

Pirkei Avot 1:10

Translation

Shemayah and Avtalyon received the Torah from them. Shemayah said: Love work; hate positions of authority; and do not seek intimacy with the powers-that-be.

Maimonides

Powers-That-Be. This refers to the ruling authority. These three rules contain improvement of faith and of mundane affairs. [Love work,] for in the absence of work he will be placed in difficult circumstances and he will rob and commit lewdness. Hate

positions of authority means that] in seeking office and mastery he will experience worldly trials and tribulations. Since people will be jealous of him and dispute him, he will

impair his faith, as they said: When a man is appointed leader of a community below, he becomes wicked toward Heaven. Thus, knowing the ruler in former times and being near to him made it very improbable to be delivered from it (i.e., moral corruption) in this world. It impairs his faith inasmuch as he would not be concerned with anything save that which will draw him near to him. You are aware of the incident of Doeg—even though the ruler to whom he was near was the anointed of the Lord, a prophet, and the elect of the Lord, may He be blessed.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin

(Translation: Chanoch Levi in *Ruach Chaim*)

Love work It is human nature that even if a person has an enjoyable job with a comfortable salary, he still aspires to be a community leader. The fact is that it is much

better to be a follower. Greater things are said about someone who earns his own living than are said about someone with reverence of Heaven (*Berachot 8a*). This means that it is better to earn a living by working than to earn it through one's reverence of Heaven, i.e., acting as a spiritual leader, or head of a community. Leaders are highly susceptible to the sin of arrogance and are responsible for the actions of their followers. If the followers sin, the leaders will also be punished. Undoubtedly, there are times when a person must assume the mantle of leadership, but he should always love work and despise leadership; he should realize that it

is preferable to be a follower, not a leader. We can also understand *Love work* as a reference to the work of the rabbinate. Love the intense study and deep analysis which is needed

to arrive at the true halachah. We find that the Sages would recite verses that deal with man's transience when they were honored by the masses (*Sanhedrin 7b*). So, too, despise the honor and trappings which accompany a rabbinical position.

Reuven Hammer (Or Chadash)

Hate positions of authority These are positions of power or lordship where someone has to make decisions about people's lives, careers, and so on. One should hate self-exaltation, the desire to have power or to be able to run things. This is the exact opposite of "love work." Whom is Sh'mayah addressing? Surely he is not speaking to the man in the street, a person who is already working from morning until night. That would be a mockery. Instead, he is addressing the members of the upper classes, who are judges, teachers, and so on. The members of an elite society are told not to ignore an entire segment of society – the ordinary person on the street – without whom they could not exist.

שְׂמַעְיָה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם.
שְׂמַעְיָה אָמַר, אֲהוּב אֶת
הַמְּלָאכָה, וְשִׂנְאָ אֶת הַרְבֵּנוּת,
וְאֵל תִּתְנַדַּע לְרֵשׁוֹת: