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**The Shmuz onParshas Shoftim**

**“If I Were a Rich Man”**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheShmuz.com**



“*Place upon yourself a king…He shall not greatly increase silver and gold for himself.*” — Devarim 17:16-20

The Torah commands us to appoint a king to rule over the Jewish people. However, there are various warnings given to the king. He should not acquire too many horses, he should not take too many wives, and he should not amass too much gold and silver.

The Daas Zakainim explains that each of these excesses is singled out to protect the king from a particular danger. The danger of amassing too much wealth is that it leads to arrogance.

**We are obligated to treat a king with great respect**

This Daas Zakainim is difficult to understand because, as the Rambam explains, we are obligated to treat a king with great honor; it is vital for his effectiveness as a ruler. As a result, any individual, even the greatest talmid chacham or Navi, who walks into the chambers of a king must bow down full face to the ground.

No person is allowed to sit down in his presence. Additionally, the king himself must guard his kavod. He isn’t allowed to stand up for any man in public. He isn’t allowed to use titles of honor for anyone else. If he commands a person to leave the room and that man refuses, the king has the right to have him killed.

At the same time, a king is expected to remain humble. The Torah isn’t afraid that the great honor accorded to him will bring him to arrogance. He is capable of maintaining his sense of balance by understanding that honor isn’t due to **him**, but rather his position. He is still a mortal human. As a servant of HASHEM, he plays his role as everyone else does.

**Why is money more dangerous than honor and power?**

The question then becomes obvious. If the king is capable of maintaining his humility despite the extraordinary honor accorded to him, why is the Torah so fearful that he will become arrogant if he amasses wealth? It’s as if the Torah is saying, “Honor he can handle, but wealth? Impossible!”

Why would it be so difficult for him not to be conceited if he acquired wealth? The answer to this question is based on a deeper understanding of the human personality.

**The antidote to honor**

Honor is a difficult life test. When a person is given status and accord, it is natural for him to feel different, apart and above the rest of the human race. Power, too, is a grave test. When a person feels that he can control the destiny of other people, he runs the risk of feeling self-important, significant, and mighty. However, these are situations that a person can deal with.

The antidote to honor is to remember **where I came from** and **where I am going**. I must understand that today I am being given great honor, but it will pass quickly. Very quickly. Today they sing my praises; tomorrow they will forget my name. That is the way of the world.

Power is also something that a person can learn to deal with. As I stand here now, I control the destiny of others. But do I? Do I really have power? I can’t even control whether I will be alive tomorrow or not. When I lay my head on the pillow this evening, it is not in my control to will myself alive tomorrow. When my time is up, it’ll be over, and there is nothing that I can do to change that. The **big, powerful, mighty me** can’t even control whether I exist or not.

In that sense, honor and power are potentially dangerous, but a person can be humble despite them.

**The danger of Wealth**

Great wealth is different. Wealth brings a person to a much more dangerous sense of himself — a sense of independence. “I am rich! I don’t need anyone! I don’t need my wife. I don’t need my children. I don’t even need HASHEM! I can buy and sell the whole world!”

This seems to be the answer to the Daas Zakainim. Because this sense of independence is almost a natural outgrowth of wealth, the Torah warns a king of Israel not amass too much of it. He may be a great man, and he might be able to keep his sense of balance despite many temptations, but wealth will almost certainly lead to arrogance, and it is something that even a man as great as a king in Israel will not be able to resist.

**In our world**

This concept has great relevance to us. Whether we are wealthy as compared to others or not, the reality is that we enjoy great bracha living in the 21st century. Today, we all enjoy material possessions, luxuries, and opportunities that were unheard of in previous generations.

One of the great dangers of living in these times is the sense of independence. “I am young, strong, and healthy. I can forge my own way. I don’t need anyone; I can make it on my own. I am independent.”

