

TORAT HAR SHIMUEL

PARSHA

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“SIX DAYS THOU SHALL WORK”: WHY?

There is a philosophical question that has

been asked for many decades, that being if Hashem Yisborach determines to the penny how much we are going to earn during the coming year, why is it necessary to engage in work? If it's meant to be, let's sit and learn Torah full time and Hashem, in His infinite wisdom will find a way for those predetermined funds to arrive in our account. How are we to understand the relationship between Hishtadlus, the effort that goes into making a living, and how much we earn?

This question is far more complicated than it appears on the surface. If we really want to do it justice, we have to ask what's more important: “Sipuch HaNefesh” – deriving personal satisfaction from what we do or how much money we make. Furthermore, there are many decisions regarding how our lives are going to unfold that Hashem makes even before we are born. The most significant is the famous Gemara (Sotah 2a), that teaches that forty days after the formation of the fetus, Hashem declares that the son of so and so is going to marry the daughter of so and so. In the same vein, Hashem could determine when we're born that during our life, we will earn a set fixed sum of money. Why is this something that is determined every year between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? We also have to ask (and this question is highly charged) how are we to view those learning in Kollel in light of the verse quoted in the title. Do we consider learning full time to be the type of work Hashem describes in the verse quoted above, (Shemos 20:9)?

Here is a point that I think is going to shock many of you. There is a company called RSA Animate that researches human behavior. (For those of you with access to You Tube, go to <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuFjJc>). Research done by economists at M.I.T., the University of Chicago and Carnegie Mellon University shockingly concluded that excellence in cognitive performance is not a consequence of one's salary. Money is not a motivator. Autonomy, mastery and purpose were found to be the three main driving forces precipitating success. Get out of the way and permit people to be their own driving force, and what they achieve will shock the boss. Why do we people play musical instruments as a hobby, (not for pay), during their time off? Because mastering an instrument brings them personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement. What drives a person to often times do better when money is not on the table? Because they feel their work makes the world a better place. Achievement for its own sake – “lishma” – is a more fulfilling choice than when money becomes a factor.

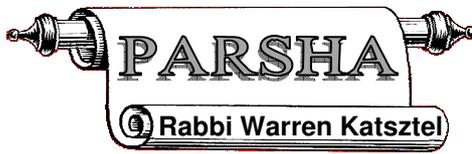
What I love about these studies is that we have the ability to reach the same conclusion without spending a ton of time (and money) doing the research. Within the pages of Chazal, the lessons expressed above have already been taught. In Sha'ar Ha'Bitachon, chapter three of the Chovos HaLevovos, HaRav Bachya Ibn Pakuda teaches that the purpose of work is “Tikkun HaMiddos”, refining our character. There is a dichotomy going on. On the one hand, Bilaam expresses that we are an “Am l'vadad yishkon”, a nation destined to

dwell alone. On the other hand, we were never meant to live isolated as do the Amish in Pennsylvania. Throughout our history we have lived and worked beside the gentile world. As a nation we cannot escape the uniqueness of who we are, what we stand for and how our Torah lifestyle transforms the theory of our national identity and purpose into a meaningful lifestyle. For centuries, we have established standards of Nobel Prize excellence in many of the professional fields. In doing so, we have worked alongside people of different race and religion. Torah is very clear regarding where these relationships can intersect. In our professional lives, there is a very legitimate place. Socially, strict lines of separation are drawn to insure that we maintain our identity and not compromise any standards of Torah behavior. Does this mean that we are not permitted to socialize with people of other faiths, race? Not at all!! What it means is that these standards of socialization are established by us, not them. These challenges require sophisticated, well-tuned Middos.

So what's behind the reality that Hashem, our heavenly Father determines how much we will earn in the coming year? In my opinion, it works like this. A person that enters the secular world with a mature, Torah based personality and work ethic has the opportunity to be m'Kadesh Shaim Shamayim in the secular, working world. Firmly established Middos are an absolute must! Hashem views this opportunity as so important, so worthwhile that He says the following to us. “Trust Me, I will see to it that you make what you need. Don't worry about the money!! Just focus on your tikkun ha'middos and be M'Kadesh Shaim Shamayim.” If we work on how we represent ourselves in the secular working world, Hashem Yisborach will take care of everything else. Focus on character, not money.

