



## **How to Make Work Meaningful for Ourselves: Exploring the Value of Work in Biblical and Rabbinic Sources**

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Dr. Diamond is the author of a chapter on the rabbinic period in the Schocken Guide to Jewish Books, and entries in the Reader's Guide to Judaism and The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception. He is the author of *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003). The book provides a thorough reassessment of the role that asceticism plays in rabbinic Judaism, suggesting that asceticism is more pervasive than is generally thought. Dr. Diamond has written on prayer, asceticism, and issues of environmental law and ethics. He is currently editing a commentary on Yerushalmi Pesahim written by the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, as well as a book on prayer. The prayer volume will address the problem of cognitive dissonance for the contemporary worshipper and will offer readings of traditional liturgy that use midrashic methodology to find meaning and relevance in these prayers for the modern Jew. Dr. Diamond has taught in a variety of settings, including Stern College, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the 92nd Street Y, and several Ramah camps. Dr. Diamond was ordained at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and received his doctorate in Talmud from JTS.

1. Genesis 2:15

<p>The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.</p>	<p>וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:</p>
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2. Genesis 3:17-19

<p>To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ Cursed be the ground because of you; By toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life:  Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field;  By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground— For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”</p>	<p>וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ וַתֹּאכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אַרְוֶה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרְךָ בְּעִצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:  וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תַּצְמִיחַ לָהּ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה:  בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל־ הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי־עֹפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל־עֹפָר תִּשׁוּב:</p>
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### 3. Tosefta Shabbat 1.21

<p>"Six days you shall labor; you shall do all of your work" (Exodus 20:9)... And Bet Hillel says: "Six days you shall work"; you shall work all six days.</p>	<p>"ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך" ... ובית הלל אוי "ששת ימים תעבד"; מלאכה עושה אתה כל ששה</p>
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### 4. Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 82b

<p>It is taught in the <i>Tosefta</i> (5:12): Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi says: There is no trade that disappears from the world. Fortunate is he who sees his parents in an elevated trade; woe is he who sees his parents in a lowly trade. It is impossible for the world [to exist] without a perfumer and without a tanner. Fortunate is he whose trade is as a perfumer, and woe is he whose trade is as a tanner.</p>	<p>תניא, רבי אומר: אין לך אומנות שעוברת מן העולם, אשרי מי שרואה את הוריו באומנות מעולה, אוי לו למי שרואה את הוריו באומנות פגומה; אי אפשר לעולם בלא בסם ובלא בורסקי, אשרי מי שאומנותו בסם, ואוי לו מי שאומנותו בורסקי;</p>
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5. Babylonian Talmud Sota 11b

<p>The verse concludes: "In all their service, wherein they made them serve with rigor" (Exodus 1:14). Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥmani says that Rabbi Yonatan says: The meaning of <i>befarekh</i> is that the Egyptians would exchange the responsibilities of men and women, giving men's work with the women's and women's work with the men's, [requiring everyone to do work to which they were unaccustomed].</p>	<p>"את כל עבודתם אשר עבדו בהם בפרך": אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: שהיו מחליפין מלאכת אנשים לנשים ומלאכת נשים לאנשים.</p>
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6. Leviticus 25:39-42

<p>If your kinsman under you continues in straits and must give himself over to you, do not subject him to the treatment of a slave.</p> <p>He shall remain with you as a hired or bound laborer; he shall serve with you only until the jubilee year.</p> <p>Then he and his children with him shall be free of your authority; he shall go back to his family and return to his ancestral holding.</p> <p>For they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt; they may not give themselves over into servitude.</p> <p>You shall not rule over him ruthlessly; you shall fear your God.</p>	<p>וְכִי־יָמוּךְ אֶת־יָדְךָ עַמֶּךָ וְנִמְכַר־לְךָ לֹא־תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עַבְדַּת עֶבֶד:</p> <p>כְּשָׂכִיר כְּתוֹשֵׁב יִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ עַד־שְׁנַת הַיָּבֹל יַעֲבֹד עִמָּךְ:</p> <p>וַיֵּצֵא מֵעִמָּךְ הוּא וּבְנָיו עִמּוֹ וְשֵׁב אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וְאֶל־אֲחֻזַּת אָבִיתּוֹ יָשׁוּב: —</p> <p>כִּי־עֲבָדֶי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לֹא יִמְכְרוּ מִמִּכְרַת עֶבֶד: —</p> <p>לֹא־תִרְדֶּה בּוֹ בְּפָרֶךְ וּרְאֹתָ מֵאֲלֵהֶיךָ:</p>
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7. Sifra Be-Har Parasha 6, end of Chapter 7, Paragraph 2

