
פרשת כי תשא

פרק לא פסוק טז

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עִוְלָם:

חז"ל

מנין לפיקוח נפש שדוחה את השבת? תלמוד לומר ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת, אמרה תורה חלל שבת אחת כדי שישמור שבתות הרבה (יומא פה:).

מושג

אמרה תורה חלל שבת אחת כדי שישמור שבתות הרבה.

Translation:

The Torah tells us to desecrate one Shabbos so that we may observe Shabbos many times in the future.

Explanation:

When faced with a question of whether one may desecrate שבת in cases of danger to human life, the Gemoroh teaches us that human life takes precedence over keeping the שבת. The reason for this is that by desecrating this one שבת and thus saving a life, the person whose life was saved will be able to keep many future שבתות. The Gemoroh is teaching that human life is to be saved at any cost¹, not because life in itself is so valuable, but rather because this will allow for future fulfillment of מצות² and earning הבא עולם.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Gemoroh is commenting on the strange wording of the Pasuk which tells us to “guard the Shabbos” in order to “make the Shabbos for generations”. Seemingly, it would have been sufficient to tell us to guard the Shabbos, which would obviously lead to us making the Shabbos. The Gemoroh teaches that the Pasuk is actually teaching us that one must guard the Shabbos only if through guarding the Shabbos it will lead to us making Shabbos for generations. However, if guarding the Shabbos will lead to a loss of life, not allowing for future keeping of the Shabbos, then one is not obligated to guard the Shabbos.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: One is permitted to violate the Shabbos, as well as other transgressions in cases of danger to human life. This is true even if there will be even a possible loss of life. There are three exceptions: idol worship, murder and adultery.

Understand: Human life is valuable in that it allows us to do Mitzvos and thereby earn everlasting life in עולם הבא. Thus if human life is endangered one may transgress any sin (except for the three cardinal sins) in order to preserve life.

Think: Look carefully at the full text of the Pesukim, realizing that any apparent redundancy impacts the meaning of the Pasuk.

1 The exceptions to this rule are עריות וגלוי עריות, שפיכות דמים ועבודה זרה, idol worship, murder and adultery.

2 See note #1

NOTES

1. The Musag is taken from the Gemoroh in (פיה:): מסכת יומא which searches for the source of the ruling that one may violate the Shabbos in order to save a life. The Gemoroh brings our Pasuk as one of the proofs. However, the Gemoroh ultimately relies on the more well known דרשה of וחי" ולא שימות בהם. The reasoning used by the Gemoroh to reject our דרשה is that this may only allow for the desecration of the Shabbos if there would be a *definite* loss of life. However, our Pasuk would not prove that one may desecrate the Shabbos when there would only be a *possible* loss of life³. Therefore, the דרשה of וחי בהם is brought to prove that one may desecrate the Shabbos even in situations when there is only a possible danger to human life.

One might ask why the דרשה of וחי בהם is any more of a proof that Shabbos may be desecrated even in cases of questionable loss of life. Why is it not plausible to claim that permission to desecrate Shabbos in order to live is only when a definite loss of life will result, but, when we are unsure as to the danger to life we will not allow the Shabbos to be desecrated.

Furthermore, Rashi's commentary on the Pasuk of וחי בהם is difficult to understand. I would have imagined that Rashi would have definitely quoted the דרשה of וחי בהם ולא שימות בהם; after all this is *the* source for extremely important allowance to violate Shabbos in order to save a life. However, Rashi ignores this דרשה and instead quotes the ספרא which comments that the Pasuk is referring to בא עולם הבא. (The ספרא explains that it is impossible to interpret the Pasuk as referring to this life, as all are destined to die⁴.) If, as Rashi suggests, the Pasuk of וחי בהם is indeed not a directive to save human life at all cost, then what indeed is the source? Additionally perplexing is that the ספרא itself later in its commentary on the very same words וחי בהם, mentions the דרשה of וחי בהם ולא שימות בהם. How can both be true? Does the Pasuk refer to this life or the next?

Perhaps we might suggest that we first have to understand why it is that saving human life is more important than observing Shabbos. After all, we know that the three cardinal sins of idol worship, murder and adultery may not be transgressed even at the cost of one's life. Why should any Mitzvah be different? One might answer that וחי בהם comes to teach that human life is more precious than Mitzvos. However there is a different possibility: That is that the Torah in וחי בהם is telling us that doing Mitzvos is the most precious thing, for through Mitzvos we earn בא עולם. Literally וחי בהם, you will live *through them*. According to this understanding וחי בהם is a statement of purpose for all Mitzvos, that they earn us life. Not life in this world, for, as the ספרא explains, such a life is transitory and not of ultimate value, but rather everlasting life in בא עולם. And it is for this reason that one may transgress one Shabbos so that he or she might be able to keep many other שבתות. As our Musag teaches, not because of the value of human life but rather because of the value of the Mitzvah of Shabbos. Thus our Pasuk of ושמרו...לעשות את השבת becomes the source of the directive to violate Shabbos to save a life, while וחי בהם provides the reasoning behind the directive. Once we know why we must guard human life so carefully, it becomes obvious that this directive, of violating one Shabbos in order to keep many, would apply even in situations of possible loss of life. For this reason the Gemoroh in יומא requires the Pasuk of וחי בהם and cannot suffice with the Pasuk of ושמרו...לעשות, for only וחי בהם provides us with the lesson regarding the ultimate value of Mitzvos. The ספרא on the Pasuk וחי בהם thus mentions both ולא שימות בהם and בא עולם, as one explains the other.

2. Questions for further discussion:

- Why should an exception be made for the three cardinal sins? If indeed we need life to fulfill Mitzvos, which is the primary directive, why should it not apply equally for all sins?
- What other situations are exceptions to this rule?
- Do you think this Musag *allows* us to violate the Shabbos to save life or *obligates* us to violate Shabbos?

³ For in cases of only possible loss of life, the reasoning of 'violate one Shabbos in order to keep many' does not hold, as he may be able to keep many future שבתות anyway, since he may not die.

⁴ וחי בהם. לעולם הבא, שאם תאמר בעולם הזה, והלא סופו הוא מת,