JEWISH BUSINESS ETHICS: Introduction

“Many of us have a mistaken idea of what is within the compass or scope of our religious traditions. People know that lighting Hanukah candles is something you talk about with a rabbi, observance of the Shabbat, the laws of Kashrut, etc., but many people have an attitude that if I don’t tell the rabbi how to run his business, the rabbi shouldn’t tell me how to run mine. Very often, we live fragmented dichotomized lives where what we do in the office from 9 to 5 (or if you’re a workaholic from 8 to 7), is our own private affair and then at home we observe the holidays, or the rituals of Judaism, on the weekends, or three-days-a-year, or whatever.

And yet we find in the Talmud a very interesting statement. The Talmud discusses what types of questions people are asked by God after their deaths. They come up to heaven, God asks them a variety of questions. The very first question that we are held accountable for after our deaths is “nasata venetata be-emuna?” which means “did you conduct your business affairs with honesty and with integrity?” This question is were we ethical in the conduct of our business. If you look throughout the Torah, you will see a constant juxtaposition between the ritual commands of Judaism and the ethical obligations between one human being and another. One verse may say, don’t eat meat and milk together and the other verse will say, do not cheat in business, do not misrepresent, do not engage in fraud, because these are all part of the same religious structure. The notion of a dichotomy between ritual behavior and social behavior is a division that is totally foreign to Judaism because all of them are part of the same God-given basis of morality.”

Adapted from “Jewish Business Ethics: An Introductory Perspective” by Rabbi Yitzchok Breitowitz

SHABBAT SHALOM!

Candle lighting in NYC	7:33 pm
Shabbat ends in NYC	8:34 pm