

YISSACHOR-ZEVULUN: THE HYPHENATED TRIBE / LUCKY STRIKE? NO WAY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshios Bamidbar & Shavuot

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Yissachor-Zevulun: The Hyphenated Tribe

In the second chapter of Bamidbar the Torah describes the order of the "Flags" and the sequence in which the Tribes of Israel travelled in the Wilderness. There were four camps, each led by a particular tribe. Each tribe had their unique flag. The Torah describes the order of the flags.

The first camp, which was on the eastern side of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], was led by the Tribe of Yehudah and included the Tribes of Yehudah, Yissocher and Zevulun. The pasukim elaborate on the names of the Princes and the population of each particular tribe.

The flag of the Tribe of Reuven led the southern camp, which included the tribes of Shimmon and Gad. The flag of the Tribe of Ephraim led the western camp, which included the tribes of Menashe and Binyamin. The flag of the Tribe of Dan led the northern camp, which included the tribes of Asher and Naftali.

The Baal HaTurim points out an anomaly in the description of the four camps. By three of the four camps, the Torah describes the tribal components in the following fashion: "The flag of the camp of (Tribe A) ... AND those encamping next to him (Tribe B)... AND (Tribe C)... In only one case is the conjunctive "AND" not used prior to naming one of the supplementary tribes in each camp. The only time that there is not an AND is by the Tribe of Zevulun, who traveled along with Yehudah and Yissocher in the eastern camp.

Most of us do not even notice such an anomaly. However, only by Zevulun it does not say "u'Mateh Zevulun" as it says by all the other tribes, but rather simply "Mateh Zevulun" [Bamidbar 2:7]. Why?

The Baal HaTurim explains (quoting the Medrash Tanchuma) that the reason is why is because the Tribe of Zevulun (who were merchants) supported the Tribe of Yissocher (who were Torah scholars). Scripture did not want to give the impression that they were subordinate to Yissachor and described their encampment in an independent fashion without the conjunctive "AND" (vov). Zevulun was not secondary to Yissocher. Zevulun was co-equal to Yissocher and they share equal reward for their respective efforts in building the Jewish people.

The pasuk "It is a Tree of Life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." [Mishlei 3:18] alludes to this concept. In a sense, the arrangement between these two tribes actually merge them into a joint "corporation" as it were – "The Tribe of Yissachor-Zevulun" where all components of this super-Tribe receive equal reward. It is for this reason that the Tribe of Zevulun is not preceded by the word "And": It is not a different tribe, but rather a hyphenated tribe which has merged with Yissocher. They are co-equals because of the parnassah [sustenance] that Zevulun provided to the Tribe of Yissocher.

Why Wasn't Zevulun A Lawyer or Computer Programmer?

Each camp and each tribe had their own flag. On each flag was that tribe's symbol. For example, Yehudah's flag contained a lion (based on Bereishis 49:9) representing Kingship and Yissocher's flag contained the moon and stars (based on Divrei HaYamim I 12:32) because the scholars of that tribe possessed astronomical knowledge necessary to determine the New Moon. Dan's possessed a snake (based on Bereishis 49:17). Zevulun's flag possessed a boat (based on Bereishis 49:13) because his territorial allotment in the Land of Israel was on the coast.

The Tribe of Zevulun, as we mentioned before, were merchants. They were in the import export business. However, it was not like people today in the import export business who sit behind a desk and conduct their transactions by phone or computer. Zevulun did it the hard way. He went out on the boats. He sailed the seas, where he bought merchandise and then sold it in various ports. That is how he earned his living.

We must ask the question: Zevulun is such a wonderful person. He supports his brother Yissocher. Why did he need to make his livelihood in such a difficult and dangerous fashion? It was not only in ancient times that going on a ship represent a risk to one's life (such that seafarers are one of four categories of people mentioned in the Talmud as needing to recite the "HaGomel" blessing upon their safe return). Even today, fishermen have a hard time obtaining life insurance. The boats go down in storms; people are thrown overboard, and so forth. It is a dangerous profession. Zevulun is a Tzaddik. He supported his brother Yissocher. Why was he not a lawyer? He could have sat behind a desk and billed by the hour. Let him be a computer programmer. Why did he need to be in the merchant marine? What kind of "Jewish profession" is being a sailor? Why did such a righteous tribe have such a tenuous existence?

Rav Dovid Feinstein once said a beautiful insight. The Gemara [Niddah 14a] says that all sailors are pious. This is a variation of the old rule "there are no atheists in foxholes". When a person is out on a boat, he does not know if he is going to survive. Even if he does survive, he realizes how difficult and tenuous earning his living is. As a result, he becomes aware of G-d and he becomes more pious. The person knows how dangerous it is and how scary it is. He knows that in a matter of minutes, he can lose everything. In such a situation, one becomes more G-d fearing; he gets religion.