<p>“You shall not rule over him ruthlessly”:</p> <p>[This means] that you should not say to him/her, “Warm this cup,” when you did not need it; “Cool this cup,” when you do not need it...</p> <p>Perhaps you will say [falsely], “I am requesting this for myself.” Behold, this is the matter found in the heart, as scripture says, “You shall revere you God” (Leviticus 25:43). Behold, regarding all matters found in the heart it is said, “You shall revere you God.”</p>	<p>לא תרדה בו בפרך, שלא תאמר בו החם את הכוס הזה והוא אינו צריך, הצין לי את הכוס והוא אינו צריך...</p> <p>שמא תאמר לצורך עצמי אני עושה, והרי הדבר מסור ללב שנא' ויראת מאלהיך הא כל דבר שהוא מסור ללב נאמר בו ויראת מאלהיך.</p>
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8. Deuteronomy 5:14-15

<p>but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.</p> <p>Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.</p>	<p>וַיֹּם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ          לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלֶאכָה אַתָּה וּבְנֶךָ־          וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ־וְאִמְתֶּךָ וְשׂוֹרְךָ וְחִמְרֶךָ          וְכָל־בְּהֵמֹתֶךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ          לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתֶּךָ כָמוֹךָ:</p> <p>זְכֹר־תִּזְכָּרְךָ כִּי־עַבְדְּ הָיִיתָ   בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם          וַיֹּצֵאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה          וּבְזַרְעוֹ נְטִיילָה עַל־כַּף צוּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ          לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:</p>
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9. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31a

<p>Rava said: [After departing from this world,] when a person is brought to judgment [for the life he lived in this world,] they say to him: Did you conduct business faithfully? Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom? Did you understand one matter from another? And, nevertheless, beyond all these, if the fear of the Lord is his treasure, yes, he is worthy, and if not, no, none of these.</p>	<p>אמר רבא: בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו: נשאת ונתת באמונה? קבעת עתים לתורה? עסקת בפריה ורביה? צפית לישועה? פלפלת בחכמה? הבנת דבר מתוך דבר? ואפילו הכי: אי יראת ה' היא אוצרו - אין, אי לא - לא.</p>
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10. Exodus 35:33

<p>[God inspired Bezalel] to cut stones for setting and to carve wood—to work in every kind of designer’s craft—</p>	<p>וּבְחַרְשֵׁת אֶבֶן לְמִלְאֵת וּבְחַרְשֵׁת עֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכָל־מְלָאכֶת מְחַשְׁבֵּת:</p>
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11. Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 62b

<p>One who absent-mindedly performs forbidden labor on Shabbat is exempt from punishment because the Torah forbade [only] “Intentional work” (Exodus 33:32; rabbinic translation)</p>	<p>המתעסק בשבת - פטור, מלאכת מחשבת אסרה תורה.</p>
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12. Psalms 100:2

Worship the Lord in joy; come before Him in song.	עבְדוּ אֶת־יְקוֹקֵךְ בְּשִׂמְחָה בְּאוֹ לְפָנָיו בְּרִנָּה:
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13. Mishnah Avot 4.1

Ben Zoma says...Who is wealthy? One who rejoices in one's portion, as Scripture states: "You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors; you shall be fortunate, and it will be good with you" (Psalms 128:2). "You will be fortunate" – in this world; "and it will be good with you" – in the next.	בן זומא אומר...איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו שנאמר "יגיע כפוך כי תאכל אשריך וטוב לך" (תהלים קכח:ב) אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא
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14. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 35a

