

MAMMA'S HANDS

Parshas Vayakhail

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

There are 39 labors prohibited on Shabbos. The Sochotchover calls his Sefer (650 pages), elaborating on each of the 39 categories, "Eglai Tal", (dew, from Iyov), used here for its numerical meaning of 39, (טל).

In our parsha, however, only one of the 39 categories is singled out, that of prohibiting kindling a fire on Shabbos (35:3). The reason for this particular labor being singled out, according to Reb Nosson, (as distinct from a different viewpoint) is לחלק (Shabbos 70a), to demonstrate that violating only one of the 39 categories calls for retribution.

For this purpose however, any other of the 39 categories could have been singled out. Why the labor of kindling fire? The Rashbam explains the reason of this choice is the distinction that fire for cooking is permitted on Yom Tov (as an extension of existing fire), and forbidden on Shabbos.

One ventures to suggest an additional reason. It emphasizes "Beyom Hashabos". On the Shabbos itself it is forbidden to kindle a fire but on erev Shabbos it is not only permitted; it is an obligation (18 minutes before sunset) thereby enhancing the radiance and joy of Shabbos.

The Halacha requires a Bracha to be recited for this mitzvah. At this recital the Shabbos begins. In fact one is not allowed to kindle once the Shabbos was received by the Bracha. It is therefore the custom to kindle the lights, cover

the eyes with the hands during the recital of the Bracha. Seeing and enjoying the lights afterwards is regarded as observing the mitzvah in the proper order (recital of Bracha before observance).

Pardon the repeat of the following anecdote noted in an essay a few years ago. When we were young children we watched mother A"H benching Shabbos candles. When she finished we kissed her hand saying good Shabbos. Her hand then was wet. (the same hand which earlier scrubbed, cooked and baked the cornflakes kugel). Only when I got older I realized it was wet from the warm tears praying for nachas from her children.

The hands are organs of prayer (see Tehillim 88:10). The kohanim bless us lifting their hands. When Moshe lifted his hands in prayer during the battle against Amalekites, Israel overpowered their enemy (Shemos 17:11).

Reb Moshe Feinstein z"l was accustomed to close the electric lights before the Rebbitzen kindled the Shabbos candles and then opened them after the Rebbitzen's conclusion. Apparently Reb Moshe held, that without the bright electric lights the Shabbos candles radiates with Shabbos spirit more than the Con Edison Electric can provide.

The Shabbos candles possess spiritual power unlimited in time; it contains rectifying impact on the past and future, on past as early as creation. According to Midrash this mitzvah was accorded to the women because at the time of creation Eve enticed Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge, therefore let

her atone by bringing light into the world by kindling the Shabbos lights.

Likewise the mitzvah influences the future. The fact that matriarch Sara's kindling the Shabbos lights radiates the whole week is revealed in connection with Rivka (See Rashi Breishis 24:67). The real meaning of kindling Shabbos lights is the assurance of this spiritual light transmitted to the next generation, from Sara to Rivka, from Rivka to the next generation, and the next, etc.

How fitting it is, thus, that In singling out one of the 39 categories of labor prohibitions on Shabbos, the choice is kindling a light, which a short period before Shabbos is such an outstanding mitzvah. How meaningful the juxtaposition of this portion, in the very context, of Vayakhel, getting ready to build the Mishkon.

How elevating, how heavenly, the Bnei Yissoschor describes it (Mamarei Shabbos 6:1): as a reward for adhering sensitively to the mitzvah of candle lighting in honor of Shabbos ,writes the Shiltei Hagiborim, they will walk in the beaming illumination of Hashem's light. As is written in Yeshayahu (60:19) "Hashem shall be unto you an eternal light". This, concludes the Bnei Yissoschor, is the reward for the mitzvah of kindling Shabbos candles, as Yeshayahu initiates in the chapter "Arise! Shine! For your light has arrived, and the glory of Hashem has shined upon you!"

