

# Toilets And Trash

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

When philosopher Bertrand Russell was imprisoned for pacifism, the Prison Warder asked him “What do you do for a living then?” Russell answered. “I think.” “Well then” asked the Warder with some asperity, “do you think you could clean these toilets?”

Rabbi Gifter of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland once counseled a couple. They came because the wife complained that the husband who studied all day would not take out the trash. She asked the Rabbi if there was anything in Jewish law that compelled the husband to do this simple chore. Sadly there is not, responded the Rabbi, and the couple went on their way.

The next morning Rabbi Gifter showed up at the house. The man was overjoyed, “Please Rabbi, come in, have something to eat -- what an honor!” “No,” said Rabbi Gifter, “I’ve just come to take out the trash.” When the man looked puzzled, the Rabbi explained, “You see, it may be beneath your dignity, but it is not beneath mine.”

To live by one’s mind does not mean that labor is unworthy. The High Priest raked the coals from the altar; the Rabbis of the Talmud mended shoes as well as souls. Dignity is in the person and the attitude we bring to our tasks.