

Suicide- Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The Shulchan Aruch writes that if the enemy's intent is to stop you from keeping Judaism, if he forces you to sin in private, the *halacha* is that you must transgress. If you can save yourself by giving up all your possessions, you are expected to do so, rather than transgress. If you are forced to sin in public, in front of ten Jews, then you must allow yourself to be killed. However, if the killer's intention is for his own amusement, then you must transgress and not allow yourself to be killed. If it's a time of *gezeirat ha'shemad* where the enemy attempts to stop everyone from keeping Judaism, then a Jew is obligated to give up his life even for a very minor custom like tying one's shoes in a particular way.

A Jew must allow himself to be killed rather than transgress one of the three cardinal sins. This is even if it's in private, not in a time of *shemad*, and even for the killer's personal amusement. However, the Rema rules that in a passive situation, one would be allowed to transgress. If the enemy says, "Give us one of you and we will kill him," one may not give anyone over, unless they specifically ask for someone. Even then, some opinions hold that one cannot give him over, unless he is actually liable for the death penalty.

The Shach brings proof from the Semak and writes, "These holy people who killed themselves because they didn't rely on themselves that they wouldn't transgress the

three cardinal sins..." Proof for this ruling is Shaul Hamelech who took his own life to prevent himself from being taken captive by the Plishtim. Nevertheless, there are opinions that disagree and therefore if a person finds himself in such a situation, he may not commit suicide. He would have to try and withstand the tremendous challenge Hashem has given him. The Shach adds that if a person doesn't manage to withstand the torture and does transgress one of the cardinal sins, although he committed a *chilul Hashem*, he is considered an *onus* (someone who was forced) and is exempt from punishment. However, if he had a chance to escape and did not take it, he is held liable.

Leah & Devora: The Unique Quality of Womens Prayer Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Chazal say that no man ever praised Hashem the way Devora did. What was unique about her song?

Yavin, the King of Canaan oppressed the Jewish people for 20 years. Sisra, the general of Yavin's army, came with 900 iron chariots and numerous troops to fight *Bnei Yisrael*. Chazal tell us 31 kings came with Sisra and each of them drew other nations to come with them. Devora told Barak to gather 10,000 people from the tribe of Naftali and Zevulun to fight Sisra. The battle took place near *Har Tavor*, a mountain in the north of Israel along the banks of the Kishon River. Hashem performed open miracles and the Jews were victorious. He confused the army of Sisra and they were not able to organize themselves to fight the war. They drowned in the Kishon River reminiscent of the miracles at Yam Suf. In fact, Chazal connect the two events. After Hashem caused all the Egyptians to drown, the Jews were still afraid. Perhaps the Egyptians had survived and emerged on the other side of the sea. Therefore, Hashem commanded the Yam Suf to spit out the dead bodies so that the Jews would be reassured. The sea said to Hashem, "Does the king give a gift to his servant and then ask it back?" Hashem said, "I will pay you back 1.5 times." And in fact, while 600 chariots drowned in the Yam Suf, 900 chariots drowned in Nachal Kishon, exactly 1.5 times more.

After the miracles, Devorah composed *Shirat Devora*. In the Navi, it's written like a song with space between the verses designed to appear like bricks one on top of the other. The parts of the *Torah* that are structured this way are considered fundamental to the Jewish nation for all generations. The Navi says Devora and Barak sang on this day, "Lemor," to say for all generations. The song begins with a preface that describes what caused the war and what caused the salvation. The Jewish people suffer because they fail to do the will of Hashem on the level required of them. Hashem sends them a leader to help them repent and then they are saved. This is what keeps repeating throughout the book of Shoftim. Why is the fact that the situation was difficult discussed? Rav Hirsh says that part of the song is thanking Hashem that when we go astray Hashem doesn't just let us go. He sends someone to remind us that we have to come back. Devora sings to Hashem not only for what is good on a superficial level, but what will bring us to our purpose. Devora's goal was to utilize whatever took place, the difficulties as well as the salvation, to bring more spirituality into the world.

She says, "Onochi l'Hashem onochi ashira." *Onochi* connects to *Onochi Hashem Elokecha*. The Metzudas explains that Devora meant to say, "Because I am to Hashem, I am totally

dedicated to Him and to *Klal Yisrael*, I believe in Him fully, that is why I sing to Hashem. I praise Him for His salvation. She nullifies herself. Although she initiated the war and caused unbelievable miracle by leading the Jews back to *teshuva*, she doesn't mention her role at all and attributes everything to Hashem. *Onochi* brings us to the giving of the *Torah*. Devora describes the experience at Sinai. Chazal say that when Hashem came to give the *Torah*, *Har Tavor* and *Har HaCarmel* wanted the *Torah* to be given on them, but Hashem rejected them because they were arrogant. He wanted to teach us that a prerequisite to accepting the *Torah* is humility. Yet Hashem pays back for every good intention, however imperfect. He repaid *Har Tavor* when His presence was revealed in the battle with Sisra. Devora hints to this when she says *Onochi* twice. So too on *Har HaCarmel*, in the time of Eliyahu, "*Hashem hu Elokim*," was said twice.

