

# Holy Labor

written by Yehudis Golshevsky  
February 26, 2015



Many Breslover chassidim were willing to work at menial jobs so they could earn a living with their own hands rather than be dependent on the generosity of others. The working men among the Breslover chassidim often cited Rebbe Nachman's words in *Likutey Moharan*: "When one works as is fitting ..."

The Rebbe meant that while there is something noble in work itself, it's also necessary to approach one's livelihood with the right perspective – "as is fitting." If possible, we should work without being completely absorbed by our jobs. That way, we can focus more easily on spirituality even while

involved in mundane concerns. Even if our job requires every drop of our attention, we should still take breaks and focus our attention on the Primal Source, because only God determines what we earn, how we earn it, and how much joy we will have in our earnings.

The many Breslovers who focused much of their time and energies on Divine service also held labor to be a spiritual value. Because they were so careful to use every available moment for Torah and prayer, these chassidim were often very poor. Nevertheless, they worked hard at any job they could find, even if it appeared to be beneath their dignity. As our Sages say, one should even skin a carcass in the marketplace if that is the only way he can make a living (*Bava Basra* 110a).

Reb Yaakov Berdichever sold candles. It was the custom right before Yom Kippur to light a candle for every married couple and leave it in the synagogue. Naturally, Erev Yom Kippur was a great time to sell candles. Even so, people were astounded to see Reb Yaakov standing in the marketplace virtually the entire day, flagging down customers. Although he was a very spiritual person, this was his work on the day before Yom Kippur – and he didn't hesitate to pursue it even if it appeared lowly.

Reb Dovid Shechter told of a certain Breslover chassid who would sell cold drinks on the street. This man was very careful to engage in *hitbodedut* (private prayer to God) whenever possible between sales. Reb Dovid would often see this man in a deep state of bonding with the Almighty, smiling and selling his wares. This is what the chassidim meant by working "as is fitting."

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:283, V:350*