

Issachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries. He saw tranquility that it was good... yet, he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer. (49:14,15)

The Torah's characterization of the *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, using the simile of a strong-boned donkey, implies Yissachar/the Torah scholar's spiritual role as the bearer of the yoke of Torah and the cultivator of the nation's spiritual treasures. As the donkey toils day and night without resting its weary body, so, too, does the Torah scholar incessantly apply himself to his books. The **Chafetz Chaim** explains that the donkey never tires to the point that it lay down in such a manner that it must have its load removed. It sleeps standing, with its bags still on it. Likewise, the Torah scholar devotes himself constantly to the Torah, never allowing for a well-deserved rest.

Bein ha'mishpesaim, resting between the boundaries, is a reference to the *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who, upon concluding a *Meseches*, Tractate, celebrates the milestone with other scholars – and then moves on to the next *Meseches*.

The next passage, *Va'yaar menuchah ki tov... va'yet shichmo lisbol*, "He saw tranquility that it was good... yet, he bent his shoulder to bear," presents us with an anomaly. Why would we think that Yissachar views his Torah obligation as some kind of load which he must bear? The Torah's wisdom is as sweet as the sweetest honey. No true Torah scholar views the time he spends studying Torah as toil, as a load he must tolerate. Torah study is the sweetest thing in life to him.

Furthermore, as the *Chafetz Chaim* notes earlier, the Torah characterizes Yissachar as a strong-boned donkey who rests under the most difficult circumstances. Now, Yaakov implies that the Torah is a heavy load which Yissachar is committed to carrying. If he seeks tranquility, why is he carrying a heavy load?

The *Chafetz Chaim* elucidates this by employing an analogy. There was a wealthy man who made his fortune through the sale of precious stones. He took a business trip to a far-off country, taking with him 3000 rubles with which to purchase jewels. He took another 400 rubles for traveling expenses. He concluded his business and was prepared to return home when he met another broker who had an excellent purchase for him. He explained to the broker that despite the wonderful opportunity, he had used up all of his money; all he had left was his traveling money, an amount with which he could not really part if he wanted to return home.

The broker explained that the government was after him on some trumped-up charges. If he did not get rid of the stones now, he would lose them along with everything else. He was prepared to take a monetary loss on the stones, but he needed to do so immediately.

The wealthy jeweler replied that, while it was true that he could not pass up a good deal, he had only 200 rubles left from his original expense money. He was willing to invest 180 rubles in the broker's stones, leaving him only twenty rubles with which to return home. He would be relegated to sitting in the cattle car with the other poor folk, but it was worth it, if he would realize a handsome profit. The broker agreed, and they closed the deal.

The return trip was rough. He was used to sitting in a lounge car, sleeping on a bed, and eating the finest foods on exquisite dishes. Now, he sat on the floor of the cattle car, ate whatever scraps he could scrounge, but, in his mind, it was worth it. Once he returned home, he would sell the jewels, and he would have his heart's desire. At one of the stops, he met one of his associates, also a wealthy man, who was shocked to see his friend descending from the cattle car. "What are you doing here with the poor people?" he asked. The jeweler replied, "It is true that now I am having it quite rough, and I am relegated to sitting with the poor, but just wait a few weeks. I will be richer than ever."

"This may be true," the other man countered, "but for a man who is used to the finer things in life, how do you tolerate the poverty and hunger to which you are being subjected?"

"You are absolutely correct," the jeweler said. "I do have pain and I miss being in the lap of luxury, but every time I open up that box of precious stones which I purchased for almost nothing and realize the great profit I will make when I return home, I am able to live with the poverty and hunger."

The *Chafetz Chaim* continues, "True, the Torah is of greater value than the most enviable riches. It is more precious than the most precious stones. There is one catch, however. In order to succeed in Torah study, one must relinquish a life of luxury in this world. He must toil day and night, plumb its profundities and delve into its intricacies. Yes, he must be like the donkey who rests only between the boundaries. Veritably, such self-abnegation, such renouncement of this world's material/physical pleasures, provides nothing for one's *neshamah*, spiritual soul. What about his *guf*, body? Man has a physical dimension that seeks enjoyment, that craves pampering. How is man to remain satisfied? How is he to deal with the inner conflict raging within him? The answer is that he sits back and realizes that it is only for a short while; it is only during his present sojourn of life in this world that he must relinquish his luxuries. In the next world, he will be duly rewarded manifold for his patience.

"Thus, Yaakov told Yissachar, 'Be patient. Think about the eternal rest you will enjoy. Think about *Gan Eden*, that little box of precious stones which will bring you great reward. This will keep you focused even in this world.'"

We might add that it requires someone like Yissachar, who understands the value of Torah, to maintain his spiritual focus in this world. Imagine a person who has no idea concerning the value of jewelry. He will look at this box of stones and say, "I would rather have a nice bologna sandwich."

Only someone who is astute and knows value when he sees it relinquishes temporal physical pleasure for a first class seat in *Gan Eden*.