

By His Own Hand

Excerpted and adapted from a shiur by Dayan Yosef Greenwald

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https://baishavaad.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/BER82_002_Noach_For_Dear_Life_The_Halachos_of_Suicide.mp3

But your blood, of your souls, I will demand; from the hand of every animal I will demand it, and from the hand of man, from the hand of each man, his brother, I will demand the soul of man.

Bereishis 9:22

The Gemara (Bava Kama 91) interprets this *pasuk* to include a prohibition of suicide, and it equates suicide with murder: Since one does not own his body, as it belongs to Hashem, he has no right to take his own life. In fact, the Rambam in *Hilchos Rotzeiach* writes that one who commits suicide is not *chayav misah*, but it does seem that the act of suicide is considered a *ma'asei retzichah* (an act of murder). (See, though, Minchas Chinuch 34:5 and Bais Meir Y.D. 215:5.)

In light of these sources, it is difficult to understand how Sha'ul Hamelech asked his assistant to kill him while in battle with the Plishtim (Shmuel I 31:4) and, when he was refused, killed himself.

The Bach and Shach (Y.D. 157, citing the Smak) answer that Sha'ul was afraid that the Plishtim would force him to worship idols. In order to prevent this, he was allowed to kill himself. The Ritva (Avodah Zarah 18a, citing the Gilyonei Tosafos) agrees, writing that it is permitted to kill oneself first to avoid possibly violating one of the three cardinal *aveiros*. The Radak and Ralbag answer that Sha'ul could commit suicide because he knew he would be killed in that battle, and he preferred to die quickly at his own hand rather than be tortured to death by his foes. The Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 345, in the halachos of *aveilus* for a suicide) appears to accept this as well, as he considers Sha'ul's case to be one of *oness* (compulsion by circumstances). But he does not specify that it was due to the concern of idol worship.