

TALMUD TORAH 3:10

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

10: Anyone who decides to be engaged in Torah [study] and not to work, and will be supported by Tzedaka - this person desecrates God's name (*Chillel et Hashem*), degrades the Torah, extinguishes the light of our faith, brings evil upon himself and forfeits life in *Olam haBa* (The world to come); since it is forbidden to derive benefit from the words of Torah in this world. The Rabbis said (Avot 4:5): Anyone who derives benefit from the words of Torah in this world, forfeits his life in Olam haBa. They further commanded and said: (Avot 4:5) Do not make them [the words of Torah] a crown to magnify yourself or an axe with which to chop. They further commanded, saying: (Avot 1:10) Love work and despise positions of power (*Rabbanut*). And: (Avot 2:2) Any Torah which is not accompanied by work will eventually be nullified and will lead to sin. Ultimately, such a person will steal from others.

Q1: The most outstanding question - what (if anything) is the impact of this Halakha on the idea of "Kollel" ? [for further research, see Kessef Mishneh here, and further in Rambam: Shemitta veYovel 13:12-13 and Mat'not 'Ani'im 10:18, also see Rambam's commentary to the Mishna, Avot 4:7]

Q1a: BR ([Brock Rozen](#)): What does this say of those who, in Israel for example, only go to Yeshiva and study all day and are supported by the Yeshiva, which gets it's money from Tzedaka?

YF: (Yitzchok Fishman): From the way Rambam uses such strict language here and from the way he interprets the Mishna in Pirke Avot (4:7) I would say he would be against Kollel. Although we can possibly say that today, even according to Rambam, Kollel is acceptable, because if people were trying to make a living -even if only enough just to support themselves in order to learn- they would get caught up as Rambam brought down in the previous halachas and Torah would be forgotten.

YE([Yitz Etshalom](#)): Brock's question strengthens the original query - how does this statement of R's impact upon today's Kollel situation?

Although the Kollel debate is a hot and passionate one, I don't believe that it is directly informed by this Halakha - at least, not in some circumstances. If a student is "recruited" by a Kollel, because of his superior learning ability, his promising future as a teacher and instructor in Israel etc., it certainly makes sense for that institution to support the student so that he may pursue his studies - much like most graduate schools have stipends to allow their students to concentrate fully on their studies. Along those lines, just as people who are concerned with the future of science will donate to a fund to support graduate students in chemistry etc., so, those of us who are concerned with the future of

Torah education and instruction, should be willing to support an institution which allows married students to continue their studies. These students are not violating Rambam's stricture here - note that he rails against those who plan to subsist on Tzedaka - in other words, since they won't work (because they are studying all day), they will be poor, and the community will be obligated to support them. Being paid by a Kollel is NOT Tzedaka.

However, this leaves us with a serious question when we are asked to support such institutions - are these institutions and their students truly aiming at - and working to achieve - these goals? Are the students really concentrating on their studies? are they being trained to teach and instruct? Or, as is the case in at least some places, are they listed on the rolls of the Kollel in order to avoid Tzahal duty - or to collect money while they participate in other (non-learning) activities?

There is a second point that needs to be considered - at what point does Kollel turn into a way of life? Even if someone studies for many years, but is moving towards a goal of public service (teaching etc.) then it is a reasonable consideration - but what of those who see Kollel as their permanent place - or at least (as has been happening for the past few years) until the Kollel runs out of funds? This may be a violation of the measures indicated in this Rambam.

Regarding the statements of Rambam at the end of Hilkhos Shemitta veYovel: (12: Why did the tribe of Levi not get any inheritance in Eretz Yisrael nor any of its spoils? - because it was separated to worship God and to serve Him and to teach His righteous ways and just laws to the public... 13: not only the tribe of Levi, but any person whose spirit moved him and his perception convinced him to be distinct and to stand in front of God, to serve Him and worship Him, to know God and walk in righteousness as God made him, and he rids himself of the burdens of concerns which most people seek, this one is sanctified as a Holy of Holies, God is his portion and inheritance...)

- there are several explanations:

a) Rambam ends every *Sefer* (volume) with words of *Aggada* - exhortative, non-Halakhic homiletics. Valid and wonderful though these statements may be, they are not intended as Halakhic instruction:

b) that statement refers to the individual and his faith - putting his fate in God's hands and knowing that God will take care of him, and, in return, he dedicates his life to learning AND teaching Torah. Following R. Eliezer haGadol's definition of faith (Sotah 48b), it would be strange for someone to follow R's advice at the end of Shemitta veYovel -and then to check the stock market! (see there - R. Eliezer haGadol said: anyone who has bread in his basket and asks "What will I eat tomorrow?" is weak of faith).

c) (I believe that R. Hayyim Soloveitchik said this - and this is somewhat akin to the previous answer) In TT 3:10, the individual is PLANNING on living off of Tzedaka - whereas in Shemitta veYovel, he puts his trust in God...

