

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey.” (49:14)

It is interesting how Yaakov *Avinu* compares his sons to various animals. Yehudah, the strong son, the leader who would one day be the monarch, is compared to a lion. Naftali is compared to a hind, because of his exceptional speed. Yaakov took a specific character trait, which the individual tribe exemplified, and compared that to an animal in which the trait was also significant. What is difficult to grasp is Yissachar's comparison to a strong-boned donkey. This is the tribe that exemplified Torah study at its zenith. The donkey is among the lowliest in the animal world. What is the relationship between the two?

Speaking to a group of vacationing *yeshivah* students, *Horav Tzvi Markowitz, Shlita*, said the following: At one time, both the horse and the donkey served man as beasts of burden. Indeed, in every village one would notice how the horse and donkey would leave in the early morning on their way to the fields. When they returned at the end of the day, their masters gave them the opportunity to rest. There was, however, an apparent difference in the manner in which they rested. In order for the horse to rest, it was necessary for its owner to remove its load, unbuckle its saddlebags and take off whatever ropes were tying it in place. The horse would gallop and jump around, as its constraints were removed.

The donkey was different. It rested with its load still tied to its back and its saddlebags still in place, while whatever constraints it had remained fastened. The donkey needed only a quiet place where it could stand undisturbed, while the horse had to “let loose.”

Vacation time, days off, are what determine the essence of a *ben Torah*, one who serves Hashem unequivocally. If vacation means the loosening of one's structure and morals, such that his spiritual commitments are relaxed, this is the vacation of a horse. If, however, he maintains his responsibilities, continues with structured observances of *davening* with a *minyan*, studying Torah and acting no different than if he would be in the *bais ha'medrash*, he rests like the donkey. Yissachar, the tribe that was devoted to Torah study, reflected their commitment even during periods of rest, because they were acutely aware that there is no rest from Torah.

Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, applies this idea to the entire year. Every time, everywhere, under all situations, Torah reigns paramount. There are those who act in the most proper and correct fashion when they are inside the walls of the *bais ha'medrash*. Yet, they have a desire to have a “good time” outside the protective walls of the sanctuary. A good time, regrettably, consists of dropping some of the restrictions that one feels are intrinsic to the *yeshivah*. What he fails to realize is that the yoke is not relegated only to the four walls of the *yeshivah*. It applies everywhere.

The question that is posed by many young people is simple: Is it possible to live under the “duress” of *Taryag mitzvos*, all the time, without any time off for a little fun? Indeed, there are those who feel that we should “go easy” on young people: give them some space and breathing room; let them “hang loose,” and other such statements which apply to contemporary culture. *Rav Beifus*

explains that it is specifically one's meticulous observance and total commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* that creates inner peace and harmony. It is the only way that one achieves a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Why? Because success, satisfaction, achievement are directly connected to the *neshamah*, soul. The soul receives satisfaction only if the individual dedicates himself to total observance.

This statement is profound. We are being told that inner peace, success and satisfaction are the 'foci' of the soul, which is the primary component in the amalgam of body and soul known to us as man. We may see the body, but his essence is his *neshamah*. All too often, we get carried away providing for our bodies and think nothing of our *neshamos* which cry out for equal time. Indeed, our primary goal in life should be to satisfy our *neshamah*. It is the *neshamah's* satisfaction that determines our satisfaction. It is the *neshamah's* success that determines our success. To provide the body and ignore the *neshamah* is tantamount to pouring liquid into a bottomless glass. It is a total waste.

Rav Beifus relates a powerful story which emphasizes the significance of the *neshamah*. There is a *ger tzedek*, righteous convert, living in *Yerushalayim*, a scholar of note, who recently related what it was that motivated him to convert to Judaism: "It was after World War II, and I was living in Holland. I felt a tremendous sense of guilt after realizing the terrible things that my countrymen had wrought against the Jews. I wanted to do something as a form of contrition to atone for what my people had done to your people. I left Holland and came to Israel to do whatever I could, to somehow, someday, pay for the sins of the gentiles. I was able to get a position in a home for children that were severely challenged both physically and mentally. I felt a deep sense of satisfaction in working with these children.

"I was dumbstruck by the mother of a little boy who came every day, early in the morning, traveling for one and one half hours each way by bus to spend the day with her son. The child was perhaps three-years-old, severely mentally retarded and physically unable to move his body. He could not hear or speak. He just lay there staring at the ceiling.

"Yet, his mother came every day and performed the same ritual. She would walk in and say, '*Boker Tov!* Good Morning, my child.' She would pat his head and give him a kiss. Then she placed his *yarmulke* on his head and a small *Tallis Katan* on his body. Then, with tears streaming down her face, she would recite *Krias Shema* and *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*, which all mothers recite with their pre-school children. Only this child heard nothing and understood nothing. She would continue by telling him about the *parsha* of the week and stories about the Jewish People. Incredible!

"This went on every day! I could not understand what she was doing. She appeared to me to be insane! She must have had a breakdown to do this daily for a child that had no clue concerning what she was saying. I finally gathered up enough courage to approach her and ask, '*Giveret*, ma'am, why are you doing this? Who are you talking to? Do you not realize that your

child neither hears nor comprehends what you are saying to him?’

“She looked at me with piercing eyes and said, ‘True, his physical body does not comprehend, but I am not talking to his body. I speak to his soul – and his soul understands and derives great satisfaction from the *Tzitzis* and the *Krias Shema* and from every *pasuk* of Torah that I recite to him.’

“When I heard these words,” continued the *ger*, “I decided that a religion that develops a relationship between a person and the spiritual dimension of a child that does not function in any physical manner – I wanted to know more about it. So began my quest to join the Jewish people.”

What a powerful message, one that opens up vistas of perspective on people. There is a crucial element in a person that we often ignore – the *neshamah*. The soul within each of us is alive and well and not impaired in any way. Perhaps this is why so many have returned to *Yiddishkeit* after years of assimilation: Their trapped *neshamah* is crying out, reaching out to be saved from extinction. Perhaps this is why some educators are better able to reach difficult students more so than others – because they focus on the students’ *neshamah*. Perhaps this is why some parents are more successful in raising their children, more so than others: They never forget the *neshamah* component of their child. The “*neshamah* factor” plays a crucial role in every person’s life. Every individual should remember this, knowing full-well that any negative action he takes will have an adverse effect on his *neshamah*. While an individual may not care about his body, he has no right to harm his *neshamah*.