

Studying Torah is the Answer to Creating Jobs

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

There has been a lot of debate in the USA and elsewhere about jobs, or rather the loss of them and what to do about it, particularly since recent plebiscites have largely been won on this issue.

Although on paper unemployment is relatively low in advanced economies, a growing number of workers are being made redundant either by jobs moving to countries where it is cheaper to manufacture, old industries dying as they are replaced by newer ones, and most significantly, technology increasingly requiring fewer and fewer humans to be employed. Robots, artificial memory and new efficiencies make humans expensive and redundant. Medicine has achieved amazing advances in treatment, diagnostics, and remote techniques that also reduce manpower. Drones will take over delivery and mail. Driverless cars will affect transport, truckers, and taxi drivers. Almost all the repetitive dull jobs will go. Employment may soon be the privilege of the few and a thing of the past.

Millions of jobs once moved from Europe and the USA to China. Now that the standard of living is rising in China, jobs are moving to Vietnam, or from America they have gone to Mexico. But one can already see signs of jobs migrated from those countries to poorer ones. The question is what can replace them? We all assume that finance or computer programming are the geese that will lay golden eggs. But they too are being lost to computerized systems. Politicians claim they can bring jobs back. Perhaps they can, a few. But like Canute, they cannot turn the tide back.

Once upon a time one entered employment assuming that if one fulfilled allocated tasks one would remain in employment throughout one's working life. This has become rarer and rarer. Most people, if not already, will soon have to get used to changing work and skills many times during their years of employment, either willingly or compulsorily.

The problem is far worse in many poorer societies, where millions of young, healthy, bright men and women have shrinking opportunities to find work. The only options are to join fanatical religious communities that offer support and a sense of belonging (which too often turn the faithful to disruptive violence) or emigration to richer countries. Which over time will not help. Like the millions brought to Britain from Pakistan to man the Lancashire textile industry, which then disappeared with their jobs.

One solution being discussed is that rich countries should give everyone a basic wage regardless of whether they are working or not. It may sound ridiculous, but at the moment welfare payments, even in supposedly capitalist countries, are ballooning out of control, and no politician dares suggest cutbacks (publicly at any rate). So switching welfare into a basic wage for

everyone might make sense. Another is for public projects, infrastructure, renovations, and innovations to pick up the employment slack—a tactic that worked well for fascist governments between the two world wars (and, dare I say it, for FDR in the USA).

Social work, nursing, teaching, home caring, and human-intensive jobs are low paid and often done by immigrants for less than the indigenous population is prepared to accept. Either immigration will continue to fill low-paying jobs, or pay will have to rise sufficiently to attract the locals. What is happening is that welfare is cushioning those who do not want to take on menial jobs. Immigration helps and objecting to all immigration makes no sense. But without proper precautions there are unwanted consequences, culturally and financially. In Europe at the moment, there are just as many immigrants who are unemployed and supported by the state as there are working and paying taxes.

It is possible that new ways will be found to keep humans employed and paid. Areas that rely on creativity, intelligence, science and human interactivity, such as research, education, nursing, caring, geriatric and mental services, drug rehabilitation, and social interaction. Not to mention music, sports, the arts and entertainment. They will all require more, not fewer, hands. But all the signs are that vast numbers of people will never have a job or have one only for a very limited period. This will help leisure activities, but once again the financial burden will fall on governments or the few rich who are making inordinate sums of money.

Despair not. Judaism has a solution. There are hundreds of thousands of young men, (and increasingly women) who sit and study, all day long, most days and weeks of the year. They neither need nor want jobs. They see studying Torah as a religious and spiritual obligation, because study, as much as prayer, is a spiritual exercise as well as an intellectual one. Some of them, a very small percentage, will take jobs as rabbis, religious judges, teachers, and administrators (some even as politicians). But the rest will be studying throughout their lives and feeling both content and morally satisfied, as well as intellectually challenged and stimulated throughout their lives. Although I concede that for many it's a convenient routine with the few questions asked about standards or achievements.

In most cases, they will not be making big money. But they will be supported by communities that go a long way towards compensating for limited financial means, with assistance or charity. Most Charedi education, to give one example, is free. Whereas out in the Jewish world it will cost you upwards of \$30,000 per year per child in a Jewish school—which becomes unfeasible if you have five children or more! What is more, studying goes on throughout one's life. No thought of retiring or having nothing to do or feeling rejected or unworthy when your job ceases.

For years the accepted narrative has been that the Charedi world will collapse under the weight of so many poor and unemployable men and women with large families. Poverty is endemic. The urgent need to find employment for them has become a mantra of sociologists and economists. But they often fail to understand how such communities of the studiers are sustained internally

as well as through welfare. It is ironic how the Charedi world despises secular culture. Yet it has been the secular culture of state welfare that has actually enabled them to thrive!

Attempts to encourage Charedi men to get a secular education and a job are to be heard everywhere. Critics say that Charedi education fails to provide the tools to join the workforce. But perhaps they are wrong. The jobs may not be there except for a very few. Maybe the Charedi model is the best in a changing world. A model that can give people a daily task and role. A sense of purpose in life and a spiritual goal. Intellectual and moral satisfaction. Who could ask for more? This is it! The solution.

Perhaps other religions should rethink their systems. To value study and to encourage the faithful to pursue it. Instead of the rest of the world seeing our Charedi Jews as narrow and regressive, Torah study may well put us way head of the rest. Intellectual achievement, far more than the labor of ones hands is the future. Am I being serious? I think I might well be. Someone should suggest this to Trump.