

Video Clip: Studying like a Yemenite

תורה עם דרך ארץ

We are told that teaching Torah is a holy mission, one for which one should not receive payment. Maimonides reiterated this in his *Mishneh Torah*. As strong followers of the Rambam, Yemenites were careful to preserve this practice, as well as many others from Mishnaic times and those of the Geonim and Rishonim. Thus, the Mori (teacher), would often teach from memory while weaving, working with silver, or engaged in another profession. Being a Mori was a privilege, not a profession.

Suggested Implementations

Philosophy/Hashkafa

1. A debate on תורה עם דרך ארץ, learning while having a profession
2. Study of the laws of Talmud Torah

Background

Yemenite Jews were dedicated to the study of Torah. Even many of the merchants would know the whole Torah by heart. This, of course, was also due to the fact that there were not enough books to go around. The printing press did not arrive to Yemen until the mid-20th century. Anyone who wanted a book, a *sefer*, would order from a family member in the Land of Israel, or they would copy the text by hand. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of handwritten Pentateuchs (five books of the Torah), Rambam's works, and other Judaic texts in personal libraries to this day, as they were written by family members and preserved by their descendants.

In fact, many of those same books have commentaries or corrections in the margins, as Yemenites were known for their strong knowledge of Torah. They would study the weekly portion twice each week with at least one commentary, שניים מקרא ואחד תרגום. They would repeat it orally for generations, and write it themselves allowing for an extensive knowledge of the texts.

The question of engaging in Torah study day and night, and *derekh erez*, or making a living, has been debated for centuries. Today, many schools encourage full immersion in Torah, often in place of a profession. This is often a topic of discussion in homes and schools across the Jewish world. Yemenite Jews strictly followed Rambam's tenet that one may not take payment for one's Torah study. Even a Mori, a teacher, was not to take money for it. Pictures abound of a Mori sitting and weaving, silversmithing, or other such work, while around him sits a group of boys sharing one book and studying Jewish texts. The Mori would know the information by heart and would ask the students to read or look and discuss while he would make his living in his chosen profession.

Questions for Discussion

1. See lesson plan on Torah with Derekh Eretz <https://www.sefaria.org.il/sheets/247002?lang=he>
2. Learning? Working? Both? Source sheet <https://www.sefaria.org.il/sheets/27940?lang=he>
3. Making Torah Study a Full-Time Occupation <https://www.sefaria.org.il/sheets/68243?lang=he>

4. A comprehensive analysis of these sources may be found in Hebrew at <http://www.daat.ac.il/mishpat-ivri/skirot/skira.asp?id=204>
5. More sources for discussion:

“כל המשים על לבו שיעסוק בתורה ולא יעשה מלאכה ויתפרנס מן הצדקה, הרי זה חלל את השם, וביזה את התורה, וכיבה מאור הדת, וגרם רעה לעצמו, ונטל חייו מן העולם הבא, לפי שאסור ליהנות מדברי תורה בעולם הזה אמרו חכמים כל הנהנה מדברי תורה נטל חייו מן העולם ועוד צו ואמרו אל תעשם עטרה להתגדל בהן ולא קרדום לחפור בהן ועוד צו ואמרו אהוב את המלאכה ושנא את הרבנות וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה, סופה בטילה וגוררת עוון וסוף אדם זה שיהא מלסטם את הבריות.”

-רמב"ם, הלכות תלמוד תורה, פרק ג, הלכה י, על פי המשנה, אבות ב, ב

“Any who comes to the conclusion that he should involve himself in the study of Torah without doing work, and derive his livelihood from charity, desecrates God’s name, dishonors the Torah, extinguishes the light of faith, brings evil upon himself and forfeits the life of the world to come, for it is forbidden to derive benefit from the words of Torah in this world. Our Sages declared: Whoever benefits from the words of Torah forfeits his life in the world.” Also, they commanded and declared: “Do not make them a crown to magnify oneself, nor an axe to chop with.” Also, they commanded and declared: “Love work and despise Rabbinic positions.” All Torah that is not accompanied by work will eventually be negated and lead to sin. Ultimately such a person will steal from others.”

-Maimonides, Torah Study 3:10

“... אחר כך ילך לעסקיו, דכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה סופה בטלה, וגוררת עון, ... ומכל מקום לא יעשה מלאכתו עיקר, אלא עראי, ותורתו קבע, וזה וזה [תורתו ופרנסתו] יתקיים בידו”
-שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים, סימן קנו, סעיף א

“Afterwards he should go to his profession, as any that has no work with it will lead to idleness, drag one to sin... but one should not make work the essence, but rather temporary, and his Torah should be the permanent, and this and this (Torah and income) will be held in his hands”

-Shulhan Aruch, Orah Haim

כך היא דרכה של תורה, פת במלח תאכל, ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן, וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל”
- אבות ו:ד

“This is the way of the Torah: you should eat bread and salt, drink plenty of water, lie on the ground, and live a life of pain, and in the Torah you should engage.”

-Chapters of the Fathers 6:4

“ואספת דגנך” (דברים יא, יד) - מה תלמוד לומר? לפי שנאמר: “לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפריך” (יהושע א, ח), יכול דברים ככתבן? תלמוד לומר: “ואספת דגנך”. הנהג בהן מנהג דרך ארץ. דברי רבי ישמעאל.
- ברכות ל”ה: ע”ב

“And gather your grains” (Deuteronomy 11:14) – what is this coming to teach us? As it says: “This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth” (Joshua 1:8). Can it be as it is written? (Should this be

taken literally?) It comes to teach us: “gather your grains.” You should follow them both, custom and an occupation. These are the words of Rabbi Yishmael.

– Brachot 35b

Suggested Readings

Kapah, Yosef, *Halichot Temian*. Jerusalem. Sixth Edition, 2007.

Kapah, Yosef, *Mishnah Tora of Rambam*, 24 volumes. Jerusalem, 1985-1997.

Rabbi Dr. BenZion Bar-Ami the Yemenite traditions https://youtu.be/SG5_JR36ldM

Dr. Ester Kapa on education among Yemenites <https://youtu.be/W0ZbMugAZAg>