Why does Hashem Yisborach determine our salary every year rather than once at the beginning of our lives?? Because our “tafkeed”, our purpose changes every year. Imagine a three year old who receives his first pair of Tzitzis at his upsherin. If he's wearing the same Tzitzis when he's 5, they make look small but acceptable. If he's wearing them at his Bar Mitzvah, something is seriously wrong. He's outgrown them and should be wearing a larger size. Similarly, every year our “tafkeed”, our purpose should change and grow. We should have accomplished the goals of the previous year and prepare ourselves to climb a higher mountain this year. All of this calls for “Tikkun Ha'Middos”, making sure our personalities and character have met the previous goals and are ready for the new challenges of the coming year. Hashem, our heavenly Father is remarkably kind in taking the pressure of earning potential off the table. Hishtadlus, commonly understood to mean putting forth the effort to make a living, takes on an entirely new understanding here. It's not about the money. It's about character refinement so we can glorify Hashem's Holy Name in the secular working world within the context of the new business challenges we face.

By now, there are many saying that I'm in a dream world. The fact is that one of the greatest challenges today is understanding that “dayga”, worry, eats away at our emunah, our faith in Hashem. I have a nephew, Doriah Zaret, who is the Chief Financial Officer of our company. One of his greatest talents is knowing how to deal



with our inherent need to worry. During those challenging moments, he tells everyone, "Everything is with *Siyata D'Shemaya*,"

with the help of Heaven. He simply does not permit himself or anyone around him to worry. If the situation reaches an extreme, he calls for the recitation of Tehillim. This standard of excellence in Emunah has had a major impact on our collective state of mind. The calm precipitated by his attitude helps all of us view the challenge at hand in a way that solutions are more readily accessible. With the worry set aside, we can think more clearly, more creatively. All of this is part of Tikkun HaMiddos.

For the secular person, this philosophy is very difficult to accept and personify. Part of the plague of "b'kochi v'etzem yodi" is the myth that how much we make rests in our hands. The veils between us and Hashem have darkened to the point that life *appears* to operate that way, when in fact it does not. We've all known people who were on top of the world one day and crash landed the next. Let me share a mystery that, when we consider its reality, frightens us. A century ago, it was common for people to be born, raised, married, have a family and eventually pass all in the same city. In general, people didn't move around that much. It was common for extended families to remain in the same neighborhood not just for years but for generations. Today the opposite is true. Parents having their married children and grandchildren close is a great blessing and not common. Ask the average person how they ended up in a particular place doing what they do, living as they live, and the majority of them will say it was "beshert". In other words, they really have no idea at all. How their lives worked out as they did, all for the good, remains a mystery.

I'll share with you a radical form of this scenario. My Father Y'L was born in Vienna, Austria in 1928. In 1938, after much preparation and expense, they were given twenty four hours to pick up my great uncle from the Dachau Concentration Camp and leave. After three weeks and ten ports on a cruise line, they arrived in Shanghai, where a family of eighteen combined adults and children shared one twelve by eighteen foot room separated by hanging sheets. In 1948 they came to the United States and settled in Denver, Colorado, which is a story by itself. In the last six months, my Father has expressed on many occasions that he cannot fathom how his parents were able to do this. We think it is us who determine which path our lives will take, that we're responsible for the success we enjoy in achieving our goals, financial and otherwise. We blind ourselves into thinking that we're in control. What a chesed is it that Avinu She'ba'Shamayim tolerates us when we delude ourselves this way rather than openly demonstrating that it is His Hashgocho that manages everything from the growth of a blade of grass to how our lives will unfold, including how much money we will make in the coming year. Many that know this pay for it with empty lip service. If they really wrapped their heads around this *reality*, they would not have the ability to begin say thank you properly. Indeed, when the first fruits – the Bikkurim – were brought to Yerushalayim, the donors always said, "Aynee kofuee tov" – I'm not ungrateful. Why say it in the negative?? Because the ability to express the reality of thankfulness in the positive is beyond the human vocabulary.

