



Chapter 3 Mishna 2

"Rabbi Chanina, the deputy High Priest, says: 'Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear it inspires, people would swallow one another alive.'"

One should not give up his life over a decree forbidding Torah study

In the words of the Tana: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear it inspires, people would swallow one another alive," it may be explained that he comes to teach us an additional lesson. To understand this, we must first introduce what we find in the *Gemara* (*Avodah Zarah* 3b), where two interpretations are given regarding the verse: "And You make man like the fish of the sea" (*Habakkuk* 1:14):

1. Just as the fish of the sea, when they come up onto dry land, die immediately, so too human beings, when they separate themselves from Torah, die immediately.
2. Just as among the fish of the sea the larger one swallows the smaller one, so too among human beings, were it not for fear of the government, the stronger would swallow the weaker, as we learned in our Mishná.

Rabbi Chanina's intention is to teach us that the correct interpretation is the second one. For if we were to say like the first interpretation — that if we would not engage in Torah, the government would rule over us, and that because of fear of it we occupy ourselves with Torah — then the government would have the merit of sustaining Torah study. And although it would not

be done *lishmah* (for the pure sake of Heaven), it would nevertheless deserve honor and good reward. Consequently, there would be no need to pray for its welfare.

But if we explain the verse according to the second interpretation, then the government has absolutely no merit whatsoever for the sustaining of Torah, and therefore we must pray for its welfare.

And from this emerges a practical implication: if — *chas veshalom* — a decree were issued forbidding Torah study, then according to the first interpretation one would have to give up his life and continue studying nevertheless, because if we do not study, the danger would be even greater and certain. For, as stated, without Torah study man would die. However, the *Halachah* rules (*Yoreh De'ah*, ch. 157, art. 1) that one should not give up his life for the fulfillment of a *mitzvat aseh* (a commandment that requires action).

And so that a person should not err and surrender his life improperly, Rabbi Chanina informed us that the correct interpretation of the verse is the second one, and that one should not give up his life if — *chas veshalom* — there exists a decree forbidding engagement in Torah study.

Chapter 3 Mishna 4

"Rabbi Shimon says: 'Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak words of Torah over it, it is as if they have eaten from the sacrifices of the dead, as it is said: "For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean" (*Yeshaiahu* 28:8). But three people who ate at the same table and spoke words of Torah over it, it is as if they have eaten from the table of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as it is said: "And he spoke to me saying: 'This is the table that is before Hashem'" (*Yechezkel* 41:22)."

Even Three People Obligated in Zimun Must Speak Words of Torah

We must analyze why the Tanna specified: "Three' people who ate at the same table."

It can be explained that this comes to teach us when the power of the *zimun* (the invitation to bless after a meal with bread) takes effect. When three people eat a meal with bread together, they become obligated to say the *zimun*; and the purpose of the *zimun* is to invite holiness and expel impurity. The Tanna teaches us that, even so, the *zimun* will not help them if they did not previously speak words of Torah over the table during the meal.

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