

MOMENTS RIPE FOR ANGER



PSYCHED FOR TORAH - PARSHAT VAYAKHEL
RABBI DR. MORDECHAI SCHIFFMAN

Before Moshe provides his long delineation of the details of the *Mishkan*, he begins with a brief message related to *Shabbat*, highlighting one specific prohibition: “you shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the day of *Shabbat*” (*Shemot* 35:3). Commentators are bothered as to the connection between *Shabbat* and the *Mishkan* and why the location of “your dwellings” is singled out for the prohibition; surely the prohibition applies no matter where one is located. Rabbi Shmuel Goldin suggests that the reason “your dwellings” is singled out is to emphasize “the primacy of that fundamental unit – the centrality of which is underscored, over and over again, at critical points in Jewish history – the Jewish home.” *Shabbat* and the *Mishkan* are connected to teach us that “as central as the Sanctuary and Temple will be in your experience, their role will pale in comparison to that of your homes and families... The Sanctuary is meant to inspire and to teach, but the lessons it teaches will reach their fulfillment only within your homes.”

The *Zohar* famously sees the fire referenced in this *pasuk* as a metaphor for anger. One should not get angry on *Shabbat*. Why is the prohibition of anger emphasized only on *Shabbat*? Shouldn't it be a problem on other days as well? Perhaps, since *Shabbat* is a symbol of peace, getting angry is so antithetical to the spirit of the day, that the problem of getting angry is accentuated on *Shabbat*.

Alternatively, while *Shabbat* is in theory emblematic of tranquility, it often does not translate well into practice. The *Mishna* requires that before *Shabbat* starts, we ask, “Have you tithed? Have you prepared the *eruv*? Light the candles!” But we are implored to say it with calmness because in the rush of *Erev Shabbat*, the sense of urgency makes it an apt time for anger, especially if those close to us are not subservient to our demands and timelines. *Shabbat* is also a time when people are home from work and families are united under the same roof for a long period of time without the distractions of a regular routine. The environment is ripe for anger, frustrations, and disagreements, so it is important to be mindful of our tone of voice, keeping it cool and level as we talk.

A related therapeutic strategy, also found in the *Mussar* literature, is to predict times we are prone to get angry and to imagine beforehand what will likely happen. After we become aware of how we usually would react in such a scenario, we rehearse in our minds how we can react effectively when that moment inevitably does surface. This way, when we are confronted with the rush of *Erev Shabbat*, or with the building frustrations that may surface on a long *Shabbat* afternoon, we are already equipped with an adaptive response.

Due to the requirements of social distancing and *shul* and school closures, we are now in a time where that same environment that is apt for angry responses is not just applicable to *Shabbat*, but to all week long. Our Sanctuaries and Temples are closed, but as Rabbi Goldin argued their roles “pale in comparison to that of our homes and families.” It is incumbent upon us, both on *Shabbat* and during the week, to be aware of situations where we tend to get angry. By identifying these patterns, we can work better on being prepared with a healthier response. This will go a long way to maintaining and sustaining the beauty and sanctity of our homes and of *Shabbat* as we confront and respond to new challenges.

**RABBI DR. MORDECHAI
SCHIFFMAN**

www.PsychedforTorah.com
PsychedforTorah@gmail.com
[@PsychedforTorah](https://www.instagram.com/PsychedforTorah)

