

HOLY DESECRATION

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

With this week's parsha, Ki Tisa, the Torah completes the instructions for the building of the Mishkan [Tabernacle] and then immediately commands about Sabbath observance:

"And you shall speak to Bnei Yisroel [the Children of Israel] saying: Ach [But] My Sabbaths you shall observe because it is a sign between you and I, for all generations, to know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you. [31:13]"

What is the connection between the Mishkan and the Sabbath?

Rashi explains that Moshe was told: Although I have instructed you to command them to build the Mishkan, do not treat the Sabbath lightly and push it aside in order to build. This is referring to the actual bringing of the materials [Sifsei Chachamim]. Rashi also teaches that the word Ach [But] always comes to limit and minimize. In this case it comes to limit the actual construction work performed by the artisans, forbidding it from being done on the Sabbath.

The Ramban takes issue with Rashi's explanation. "Ach [But] My Sabbaths" seems to be limiting the Sabbath, not the construction of the Temple! If it was referring to the Mishkan, it would come to allow the building on the Sabbath! He therefore explains that it in fact comes to limit the observance of the Sabbath, pushing it aside in the case of a circumcision and a life-and-death situation.

The Ohr HaChaim explains this concept further. "Ach [But] My Sabbaths": when a person's life is at stake, do what must be done to save that life, even if it will involve desecrating the Sabbath. This applies to all days that are called "Sabbath" all the Sabbaths: including Sabbath, Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement] and all holidays.

According to the Ohr HaChaim, the passuk also contains two explanations as to why the Sabbath is pushed aside in order to save a life.

"Ach [But] My Sabbaths . . . "

We desecrate a Sabbath in order to (by keeping this person alive) allow for the observance of many, many Sabbaths in the future. As such, it's not even considered desecration but rather, in such a life-threatening situation, 'breaking' the Sabbath would be considered its proper observance! This explains that although we are not allowed to sin, even to help someone else, in the case of saving a life it's not a sin but rather a mitzvah.

". . .to know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you."

This law, that the Sabbath is broken in order to save a life, enables us "to know that I am Hashem and I have sanctified you." The holiness of a nefesh [soul of a] Yisroel is greater than the holiness of the Sabbath. The lesser (Sabbath) is pushed aside for the sake of the greater (a nefesh Yisroel). How was this holiness attained? Because Hashem, in all of His glory, is the one who sanctifies us.

In a few short words the Ohr HaChaim is revealing volumes. If one is careful with the time when the Sabbath begins and ends, not wanting to shortchange it in any way, how meticulous must one be with the 'time' given to people, giving them the full attention they deserve. If one is careful to honor the Sabbath because it is Hashem's day of rest, how careful must one be to honor a person in whom Hashem rests...

Good Shabbos,

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