

On the third day, Avraham lifted up his eyes and he saw the place from afar and Avraham said to his young men, abide you here with the donkey. (22:4,5)

Chazal explain Avraham's vision. He saw a cloud attached to the mountain. This symbolizes Hashem's presence over the mountain, waiting for Avraham and Yitzchak's arrival. Avraham asked Yitzchak, "Do you see what I see?" "Yes, I do," responded Yitzchak. Avraham subsequently questioned his servants, "What do you see?" When they answered, "Nothing," he concluded, "Since the donkey does not see, and you as well do not see, you are no better than the donkey. Therefore, stay here with the donkey."

This *Midrash* does not seem consistent with other *Midrashim*, which state that these two servants were actually Eliezer and Yishmael. Eliezer is depicted as Avraham's faithful servant, entirely devoted to transmitting his master's teachings. He is referred to as "*Damesek Eliezer*," *the one who draws from the wellsprings of his master and gives drink to others.*" He was the one Avraham trusted to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Yet, the *Midrash* refers to him as a donkey! Yishmael, the other servant, permitted himself to be circumcised at the age of thirteen. He was driven out of his father's house, later to return bearing no grudge. Obviously, he repented his ways prior to his return. Nonetheless, he is viewed as the other donkey.

Rabbi Y. Lubchansky z.t.l. derives a profound lesson from this *pasuk*. Undoubtedly, Eliezer and Yishmael reached great spiritual heights, but they were not yet able to internalize the sanctity of *Har Ha'Moriah*. They did not perceive the heavenly cloud hovering over the mountain. This spiritual deficiency was sufficient evidence that they had not yet attained the moral and spiritual perfection that would permit them access to the *Akeidah*.

Regardless of one's profundity in *Torah* scholarship or his lofty level of spirituality, he must see beyond the *Torah* to the sublime holiness of its Giver. If one does not perceive Hashem *Yisborach* in his *Torah* studies, if his *mitzvah* performance is not infused with the inherent joy of being close to the Almighty, how is he really different than a "*chamor*," donkey? The "*tzelem Elokim*," image of Hashem, with which we are all imbued, must be cultivated through our *Torah* study and *mitzvah* performance, so that we sense a *d'veikus ba'Hashem*, a strong spiritual bonding with Hashem.