So permit me please to opine on a topic that for me is not at all controversial, despite the fact that for many it is: How do we understand the concept of work as it applies to learning in Kollel full time. I'm going to express my opinion in the context of today's world. Nonetheless, we should not forget that during our forty years in the desert, Hashem provided everyone with their daily needs, while Moshe engaged in teaching Torah to the entire nation. It was the first Kollel in the history of the Jewish nation. Is it still valid today? Does it qualify as work? Yes!!

Until almost ten years ago, I had my questions, indeed my doubts. And then the North Miami Beach Community Kollel, founded by HaRav Elie Schmelzger was established. Everyone questioned

who and how was the Kollel going to be supported in a community that was already overtaxed with Shuls, Yeshivas, Tomchay Shabbos, etc. It's almost ten years later, and the Kollel is the most successful organization in the neighborhood. Let me share what I've seen and learned over the past decade.

A big part of what makes the concept of Kollel controversial is the reality that there are people learning in Kollel who should not be there. It's their default position, something to do until they figure out what they really want to do with their lives. Even if they're not supported directly at all by the Kollel, one who does not belong there does damage to those who do. They cannot carry their spiritual weight and as a result become a burden rather than a benefit to those carrying the torch. So who does belong there? In my opinion, two ingredients are necessary. They have had to have the "zits fleish", the ability to focus on learning for an extended period of time. I'm willing to wager that the vast majority of people in the standard workplace would find this impossible. Of equal importance is that they have to have the intellectual ability to take their learning to a level most cannot reach. This is our intellectual cream of the crop!! The best of our best!! It's the combination of their sincerity regarding the holy task at hand and their intellectual ability to meet the challenge of mastering Kisvay Ha'Kodesh that should serve as the foundation for a proper Kollel.

I have often said that when Rov Schmelzger selected the original members from the Lakewood Yeshiva, he was blessed with Ruach HaKodesh, as has been HaRav Yakov Tzvi Blejer, today's Rosh Kollel. The personality fits were and are perfect!! They started learning b'chavrusa with people in the community, young and old. In a very short time, the Bais Midrash was full and the sweet sound of Torah could be heard loudly and clearly. Lives were changed, Kedusha elevated, publications released near and far and a new standard of Torah character and excellence found its way to North Miami Beach.

This is more important today than it's ever been. We're living during times where Hashem Yisborach is testing us with "Ashirus" wealth. It's not an easy test to pass. There are many temptations in the secular world, all of which serve to remove us from Kedusha. There are many philosophies preached that cloud our ability to see the world as it should really be seen, especially as it relates to making a living. When a person comes home tired from a challenging day at work and chooses to learn with his chavrusa at the Kollel, he is restoring balance in his mind, his world. It doesn't matter what they're learning. At the end of the session, his mind should have his spiritual, Torah priority re-fixed in their proper place. He brings this home and shares it with his wife and children, raising the level of Kedusha therein. He goes to work the next day with the proper attitude, with priorities in their proper place. Today, this is more important than ever before because it is a test of ashirus, wealth. Poverty brings one to Hashem albeit the hard way. Nothing can remove one from Hashem Yisborach faster than success and wealth.

There is a famous Gemara in Bava Basra (10b) and Pesachim (50b) that speaks of the son of Rav Yehoshua who died, had an "out of body" experience and came back. He was asked what he experienced during that time, to which he answered "olom ha'fuch" – an upside down world. Everything that's important in our world has no value in the world to come, while everything in Hashem's world has little value here. Indeed, our world is upside down. So what is the purpose of the Kollel? It's a place where everyone should experience this world right side up. Until the Geulah, it should happen QUICKLY, supporting those who are solely dedicated to learning Torah, spreading Torah and exemplifying Torah personally (middos) and intellectually is the lifeboat needed to make sure that when we work six days a week, it will be with the proper focus and understanding as to where everything in our blessed lives comes from – Avinu She'ba'Shamayim, Hashem Yisborach. May all of us be zoche to pass the test of ashirus in a manner that's M'Kadesh Shaim Shamayim.