While on one level, this sense is central to being an effective human being, it is also fraught with danger. A person must remain clear-headed in his understanding of Who is really in charge here. I am not the Master of the universe, nor even the master of my destiny. I am dependent. I depend on my Creator for my daily bread, my health, my success, and my existence. With this understanding, a man can enjoy great bracha and still remain humble.

When a person is humble, the rest of his character traits naturally fall into place. But when a person is arrogant, the rest of his middos are out of balance as well. An arrogant person becomes angry easily. A humble man doesn’t. An arrogant individual doesn’t feel the pain of others, but a humble man does. The pivot point of all good middos is humility.

Just as humility is the center of a person’s character development, so too is it the cornerstone of his avodas HASHEM. The Chovos Ha’Levovos explains that just as a master needs a servant, a servant needs a master. One cannot exist without the other. Any sense of arrogance is a denial of my dependence upon HASHEM. It revokes my status of a servant of my Master.

This sense of dependence upon my Creator brings a person balance and internal happiness because he is in synch with his himself. He doesn’t need to self-inflate and create illusions about his worth. Ultimately, it leads a person to success in this world and the World to Come.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**The Spiritual Connection Between The Judge and the Judged**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



Our Torah portion, Shoftim, opens with the command, "Judges and officers you shall place at all your gates."

The wording is reminiscent of, but differs from, the one that we say three times daily in the silent Amida prayer, taken from the prophet of Redemption, Isaiah, "Return your judges as of old and your advisors as in the beginning."

We can well understand why the word "officers" is not part of the promise of the Redemption, for officers enforce the law and will therefore not be necessary at a time when the very existence of evil will be banished from the earth.

Here we see the difference between the times of exile and the times of Redemption.

In our portion, the Torah links the judges to officers indicating that their rulership is by decree and dependent on enforcement.

In the Redemption, soon to come, the judges will be seen more as advisors since the people will be convinced more of the personal benefit that is derived from compliance.

This feeling develops the closeness between judge and judged which is implied in the wording of Isaiah, "your judges" in the second person.

The way this concept is worded in the Torah is associated with the nature of the Torah itself, it being a direct revelation of the will and wisdom of the Almighty, a decree from Above, as it were.

On the other hand the words of the Prophets, though also emanating from G-d, are more clearly associated with the human mind which transmits them and thus are more similar to the judge as advisor mentioned before.

Indeed part of the role assumed by the prophets of each generation has been to care for the spiritual and even material needs of the people.

Our current portion is also the source of Maimonides ruling that the belief in human prophets is a fundamental of Judaism.

In his epistle to Yemen, Maimonides describes "Prophecy returns to Israel" as a preparation to the Redemption particularly in the personage of Moshiach who is to be "close in prophecy to Moshe."

It is therefore essential to convey to the world that there are human beings in our times who have been endowed with prophecy, that we have a positive commandment to obey them once established as such.

Particularly in the major prophecy that all required conditions for the coming of Moshiach have been met and that we should prepare to greet the Redemption which is immediately to unfold.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Shoftim 5754/1994 edition of L’Chaim Weekly (Issue #275), a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**The Sin of Smoking**



**QUESTION:** Is it against the Torah to start smoking?

**ANSWER:** The Alter of Slabodka was once asked, what’s the first mitzvah of the Torah? So he said - he said it in *litvish*: *Nebuk dur nisht* – “Don’t be a fool.” That’s the first commandment of the Torah – don’t be a fool.  Anybody who’s a fool is a *choiteh.*

If a person starts fooling around with drugs, he’s a sinner – a very big *choteih.* So you'll say what did he do wrong? Where does it say that drugs are *ossur?* It’s a glatt kosher drug; he’s not eating treif. What of it?

