

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Ki Tisa

“Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’” Exodus 31:13

Perhaps we can explain the matter according to a comment made by the Ramban in this Rashi comments on this verse that the words “ach es shabsosai tishmoru”, literally: “but you must observe My Sabbaths,” contain a mi’ut, a clause intended to exclude something from the statement. He bases this on the general rabbinic principle that the word “ach”, meaning “but,” always represents a mi’ut. The exclusion in this case is the construction of the Mishkan. Even a matter as important as building Hashem’s “home” (as it were) amid the Jewish people does not supersede Shabbos.

However, Ramban disagrees. He points out that since what is being discussed here is the prohibition against working on Shabbos (based on the word tishmoru, to guard or observe,) anything excluded from that prohibition would necessarily be permitted on Shabbos! He therefore suggests that the primary purpose of the exclusion here is to permit two activities on Shabbos: circumcision and the preservation of human life.

The Chasam Sofer points out that according to Ramban, an amazing lesson is learned--one particularly relevant to our current situation. No doubt, the construction of the Mishkan is an incredibly important matter. Nonetheless, it does not take priority over Shabbos, the source of our spiritual vitality. But the preservation of human life is even more important than that! The sanctity of a Jewish life, says the Chasam Sofer, is so great that it supersedes even Shabbos, and is by extension more important than the construction of the Mishkan. We see from here the power of Hashem’s love for us, and the great care we must take in preserving our safety and health. May we all be blessed with a peaceful Shabbos, good health and besoros tovos, good news!

Health is the greatest possession. Contentment is the greatest treasure. Confidence is the greatest friend.

Lao Tzu

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman

