

## THOUGHT C

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**FIRE AND SHABBAT:** Torah's elaborate description of the construction of the *Mishkan* ("Place of Divine Dwelling"). Israel's portable sanctuary in the desert, starts with a brief reiteration of the Shabbat concept (Exodus 35:1-3). The two themes are linked by the idea of holiness (*kedusha*), *mishkan* in space and Shabbat in time. Intriguingly, both themes conclude with fire imagery: *mishkan* with divine, honorific-protective "fire at night" (40:38); and *Shabbat* with domestic fire: "Kindle no fire in all your households during Sabbath-day" (35:3). Consequently, by amazing *halakhic* logic, we do kindle fire, before and after Shabbat, to welcome and depart from Shabbat. Why?

The Sadducees (c. 200 BCE-100 CE), strictly following Scriptures, banned fire on Shabbat altogether. No heat, no light, no warm food on Shabbat. By shunning the oral tradition, they transformed the holy day of rest and pleasure into a

gloomy day of darkness.

In striking contrast, our sages ordained candle-kindling before Shabbat, to bring light to our homes on Shabbat, promoting domestic joy and peace (*shalom bayit*).

Fire is a powerful tool for human productivity and labor. Igniting fire symbolizes preparation for human industry, prohibited on Shabbat. As Shabbat ends, however, we enter the world of human creativity and enterprise, fulfilling our role as God's partners in cultivating the universe. We dramatize this idea by the *Havdala* at the Sabbath's conclusion. This ritual includes a special blessing on "the lights of fire" over a kindled, multi-wicked candlestick, symbolizing human enlightenment and enterprise.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus had to steal the fire from the begrudging, malevolent gods, and they harshly punished him for his audacity. In contrast, Jewish tradition views the fire – and the ability of human beings to create, control and employ it – as a Divine gift.

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## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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MARCH 4, 1994

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### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA


**KINDLING FIRE ON SHABBAT** is explicitly forbidden (Exodus 35:3). Taking this law literally and broadly, some ancient Jewish sects banned not only the creation of fire but also its utilization: No heat, no light, no warm food on Shabbat! Some went even further: Considering sexual passion a form of "kindling fire," they abstained from all forms of love-making throughout this holy day of rest. The Sabbath, intended to be a day of joy and pleasure, was thus transformed by these sectarians into a day of darkness and gloom.

To protest this restrictive view, the talmudic sages ordained the kindling of lights before the onset of Shabbat in honor of Shabbat. Thus, we welcome the holy day with luster and warmth, celebrating its coming in an illuminated home at a festive table around which family and guests can joyously gather.

To enhance *oneg Shabbat* (pleasures of the Sabbath),

warm food should be enjoyed if prepared and kept warm from before Shabbat. The metaphoric kindling of the "fire" of hateful strife and dissension, which is forbidden on any weekday, is especially prohibited on Shabbat. As for kindling the "fire" of love on Shabbat, far from being banned, it is considered a sacred experience, in keeping with the day's spirit.

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## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

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In opposition, our Sages ordained the kindling of lights before the Shabbat in its honor -- to welcome the day with luster and warmth, and celebrate it in a lighted home at a festive table, where all can see each other in joy and domestic peace (*shalom-bayit*).

Candlelight time 7:15 Sabbath ends 8:09

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 16:

VAYAKHEL: Exodus 35:1-38:20; Numbers 19

HAFTARAH: Ezekiel 36:16-38

### *Thought of the Week*

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

**TORAH AND KEDUSHA:** "Kitevei Ha-Kodesh" (commonly "The Holy Scriptures") are truly the literature of holiness-related to sanctity, conceived through prophetic revelation or inspiration, teaching a way of distinctive living, and, accordingly, treated with reverence. "Kodesh" is a noun, not an adjective. Therefore, "Aron Ha-Kodesh" (commonly "The Holy Ark") is rather a container and carrier of holiness. Objects are considered "holy" only in relation to the general concept of holiness. "Kedusha" is not a static element of an object but a dynamic process—denoting the object's origin, purpose and treatment. The Land of Israel is "The Land of Holiness," being the arena, the symbol and expression of holiness. So is the Hebrew language a language of holiness (not simply a "Holy Tongue")—conveying ideas of greatness and cherished with fervent dedication. All aspects of Torah and objects of holiness, far from being perceived as untouchable, unreachable and unteachable, are to be humanly cherished—within man's domain, by his deeds and concerns. The Temple—the permanent "Mikdash" as well as the temporary Mishcan—is not an abode for the Divine but an instrument for human perfection.

## Thought of the Week

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**WORK, CREATIVITY AND SHABBAT:** In Hebrew, "*avoda*" means work and "*melakha*" creativity. Speaking of God's role in creation and the people's involvement in building the Mishkan Temple, Torah uses the term "*melakha*"—creative accomplishment. The term stems from the word "*mal'akh*" meaning messenger, angel. By creative and constructive work during the six weekdays, we express our divine quality and mission to improve this world.

On the Seventh Day — in order to symbolize our God-like quality — Torah forbids all forms of *melakha*, of physically creative activities, even when they are not tiring to engage in. Shabbat is more than a day of rest; it is a day of asserting our inner freedom, our innate divinity.