What of it?! It’s a glatt kosher funeral. A man jumps off a roof and he says it’s glatt kosher to jump off a roof. It’s as *ossur* as could be.  ושמרתם את נפשותיכם – Hashem says, “I’m lending you your body.  It’s not your body – I’m lending it.” And a *sho’el* is *chayav b’onsim*.  If you borrow something you have to pay for whatever goes wrong. Let’s say if I lend you a watch, so now you have to guard my watch.  You can’t throw it around. “I’ll lend you the body,” says Hashem, “so you have to guard it.”

Now, here’s a person who start smoking; he takes a pack. On the package it says, if you start smoking, you should know it can be dangerous for your lungs, emphysema, cancer and so on.  And this *meshuganer* lights a cigarette.  So Hashem says “Look, it’s a *mitzvah* to have some common sense. You don’t have common sense – therefore you’re a very great *choiteh.*”  And therefore anybody who smokes is a very great *choiteh.*

*Reprinted from the August 26, 2019 email of Toras Avigdor, based on Tape #E-213.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parashat Shoftim**

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The reading of this week deals with a basic human temptation and almost universal failing – corruption. Though the Torah speaks of actual physical and financial graft it certainly implies a broader message to not only to those in the judiciary but to others in positions of power.

The Torah recognizes that human beings, by their very nature, have biases and prejudices. Some of these seem to be almost inborn while others are acquired because of life experiences, educational instruction and societal norms.

Students of human nature have long debated which traits are inborn, such as hatreds and prejudices, and which are learned and acquired in life. As you can imagine, there is no consensus on this issue and on many other questions regarding human behavior.

It is obvious that the Torah recognizes the presence of prejudice and corruption, both willingly and unknowingly within all of us. Even the greatest of us, who possess G-dly wisdom and holiness in behavior and speech, is also subject to being corrupted. Wisdom can be perverted, and speech can be twisted because of our innate susceptibility to corruption.

We are not provided with any magic method to avoid this problem. We only know that it exists and that it is universal and omnipresent. As such, perhaps simply being aware of its existence eventually leads human beings individually and human society generally to a willingness to deal with the matter and to correct it to the extent that human beings are able.

We are all aware that that when it comes to physical health and mental well-being, the first act is to identify and be aware of the problem that is involved. The same thing is true in all human emotional and spiritual difficulties. People tend to believe that, somehow, they are immune to corruption if they do not actually take money offered to influence their opinions and judgments.

However, that is a very simplistic view of corruption. Since people feel that they are balanced and fair in their opinions and viewpoints, this is exactly what leads to prejudices, intolerance of others and a closed mind when it comes to deciding on important issues and personal matters.

One of the reasons the Talmud insisted that at least three people be present to judge in a Jewish court of law is that when you have three people you will automatically hear different points of view and a fairer result will emerge.

There are exceptional cases where even one judge – and that judge must be a true expert on the law and facts involved – will suffice, but the practice in Jewish courts  throughout the ages has been to have more than one judge – at least three – involved in arriving at judicial decisions.

The Torah demanded that we pursue justice and fairness at all costs. It does not guarantee that we will always be able to achieve that goal, but it does demand that we constantly pursue it.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Thoughts that Count**

**For Parashat Shoftim**

*And this is the case of the slayer...whoever unwittingly kills his neighbor...he shall flee to one of those cities, and live* (Deut. 19:4,5)

The Torah designates six cities of refuge to which a person who has inadvertently killed someone can flee and atone for his deed. When Moshiach comes and the borders of Israel are expanded to include the territory of the Kini, Kenizi and Kadmoni, three more cities of refuge will be established.

But why will additional cities be necessary in the Messianic Era? If peace will reign supreme, and violence between men will disappear from the face of the earth, what purpose will these cities of refuge serve?

Although no new acts of violence will occur, the cities of refuge will allow those Jews who accidentally killed someone throughout the centuries of exile to seek atonement and be worthy of the Messianic Era. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rosh Chodesh Elul 5746) Reprinted from the Parashat Shoftim 5754/1994 edition of L’Chaim Weekly*

**Decision and Execution**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**

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In the opening verse of Parashat Shofetim, Moshe exhorts Benei Yisrael to appoint "Shofetim Ve'shoterim" – judges and enforcers – in every town and city. Wherever there is a Jewish community, its members must establish and maintain a Bet Din to decide matters of Jewish law, and hire enforcers to ensure compliance with those laws.

The Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger, Poland, 1847-1905) made an insightful and relevant observation concerning the different roles served by the Shofetim – judges – and the Shoterim – enforcers.

The judges are responsible for determining the law. They must analyze, assess, deliberate and consider all angles of the issue at hand, and then render a final decision.

The Shoterim, by contrast, are not appointed to decide the law; their job is merely to enforce it. Regardless of their opinion regarding the judges' conclusions, they are assigned the task of executing those conclusions by ensuring that the constituents comply with the established law.

Throughout a person's life, he must play the roles of both Shofet and Shoter, judge and enforcer. Each individual must reach decisions as to what is right and wrong, what he needs to do and what he must refrain from doing. Then, once the conclusion has been reached, a person faces the task of executing and implementing the decision.

Unfortunately, many of us have a tendency to fulfill our role as Shofet without carrying out the task of Shoter; we reach the proper decisions, but we fail to implement them.

So often people hear a Rabbi speak about a certain topic and acknowledge that what he says is true, that the changes he demands are indeed warranted. But then, when the time comes to implement those changes in their lives, they reconsider and begin questioning and doubting. Rather than doing their job of Shoter, to execute the proper decision, they act as a Shofet to avoid making the necessary changes in their lives.

Acknowledging what is right and what is wrong is only half the job of an observant Jew. The second half, which is generally the more difficult stage, is to make the effort and sacrifices necessary to implement our decisions, to have the courage and conviction to change direction and lifestyle for the sake of actualizing our full spiritual potential.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of the Edmund J. Safra Synagogue in Brooklyn, NY.*

**More Thoughts on the Parashat**

*For these nations...hearken to soothsayers and to diviners. But as for you, the L-rd your G-d has not permitted you to do so* (Deut. 18: 14)

Heavenly bodies and constellations have no power over the Jew; whatever is foretold by stargazers will be nullified, for "Israel is not under the influence of the stars." *(Sforno)*

*You shall appoint judges... in all your gates*. (Deut. 16:18)

In the homiletic explanation of this passage, "your gates" refers to our sensory orifices (our eyes, ears, nose and mouth) which are the gates between the person and all that surrounds him. You should "appoint judges" on "all your gates," that all one's senses should be led by the "judges" of his soul, the intellect of the G-dly soul with which he learns Torah. The Torah should control the functioning of one's sensory powers. *(Sichot Kodesh, parshat Shoftim, 5751)*

*Neither shall you set up for yourself any pillar (matzeiva), which the L-rd your G-d hates* (Deut. 16:22)

The word "matzeiva" comes from the Hebrew root meaning constant, steady and permanent. Do not look at this world as an end unto itself, the Torah counsels. Regard it merely as a passageway to be navigated and a preparation for the World to Come. *(Kedushat Levi)*

*Reprinted from the Parashat Shoftim 5754/1994 edition of L’Chaim Weekly*

**18 Ways to More**

**Effective Prayer (Part 5)**

**By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**



We will continue now our crash course on skillful prayer. We are taught in the third perek of Masechtas Kallah Rabosi, “Kol hamevakeish shalom, ein tefiloso chozeres reikom – Whoever pursues peace, his prayer is never turned back empty.” In other words, his prayers are always answered. The baraisa then backs it up with a gematria. The gematria of shalom, peace, is 376. It is the same numerical value as shavei’a, to cry out, which is also 376.

This is to bolster the fact that a peace-loving person has great potency in their petition. As the High Holidays approach, many shuls look for someone to daven from the omud to represent them on Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgement and on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.

