



## TRADING IN TORAH FUTURES

Avos Perek 4 Mishna 10

*Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

A young and successful entrepreneur was recently telling me about the rollercoaster of events in the world of business. In this era of rapid communications things happen so swiftly that participants sometimes feel that the ocean of information can very well drown them. Decisions are made, fortunes are turned up and down within moments, one runs to stand still and each moment seems compacted with a myriad of dynamics. The ambitious enterpriser looked at me and sighed, "Thank Hashem there is Shabbos, but during the week I sometimes feel ground down and chewed up. I feel afflicted with a personal quirk: being a perfectionist and working with others sometimes drives me to distraction." I asked my young friend if we could get together the next day, I wanted to share some thoughts on the matter and learn more about the jungle of modern commerce. That afternoon I opened up my Perek and found the following Mishna just waiting for me.

"Rabbi Meir says, "limit your business activities and be occupied with the Torah instead....."

Now we all know that the Torah doesn't teach us to be separated from the business world; the fact is that in earlier times most of our Torah sages were men who worked either in a trade or some sort of enterprise. Yet here it seems we are being instructed to cut down on our business hours and open up a sefer instead. Obviously learning Torah in the midst of the work day is of huge benefit, but perhaps we can learn even more from this teaching.

The Torah Jew is meant to be attached to our teachings at all times, "when you sit in your home, while you walk on the way;" therefore, business should be part of your Torah. There is no room for compartmentalising our goals into the material and the spiritual. All must be part of our service to Hashem, all in accordance with the Torah's pathway. The Mishna is teaching us that we must minimize what we see as "just business" and actualise our Torah awareness. Everything is Torah for that is our true occupation.

The story is told of the Rebbe, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev who, on seeing a man running in the street, asked "Where are you running to?" "I have no time to talk, Rebbe, I am hurrying to make my livelihood." "How do you know that your success is in the direction

בס"ד



## Adass Aish Kodesh

Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

36 Bury Old Road

Prestwich – Manchester

M25 0FT



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you are running?” quipped the sage, “perhaps it is in the other direction and you are in fact running away from it.”

Living with Torah in our every business moment allows us to realise that everything is in Hashem’s hands and that we must live with this faith.

I can imagine that many who are reading these words will shrug with a condescending smile and think, “He is talking about others, because I know all this and live accordingly.” Well, I certainly hope so, because all the years learning Torah are meant to sensitise ourselves to just this point, that our “real” lives are meant to be Torah lives.

Rav Shlomo Freifeld Zt”l, pointed out that every morning before Shacharis we list some of the major mitzvos we are commanded to do, and we conclude, “Vetalmud Torah kenegeg kulam, and the study of Torah is comparable to all the mitzvos”. You take a scale and put all the mitzvos on one side and the mitzvah of learning Torah on the other side, and there is a balance. The two sides are equal. He asks: what exactly does this mean? There are so many important mitzvos in the Torah. Why should the mitzvah of learning Torah be equal to all of them combined?

The Gemoro states in many places: “This world is comparable to darkness.”

We all know that this mortal coil can be a place of gloom, but that can mean different things at different times. Rav Shlomo explains that a dark night illuminated by the moon is too dark for reading. You can, however, see something... the outlines of a house, a tree, the road. But sometimes a thick blanket of black clouds produces darkness so dense that the sky is obscured and you see nothing. You can barely walk two steps without stumbling and falling.

How dense are our times? How far has the darkness covered our golus?

The world at large has descended into such dimness that it has lost all sense of the value of a human being. The present chaos of demonstrations aimed at blaming the Jewish People for everything that is wrong in the world is a clear sign that this moral darkness has obscured the hearts and minds of those who refuse to see. Our treasured martyrs don’t even get mentioned as strident demonstrators scream aloud words not heard in public since the nazi holocaust. Thousands of unborn children are destroyed before they have drawn a breath and society shrugs its collective shoulders. The emptiness that resides within so many is the darkest place of all, and many just stumble about sleepwalking through their allotted time on earth. The present chaos of demonstrations aimed at blaming the Jewish People for everything that is wrong in the world is a clear sign that the moral darkness has obscured the hearts and minds of those who refuse to see.

Illumination can be found but it takes some seeking. Torah is our light; it creates enlightenment in the hearts of those who live its holiness. We have lived through thousands of years of various levels of darkness and although small in number we have basked in Hashem’s light. All around us was anarchy and yet Yidden have learnt Abaya and Rava no matter what. The Torah gave hope whilst all else wallowed in despair.

My friend, the trader, seeks to integrate Torah into his life, and in time that will be his point of perfection. Taking the Torah’s lessons and actualising them in the workplace is truly illuminating. We should make no mistake: such integration does not come easily. This acknowledgment is truly equal to all the mitzvos because it is the starting point of our existence. When we truly realise this, then the business day becomes a Torah experience well worthy of a heritage built on its light

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