Q2: Why so many citations from the Rabbis about this issue? This is atypical of Rambam's style.

YF: Rambam brought down so many citations because most Rabbis held not like him, that you could take money for learning, and Rambam wanted to show how strongly he was against it. In Pirke Avot, explaining the Mishna from where these quotes come, he does, in fact, say "You're not going to like what I'm going to tell you - but it's true." He then goes on to explain, as he does here, that taking money for learning is prohibited.

Q3: On a more detailed plane: is there a unique message to each of the ramifications listed by Rambam - "desecrates God's name" etc, or is hyperbolic?

YF: I think that the problem Rambam saw in learning all day by means of charity instead of working for a living was that you would never have to worry from where your next meal was coming from. This was how the Rabbis [see Or HaChayim on Beresheet - mod.] explained the curse of the snake after the snake caused Adam to sin. The curse was everything you eat will taste like dust. So the Rabbis ask what kind of curse is that? it's a blessing! Because it means everywhere he goes he will never have to worry about food. They answer that it's a curse because what Hashem was telling the snake was "I never want to see your face again, I never want you to have to come to me for anything." So, if someone is being supported by charity and sits and learns the whole day and never has to worry about his next meal, he can come to forget about Hashem.

YE: It's worth a stab:

Desecrates God's name: The message of this man's behavior is that Torah, in its ideal form, is antithetical to this-worldliness. Just the opposite - the Torah personality (Ben-Torah) looks to give to the world and to interact in a positive and sanctifying way - not to sit back and let the world take care of him. B'nai Torah (and those who SEEM to be B'nai Torah) are God's representatives - therefore, the possibilities for sanctifying - and desecrating - God's name are more frequent and ubiquitous. He has acted against God. Degrades the Torah: he is using Torah study as an "out" for not working. He has acted against the Torah.

Extinguishes the light of our faith: the *m'or* (light) is a Midrashic synonym for Torah - the pure study and teaching, regardless of motivation. He might think that at least, he has gained much Torah, because he has studied so much - even if his motivation is not appropriate. Therefore, Rambam teaches that at the very least, in order for the beacon of Torah to shine, at least the "lighthouse" has to be standing straight - there is no way that others will be inspired, instructed or brought closer to God and to Truth as a result of his study. He not only makes his own Torah inaccessible and unattractive to others - but they may be repelled from Torah scholarship and wisdom in general. He has acted against the Jewish people (who should be learning from - and with - him). Brings evil upon himself: He may think that he hasn't successfully promoted God, Torah or inspiration among others - but at least he has the wisdom and the knowledge...R teaches that he doesn't have that, either. He has acted against himself.

Forfeits life in *Olam haBa*: He might think that he has lived an ascetic life, for which there is no reward in this world, but in Olam haBa...

Q4: What is the specific message behind each of the quotes from Pirkei Avot?

YF: When Rambam says "anyone who benefits from the words of Torah forfeits his life in the world" he does not specify a world. He could be saying you lose both worlds. When he says "not to make a crown..." he could be talking about honor. When he says "not to use Torah as an ax to chop with" he mean using it to make a living, or using a high position of Torah to cut someone else down. When he says "love work..." and, "all Torah that is not accompanied by work..." he means that living otherwise can lead to stealing. Rambam is telling us that your downfall can come about in two ways: if you are involved only in Torah, you can become haughty, and can also come to steal.

YE: Another stab:

Anyone who derives benefit from the words of Torah in this world, forfeits his life in Olam haBa: (but it's still your choice)

Do not make them [the words of Torah] a crown to magnify yourself or an axe with which to chop: (this is a command - but it speaks to motivation - why you are studying)

Love work and despise positions of power (*Rabbanut*): (a second command - sort of - but this addresses the situation after you have reached greatness in scholarship - you still need to be careful!)

Any Torah which is not accompanied by work will eventually be nullified and will lead to sin. (I might have thought that it is just not ideal - but I still have Torah!...)

Q5: Which type of benefit from Torah is prohibited? Are we not allowed to enjoy studying? Must we protest being called "Rabbi" or described as "scholarly"? How about Rabbinic perks (such as free or discounted medical care, etc. quite common in some communities - and free or discounted day school education)?

YF: The benefit that Rambam says is prohibited is something you can get because of your Torah, not what you get from it. Of course Rambam agrees that a Rabbi has to be respected, but what he is saying is that people will respect a Rabbi more if he is also involved in day-to-day business and still maintains himself in the way of the Torah and as a Rabbi.

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