It is obvious that we want a powerful ambassador to present our community’s case at this pivotal time of the year. This is why we are taught that we look for someone who is m’urov im habrios, one who blends well with all people, because the best ambassador that we can find is someone who has the trait of shalom, who gets along with all people.

So, if we want to strengthen the potency of our supplications, we must realize that by increasing our tolerance and sculpting a pleasant demeanor to all people, we are greatly enhancing our tefilah powers.

Effective Way Number Six: In the beginning of Parshas V’eschanan, the Medrash reveals to us that there are ten terms for prayer. Then, the Medrash reveals that the highest level is V’eschanan.

The word v’eschanan shares the root word of chinum, for free. Thus, the most powerful way to approach Hashem is to ask Him to give us a freebie, although we don’t deserve it.

The posuk says, “Tefilah l’ani ki yatof – The prayer of the poor when he feels faint,” and as the Mishna Berurah tells us, we should pray like a beggar who goes around to people’s doors. Indeed, in Selichos we say, “K,dalim u’churoshim dafaknu d,losecha – Like the needy and the poor, we bang on Your doors.”

Rav Schwadron, zt”l, zy”a, wonders, usually a poor man doesn’t bang. He knocks respectfully and timidly. However, explains Rav Schwadron, “If the poor man hasn’t eaten in three day, he bangs.”

Our best prayer is when we portray to Hashem that we desperately need him. The Gemora says, “Hayored lifnei hateiva – They [the shliach tzibor] went down to daven from the omud. Indeed, in Rav Heinneman’s shul in Baltimore, the chazzan goes down a step before standing by the omud.

This is in sync with a posuk in Tehillim, “Shir hama’alos, mimamakim karosicha Kah – A Song of Ascents, from the depths I called You.” This is to express that we are not asking Hashem because we feel we deserve it but we are praying to Him as our Father in Heaven to give us a matnas chinam, a free gift. Like we say in the final stanza of Avinu Malkeinu, “Avinu Malkeinu, chaneinu v’aneinu ki ein bonu ma’asim, aseh imonu tzedakah v’chesed v’hoshi’einu – Our Father, our King, do for us for free, and answer us because we don’t have deeds, perform for us charity and kindness and grant us salvation.”

The smart davener knows that Hashem appreciates it when we approach Him with humility rather than with an attitude that it is coming to me and I surely deserve it. In the merit of learning more about tefilah, may Hashem answ

*Reprinted from the Parshas Re’eh 5779 email of the Jewish VUES.*

**Emunah at Work: Maintaining Spiritual Equilibrium in the Workplace**

**By Janet Sunness**

[](https://jewishaction.com/content/uploads/2019/06/woman-working-clouds-book-phone-sky.png)

With the rise of the “Me Too” movement, there’s been much coverage in the secular press about sexual harassment in the workplace. According to a 2018 online survey, more than 80 percent of American women in the workforce1 have experienced some form of sexual harassment. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2015, through the EEOC’s administrative enforcement prelitigation process employers have paid out almost $700 million to employees claiming sexual harassment before the cases even went to court.2

Since sexual harassment is so widespread, it poses a significant challenge for women in the workplace, including, of course, Orthodox women. (Men can be challenged in this area too but statistically, women are far more at risk.)

While certain mitzvot may feel like a challenge to observe in the workplace, in many ways they protect us and help us maintain appropriate boundaries at work. Tzeniut, the laws of modesty in dress and behavior, distinguishes us. Yichud (the prohibition against being alone with members of the opposite sex) protects us from what could turn into difficult situations.

But not all spiritual challenges in the workplace are overt. In fact, there are perhaps dozens of situations that take place on a daily basis in the workplace that can compromise one’s spiritual equilibrium: the lashon hara at the water cooler, petty stealing (i.e., taking paper or pens from work to use at home or for your own purposes, et cetera) and other integrity issues. While there’s an opportunity to make a tremendous kiddush Hashem in the workplace, there are real challenges that test one’s religious identity and commitment.

