

Can You Sell a Mitzvah?

What was unique about Yissachar and Zevulun's relationship, and how is it being played out in Israel today?

Picking Lettuce

This week, my daughter studying in Jerusalem sent me a picture of herself picking lettuce. I asked her, "What's with you and lettuce?" We didn't send her to Israel to pick lettuce.

Since the war began on October 7th, over seven thousand foreign workers have left Israel, including two thousand from Thailand. The King of Thailand bought them tickets on his own dime to return to their home country. Most of the foreigners work in agriculture, and as a result, the agricultural sector is in a severe crisis. Volunteers from all over the country, mainly students and retirees, are filling this shortage.

She told me that her entire program, went one day to a kibbutz in the south to help with the lettuce harvest. Within a few hours, they picked and packaged everything and shipped them out to the stores. She also said that when they went to donate blood; the line was so large that the clinic couldn't handle the crowd, and they had to go home and come back on a different day!

The authors of the best seller "Start-Up Nation" recently published an interesting article about the war in Israel. In the article, they make an intriguing analysis. They acknowledge that the army failed on October 7th, but on the other hand, what was revealed that day was a tremendous power of

solidarity. Israelis themselves were surprised by the incredible outpouring of support and mutual care and concern for each other.

This partnership was not born in the last 75 years. It is part of the DNA of the Jewish people.

Yissachar and Zevulun

In this week's Torah portion, Vayetze, we read about Yaakov's family coming into being.

Yaakov journeys to Haran, meets Rachel and wants to marry her, and offers to work seven years for Lavan in exchange for her. On the wedding day, Lavan substitutes Leah for Rachel. In the morning, Yaakov discovers the deception, and after negotiations with Lavan, agrees to work another seven years in exchange for marrying Rachel immediately.

Then the children start to arrive. Leah first bears a son named Reuven, a second named Shimon, the third named Levi, and a fourth named Yehudah. Leah thanked G-d for having received four sons, and then, the Torah declares, "And she stopped bearing." She no longer gave birth.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Leah encouraged Yaakov to marry her maidservant Zilpah, and after Zilpah's 2 sons were born, Leah became pregnant again. She gave birth to two more sons, Yissachar and Zevulun.

Yissachar and Zevulun were the fathers of unique tribes. Yissachar was a tribe of scholars and wise men who engaged in astronomy and the calculations of the calendar. Zevulun, on the

other hand, were successful businessmen, particularly in maritime trade, living near the shores of the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean.

Our sages tell us that these two tribes had a very good relationship and formed a partnership agreement. The deal was that the Zevulun tribe, thriving in business, would support the Yissachar tribe, dedicating their lives to Torah study. In return, half of the spiritual rewards earned through Torah study by the Yissachar tribe would be transferred to Zevulun.

For those unfamiliar with this agreement, the notion of trading in the spiritual merits of Torah study may sound peculiar. However, in Jewish law, it is explicitly stated that if a person lacks time to study Torah due to business or other obligations, the solution is to support others who study. By doing so, the supporter is considered as if they are personally engaged in learning (Yoreh Deah 246:1 in the *hagaha*).

You can actually find “Yissachar and Zevulun Agreement” forms on Google, where both the learner and the supporter sign their commitment to this arrangement.

The Butcher Who Was Afraid of Blood

Here is a story I recently read about one such arrangement:

There is a famous organization called Hatzalah, a Jewish emergency service that operates practically in every Jewish neighborhood around the world.

The Israeli branch, known as “United Hatzalah,” was founded by Eli Beer. He recently published a book called “90 Seconds: The

Epic Story of Eli Beer and United Hatzalah,” telling the story of his volunteer organization that brings together over 7,000 volunteer medics to provide first aid until ambulances arrive.

What’s unique about Hatzalah is that they have an Uber-like system, where the task is given to the responder who is nearest to the scene. Countless lives were saved because of their system, which allows care to come to emergencies in an incredibly fast way, in under 90 seconds.