This explains why the Tribe of Zevulun supported his brother. Such a person knows Who really provides 'parnassah'. When one sits behind a desk and gets the same paycheck every single week, it is much easier to think, "This is the way it is supposed to be". A person might begin to believe in himself: It is because I am such a brilliant lawyer that I have such a good income. It is because I am such a clever accountant. It is because I am such a creative and innovative programmer. "That is why I make a good living." When someone approaches such a person and asks for a check for someone

else, his response is "I should give you a check of my hard earned money that I worked and sweated for with my ingenuity and my talent? You want me to give away my money? I worked hard for this money!"

However, when a person is a sailor who works on the high seas and knows how scary it can be, he knows that only the Master of the World provides "parnassah". He is much more amenable to have a brother like Yissocher and to support him fully. "After all, I do not earn the money. I am just a conduit, a bank for someone to hold the money of the Ribono shel Olam. If the Ribono shel Olam wants me to do this with His money, I will do it!"

Since the Tribe of Zevulun was the one that supported the Tribe of Yissocher, it was for that very reason that he needed to make a living through being a merchant marine – the type of profession where one gains an appreciation for who really provides the "parnassah".

Lucky Strike? No Way

I would like to share an insight on the Book of Rus, from a sefer entitled Ikvei Erev by Rav Azriel Langa, a student in the Mir Yeshiva in Europe. Rav Langa escaped through Shanghai with the rest of the Mir Yeshiva, came to America, and was an eighth grade Rebbe in Yeshivas Torah VoDaath. Unfortunately, Rav Langa never had any children. He left behind a number of manuscripts, which friends of the family recently published. Mr. Moshe Smith was instrumental in publishing this work and sent me a copy of the Sefer, from which I would like to share one insight.

It says in Megillas Rus, "...and her fate made her happen upon a parcel of land, belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech" [Rus 2:3]. Rus and Naomi came back from Moav. They literally had nothing to eat. Rus starts picking the gleanings left for the poor (Leket, Shikcha, Peah) in the field of Boaz.

The pasuk uses a very unusual expression to describe what happened. "Vayiker mikreh chelkas haSadeh L'Boaz". "Vayiker mikreh" basically means "And it so happens (that she started picking in the field of Boaz)". We know the end of the story. We know that Boaz saw her. He was kind to her. She told Naomi about it. Eventually Rus and Boaz married and they were the ancestors of Dovid King of Israel, from whom the righteous Moshiach will eventually descend.

This is not "Vayiker mikreh". This was not happenstance. This was all pre-ordained. The Master of the World wanted Rus to be the Mother of Royalty.

Therefore, out of all the fields that Rus could have chosen, the Ribono shel Olam directed her to the field of Boaz. So why then does the pasuk use the expression "Vayiker mikreh chelkas haSader L'Boaz" as if this was a lucky chance – a shot in the dark? This was not "mikreh" [happenstance]. This

was "Hashgacha" [Divine Providence] of the highest order! The Almighty is orchestrating the advent of Moshiach!

The answer is that this is a lesson. The lesson is that what appears to us as happenstance ("Mikreh") just LOOKS like that. It LOOKS like a stroke of luck. However, it is not luck at all! It is all preordained and pre-planned.

Rabbi Langa writes from personal experience, "If a prophet would have predicted in Europe in 1930 that there would be a Holocaust in Europe and the entire student body of the Mir Yeshiva would manage to escape just in time, who would have believed him? Could anyone have predicted the amazing sequence of events and opportunities that enabled the salvation of the Yeshiva students?

(After the Soviets captured Eastern Poland including Vilna early in World War II, they planned to transfer Vilna to Lithuania. However, there was a window of opportunity prior to that transfer when travel was possible between Poland and Vilna. The Mir Yeshiva and many others rushed from various parts of Poland to Vilna. After the Soviets transferred Vilna to Lithuania, travel between Vilna and Poland ceased. Anyone who was in Vilna was now in Lithuania and was at least temporarily out of harm's way.)

An amazing combination of permits and visas then enabled the escape of the Mir Yeshiva, which planted the seeds of Torah communities in America and Eretz Yisrael. Rav Shach, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, Rav Nochum Parchovitz, Rav Dovid Kronglass – all great future Torah leaders who were saved along with the Mir Yeshiva. Why? They were saved, in part, through an amazing sequence of events that included the timing of both the opening of the gates between Poland and Lithuania and the transfer of Vilna to Lithuania. If someone had predicted at the time that this political event would be a vital link in the chain that led to the salvation of Torah for Klal Yisrael, we might have dismissed him as delusional.

Events might look like ordinary. They may look like "luck," however; they are Hashgacha Pratis [personal Divine Providence]. The reason the pasuk in Rus uses these words is to tell us that regarding the history of Klal Yisrael – for good or for bad – nothing is "just a matter of luck".

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