"*Ad shekamti Devora shekamti eim b'Yisrael.*" A mother symbolizes having mercy and caring for her children. So too Devora was an *eim b'Yisrael*. She cared about the Jewish people. A mother as much as she loves her child, will also criticize and punish him, in order to educate him. Devora did the same through her prophecy. She was like a mother giving birth, enabling the spiritual rebirth of the Jewish people.



Shavuot: Propitious Prayer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channi Kolpowitz-Stein

Shavuot has the unique distinction of not having any specific *mitzvot* associated with it. True, there is the custom to remain awake all night studying the *Torah*, but this is not a *Torah* mandate. Shavuot then, is closely associated with prayer, as it is the means through which we show our desire for *Torah*.

The specific blessings at the start of our day verbalize this desire. We begin with the blessing that Hashem has commanded us to be constantly involved in *Torah*. Then we ask Hashem to make those words sweet in our mouths. Finally, we bless and thank Hashem for having chosen us to receive the *Torah*. We then apply these brachot immediately by reciting the Priestly Blessings that reflect God's love for us. We express gratitude to Hashem for His love in *Ahavah Rabbah*, and we ask Him to help us reciprocate that love so that we may uphold all the words of the *Torah*. Especially on Shavuot, how intensely we say these blessings will impact our learning and *avodat Hashem*, throughout the year, notes the *Sichot Ba'avodat Hashem*.

The Gemara in Nedarim relates that Hashem brought the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdosh* because "They did not recite the blessing over My *Torah*." How does reciting these blessings provide a hook for *Torah* learning, and what does it mean that *Bnei Yisroel* failed to recite them? Lefonov Na'avod based on Rabbi Wolbe z"l cites the Mishneh that every morning a voice goes out from Sinai, "Woe to the people for the humiliation of *Torah*." But if no one hears this declaration, what does it achieve? Says Rabbi Wolbe z"l citing the Chazon Ish z"l, the soul of every Jew was at

Sinai, and it retains some of that Sinai experience. That voice is actually our inner voice calling out to us.

The purpose of the *Torah* blessings is to keep us connected to Hashem and remind us that He is the Source of everything. The three *Torah* blessings remind us of the three categories of blessings. First, there are blessings we recite in preparation of performing a *mitzvah*. This category is represented by "That You have sanctified us ... At other times, we bless Hashem for things we enjoy. We ask Hashem to make *Torah* words sweet for us. Finally, we thank Hashem for choosing us and giving us His *Torah*. Rav S. M. HaKohen explains that we go through three stages of learning *Torah*. First, our parents take us to learn. This is the stage of the first blessing, that we study *Torah* because Hashem commanded us. As we grow older, we find *Torah* study sweet and enjoyable. Finally, we grow to appreciate how the *Torah* has elevated us.

"*Veha'arev* is usually translated as "make [it]sweet." An alternate translation would render it as "inter mix the words of *Torah* in our mouths," let *Torah* become part and parcel of our being. *Torah* learning should be so pleasant that it becomes integrated into your soul. It should become part of your essence, part of everything you do, adds Rav E. Lopian z"l, so that you are always involved with Hashem. Then I can ask Hashem's blessings not only for myself, but for my descendants too. We pray that even those who now are more distant from *Torah* will come to experience its sweetness, writes the Rinat Chaim, that they too will come to know God's name.

We are incapable of acquiring the wisdom of *Torah* on our own writes Rabbi Pincus z"l. Therefore the *brachah* emphasizes the present tense, that Hashem continues to teach us His *Torah*. On Shavuot, we re-experience the joy of that first Shavuot, when Hashem came down to teach us His *Torah* writes the *Halekach Vehalebuv*. Every time someone sits down to learn *Torah*, Hashem individually teaches him, just as he spoke to each of us at Sinai in a voice tuned to our own individual wavelength. When someone feels Hashem's presence alongside him as he is learning, he feels tremendous joy. In this way, our experience at Sinai repeats itself each day. The voice from Sinai never stopped, write Rabbi Mandelbaum. It continues to teach us so that we can continuously find new insights in the *Torah*. After reciting these blessings, we've created an auspicious time of joy in heaven and can ask Hashem for anything. Therefore, we recite the Priestly Blessing which includes all the spiritual and material blessings.

Every Shavuot Hashem reenacts Sinai. He symbolically comes down to greet us as a groom goes out to his bride. Therefore, writes Rabbi Schorr, Hashem will forgive our sins on Shavuot just as He forgives the sins of a bride and groom on their wedding day. On his wedding day, the King distributes gifts to all who come to ask. Let us pray for our children, focus on each of their names, as we recite the blessings of the *Torah* and as we light the holiday candles, that Hashem should open their hearts to joyously learn, understand, and live the *Torah*.