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## THOUGHT OF THE

RABBI ZVI EHUDA

/ FEBRUARY 24, 1995 29

REGARD FOR VISUAL ART is shown in Torah's design of the Mishkan, Israel's portable Tabernacle in the desert. The Second Word of the Decalogue prohibits idolatry, not artistry. Sculptures or paintings must not be worshipped, but may be created and enjoyed as objects of art and beauty. Rabban Gamliel (2nd c. B.C.E.) was once bathing at the Aphrodite bathhouse (in Acre), which was dedicated to the Greek goddess of love and beauty. Questioned whether his conduct was not idolatrous, the rabbi replied (Mishna AZ 3:4):

*It is not the bathhouse which serves as an adornment to Aphrodite (the goddess); it is an aphrodite (statue) which serves as an adornment to the bathhouse.*

When used as a decorative ornament, and not as an object of worship, an Aphrodite statute, or any other pagan figurine, is not a forbidden item of idolatry. In Judaism, depiction of the human figure has been avoided to guard pure monotheism; erection of monuments eschewed, to curb human boast. But the quest for and appreciation of artistic expression have always been kept alive.

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Feb. 28:

VAYAKHEL: Exodus 35:1-38:20, 30:11-16

HAFTARAH: II Kings 12:1-17

Tuesday, Wednesday: Rosh Chodesh Adar II

### *Thought of the Week*

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

**THE SABBATH AND THE TEMPLE:** The portion of the week that deals with the construction of the Temple (Mishcan) opens with a brief note about the Sabbath. This teaches us that the holiness of the Sabbath must not be violated even for the sacred purpose of building the Temple. According to Halacha (the traditional authoritative ruling on Jewish conduct), the demand to keep the Shabbat holy supersedes the need to worship with the congregation in the synagogue; one should rather worship and pray at home than violate the Shabbat. Shabbat represents holiness in time which transcends space. Shabbat transforms the home into a temple.

## **Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

**GIVING AND SURVIVING:** "Shekalim" (shekels) is the theme of the Shabbat heralding the festive month of Purim (Adar). The shekel (from "sahkol," to weigh) is the main biblical silver coin (weighing about a third of an ounce). The idea of "shekalim," giving shekels for survival to enhance both the sanctity and security of the people, is intrinsically related to the theme of Purim. Purim celebrates the wonder of Jewish survival, shekalim the marvel of Jewish generosity. The enduring spirit of "giving." The Shekalim motif in reverse is ironically interwoven into the plot of the Meggila (3:9): Haman entices the king to allow the annihilation of the Jews by offering him money (Jewish money, of course): he uses the term "eshkol" (I will weigh shekels...). The enemy's "eshkol" – their decision to kill us, using the power of money as bait and weapon – must be counteracted in advance with our "shekalim" – our resolve to give; their threat to our "surviving" with our power of "giving."

**Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 4:**

**VAYAKHEIL:** Exodus 35:1-38:20;30:11-16

**HAFTARAH:** Kings II 12:1-17

**Rosh Hodesh II Adar:** Thursday, March 9

Candlelight time 6:19 Sabbath ends 7:13

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 20

VAYAKHEL: Exodus 35:1-38:20, 30:11-16

HAFTARAH: II Kings 12:1-17

**THOUGHT OF THE WEEK:** *On this Shabbat, the third of four special Shabbatot preceding the Passover, the laws of Para Aduma (the red heifer, Nu. 19:1-22) are read. They describe the procedures of ritual purification. In order to partake of the Paschal lamb, one had to be cleansed from his impurity (tum'ah). The reading of Parasnat Para in our days, reminiscent of the days of the Temple, signifies the approaching of the Passover. Cleanliness and purity are basic elements of the anticipation and celebration of this festival. So, too, the removal of hametz before Passover is symbolic of our moral need and aspiration to purge our hearts from any sourness and fermentation. The ezov (hyssop), a known Biblical plant — white, fragrant and unpretentious — mentioned in connection with the ritual of purification, symbolizes pleasant humbleness and modesty. In the Haftara, Ezekiel in the name of God prophesies: "I will take out the heart of stone from your body and I will give you a heart of flesh." (Ez. 36-26).*

*By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda*

March 23, 1979

THE SHABBAT AND THE TEMPLE are interrelated in Judaism, both expressing sanctity -- Shabbat in time, and Temple in space. The precept of Shabbat is indicatively interwoven in Scripture within the details of the Temple's construction (Ex. 35:2-3): "On six days work ("melakha") must be done; but the seventh day must be a sanctity to you, a Shabbat of complete rest dedicated to the Lord." No work on this day! Nor is the ignition of any flame allowed (3): "Do not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the day of Shabbat." The Hebrew for "work" in regard to Shabbat is "melakha;" this term means accomplishment, a fulfillment of human purpose and design -- a creative act. "Melakha" is related to "mal'akh" (angel, messenger); it is the achievement of one who carries out and completes a task. The definition of what is considered "melakha" for Shabbat is derived from the construction of the Temple: All archetypes of human work invested and employed for the Temple (39 in number) are forbidden on the Shabbat. The Rabbis teach: How supreme is the sanctity of Shabbat! Even for the sake of the Temple, the Shabbat must not be desecrated. The highest Temple, built in the eternity of time and within the hearts of the people, is the Shabbat.