Many years ago, Lady Amalie Jakobovits, a”h, wife of the late Chief Rabbi of England Lord Immanuel Jakobovits and mother of Dr. Yoel Jakobovits, a prominent physician in Baltimore, mentioned that she had davened every day when her son Yoel was in medical school that he overcome the spiritual hurdles.

**We have to view our lives not as an either-or situation but as multi-dimensional, which includes work, family, and our spiritual lives. Our task while working at our jobs is to be simultaneously dedicated to God and to our families.**

There is, however, a more subtle challenge facing the religious personality in the workplace that few recognize: the all-consuming nature of many professions often stifles one’s religious development. How does one retain one’s spiritual focus and even bring kedushah, a sense of sanctity, to one’s role at work?

In a famous responsum, Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner once guided a young man who was preparing to leave yeshivah and go out into the workforce. The young man asked how he should deal with the fact that he would now be leading a double life.

Rabbi Hutner responded that working and being a Torah Jew should not be considered as leading a double life, but should be viewed as leading a broad life, analogous to two different rooms in the same house. One must take his spiritual life with him when he enters the workplace.

In order to achieve this, it is, of course, important to bear in mind what not to do in the workplace:

**As mentioned above, do not legitimize petty stealing**. Do not take paper or pens from work for personal use. Don’t spend time on private phone calls (unless it’s your lunch hour).

**Don’t compromise your standards**. Recently, in an effort to boost camaraderie, a book club was started at work. The first book to be read was authored by one of the administrators’ friends, and free copies were to be provided for all participants. I signed up.

When I received the book, I realized that there was hardly a single page I felt comfortable reading. I returned the book and explained that I could not read it. My colleagues understood and respected my decision.

**Do not speak or listen to lashon hara**.  If you can’t stop the gossip or redirect the conversation, just walk away. This is a great means of protection for yourself as well; have no doubt that anything you say will be repeated, and by not indulging in gossip you will protect yourself from being a target one day. On the flip side, below are suggestions of what one can do.

**One of the most important ways to lead a life of kedushah even when immersed in secular pursuits is by davening every day**. Focusing on the berachot you recite during the day, after eating or when saying Asher Yatzar, is a concrete way of proclaiming to yourself that your spiritual self is with you in the office as well.

**Being mindful while saying Birchot HaTorah is also very relevant**. The blessings we recite in the morning on learning Torah essentially instructs us to busy ourselves throughout the day with words and concepts of Torah—not to leave it at home when we go to work. Learning Torah at some point during the day is very helpful in retaining spirituality in the workplace. With the plethora of online Torah materials available (including shiurim on OUTorah.org!), one can easily make time for Torah during a break or lunch hour.

**Play fair**. When I was doing a shomer Shabbat internship, we were working just as hard as the other non-Sabbath-observant interns, but their schedule was constrained to accommodate us.  For example, they would have to work every Friday and Shabbat, every yom tov, et cetera, while we did not.

Most interns in the shomer Shabbat program expressed their gratitude, but there was one intern who took advantage of the system, and this caused a great deal of ill will among the interns who were working on the regular schedule.

**Sometimes your attitude alone can make a kiddush Hashem among your patients or colleagues**. In my role as an ophthalmologist and low-vision specialist, I often care for people with very poor vision, for whom there is currently no treatment.

I try to give them a dose of optimism and I often mention Hashem (i.e., thank G-d you don’t have that).​There are also circumstances in which I do specialized testing to determine if a patient has severe progressive retinal degeneration. I often daven for the patient before I administer the test, when the outcome of the test is not yet known.

**Judging people favorably, as Pirkei Avot advises, is critical in the workplace**. It’s easy to become angry and impatient when you have obligations and deadlines, but it is worth stepping back and viewing your coworkers or employees in a good light.  For example, as a physician it is very important for me to get the referring doctor’s notes before I see a patient.

