

Parshas Vayakhel – Shekalim - David Levy

כ"ה אדר א' תשע"ו – 5th March 2016 – שבת פי' ויקהל / שקלים

Moshe assembles the people and before commencing his instructions about the building of the Mishkan he reminds them that while M'locho is permitted for 6 days of the week it is prohibited on Shabbos. This short passage (Sh'mos 35: 1-3) has 39 words plus the word Shabbos itself. It is a neat allusion to the 39 M'lochos which may not be carried out on Shabbos and which M'lochos we learn out from the activities involved in constructing the Mishkan. Bal HaTurim points out that the word La'asos (in the phrase "Asher Tzivo Hash-m La'asos Osom" in the first Posuk) consists of a Lamed (= 30) and an anagram of Teisha (= 9), i.e another hint at the 39 prohibited M'lochos. He notes that the word La'asos is unusually spelt defectively without a Vav (which = 6 and therefore represents the 6 weekdays when these M'lochos are allowed). This is an example of the Torah's amazing facility to teach us something from the presence or unexpected absence of a single letter.

The last of these 3 P'sukim says: "Lo S'va'aru Aish B'chol Mosh'voseichem B'yom HaShabbos" meaning: "You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the day of Shabbos" Why is this single one of the 39 M'lochos mentioned here to the exclusion of all the others and why does it need to be repeated at all as the Aseres HaDibros (10 Commandments) already forbade all M'locho in Sh'mos 20:10?

There are many different explanations some of which we will summarise:

Ibn Ezra, Rashbam and Ramban all suggest that since a fire may be lit on Yom Tov in order to cook food it was necessary for the Torah to make clear that that does not apply on Shabbos and Ramban adds in the name of Rabbi Nossan in the Mechilta that it shows that it is not just for cooking that making a fire on Shabbos is prohibited but for other bodily purposes like washing.

Rabbenu Bachaye and Sforno suggest that it was necessary to warn against lighting a fire since it does not look like a M'locho and often one does it only as a preparation for other M'lochos.

Kli Yakar cites Talmud Bavli Shabbos 20a that the verse states that you shall not kindle fire in your dwellings so as to exclude the Beis Hamikdash where a fire was permitted but only for burning the limbs and fats of Korbonos (sacrificial offerings)

Tiferes Y'honoson argues that since we abstain from M'locho on Shabbos in recognition of G-d's resting from creation of the world and since fire was only created at Havdalah after the first Shabbos we might have thought that creation of fire on Shabbos itself is permitted so it has to be expressly forbidden.

Rashi notes that creation of fire is singled out since (according to some) it is only a "Lav" for which the punishment is Malkos (lashes) not death as in the case of other M'lochos (i.e it is a less serious prohibition because on Yom Tov fire is permissible). Also it shows that each M'locho that one does has its own punishment. You might have thought that you are only guilty if you have carried out all 39 M'lochos or that if you carry out several M'lochos unintentionally (for which you have to bring a Chatos (sin-offering)) then you only need bring one offering in total but in fact you have to bring one for each.

Sefer HaChinuch says this prohibition is directed at the Sanhedrin, not the individual. The courts may not carry out the capital punishment of burning (S'reifah) on Shabbos and from this we also learn that no means of capital punishment may be carried on Shabbos.

The Zohar attributes a metaphorical meaning to the prohibition of creating fire namely don't be angry with people on Shabbos as this leads to rebellion. A mystical idea is that the fires of G'hinnom don't burn on Shabbos but an act of M'chalel (profaning) Shabbos causes these fires to be reignited.

On Shabbos Parshas Sh'kalim (the Shabbos occurring on or immediately before 1st Adar, or Adar Sheni in a leap year like this one) we read as the special Maftir the commandment from the Sidra Ki Sisoh for everyone to contribute a half shekel towards the cost of upkeep of the Mishkan (and later the Beis HaMikdash). We don't have space for a meaningful D'var Torah about that also but fellow calendar geeks may be interested to know that in the 75 leap years between 1900 and 2100 (5660 to 5860) Parshas Sh'kalim coincided or will coincide with Vayakhel 54 times (72%) like this year and with P'kudei 21 times (28%), whereas in the 126 non leap years in that period Parshas Sh'kalim coincided or will coincide with Mishpotim 123 times (97.62%) and only 3 times (2.38%) with T'rumoh. Why those different proportions apply only a geekier geek could tell us!