

Derech Eretz – Pirkei Avot 2:2

רַבּוֹן גַּמְלִיאֵל בֶּנוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הַנָּשִׂיא אָמַר, יָפָה תְּלִמוּד תּוֹרָה
עִם דְּרֵךְ אֶרֶץ, שְׂיִגִיעַת שְׁנֵיהֶם מְשַׁכַּח עֲוֹן. וְכָל תּוֹרָה שְׂאִין
עִמָּה מְלָאכָה, סוֹפָה בְּטִלָּה וְגוֹרָרֶת עֲוֹן. וְכָל הָעֲמֵלִים עִם הַצְּבוּר,
יְהִיו עֲמֵלִים עִמָּהֶם לְנֶשֶׁם שָׁמַיִם, שְׂזִיכוֹת אֲבוֹתָם מְסִיעָתוֹן וְצַדִּיקָתָם
עוֹמְדֵת לְעַד. וְאַתֶּם, מֵעַלָּה אֲנִי עֲלֵיכֶם שֹׁכֵר הַרְבֵּה כְּאֵלוֹ עֲשִׂיתֶם:

Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say:

Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world, for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin.

A discussion on Derech Eretz based on Avot 2:2

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Gittin 70a:

Eight actions are difficult for the body and the soul to handle in large amounts and are beneficial in small amounts, and they are: Traveling on the road, engaging in the way of the world, i.e., engaging in sexual intercourse, having wealth, work, drinking wine, sleep, hot water, and bloodletting.

Pirkei Avot 3:1:

Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting. From where you came—from a putrid drop; where you are going—to a place of dust, maggots and worms; and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting—before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

Pirkei Avot 4:1:

Ben Zoma would say: Who is wise? One who learns from every man. As is stated (Psalms 119:99): "From all my teachers I have grown wise, for Your testimonials are my meditation."

Rambam:

Just as the wise man is recognized through his wisdom and his temperaments and in these, he stands apart from the rest of the people, so, too, he should be recognized through his actions - in his eating, drinking, intimate relations, in relieving himself, in his speech, manner of walking and dress, in the management of his finances, and in his business dealings. All of these actions should be exceptionally becoming and befitting.

Rabbi Sacks:

"Torah im Derech Eretz is the ongoing critical dialogue that must always occur at the interface between Judaism and its envioning culture."

Some Interactive Resources:

Youtube: SAR High School Tikkun HaMiddot Video Series 5778: Zerizut

- Should we first work on avoiding averah's or should we also work on doing positive mitzvot at the same time?
- How can we develop positive middot?
- Does it matter if we are not excited to do mitzvot? Should we still do mitzvot and act like we have good middot even if we aren't internally feeling them? Instead is it better that we are consistent with how we feel?

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Why would Torah study without work cause a person to sin? If the Torah is wholly good, how can a person be caused to sin from its study?
- What does the text mean by "for the sake of heaven"? Are we affirming our place in heaven or are we acting with Godliness in mind?
- Is it fair that people should merit things due to the holiness of their ancestors?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- "Derech Eretz (lit) – the way of the land" - Is the way of the land always good? Are the way of the Torah and the way of the world always compatible?
- Is the way that we act always the most important thing? Do our intentions and motivations not matter as long as our actions bring about goodness?
- Do people have control over themselves to be able to cultivate their own character traits in their life?
- Is it enough to only learn Torah without having good middot? Is it enough to only have good middot and not to learn Torah?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you believe that humility should be a religious character trait?
- Do you think you have the ability to choose who influences you? Are you able to unlearn unwanted traits that you learnt when you were a child?

A Related Story

In general, to have derech eretz usually means to live ethically, responsibly and with dignity, and to be considerate of others. Before G d created Adam, the first man, He said to the angels, "Let us create man." Why didn't G d say, "I will create man," since clearly He didn't need assistance? Rashi, the great biblical commentator, says that He did so "to teach derech eretz and the trait of humility, that a great person should consult with and receive permission from a smaller one."