

# INVESTING IN TORAH—YOU CAN BANK ON IT

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

*This is how the Menorah was made: Hammered out of one piece of gold, from its base to its flower, it was hammered out. [8:4]*

In the city of Vienna about two-hundred years ago lived a wealthy and famous banker, R' Shimshon Wertheimer z"l. In the secular world, he was known for his great wealth and uncanny business acumen. Among Jews, he was famous for his love and support of Torah foundations, yeshivos, and generosity towards those less fortunate than him. Everyone knew: Those who knocked on R' Shimshon's door would not be turned away empty handed.

A short while after he passed away, the holy Rabbi Chaim of Sanz zt"l gathered his disciples. "Let me tell you," he began, "what transpired in Heaven when the neshama (soul) of R' Shimshon arrived, and the time came for him to give his ultimate reckoning:

"Let me tell you how I spent my day,' R' Shimshon began his testimony before the Heavenly Tribunal. 'More or less, my days were always the same. I got up early, and went to shul to pray shacharis (morning prayers). After praying, I returned home for breakfast. After breakfast, I had a coffee and cigar as I read the daily newspapers. A banker, after all, must always be well informed. I recited Birkas Ha-mazon (Grace), and went to the bank.

"In the late afternoon, I returned home for lunch, and after eating a healthy meal and bentsching, I had a small rest. When I arose, there was invariably a line-up of collectors waiting for me. I gave each one of them my time, and tried to always give as generously as I could.

"At this point, it was already time to daven mincha. Between mincha and ma'ariv, I attended a shiur (Torah lesson). After praying ma'ariv, I had yet another shiur before going home to eat supper with my family. After supper I usually relaxed by playing some chess; it helped me overcome some of the day's stresses.

"Before going to bed, of course, I recited the bedtime k'rias Shema, and that, give or take, was my schedule.'

"R' Shimshon, as we all know, was a righteous man of great integrity, and after bearing witness, he was immediately ushered into Gan Eden among the righteous of Israel.

"It just so happens," continued R' Chaim, "that another banker, an associate of R' Shimshon, also passed away that very day. After escorting R' Shimshon to his exalted spot in Gan Eden, the

Heavenly Tribunal once again adjourned.

"Not having been much of a shomer Torah u'mitzvos (Torah-observant Jew), he was quite terrified of having to bear testimony. Hearing R' Shimshon's testimony, and the Tribunal's reaction, though, seems to have calmed his nerves.

"I was also a banker,' he began. 'In fact, my schedule was in many ways identical to that of my contemporary, R' Shimshon. I too arose early. I ate breakfast, and read the dailies while savouring a hot coffee and smoking a cigar. I went to the bank, where I worked hard all morning, and returned home in the afternoon for a late lunch and a rest. I usually spent the rest of the afternoon keeping fit with some sports. After supper, I also liked to play a round or two of chess, and then I went to sleep. So you could say that, for perhaps four-fifths of our days, our schedules were identical.'

"Of course," said R' Chaim, "it takes no genius to realize that the Heavenly Tribunal did not view the second man's daily schedule as being worthy of the reward given R' Shimshon.

"Tell me something,' the soul of the poor man protested, 'my friend, R' Shimshon, is he being rewarded for a lifetime of good deeds, or only for the few hours a day he spent studying Torah, praying, and giving charity?'

"R' Shimshon was a righteous man,' they said, 'of course he will be rewarded for a lifetime full of righteousness.'

"Yet is it not true,' he persisted, 'that twenty out of the twenty-four hours of our days were identical? We slept, we ate, and we worked. If he's being rewarded for all twenty-four, why shouldn't I get my reward for at least twenty?'

"An original argument, no doubt, yet a foolish one all the same. The Beis- din shel ma'alah had no problem answering him.

"Suppose a farmer sells raw wheat at the marketplace,' they told him. 'To separate the straw and stones is too difficult, so he sells the wheat by the wagonload, 'as is.' Of course, all of this is taken into account when calculating his price, so his buyers know what to expect.'

"One day, he is struck by a brilliant idea. He goes around gathering lots and lots of stones and straw, and puts them in big sacks. He takes them to the marketplace, placing them alongside his regular wagonloads of grain. To his shock, no one seems the least bit interested in buying them.

"Tell me,' he asks one of his regular buyers, 'why is nobody buying any of these bags of straw and stones I prepared—I spent lots of time gathering them?'

"But who on earth would pay money for straw and stones?' he replied. 'And to boot, you've priced them identically to your grain! Who ever heard of such foolishness?'

"Yet you do pay me for straw and stones all the time,' he replied. 'You know that; there's not a single

wagon load of grain that I sell that doesn't contain tens of pounds of them. When you pay me by weight, don't you realize you're paying me for the straw and stones too?'

"Of course I realize that. When I buy grain, I know there is invariably going to be some straw and stones too. I take that into account. I don't need the chaff, but who ever heard of grain without it? When you buy grain, you're always going to accept some straw and stones. But without the grain? It's useless! Please don't waste my time.'

"A G-d-fearing Jew,' they told him, 'who lived a life of Torah and mitzvos, and used his business not only for his personal well-being, but to support Torah study and aid the poor, is rewarded for his whole day—all twenty-four hours! His work, his leisure time—it's all part-and-parcel of the life of a dedicated Jew and philanthropist. The chaff, so to speak, joins the grain on the scale of life.

"But you lived a life void of Torah, of mitzvos, and of charity. Your days, so to speak, were all chaff and no substance. For what shall we reward you?" [Ma'yan ha-shavua]

The Menorah, explains the holy Chafetz Chaim zt"l, alludes to the Torah. Its lamps radiate the Torah's light, and its oil, which our Sages say symbolizes wisdom, represents the Torah's pure and infinite wisdom. Its intricate flowers, buttons and carvings allude to the intricate halachos (laws) of the Torah—so detailed yet so precise. Here, though, the Torah adds one detail. It was all hammered out of one piece of gold—even its base. Its base, says the Chafetz Chaim, is what supports it. Aside from holding the rest of the Menorah up, it serves no holy function. Yet precisely because of this, because the Menorah can't stand without it, its base is hammered out of the same piece of gold as the rest of it.

When we work to ignite the flame of the Torah in our own hearts and the hearts of our fellow Jews, we sanctify not only the precious moments we spend studying Torah and lovingly performing its mitzvos, but even the mundane moments that make up such an otherwise large portion of our lives. Attaching ourselves to the light of the Torah is an investment that yields exponential dividends—and you can bank on that.

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