<p><b>The Sages taught: What is the meaning of that which the verse states: “And you shall gather your grain”? Because it is stated: “This Torah shall not depart from your mouths, and you shall contemplate in it day and night” (Joshua 1:8), I might have thought that these matters are to be understood as they are written; one is to literally spend his days immersed exclusively in Torah study. Therefore, the verse states: “And you shall gather your grain, your wine and your oil,” assume in their regard, the way of the world; set aside time not only for Torah, but also for work. This is the statement of Rabbi Yishmael.</b></p> <p><b>Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Is it possible that a person plows in the plowing season and sows in the sowing season and harvests in the harvest season and threshes in the threshing season and winnows in the windy season, as grain is separated from the chaff by means of the wind, and is constantly busy; what will become of Torah? Rather, one must dedicate himself exclusively to Torah at the expense of other endeavors; as when Israel performs God’s will, their work is performed by others, as it is</b></p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף לה עמוד ב</p> <p>רבי חנינא בר פפא רמי: כתיב ולקחתי דגני בעתו וגו', וכתוב: ואספת דגנך וגו'! - לא קשיא: כאן בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום, כאן בזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום. תנו רבנן: ואספת דגנך, - מה תלמוד לומר - לפי שנאמר: לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיו, יכול דברים ככתבן? תלמוד לומר: ואספת דגנך - הנהג בהן מנהג דרך ארץ, דברי רבי ישמעאל; רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר: אפשר אדם חורש בשעת חרישה, וזורע בשעת זריעה, וקוצר בשעת קצירה, ודש בשעת דישה, וזורח בשעת הרוח, תורה מה תהא עליה? אלא: בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום - מלאכתן נעשית על ידי אחרים, שנאמר: ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם וגו'. ובזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום - מלאכתן נעשית על ידי עצמן, שנאמר: ואספת דגנך; ולא עוד, אלא שמלאכת אחרים נעשית על ידן, שנאמר: ועבדת את אויבך וגו'. אמר אביי: הרבה עשו כרבי ישמעאל - ועלתה בידן, כרבי שמעון בן יוחי - ולא עלתה בידן.</p>
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**stated: “And strangers will stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners will be your plowmen and your vinedressers” (Isaiah 61:5). When Israel does not perform God’s will, their work is performed by them themselves, as it is stated: “And you shall gather your grain.” Moreover, if Israel fails to perform God’s will, others’ work will be performed by them, as it is stated: “You shall serve your enemy whom God shall send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness and in want of all things” (Deuteronomy 28:48).**

Summing up this dispute, **Abaye said:** Although there is room for both opinions, **many have acted in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yishmael**, and combined working for a living and learning Torah, **and** although they engaged in activities other than the study of Torah, **were successful** in their Torah study. **Many have acted in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai** **and were not successful** in their Torah study. They were ultimately forced to abandon their Torah study altogether.

15. Mishnah Kiddushin 4.14

<p><b>...Rabbi Meir says: A person should always teach his son a clean and easy trade and pray for success to the One to Whom wealth and property belong, as ultimately there is no trade that does not include both poverty and wealth,</b> since a person can become rich from any profession. <b>Poverty does not come from a particular trade, nor does wealth come from a particular trade, but rather, all is in accordance with a person's merit.</b> Therefore, one should choose a clean and easy trade, and pray to God for success...</p> <p><b>Abba Guryan of Tzadyan says in the name of Abba Gurya: A person may not teach his son the trades of a donkey driver, a camel driver, a pot maker, a sailor, a shepherd, or a storekeeper.</b> The reason for all these is the same, <b>as their trades are the trades of robbers;</b> all of these professions involve a measure of dishonesty and are likely to lead to robbery.</p> <p><b>Rabbi Yehuda says in Abba Gurya's name: Most donkey drivers are wicked,</b> since they engage in deceit, <b>and most camel drivers,</b> who traverse dangerous places such as</p>	<p>...רבי מאיר אומר לעולם ילמד אדם את בנו אומנות נקיה וקלה ויתפלל למי שהעושר והנכסים שלו שאין אומנות שאין בה עניות ועשירות שלא עניות מן האומנות ולא עשירות מן האומנות אלא הכל לפי זכותו...</p> <p>אבא גוריין איש צדיין אומר משום אבא גוריא לא ילמד אדם את בנו חמר גמל ספר ספן רועה וחנוני שאומנתן אומנות לסטים</p> <p>רבי יהודה אומר משמו החמרין רובן רשעים והגמלין רובן כשרים הספנין רובן חסידים טוב שברופאים לגיהנם והכשר שבטבחים שותפו של עמלק</p> <p>רבי נהוראי אומר מניח אני כל אומנות שבעולם ואיני מלמד את בני אלא תורה שאדם אוכל משכרה בעולם הזה וקרן קיימת לעולם הבא ושאר כל אומנות אינן כן כשאדם בא לידי חולי או לידי זקנה או לידי יסורין ואינו יכול לעסוק במלאכתו הרי הוא מת ברעב אבל התורה אינה כן אלא משמרתו מכל רע בנערותו ונותנת לו אחרית ותקוה בזקנותו...</p>
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deserts, **are of fit** character, as they pray to God to protect them on their journeys. **Most sailors are pious**, since the great danger of the seas instills in them the fear of Heaven. **The best of doctors is to Gehenna, and even the fittest of butchers is a partner of Amalek.**

**Rabbi Nehorai says: I set aside all the trades in the world, and I teach my son only Torah, as a person partakes of its reward in this world and the principal reward remains for him in the World-to-Come, which is not true of other professions, whose rewards are only in this world. Furthermore, if a person comes to be ill, or old, or undergoes suffering, and is unable to be involved in his trade, behold, he dies in hunger. But with regard to the Torah it is not so, since one can study it under all circumstances. Rather, it preserves him from all evil and sin in his youth, and provides him with a future and hope in his old age...**