There are times when the notes are not in place. It would be easy for me to lose my temper and criticize my secretary whose job it is to obtain the notes. I try not to. Oftentimes, when I look into the particular situation, I discover that the secretary has called the referring doctor’s office several times to get the notes in question and is as anxious as I am to have it in place.

**Know that the work is not yours to complete**. I gave birth to my second child during my ophthalmology residency. It was a very stressful time. I was trying to nurse my newborn baby while maintaining my on-call schedule at a hospital that was forty-five minutes away from my home. When I discussed with someone how stressed I felt, he advised, “Lo alecha hamelachah ligmor, you are not required to complete the task.”

There are two mishnayot from Rabbi Tarfon that appear at the end of the second chapter of Pirkei Avot. The first, very well-known mishnah is: “Hayom katzar vehamelachah merubah, the day is short and the work is abundant . . .” One should live with the sense that there is a vast sea of Torah for us to acquire. This should motivate us to work hard. But one might argue that since we will never be able to accomplish everything, why even try? The mishnah that follows continues: “He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say, ‘Lo alecha hamelachah ligmor, it is not up to you to complete the task, but you are not free to desist from it.’”

**Sometimes your attitude alone can make a kiddush Hashem among your patients or colleagues.**

The second mishnah is regarded as the necessary response to the first. The first mishnah is supposed to stir us to action but can also lead to a sense of frustration and futility. The work to accomplish is greater than a man could do even if he lived a thousand years. So why should one even start to work, knowing that he cannot finish? In the second mishnah, Rabbi Tarfon responds to this paradox and expresses profound ideas that have great implications for our own lives today.

We are not obligated to complete the work. We are merely obligated to engage. The Chofetz Chaim emphasizes that not only are we not obligated to complete the work, but it is not even in our hands to accomplish. We must make the effort but achievement and success are up to G-d.

**Limit the stress**. In one of his books, Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells of a young student, new to the yeshivah, who was the chazzan one day and raced through the davening. When he finished, the rosh yeshivah took him aside and said, “You should know that ‘v’nastem v’ein rodef etchem’ is a kelalah (curse).”

The Tochachah (rebuke) in the Torah includes “and you will flee with no one pursuing you” as a curse. In everyday life, too, we must try not to pressure ourselves beyond what is good or healthy for each of us individually. Emotional equilibrium requires a sense of tranquility, at least to the degree this can be attained.

I have found in my working life that if I feel satisfied and not overly stressed, things fall into place at work and at home. But if I get too stressed or too frustrated at work, it carries over to the home environment and things more easily fall apart. It must be a priority in life to keep ourselves healthy and reduce stress to the extent possible.

**Finally, keep in mind that your goals in life may be different from those of your coworkers**. I applied for my residency in ophthalmology in 1977, a different era. It was right after I had my first child. I had done very well in medical school and in my elective rotation in ophthalmology, and I had every expectation that I would be accepted into the school’s residency program. But I was not.

Two other members of my class were accepted, and their credentials were not as good as mine. I called up the chairman of the Ophthalmology Department and asked him why I was not accepted.

He explained, “We want every resident to become a dedicated ophthalmologist, and in your case we weren’t sure that family considerations wouldn’t intervene.” Of course, today no one would be allowed to say this. Nevertheless, we have to view our lives not as an either-or situation but as multi-dimensional, which includes work, family, and our spiritual lives. We may have to stagger things, reduce our workload in certain phases of our lives and assume more as we are able to. Our task while working at our jobs is to be simultaneously dedicated to G-d and to our families.

**Notes**

1. [https://www.npr.org/sections/.thetwo-way/2018/02/21/587671849/a-new-survey-finds-eighty-percent-of-women-have-experienced-sexual-harassment](https://www.npr.org/sections/.thetwo-way/2018/02/21/587671849/a-new-survey-finds-eighty-percent-of-women-have-experienced-sexual-harassment.)

2. <https://mnnow.org/the-economic-costs-of-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/>

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