JEWISH BUSINESS
ETHICS
KOSHER ISN’T JUST ABOUT FOOD
For years now, we’ve been hearing about corporate executives who made fortunes for themselves while driving their companies into bankruptcy, costing employees their jobs and sometimes their life savings.

Not so at Malden Mills, the textile company in Lawrence, Mass., that invented the fabric Polartec. As 60 Minutes reported last year, Malden Mills also filed for bankruptcy protection, but that’s the only thing it has in common with companies like Enron.

In fact, Malden Mills is known for going out of its way to help its employees, even when the company suffered a shattering setback. Correspondent Morley Safer reports on this story which aired last summer.

The fire that broke out at Malden Mills in the winter of 1995 was the largest fire Massachusetts had seen for a century. No one was killed. But the town was devastated. Malden Mills was one of the few large employers in a town that was already in desperate straits.

“The only thing that went through my mind was, how can I possibly recreate it,” says owner Aaron Feuerstein, the third generation of his family to run the mill.

“I was proud of the family business and I wanted to keep that alive, and I wanted that to survive. But I also felt the responsibility for all my employees, to take care of them, to give them jobs.”

He made a decision - one that others in the textile industry found hard to believe. Feuerstein decided to rebuild right there in Lawrence - not to move down South or overseas as much of the industry had done in search of cheap labor.

He also made another shocking decision. For the next 60 days, all employees would be paid their full salaries.

“I think it was a wise business decision, but that isn’t why I did it. I did it because it was the right thing to do,” says Feuerstein.

Some might have said the proper business decision was to take the $300 million in insurance and retire.


He kept his promises. Workers picked up their checks for months. In all, he paid out $25 million and became known as the Mensch of Malden Mills - a businessman who seemed to care more about his workers than about his net worth.

The press loved him, and so did politicians. President Clinton invited him to the State of the Union Address as an honored guest. He also received 12 honorary degrees, including one from Boston University.

He became that rare duck - the businessman as national hero.

“I got a lot of publicity. And I don’t think that speaks well for our times,” says Feuerstein. “At the time in America of the greatest prosperity, the god of money has taken over to an extreme.”

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"You are not permitted to oppress the working man, because he's poor and he's needy, amongst your brethren and amongst the non-Jew in your community," says Feuerstein, who spent $300 million of the insurance money and then borrowed $100 million more to build a new plant that is both environmentally friendly and worker friendly.

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

What are the Questions in the Afterlife?

Talmud Tractate Shabbos 31a

Rava said: At the time that man is brought before judgment, they say to him: Did you conduct your business faithfully? Did you involve yourself in procreation? Did you anticipate and yearn for redemption? Did you delve into wisdom? Did you distinguish one thing from another?

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- Why are these the questions asked in the world to come?
- What does it mean to conduct business faithfully?
Devarim (Deutoronomy) 6:5
You should love God with all of your heart, and with all your soul, and with all of your might.

Rashi (ibid.)
And with all of your might- Meaning, with all of your money, for there are some people whose property is more beloved to them themselves, therefore the first states you must love God with all of your money.

Mishlei (Proverbs 2:20)
In order that you go in the path of the good people and keep the ways of the righteous people.

Questions to Consider
- If it already says to love God with your life, why does it have to mention loving Him with your money?
- What does it mean to love God with your money?
- How is it possible to love money more than yourself?
Rabbah bar bar Chanan had a keg of wine broken by his workers. He took their cloaks as collateral payment. They (the workers) went and told Rav.

Rav said to Rabbah bar bar Chanan: “Give them back their cloaks!”

Rabbah bar bar Chanan asked, “Is that indeed the law?”

Rav answered, “Yes! As the verse states: In order that you go in the path of good people.” Rabbah bar bar Chanan returned their cloaks.

The workers then stated to Rav, “We are poor people, and we labored the entire day; we are starving and have nothing to eat.”

Rav said to Rabbah bar bar Chanan, “Pay them their fee!”

Rabbah bar bar Chanan asked, “Is that the law?”

Rav answered, “Yes, as the same verse continues: And keep the ways of the righteous people.”

Questions to Consider

- What is the difference between the “letter of the law” and the “spirit of the law”?
- Which one was Rabbah bar bar Chanan bound by?
- What does the verse tell us about the extent one has to go for his workers?