

A Taste of Torah Work-Study Program

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

It's a Jew's age-old dilemma: how much time do you devote towards Torah study, and how much towards making a living? But there's another question asked less frequently: should we be devoting all our time to Torah study, and not working at all?

This dilemma is discussed in the Talmud (B'rachos 35b). There we find a dispute between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rabbi Yishmael states that one must conduct one's Torah study in conjunction with work. He bases his opinion on a verse in this week's Torah portion, found in the section which comprises the second part of our twice-daily recitation of the Shema. The Torah there details what will occur if we follow G-d's commandments. And therein we find the verse "...and you shall gather your grain." (Deuteronomy 11:14) This verse, states Rabbi Yishmael, tells us that we must make an effort to earn a living.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai disagrees, and emphatically states that one cannot expect to have sufficient time to study Torah if he is out in the fields plowing, planting, and harvesting. Rather, he says, when the Jewish People follow G-d's Word, their work is performed by others.

The Talmud concludes by stating,

"Many have done in accordance with Rabbi Yishmael, and have succeeded, while many have followed Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai without success." The implication of the passage would indicate that one is ill-advised to devote himself exclusively to Torah study and trust that G-d will provide. But first impressions can be deceiving, and nowhere is this more true than when it comes to understanding Talmudic passages.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner (1749-1821) makes two important points regarding the wording of the aforementioned passage. First of all, he says, Rabbi Yishmael stated that one should "conduct his Torah study with work." It does not say, "Combine Torah study and work," because that would indicate that both are of equal importance. Rather, Rabbi Yishmael is informing us that while he believes that one must set aside time to make a living, one's primary focus must be Torah study; there is a secondary need to go out and work.

Secondly, the Talmud never advised which path one should follow; it merely stated that most people found success following Rabbi Yishmael's approach, while most failed with the model espoused by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. There is a minority, however, who succeeded with Rabbi Shimon

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Ask the Rabbi Conceded Conceit

From: Dennis

Dear Rabbi,

I find that I have a problem with arrogance. Is there anything you can tell me that might help me work on this

shortcoming?

Dear Gary,

Interestingly enough, in your very question you admit to being flawed. Isn't that humbling enough?

A man once went to the Kotsker

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Stories For The Soul

Take a Step Up

One day a farmer's donkey fell into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered anyway, and it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.

He invited all his neighbors to help him. They grabbed shovels and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw.

With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he continued to shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Moshe was commanded to carve a second set of Tablets with the Ten Commandments to replace the first set of Tablets, which had been smashed during the incident of the Golden Calf. The second set of Tablets were not as great as the first set.

One might say, "I can never duplicate the original so I will give up and not bother." We see here instead the correct attitude, that one must always do his best with whatever he has to work with. Life is going to shovel all kinds of dirt on you. The trick is to shake it off and take a step up.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

DERECH HASHEM

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a philosophical series on "Derech Hashem", a sefer by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto. Discover and delve into the vital understanding of Hashem's world. The women's class will resume on Monday, August 27th, 7:45 p.m., at EDOS. For info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.



A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issues, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. The class will resume on Tuesday, August 21st, 8 p.m. at Aish.



TRUST THY FATHER

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers for "Trust Thy Father", a series based on Chovos Ha'Levavos/Duties of the Heart. Discover and delve into vital Jewish concept of Bitachon. The classes will resume on Tuesday, August 21st, from 7:55-8:25 a.m., at Aish. For info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Interpersonal Issues

If the Lost Item Has No Valid Identifying Feature

Although we have stated that a talmid chochom, upon viewing the lost item, is believed to say it is his, there is an exception. If the item is brand-new, there is no way that he could be

sufficiently familiar with the item's appearance to make such a claim.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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Rebbe with a similar request saying, "Rabbi, I am haughty. Please help me be humble."

The Rebbe told him to sit down with him in his study for a while.

Soon thereafter, a person entered the study asking the Rebbe for a blessing and help in marrying off his daughter. The Rebbe referred him to the visitor to seek financial help. Surprised, the visitor replied, "But Rebbe, I have no money of substance to help."

A little later, another person entered the study asking the Rebbe to clarify a certain intricate matter of halacha. The Rebbe referred him to the visitor for an answer. Taken aback, the visitor replied,

"Dear Rebbe, my Torah knowledge is only very basic. I cannot answer this."

Then a third man entered the study asking the Rebbe for advice regarding a particular endeavor. The Rebbe referred him to the visitor for advice in the matter. Discomfited, the visitor replied, "Wise Rebbe, I am not qualified to counsel on this, or other, endeavors."

The Kotzker Rebbe then needled the visitor, "According to your own admission, you have little money, little Torah, and little worldly wisdom. So what exactly is it that you're arrogant about?"

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A Taste of Torah

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bar Yochai's approach. In fact, says Rav Chaim Volozhiner, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai never intended his vision for the masses; the level of righteousness and trust in G-d necessary to exist at a level of relying completely on G-d, without expending any effort, is reserved, as he himself expressed, for those who fulfill the will of G-d – that is to say, those who have attained an extreme level of righteousness.

To be sure, there are meritorious individuals throughout our history – even today – who do nothing but study Torah and trust that G-d will provide. But most people cannot claim to be at a level where they will study and assume G-d will supply their needs. And one who claims to be ready for such an

endeavor needs to seriously check if it is mere laziness, irresponsibility, or haughtiness that leads him to such a conclusion. Thus, the masses of Jewry must take the approach of Rabbi Yishmael. Yet even Rabbi Yishmael agrees that Torah must be the primary focus of one's efforts; making a living is a distant second place. Torah study is the hallmark of the Jewish People; it has preserved us throughout millennia of persecution and wandering. There may be other issues in life which necessitate leaving the study hall for a period of time, be it working, going on vacation, or defending a country. But to say that anything else takes priority over Torah study is contrary to the Talmud's teaching.

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Denver Community Kollel: 1516 Xavier Street, Denver, CO 80204 Tel: 303-820-2855 Fax: 303-820-2806

Email: info@denverkollel.org Web: www.denverkollel.org

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