

How Does a Working Man Fulfill His Obligation to Learn Torah?

Rav Chaim Weg

Question: Most people spend a good portion of their day working at a job. How can someone like that fulfill the dictum of "*v'higisa bo yomam v'layla*"?

Answer: The words "*v'higisa bo yomam v'layla*" mean two things on a practical level.

First of all, whenever a person has the time, he is supposed to learn Torah at that time.

What does it mean to "have time"? That is a delicate question that needs to be answered with intellectual integrity from a Torah perspective. People have obligations to their family, to their health, and to their job, which take up much of their time. Additionally, it is sometimes necessary to spend time in relaxation because this helps a person learn and work better, as well as helping him be a better husband and father, etc. Rav Yisroel Salanter adds that one may need to relax in order to have greater clarity and depth in his learning and to use his full mental abilities when studying Torah.

Accordingly, a person needs to be very honest with himself when he determines how much time he needs to spend on other things. Any time that does not need to be dedicated to *parnassah*, family, health, and necessary relaxation should be spent learning Torah.

Secondly, Chazal say that one should make his Torah "*keva*" (his primary pursuit) and his work should be "*arai*" (secondary). The Mishnah Berurah explains this to mean that one should work to make a living according to accepted societal norms, but one should not spend extra time working in order to upgrade his lifestyle or to get rich. Again, one has to be honest with himself to determine how much it is necessary for him to work. In some instances, it is necessary to work longer hours to grow one's business so that it doesn't collapse.

Every society has its own social norms regarding what is considered basic and what is considered a luxury. The Chovos Halevavos tells us that a person only should spend enough time working to take care of his basic needs and if Hashem wants to make him wealthy, He will grant him success even if he only works that amount of time. In any case, a person's focus has to be to get back to learning so that his Torah remains his primary concern and his work is secondary and is only done to support his family according to the norms of his society.