

TALMUD TORAH 3:11

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

11: It is a great value for someone to derive his livelihood from the work of his own hands - it is also characteristic of the pious ones of early generations (*Hassidim haRishonim*). Through this, he merits all honor and good in this world and in Olam haBa, as it says (Tehillim 128:2) If you eat of the toil of your hands, you will be happy and it will be good for you. [and in Avot 4:1, the Rabbis explained:] You will be happy - in this world; And it will be good for you - in Olam haBa, which is entirely good.

Q1: Is this "great value" *ma'alah gedolah* as opposed to some other form of sustenance, or an inherent value? What about an heir? Should he sit and study all day, or is there something beneficial about "working with your hands"? This question certainly addresses the various interpretations of the world-view of "Torah va'Avodah" - the motto of B'nei Akiva.

YF: I think Rambam is saying *ma'alah gedolah* as opposed to charity.

YE: I don't read it that way. Rambam could have left this entire Halakha out if he just wanted to negate living off of Tzedaka. Rambam seems to be promoting several ideas:

- a) NOT living off of charity
- b) Working for a living
- c) Choosing work which involved your own hands-on involvement.

Q2: What is the essential teaching of the verse - that if you ONLY eat from the toil of your hands - and not stolen items or the work of others, then you will be happy - or that you need to work with your hands in order to be happy?

YF: Working with your hands can mean work that does not require heavy thinking. First of all, if one is only using his hands his mind can still be involved in Torah. Second, if there is too much mental work during the day, at night he will want to rest his mind instead of learn. On the other hand, if he is only tired from physical work he can still learn. It can also mean working in the secular world and not giving in to temptations that might occur, like stealing or cheating. Secondly, Rambam could be saying that while doing business during the day, one can see Hashem more clearly. They tell the story that someone asked a Chasid why he doesn't have more time for Hashem? He answered "Who has time, I get up at six o'clock in the morning and go to the mikvah, then I read Sefer Tehilim, then I Daven, and the rest of the day I'm learning. Who has time?" But if someone is out in the business world, there are times we can see clearly the Yad Hashem. There are times we might have thought we were making the biggest mistakes and it turns out that it was the best thing that could have

happened.

YE: As an old B'nei Akivanik, I was brought up on the value of Avodah - and this seems to be one of the key sources (the Mishna in Avot 4:1) - there is a tremendous sense of satisfaction from doing a piece of work with your own hands (like moderating and posting this list!) and realizing the results. When interacting with the natural world, it also has the potential of involving a great deal of *Yir'at Shamayim* - fear of God and amazement at the beauty of creation. It certainly adds a component of *Tzelem Elokim* - [being created in] the Image of God - God creates, and we, in a limited and finite way, continue that process, as is the mandate in Beresheet 1:26-28.

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