

# THE ULTIMATE PARTNERSHIP

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"The tribe of Zevulun, and the head of the children of Zevulun is Eliav ben Chelon." [2:7]*

In the town of Vilna, several centuries ago, two Jewish merchants found themselves in a financial dispute which they could not resolve on their own. They decided to settle their dispute by using a traditional method known by the acronym "zablah" -- each side would choose an individual to act as a judge, the two judges would choose a third to sit with them, and the three judges would then adjudicate the case.

At that time, an outstanding scholar named Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer lived in the city -- he was called the Vilna Gaon, the "Genius of Vilna." One of the two participants chose a leading merchant to be a judge; the other went to Rabbi Kramer to be his.

Rabbi Kramer, however, refused. He said that the world of business and the world of Torah are often complete opposites. A person can get caught up in business affairs, and believe that wrong is right and right is wrong, so Rabbi Kramer could not serve on a court together with a merchant and ensure that they would agree upon the right answer. And, he said, we find a hint to this concept in this week's reading.

In the desert, the 12 tribes were divided into groups of three, and each group followed the flag of one tribe's camp: the flag of Yehudah to the east, Reuven to the south, Ephraim to the West and Dan to the north. In each case, said the Gaon, we find that when the tribes under each flag are mentioned, the Torah lists the first, the second, and then says "and the tribe of..." to indicate the third.

Only in the case of the flag of Yehudah is the third tribe not joined to the others with "and." The verse simply starts out of nowhere: "the tribe of Zevulun..."

Yissacher and Zevulun had a partnership. The children of Yissacher sat and studied Torah. The tribe of Zevulun supported Yissacher, and in doing so shared the merit of Yissacher's study. But even so, said the Vilna Gaon, the two were separate. They lacked a connection.

Those who studied in yeshiva for several years, and then went into the business world, know that this is true -- it is difficult to go into business, yet continue to think like a Torah scholar. They are different worlds, requiring a person to think and act differently, much as Western society in general calls for behavior which opposes Jewish values.

To actually move from work or business to Torah scholarship later in life is a deed worthy of Rebbe

Akiva (who went to yeshiva at age 40, and grew to become the leading Rabbi of his time). It is also, of course, a tremendous challenge and accomplishment for a person to come from a non-observant, standard American Jewish lifestyle, and adopt full Jewish observance, at any age. And this too is much easier early in life, when a person is exploring various options without a strong commitment to any. For an older person, this is another transition, even greater than that from business to Torah study.

Last week, we lost a man who did what is difficult to imagine: as a successful businessman, he not only migrated to Jewish observance, but set aside his expertise to sit at the feet of teachers -- as if he were a young child -- to learn Torah.

Arthur Morgenstern spent his later years going to the Yeshiva of Philadelphia every morning, paying attention to the words of Abbayeh and Rava rather than the latest investment opportunities. He learned with people many years his junior, in order to learn to swim in the Sea of Talmud. And his accomplishments were considerable, to say the least -- I had the opportunity to attend a Siyum (celebration of completion of a Tractate) which he made a few years ago, and know that this was but one of his many accomplishments in learning.

His investments turned to Torah as well, as many Jewish institutions in Philadelphia and beyond gratefully attest. One of his most recent projects was to help found the Philadelphia Kollel, which is just getting underway. A Kollel, an advanced study center for Jewish scholars, often serves a crucial role in the development of an affiliated Jewish community -- and it was surprising that there was none in Philadelphia. Arthur recognized the need.

And I must also mention that he was the founding Chairman of the Board of Project Genesis -- in fact, he helped me to incorporate Project Genesis in 1993. He was one of the first to believe in Project Genesis and what it might accomplish. Today, what we provide to nearly 40,000 subscribers is in his merit.

Aharon ben Binyamin a"h will be sorely missed, by his family and by all who knew him.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken