



Ask The Rabbi...



December 12, 1993 Issue #3

This edition contains:

1. What is this list and how to submit to it.
2. How can people justify studying Torah all the time.

"Ask The Rabbi" is a newsletter that answers questions you've always had about Judaism or Jewish practice but never had a chance to ask. Selected questions from our readers will be chosen and answered by a certified Rabbi in our newsletter.

To submit your questions, please address them to: ohr@jer1.co.il
Set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" to speed entry and response.

Confused from Jerusalem asks:

Dear Rabbi,

I was told that according to Jewish law a person must work for a living. If so, how do those people who only study Torah all day justify their lifestyles?

Dear Confused,

At first glance it seems that what you were told is correct. Maimonides paints a grim picture for one who relies on charity to support full-time Torah study.

"Anyone who decides to study Torah and not work, making his living from charity, desecrates Hashem's name, disgraces the Torah ...and any Torah that is not accompanied by work will lead to it's own undoing and cause sin...."

However, in a different statement, Maimonides appears to contradict himself. He teaches the Tribe of Levi has a special dispensation from earning a living from their own labor, and he adds:

*"And not only the Tribe of Levi, but **any** person whose spirit moves him to separate himself and stand before Hashem, to serve Him in order to know Him...behold he has become sanctified as the Holy of Holies, and Hashem becomes his portion, his inheritance for ever. And He will provide his basic necessities for him in this world, as with the Kohanim and Levi'im..."*

The "Brisker Rav" resolves this apparent contradiction by suggesting that these are the two lifestyles that the Talmud teaches:

Rabbi Yishmael emphasizes the verse "And you shall gather your grain" that the study of Torah is to be accompanied by earning a livelihood. Rabbi Shimon bar

Yochai, however, contends that "when Israel does the Will of Hashem, others will do her work..." The Sage Abaye concludes that "many did like Rav Yishmael and succeeded; as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and did not succeed."

The Brisker Rav explains that Abaye is saying to choose your own path — but Rabbi Yishmael's is the path for the masses. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's approach "works" for only a few, determined individuals. The first statement of Maimonides is directed toward the masses. The average person's commitment will not stand up to the demand of full-time Torah. The second statement is relevant to the individual who is able to fulfill such a commitment.

Rabbi Moshe Isserlis (*Rama*) quotes Maimonides' first statement, that encourages earning a livelihood. He notes, however, that there are dissenting views, and that their opinion is the one that "all places in Israel" have adopted.

Rabbi Israel Meir Kagen (*Chofetz Chaim*) rules that even the Rambam would agree that nowadays one may learn full-time., since it is so difficult for someone to simultaneously devote himself to a livelihood and also master the Torah.

Sources:

- Maimonides, "Yad Hachazaka", Talmud Torah, 3:10.
- Ibid., Laws of Shemita and Yovel, 13:13.
- Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveichik (Brisker Rav), "Maran R.Y.Z. on the Torah", Parshat Chayei Sarah.
- Talmud, Tractate Brachot 35b.
- Shulchan Aruch, Laws of Talmud Torah, 246:21.
- Rabbi Israel Meir Kagen (Chofetz Chaim), "Mishna Brura", Laws of Brachot 231:1 (in the Biur Halacha).

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