



Torah Study & Work

By Rabbi Ariel bar Tzadok.

Copyright © 2006 by Ariel bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל בֶּן רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הַנָּשִׂיא אָמַר,
יִפָּה תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה עִם דְּרוֹךְ אֶרֶץ, שִׁיגִיעַת שְׁנֵיהֶם מְשַׁכַּחַת עֶזְרָה.
וְכָל תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵין עִמָּה מְלָאכָה, סוֹפָה בְטֻלָה וְגוֹרְרַת עֶזְרָה.

Rabban Gamliel son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said, Torah study is good alongside work, for efforts in both makes one forget sin and all Torah that has not with it work in the end will be nullified and cause sin. (Avot 2:2)

In the beginning, G-d created the Heavens and the Earth (Gen.1:1). We all know this! Yet, we often fail to recognize the moral lesson being taught in this verse. While we acknowledge our Creator, we must also acknowledge His creation. G-d created two very different and distinct worlds, referred to in the pasuk as the Heavens and the Earth. Each realm is ruled by its own set of laws of physics.

The needs of one realm are not the same as the needs of the other. Yet, as our Creator created both realms equally, thus the needs of both realms must be equally addressed. This is the great spiritual truth addressed here in this Mishna by Rabban Gamliel ben Yehuda.

The study of Torah services spiritual needs referred to as Heaven. Working for a living services physical needs referred to as the Earth. This is why the greatest of scholars is one who indulges in a trade while at the same time indulging in Torah. In this way, one makes one's work imbued with Torah and holiness. In this way is the Earth elevated on high and Heaven and Earth meet in proper unity, harmony and balance.

Heaven and Earth unite the great cycle of creation. Torah and work create a harmony that sustains the world and gives glory to the Jewish people. The Ba'al Shem Tov has taught that just as on Shabat one is forbidden to perform work, so on the weekdays, one is commanded to perform those works forbidden on Shabat. It is a mitzvah to work, a tikkun (repair) for the world, all the more so for one's character and discipline.

This is the secret of how sinning is overcome. One who does not think of a thing will not come to do a thing. When one is involved in fulfilling the needs of both Heaven and earth, one becomes so personally and emotionally fulfilled that there remains no empty room for dangerous thoughts to enter into one's mind.



In the presence of balance, there is no imbalance. Sin is caused by imbalance. When one studies Torah and applies what one has learned; when one works in one's profession, living Torah and applying its lessons therein, one creates balance, harmony, blessing and peace. In the presence of such stability, there will be no instability. Instability is what causes one to sin. Create balance and stability; this is the underlying message of Rabban Gamliel.

Many make the mistake and think that studying Torah is enough and that work is neither desired nor necessary. In our many sins, this idea is nothing more than one of the many deceptions brought upon us by the forces of evil. Many are those who are led to believe that by filling one's mind with Heavenly things is all one needs to do. This is very untrue.

It is said that some people can become so Heavenly minded that they become no earthly good. To avoid this unfortunate imbalance and waste are we taught that any Torah study without harmonizing work still exists in a state of imbalance and in the end will amount to nothing. Imbalance leads to sin, regardless if one is imbalanced towards the side of Heaven or the side of earth. Both are needed and both must be together; they are two halves of the same circle.

Only when we proclaim the unity of HaShem with our actions coupled with the intentions of our hearts can we create the reality of harmony and balance that in the end reveals the coming of Melekh HaMashiah.