

A Taste of Torah – Nourishment in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat V'Zot Habracha: "From the Ships of Zevulun to the Tents of Yissachar" What is Greater: Learning Torah or Supporting Torah Learning?

What Dilemma May We Experience When Dedicating Ourselves Fully to Torah Study?

As a new Ba'alat Teshuva (returnee to Torah), I was told in the yeshiva that all Jews must learn Torah, and then the Arabs will do all our work. This concept never really resonated with me. I hail from a family of very hardworking people. Alongside academic accomplishments, my parents always took pride in working hard physically. My father would fix, paint, build, mow the lawn, and prune the trees. He also engaged in creative projects, such as weaving a beautiful, colorful rug that still adorns my childhood home. My mother kept everything in the house spotless, including every nook and cranny. We children were also put to work from an early age and carried responsibilities according to our abilities.

As I became Torah observant and began learning Torah, statements such as "Torah study is beautiful when combined with a worldly occupation, for the toil of them both keeps sin out of one's mind" (*Pirkei Avot* 2:2) naturally resonated with me. Simultaneously, it became clear to me that there are special souls whose primary work is to toil in Torah. To truly excel and make significant Torah contributions to Israel and the world, particularly gifted Torah scholars may need to devote themselves full time to their studies. Throughout Jewish history, families and communities have therefore supported outstanding Torah scholars, enabling them to immerse themselves in Torah. In some families, the most erudite and studious son was sent to yeshiva, while his brothers worked and helped support his Torah learning. This arrangement echoes the ancient partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun, in which one brother devoted himself to Torah while the other provided the material means that made his learning possible.

My husband and I immersed ourselves in Torah learning for seven years to catch up on all the Torah we hadn't learned during our childhood. Our rabbi told us that it was a mitzvah for us to ask our parents to support us, since by doing so they would receive a share in the merit of our Torah learning. Yet I never felt completely at ease relying on my parents for financial support, since they didn't live in our Torah world and naturally lacked appreciation for the need to support their adult, able-bodied children. Although I didn't want to deprive our parents of the opportunity to receive great merit by supporting Torah learning, I always felt torn about accepting their financial support. Is it really such a great mitzvah to support those who study Torah full time?

How Does Financial Support Nourish Torah Scholarship?

The partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun provides a powerful answer to my dilemma. In his final blessing to the tribes, Moshe juxtaposes Zevulun's going out into the world with Yissachar's remaining in the tents:

ספר דברים פרק לג פסוקים יח-יט

וְלִזְבוּלֹן אָמַר שְׂמַח זְבוּלֹן בְּצֵאתְךָ וַיִּשָּׂאֲכָר בְּאֵהָלָיִךְ... כִּי שָׁפַע יָמִים יִנְקוּ וּשְׂפּוֹנֵי טָמוּנֵי חוֹל:

"And of Zevulun he said: Rejoice, Zevulun, in your going out, and Yissachar, in your tents... for they shall suck the abundance of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand" (*Devarim* 33:18-19).

The Torah's expression **וְיִנְקוּ יָמִים** *ki shefa yamim yinaku* – "for they shall suck the abundance of the seas" – is particularly evocative in the context of nourishment. The word **וְיִנְקוּ** *yinaku* literally means "they shall suck" or "nurse." Zevulun would draw sustenance from the abundance of the seas through his maritime commerce. Yet this material abundance would ultimately nourish the Torah learning taking place within Yissachar's tents. In the partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun, Zevulun would dwell by

the seacoast, sail forth to conduct business, earn a livelihood, and **וְנוֹתֵן לְתוֹךְ פִּי שֶׁל יִשָּׁשכָר**/venoten letoch piv shel Yissachar – “place [his earnings] into Yissachar’s mouth.” Thus, he enabled Yissachar to become so accomplished in Torah that his scholars served as heads of the Sanhedrin, calculating the calendar and determining the new months (Rashi, *Devarim* 33:18).

The Midrash further clarifies this interdependence. Zevulun engaged in commerce while Yissachar devoted himself to Torah. “It is a tree of life to those who support it” (Mishlei 3:18) applies to Zevulun, because “Had it not been for Zevulun, Yissachar would not have engaged in Torah.” Freed from the demands of making a living, Yissachar could dedicate himself entirely to Torah and consequently produce outstanding Torah scholars about whom it states **יֹדְעֵי בִינָה לַעֲתִים**/yodei binah la’itim – “those who understand the times” (*Midrash Tanchuma*, *Vayechi* 11).

We often think of nourishment primarily as sustaining the body. However, the bread placed into Yissachar’s mouth nourished not only his body; it nourished the Torah that emerged from his learning. By providing Yissachar with the physical security and peace of mind necessary to immerse himself in Torah, Zevulun enabled his brother’s spiritual gifts to develop for the benefit of all Israel. In this way, physical sustenance became the vessel for spiritual nourishment.

How Can Material Abundance Become a Vehicle for Spiritual Nourishment?

The partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun goes even deeper than providing the physical conditions necessary for Torah study. The Zohar teaches that each brother shared his portion with the other. Zevulun went out into the world, while Yissachar remained immersed in Torah – “this one gave a portion to the other, and the other gave a portion to this one” (*Zohar*, *Beha’alotcha* 150a).