In this book, he recounts a day when he received a call from a volunteer, saying that he had been fired from his job.

This volunteer was a truck driver delivering meat to customers, and on Erev Pesach, while en route to distribute meat, he received an emergency call — a woman was giving birth on the side of the road, without enough time to make it to the hospital. He quickly raced to the scene, abandoned his truck, and helped deliver a healthy baby. Then, he waited with the couple until the ambulance arrived to bring them to the hospital.

All this time, the owner of the meat distribution company was receiving angry calls from customers. “Where is our meat for Pesach?” they all wanted to know, with all the intensity of the pre-Pesach rush.

When it became clear that the driver had chosen to do mitzvos instead of fulfilling his work duties, he was fired. “You want to do mitzvos?” his boss told him, “fine, but not on my dime.” Eli Beer called the boss, but to no avail. The boss was frustrated that this was happening again and again, and he wasn’t willing to deal with it anymore. Finally, Eli suggested going to a rabbi to

resolve the matter.

After hearing both sides, the rabbi ruled in favor of the boss, stating that while an employer must allow time for prayer, meals, and possibly rest, they are not obligated to pay for an employee's good deeds. But then, the rabbi turned to the boss and asked him if he had ever saved a life. The boss replied, "No, I'm afraid of the sight of blood." Eli Beer jumped in, pointing out the absurdity that a butcher is afraid of blood, but the owner insisted; "the mere sight of human blood makes me faint."

So, the rabbi proposed a solution: "Let's make a deal between you two, a sort of 'Yissachar and Zevulun' agreement." After all, the Mishnah states, "One who saves a single soul of Israel is as if he saved an entire world" (Sanhedrin 4:5). Since you don't have the opportunity to save lives directly, make an agreement with your employee. Every time he saves a life, you share the merit - a fifty-fifty split.

It was an offer he couldn't refuse. The merit of saving a life is priceless. The employer agreed, with one condition - he'd share in the reward not just during working hours but also if the employee happened to save a life during his free time.

The employee wasn't so enthusiastic about the condition; why should his mitzvah in private time be shared with his employer? But after a negotiation, they signed an agreement: for a life-saving during working hours, the boss received 50% of the mitzvah's reward; if it occurs after working hours, he got 25%. (90 seconds, pg. 183).

Being a Collective

The Rebbe often emphasized that each one of us is part of a collective partnership. Men fulfill certain mitzvos, women fulfill others, and when a married couple engages in a mitzvah, they're essentially partners in that act. When the woman lights Shabbat candles, her husband shares in that special merit. Likewise, when the husband puts on tefillin, his wife is a part of that deed (see Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 8, p. 212; Toras Menachem 5749 vol. 2 pg. 187).

This concept extends to the entire Jewish people. Some commandments are exclusive to Kohanim, while others are tied to residing in the Land of Israel, like the mitzvot of Shemitah. But because the Jewish people form one united entity, everyone is a partner in all the mitzvot.

The beauty of this partnership has become even more evident in recent weeks. I heard a heartwarming story from a community member who works for a flooring and ceramics company based in New York. His boss, an observant Jew, rented an entire hotel in Israel and gave all 200 rooms to host families who had to relocate from the south. Every two weeks, he personally travels to Israel for Shabbat to explore additional ways to support these families. This is just one of countless examples of how the Jewish people have come together to care for each other.

This partnership, this sense of collective responsibility, is the secret of our survival. It is this shared effort that will help us usher in the age of Moshiach.

Since that day, the employer has been amazed by the merit of employing only United Hatzalah volunteers who are willing to share the reward of the mitzvah. In the end, they signed an agreement specifying that for a life-saving during working hours, the boss receives 50% of the merit, but if it occurs after working hours, he gets only 25%. Ever since, the employer has been so impressed with this arrangement that he only hires United Hatzalah volunteers willing to share the reward of the mitzvah.