

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF WORK

by JewishAnswers.org

Question: *I work with undergraduate students who are in the process of finding their first professional job after graduating college. One often unarticulated, but clearly present, issue for them is what one might call the spiritual dimension of work e.g. what it is all about besides a paycheck. Can you point me in the direction of any good books or sources on Jewish perceptions of the meaning of work or the spiritual value of work? Thank you.*

Answer: The Torah and the Talmud, with their commentaries, discuss the spiritual value of work in many places. Here are just a few:

Tractate Avot 1:10 says, "Love work.." The Commentary of the Tosfos Yom Tov points out that it says it's the work that you should love and not the money. Even if you are independently wealthy you should still seek out a profession as the Talmud says in Ketubot 59b, "Inactivity leads to idiocy." As human beings we must keep ourselves fulfilled, for otherwise our minds will atrophy.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary on the Prayer Book, writes that this Avot 1:10 is counseling us to preserve our personal independence. When we are dependent we may do things that coincide with the views of those who support us and have more power than us. Work allows us to live by our own principles. This is based on the verse from Psalms 128:2, "When you eat the labor of your hands, you are praiseworthy, and it is well with you." One is best off eating the labor of their own hands. In the Grace After Meals we say, "Please G-d, let us not be in need of the presents from flesh and blood." We want our sustenance to be a direct result of our relationship with the Almighty (See below). Similarly, in Proverbs 15:27 King Solomon writes, "One who hates gifts shall live." Also see the Talmud in Berachot 8a on the verse from Psalms 128:2 above. ([more...](#))