

THE WEIGHT OF ETERNITY

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

The relationship between the tribes of Yisachar and Zevulun was unique. Both had the supreme appreciation for the imperative of Torah study. Yet, only Yisachar possessed the penchant for toiling in G-d's sublime word; Zevulun's forte was the realm of commerce. So each pursued their strength to the benefit of the other: Zevulun pursued trade and financially supported his brother to allow his Torah study to flourish, while Yisachar labored in the Torah and gave Zevulun half of his "s'char" (Divine merit) in recognition of his support.

Yaakov (Jacob) acknowledged these strengths in his blessings to his sons before his death. "Zevulun shall settle by seashores. He shall be at the ship's harbor...Yisachar 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." (Beraishis/Genesis 49:13-15) Rashi clarifies that Zevulun's portion in the Land of Israel included Mediterranean and Galilee seaports, and Zevulun would sell the wares from overseas, with which they supported themselves and Yisachar. Yisachar's might was in carrying the yoke of Torah, thus the analogy to the donkey. And just as a donkey, as it carries its load, does not have the luxury of sleeping indoors, rather, it is forced to stay out in the streets at the edges of town where it delivers its cargo, so too the Torah sage who toils in his study day and night finds his comfort in his service, not his physical relaxation. The blessing concludes, explains Rashi, that with shouldering the yoke of Torah, the scholar becomes indentured to the spiritual needs of the masses, answering their queries and offering them guidance.

But if the paradigm of the Torah scholar is finding meaning in the cause, such that his responsibility is shouldered day and night, that he is indentured to the community, then how does "he [see] tranquility that it [is] good"?

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Mayer Kagan; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics, and acknowledged as the foremost leader of Torah Jewry at the turn of the last century) elucidates that he so joyfully shoulders these burdens in this temporal world because he sees and anticipates the tranquility of the world to come. Rabbi Kagan compares him to the European merchant of old, who would travel to the fair to buy merchandise to sell back home over the next number of months. During the days of the fair, the merchant minimized his expenditures on his own comforts and accommodations, choosing to dedicate maximum resources toward the procurement of sellable goods, because the more he sold the wealthier he would become.

So, too, the scholar who dedicates his life to the Divine - Yisachar, his family, or any of us who is elevated to a new level of "G-d consciousness" by performing a single mitzvah (Divine command) or gaining Divine wisdom through Torah learning - has no difficulty overlooking the temporary pleasures of this world to reap a wealth of Torah study and mitzvah observances to be enjoyed for eternity.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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