

Parashat : Vayak'heil Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת “You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on Shabbat” (35:3)

Rashi explains in brevity why the melacha of Hav'arah is singled out and he merely states that this is a Machloket Hatana'im, either “Lelav Yatza or Le'chaleik Yatza.

Rashi is referring to Gemara Shabbat (70a) which asks, “Since starting a fire on Shabbat is one of the known 39 forbidden melachot so why is it singled out?” R' Yossi holds Lelav Yatza, that hav'arah (kindling a fire) is not punishable with the severity of S'kilah or Kareit, but only with Malkot. R'Natan holds that the Torah singles this out to teach us that just as for this single Shabbat violation one is pushed with S'kilah or Kareit so too for any of the other 38 melachot. For we may have thought that the severe punishment for melacha on Shabbat is only if one violates All 39 melachot together, (b'helam echad) therefore Torah teaches us here otherwise: that each and any of the 39 melachot warrants the severe Onesh.

In the Ga'onic period, this pasuk of ‘Lo Teva'aru Aish’ also engendered a major dispute between our Sages and the Tzeddokim, who followed only the Torah She'bich'tav but not the Torah She'b'alpeh. The Tzeddokim read the pasuk literally and ruled that use of fire of any sort is prohibited. Consequently, they ate in darkness, they had no warm food, and no heat during the entire Shabbat period. Our Sages, through the understanding of Torah She'b'alpeh, interpreted the pasuk as prohibiting only the kindling of a new fire on Shabbat, but from an existing fire from Erev Shabbat we are permitted to benefit on Shabbat.

Our Sages were so intent on teaching us the correct ways of learning Torah, they made it mandatory to eat something hot on Shabbat. Hence, the creation of the ‘Cholent’ that is cooked on Erev Shabbat and with the pre-existing fire we maintain the heat of the Cholent all through Shabbat day. One who does not eat cholent could satisfy this mandatory requirement by eating hot (kugel or chicken), or by drinking something hot (coffee, or tea).

Furthermore, to publicly demonstrate our rejection of the Tzeddokim, our Sages went a step further, and declared it a Mitzvah of Shabbat to have our homes light and bright, by lighting candles (before Shabbat begins) and even reciting a Bracha אשר עולם מלך ה ברוך אתה יקוק אלקינו קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת ה This Bracha is not found in the Gemara but was formulated by the Ge'onim in the post-Talmudic period.

Many ‘sects’ called by different names, have followed the erroneous position of the Tzeddokim. Therefore, we the traditional orthodox Jew are often called upon to go out of our way by demonstrating our faith and loyalty in Torah She'b'alpeh. That just as Torah She'bichtav is Divine and handed down to us from Moshe Rabbeinu, so too do we believe in the Divinity of Torah She'b'alpeh given to us through Moshe Rabbeinu.