

Pirkei Avot 2-2

Translation:

Rabbi Gamliel, son of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, The study of Torah is commendable when combined with a gainful occupation, for when a person toils in both, sin is driven out of mind. Study alone, without an occupation, leads to idleness and ultimately to sin. All who serve on behalf of the community should do so for heaven's sake. Their work will prosper because the inherited merit of our ancestors endures forever. God will abundantly reward them as though they had achieved it all through their own efforts.

Maimonides

Here, through the term "derech erez - worldly occupation," he intended to say, being engaged in earning a livelihood. (The meaning of) his statement, . . . and leads to sin, is as we explained in another place, (as) they said: He ends by robbing from mankind. When he said, *And you I consider worthy of great recompense as though you had practiced*, it is (to be understood as) the word of the Lord to those who toil with the community. For at times, while they are engaged in the needs of the community they will be precluded from practicing a precept. He said that the Lord, may He be blessed, will consider them worthy of recompense as though they had practiced that precept even though they did not practice it, since they were engaged with the community for the sake of Heaven.

Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld

This appears to be a dispute among the Sages. The Talmud (Berachos 35b) records a disagreement between R. Yishmael and R. Shimon ben (son of) Yochai regarding the ideal way of life. R. Yishmael saw the many verses in the Torah promising bountiful crops -- such as, "I will give the rain for your land in its time... and you will gather your grain, wine and oil" (Deuteronomy 11:14) -- as a Divine sanction that we till the land and reap its riches -- if we are worthy to merit such bounty. R. Shimon, however, refused to accept this: "If one plows, plants, reaps, threshes, and winnows, what will happen to the Torah?" He concludes that one must dedicate himself fully to Torah study, and let G-d worry about his

sustenance. If G-d wants us to study, surely He will be able to take care of the details. The Talmud does not settle the dispute, but does add the following words of caution: "Many tried like R. Shimon and were not successful." Likewise Maimonides ... writes ... discussing the unique mission of the Tribe of Levi, which was supported by tithes in Ancient Israel. Levi was separated to serve G-d and to teach His upright ways and just laws to the public. Therefore, its members were separated from the ways of the world, not serving in the army nor receiving an inheritance [in the Land of Israel], nor laboring for their own profit. They are the

soldiers of G-d... and He provides for them, as it says, "I am your possession and inheritance" (Numbers 18:20). Maimonides then concludes: Not only does this apply to the Tribe of Levi but to any person whose spirit compels him and who understands on his own to separate himself to serve and to know G-d, and who removes from himself the "yoke of many complexities" that most people willingly accept. He too will receive in this world enough to satisfy himself -- just as G-d provides for the Priests and Levites. For he will be sanctified as holy of holy, and the L-rd will be his lot and inheritance forever and ever.

רָבִן גַּמְלִיאֵל בְּנוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי
יְהוּדָה הַנָּשִׂיא אָמַר, יָפָה
תְּלִמּוּד תּוֹרָה עִם דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ,
שֶׁיִגְיַעַת שְׁנֵיהֶם מִשִּׁבְחַת עוֹן.
וְכָל תּוֹרָה שֶׁאֵין עִמָּה מְלָאכָה,
סוֹפָה בְּטִלָּה וְגוֹרְרַת עוֹן. וְכָל
הָעֹמְלִים עִם הַצְּבוּר, יִהְיוּ
עֹמְלִים עִמָּהֶם לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,
שֶׁזִּכּוֹת אַבּוֹתָם מְסִיעֵתָן
וְצִדְקָתָם עוֹמְדַת לְעַד. וְאַתֶּם,
מֵעַלְּהָ אָנִי עֲלֵיכֶם שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה
כְּאֵלוֹ עֲשִׂיתֶם