

Avraham said to his lads, “Stay here by yourselves with the donkey.” (22:5)

The Torah relates that, on the third day of Avraham and Yitzchak’s journey, they saw the “place” from afar. *Rashi* explains that he saw *anan kashur al ha’har*, “a cloud affixed on the mountain.” The cloud that was above the mountain was a cloud accompanying the *Shechinah*. *Chazal* teach (*Bereishis Rabbah* 56:1), “Avraham said to Yitzchak, ‘My son, what do you see? Do you see what I see?’ Yitzchak answered, ‘Yes.’ Avraham then asked his two aides (Yishmael and Eliezer), ‘Do you see what I see?’ When they replied, ‘No,’ he said, ‘Since the donkey does not see and you do not see, remain here with the donkey!’” We are talking about Yishmael and Eliezer who did nothing wrong. Yet Avraham compared them to the donkey on some level. Does not seeing/sensing the cloud diminish a person to donkey status? Eliezer was far from being a spiritual pushover. He was Avraham’s primary disciple. Is it this same Eliezer, who reached unparalleled heights of spiritual achievements, that Avraham likened to a donkey?

In the *Ohr HaTzafun*, the *Alter, zl, m’Slabodka* writes that one can observe two men diligently studying Torah, putting their hearts and souls into their studies. Yet, one of them achieves greater and elevated spiritual distinction than the other. Why? The *Alter* explains that it is our observation that is flawed. The one who has achieved greater distinction is on a different plane and in a different world. To the uneducated, uninitiated observer they appear to be on the same spiritual plane, but they are not. Indeed, any added *z’chus* --- even a miniscule spiritual elevation – transforms the person into another being. In other words, these two men are as different from one another as night and day. We do not, however, see this distinction. That is our problem. Yitzchak, who saw the *Shechinah*, became the next Patriarch. Eliezer, who did not see, was relegated to being compared to a donkey. Every additional elevation on the spiritual ladder is transformative.

Settling for the mediocre has recently become acceptable. We forget that between mediocre and (even) tasteful is a great divide. We conjure all forms of rationale (excuses) for not driving up a notch, for adjusting our barometer of acceptance to include inferior when we should seek refined and polished. *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 25:3) delineates ten periods of famine which our people will experience, the last and final one will be: *Lo raav la’lechem v’lo tzama la’mayim ki im lishmoa es d’var Hashem*, “It will be neither a hunger for bread nor a thirst for water, but just to hear the word of G-d” (*Amos* 5). “Is there something wrong with such a famine?” asked the *Ponovezher Rav, zl*. On the contrary, this is the famine for which we should strive. As people, hunger for Torah is a good thing.

The *Rav* explained, when a famine exists; when the store shelves are empty; the cupboards bereft of anything solid to sustain the body, people begin to settle for crumbs. They grab whatever they can, regardless of taste or freshness, as long as they have something. Crumbs, peels, even from the garbage—they will eat whatever they can get. The spiritual hunger that will exist in the End of Days will be such that anything related to Torah will suffice. People will not scrutinize, the validity,

veracity, or source – as long as they hear a *d'var Torah*. As a result, they will remain small people, with little knowledge, because they are hungry. When one is hungry, he settles for anything.