Thus, the flow of nourishment went in both directions. This reciprocal relationship transforms our understanding of material abundance. Money used only for our own benefit remains material wealth. Yet when we direct some of our resources toward enabling Torah learning, our material abundance becomes a vehicle for spiritual nourishment. The livelihood earned through Zevulun’s commerce entered Yissachar’s tent as food and financial support, but Yissachar’s learning transformed it into Torah shared equally with Zevulun – “and the blessing of Torah is the blessing of everything” (*Zohar* III:150a).

The Radzyner Rebbe reveals an even deeper dimension of Zevulun’s blessing. Drawing on the Zohar and the teachings of the Arizal, he connects Zevulun’s sea with the spiritual “sea” of Knesset Yisrael and with the mystery of *techelet*, which emerges from the sea. The Zohar teaches that the Sea of Kinneret below corresponds to a spiritual Sea of Kinneret above. Thus, “for they shall suck the abundance of the seas” may suggest more than drawing material prosperity from maritime commerce. The physical abundance flowing from the sea below reflects a higher spiritual current (*Ma’amar Ein HaTechelet* 3). Seen through this mystical lens, when Zevulun directs his earnings toward sustaining Yissachar’s Torah, they become a conduit for spiritual nourishment.

This sheds new light on the dilemma I struggled with when my husband and I were studying Torah full time. Material support given to a Torah scholar enters the world of Torah and becomes part of the Torah it enables. The supporter is therefore not standing outside the beit midrash merely paying its bills, but becomes a partner in the spiritual nourishment flowing from it. Just as Zevulun’s material shefa was transformed through Yissachar’s Torah, the resources we dedicate to Torah can become vessels through which Hashem’s spiritual abundance flows into the world. In this partnership, physical and spiritual nourishment join together, allowing Hashem’s blessing to flow equally through both.

Why Does the Torah Mention Zevulun Before Yissachar?

We may wonder why Moshe mentions Zevulun first: “Rejoice, Zevulun, in your going out, and Yissachar, in your tents” (*Devarim* 33:18). After all, Yissachar was born before Zevulun, and Torah learning would seem to

to deserve precedence over the material support that enables it. Yet both Ya'acov and Moshe bless Zevulun before Yissachar.

The Zohar answers that supporting Torah is portrayed not merely as giving from one's surplus, but as sharing one's own bread. Zevulun transformed the fruit of his labor into the nourishment that allowed Yissachar to remain within the tents of Torah. His precedence therefore reflects the extraordinary value Hashem places upon supporting Torah. Zevulun did not merely earn a livelihood alongside Yissachar's learning; he deliberately directed his hard-earned income toward making that learning possible.

The Zohar goes even further. Because Zevulun sustained those who labored in Torah, he merited blessings both in this world and in the World-to-Come. While Yissachar devoted himself to the "table" of Torah, Zevulun was blessed with "two tables" – material blessing below as well as spiritual reward above. His physical work became elevated and bound to the Torah he sustained (*Zohar* I:242a).

The *Kedushat Yom Tov* raises a profound question: can the one who enables Torah learning in some sense receive precedence over the one who actually learns? Yet he challenges this possibility with the Talmudic teaching, "Great is Torah study, for it leads to action" (*Kiddushin* 40b). Perhaps Zevulun's precedence teaches us that spiritual nourishment does not appear in the world without vessels to sustain it. Before Yissachar can remain in his tent and immerse himself in Torah, someone must place bread into his mouth. The bread is not the ultimate purpose – the Torah is – yet the Torah cannot flourish if the physical needs of those who learn it are neglected. By mentioning Zevulun first, the Torah honors the person who willingly transforms his own physical nourishment into nourishment for another person's Torah.

Why Do Material Blessings at Times Precede Spiritual Blessings?

Does Zevulun's primacy indicate that material pursuits are ultimately worthier than Torah? *Imrei Shammai* points out a fascinating distinction. In Moshe's blessings, Zevulun precedes Yissachar, whereas in the arrangement of the tribal banners, Yissachar precedes Zevulun. He explains that a blessing concerns the flow of shefa. Since Zevulun receives material abundance and channels it toward sustaining Yissachar's Torah, the material shefa must first flow to Zevulun before it can enable the spiritual flow emerging from Yissachar's Torah. When it comes to the essential spiritual order, Yissachar takes precedence because Torah remains the ultimate purpose (*Imrei Shammai, Devarim* 488).

This relationship is encapsulated in the well-known teaching "If there is no flour, there is no Torah" (*Pirkei Avot* 3:17). Flour comes first not because it is more important than Torah, but because the body must be nourished before it can become a vessel for the soul. We need bread, shelter, clothing, livelihood, and sufficient peace of mind to devote ourselves to higher spiritual pursuits. This insight illuminates Moshe's final blessings. As he prepares to leave this world, Moshe blesses the tribes not only with spiritual greatness, but with the tangible nourishment of this earth – the dew of heaven, the waters of the deep, produce ripened by the sun, the abundance of the seas, bread, oil, grain, and wine. The Torah does not ask us to escape the physical world in pursuit of the spiritual. Rather, it teaches us to receive Hashem's physical blessings with gratitude and elevate them by directing them toward His service.

As we complete the yearly Torah reading cycle, we are taught that physical and spiritual nourishment were never meant to be separate worlds. The food we eat, the livelihood we earn, and the abundance with which Hashem blesses us can all become vessels for Torah. Zevulun's ships and Yissachar's tents ultimately serve one purpose: bringing more Torah and Hashem's presence into the world. May we merit to receive Hashem's abundance with gratitude and share it generously. In this way, the physical blessings of this world can become vessels for the greatest nourishment of all – the Torah that gives life to Israel and carries Hashem's blessing into the entire world.

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