wood for ash, where the ash is created as a byproduct of the flame, the first example Rambam brings and not the example of lighting a candle for light or warmth?

Simple explanation

It is possible to explain this peculiarity as follows:

The reason for Rambam’s statement that one is only liable when he needs the ashes from the fire, or in the instance that he needs the heat or light that is produced by the flame, is for the purpose of making the point that the act of kindling is only considered a *malacha* when it serves a *purpose*, and not if it is a purely destructive deed.

The reason why this point is pertinent is that one is not liable on Shabbos when they do a destructive act.

Text 5

All who cause damage are exempt, except he who wounds and he who sets fire [to a stack of corn]... setting fire (refers), to one who needs the ashes.

Talmud, Shabbos, 106a

This point that the act of lighting a flame is for a beneficial purpose is best illustrated in the example of lighting a flame for the purpose of the benefitting from its ash.

The burning of wood for ash most clearly expresses that there is no destruction event in the destruction of the wood. For, since he needs the ash, it is clear that the deed is not destructive at all, but rather he is doing an act of fixing, by transforming the wood into the ashes that he needs.

When a person lights a candle for light or warmth, even though the person's intent is for the benefit of the flame, there is still however, an element of destruction of the wick or wood through his action—a destruction from which he does not directly receive use from. He destroys the wood for the gain that he gets from the *light*.

According to this it is understood why Rambam begins his laws with an example of burning wood for ash, where there is no destructive act whatsoever and only afterwards mentions lighting a candle for light or warmth where there is indeed an element of destruction.

Not a complete explanation

This, however, is not an adequate explanation. Since the primary classification of the act of kindling is lighting fire for its own sake, he should have first brought an example where one benefits directly from the flame and only afterwards mentioned a case where one merely benefits from the byproduct of the flame.

While we explained that the reason that he didn't do so was so that it would be clear that one is only liable for lighting a flame when the act is not destructive, this is only something that is important to point out from the get-go according to the opinion that the prohibition of kindling a flame is classified in the destruction of wood.

According to this reasoning that the entire prohibition is classified by the destruction of wood it is important to stress that one is only liable when the destruction of the wood is done for some constructive purpose, e.g. to create ash.

However, since Rambam believes that the main *malacha* of kindling is in *increasing* fire in and not *destroying* wood, there is not any destructive element in the kindling to begin with.

Yet, from the fact thought that Rambam *does indeed* begin his description of these laws with lighting a fire for the purpose of ash, it must be that the essence of the *malacha* according to his definition, is somehow specifically expressed in this action.

Building a Mishkan

The relevance of lighting for the purpose of creating ash in fitting with the Rambam's view, can be understood in light of the spiritual significance of this *malacha*. Once the spiritual significance of lighting a flame is understood, the order of the examples given will be appreciated as well.

In general, all of the *malachos* that one is prohibited to do on Shabbos are those forms of activities that were done in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle).

Text 6

It was taught: Liability is incurred only for work of which the same was performed in the Tabernacle. They sowed, hence you must not sow; they reaped, hence you must not reap; they lifted up the boards from the ground to the wagon, hence you must not carry in from a public to a private domain; they lowered the boards from the wagon to the ground, hence you must not carry out from a private to a public domain; they transported [boards, etc.,] from wagon to wagon, hence you must not carry from one private to another private domain.

Talmud, Shabbos, 49b

The 39 prohibited acts on Shabbos are specifically defined as only those activities which were performed in the *Mishkan*.

From this, we can understand the nature of these acts in their spiritual sense. It is understood that although the 39 *malachos* are mundane acts (and therefore cannot be performed on the holy Shabbos), being that these were the distinct forms of the service of G-d in the Tabernacle, they are, in their roots, integral acts in man's service of G-d, and bring about a dwelling place for the Almighty in this world.

G-d expressed this purpose of creating a physical dwelling, through the wording of His instruction to the Jewish people to build the *Mishkan*:

Text 7

And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.

Shemos, 25:8

The purpose for the *mishkan* was to create a dwelling place for the Almighty and the way that the *mishkan* was built were through the various *malachos* that helped build it.

The *malachos* that are prohibited on Shabbos are in a spiritual sense the channels through which the dwelling for G-d is accomplished.

The specific laws

Additionally, just as the *malachos* in their general sense represent the specific ways that the service of G-d is fulfilled, and bring about a dwelling for the Almighty in (the physical *Mishkan* and in) the physical world at large, so too, do the various qualifications as to what defines a *malacha*, are as well representative of the way that we are to bring G-dliness into this world.

The particular qualifications of each *malacha*, which establish which exactly was the act that was performed in the *Mishkan*, are in their fundamental root, based on the spiritual service of G-d that they represent. Just as in service to G-d certain things are mandated and need to be in place, so too in the *malacha* as well there are specific definitions of what constitutes an act that is deemed a *malacha*.

According to this, the present difficulty in understanding the Rambam's presentation of the law, also can be understood.

From a deeper dimension, the reason why Rambam begins his description specifically with one who kindles for the purpose of creating ash, though it doesn't seem relevant to the essential definition of the *malacha* in his view, is because

in *one's service of G-d*, this is the true classification of the *malacha*.

Only when one lights a fire for the purpose of creating ash can it truly be said that one has done an act of kindling.

Souls on fire

The concept of the *malacha* of kindling in a spiritual sense is expressive of the fiery love that the soul has for G-d.

This is expressed in a verse in Mishlei.

Text 8

The candle of G-d is the soul of man, which searches out all the innermost parts.

Mishlei, 20:27

The soul of man is compared to a candle. The correlation of this idea is further expressed in Chassidic thought:

Text 9

"The candle of G-d is the soul of man." What it means is that the souls of Jews, who are called "man," are, by way of illustration, like the flame of the candle, whose nature it is always to scintillate upwards, for the flame of the fire intrinsically seeks to be parted from the wick in order to unite with its source above, in the universal element of fire which is in the sublunar

sphere, as is explained in Etz Chayim. And although it would thereby be extinguished and emit no light at all below, and even above, in its source, its light would be nullified, nevertheless this is what it seeks in accordance with its nature.

In like manner does the soul of man...naturally desire and yearn to separate itself and depart from the body in order to unite with its origin and source in G-d, the fountain-head of all life, Blessed be He, though thereby it would become null and void, completely losing its entity therein, with nothing remaining of its former essence and being. Nevertheless, this is its will and desire by its nature.

Tanya, Ch. 19

Accordingly, one can also understand the reason that the law is that "a person who kindles even the smallest fire is liable."²

The reason that there is no amount of fire that one must produce in order to be liable for the act kindling, is because the flame is expressive of the quintessence of the Jewish soul (expressed in Tanya as the "second soul"), which is a part of G-d Himself.

Text 10

The second soul of a Jew is truly a part of G-d above, as it is written, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and "You did breathe it [the soul] into me." And it is written in the *Zohar*, "He who exhales, exhales from within him," that is to say, from his inwardness and his

² Rambam, *ibid*

innermost, for it is something of his internal and innermost vitality that man emits through exhaling with force.

Tanya, Ch. 2

On this essential soul level, the quantity of light is unimportant. When one fans the flame of the soul, they have immediately revealed a part of G-d. It is not important to reveal a lot of the soul it is important to reveal that spark of G-dliness which resides in every Jew.

Needing ash

Rambam, explains, that although fire is important, one needs ash as well. "A person who kindles even the smallest fire is liable, provided he needs the ash that it creates."

Ash is representative physicality. This is expressed as well in the manner in which ash is produced. Tanya explains the manner in which ash is created as follows:

Text 11

...Just as ashes, which are the essence and substance of the burned wood. (For the wood) was composed of the four elements fire-air-water-earth, and the three elements of fire-

water-air passed away and were consumed in the smoke that came about through their compound, as known. The fourth element of the wood, namely the earth which goes netherwards and over which the fire has no dominion, it remains in existence, and it forms the ashes....For earth is the most material of them all.

Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh, Epistle 15

Everything is comprised of the four elements of fire, air, water and earth. Ash is representative of the element of earth. When everything is burned and the elements of fire, air and water are no longer extent in the object, one is left with ash.

This is the meaning to the condition of the *malacha* of kindling fire, that one is liable only if he burns it to make use of the ash. The goal of kindling the fire of the soul is not that the soul should soar upwards and *leave* the confines of the physical world, rather, the intent of this elevation must be that the flame should create *ash*.

A person must realize that spirituality in not enough. He must remain in this physical world and work *with it* to refine it.

This ultimately is the purpose of igniting the soul to begin with; so that he can have energy to serve G-d with his *physical* body and the *physical* world (i.e. to create ash).

As mentioned above, the entire purpose of serving G-d in the *Mishkan* (which is the source of all 39 malachos prohibited on Shabbos), was to create a dwelling place for G-d in *this* world.

By extension, aside for G-d instructing the Jewish people to build a physical *Mishkan*, this instruction also included G-d's desire to dwell among each and every one of the Jewish people.

The idea of the *malachos* of the *mishkan* are thus the tools with which a person should facilitate G-d's dwelling place, here in the physical world.

The *malacha* of kindling a fire therefore instructs us, that we must realize that the objective in our personal world is that when we ignite our souls, it shouldn't be for the purpose of *escaping* the world it should be for the purpose of *transforming* the *physical*.

The act of kindling our souls is only complete when it is for the purpose of benefitting from the ash—i.e. it must be recognized that our efforts of elevating our souls is in order to create a dwelling place for G-d in the most mundane.

Not opposites

One may think that creating a flame and creating ash are two opposite thrusts of one service to G-d. It is possible to assume that creating a flame is the longing to cling to G-dliness and that creating ash is the opposite extreme of residing in this world.

This though is not the case. The *purpose* of lighting the flame is to create the ash and the *purpose* of igniting the soul is to transform this world.

The litmus test to know if one is inspiring themselves and igniting the flame of their soul in the correct manner is when the fiery love to G-d brings one to serve G-d in this world with more vitality.

The desire to have a world that G-d resides in, is the desire of the *essence* of G-d, so-to-speak. The closer a person is to G-d, the more that they are in tune with His desire and realize the utmost importance of transforming this world, and directing their efforts in that direction.

Therefore, it comes out the *malacha* of kindling a fire in its essential and most complete form, *does* include the idea creating ash. Only when

one is intent on transforming *this world* can one be sure that he is truly fulfilling the spiritual *malacha* of igniting his soul, and that his soul is truly connected to the essence of G-d's will.

This is the deeper reason why Rambam first writes "A person who kindles even the smallest fire is liable, provided he needs the ash that it creates," and only afterwards does he write "a person who lights a candle or wood, whether to generate warmth or light, is liable." It is not enough that one is warmed up by the light of their soul. They must use the light of their soul to transform the physical.

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