

OzTORAH

V'zot HaB'racha

Z'vulun & Yissachar

Divrei Torah on the weekly reading usually skip the final section of the Torah, V'Zot HaB'racha, presumably because it is read on Simchat Torah and doesn't have a Shabbat to itself. A pity, since there is so much to think and speak about in this section.

As an example, there is the verse in Moshe's blessing (D'varim 33:18), "Rejoice, Z'vulun, in your going out, and Yissachar in your tents."

Mentioning these two tribes together echoes their long-established association that has its beginning in the patriarch Yaakov's blessing of his sons (B'reishit 49:13-14).

The sages explain that the two brothers, Z'vulun and Yissachar, and the tribes named after them, had a mutually beneficial partnership: Z'vulun were seafarers who went out to make a living, supporting Yissachar who were scholars who stayed home to study. Yissachar in turn brought spiritual benefit to Z'vulun.

In that sense Z'vulun were known for their "going out" for business, and Yissachar for their life in the tents of Torah.

(It is said that there was a similar partnership between the Rambam and his brother, which worked well until the trading brother lost his life at an early age.)

This is how many of the commen-

tators take the verse from V'Zot HaB'racha. However, Targum Onkelos follows a line of rabbinic commentary that considers that Z'vulun's going out is for the purpose of war against an enemy: the notion of "going out" at the beginning of Parshat Ki Teitzei is "going out to war".

Onkelos also says that Yissachar's expertise is "to set the time of the festivals in Jerusalem". The responsibility for making calendrical decisions in those days, long before the scientific calculation of the calendar, required Torah knowledge acquired whilst sitting in the tents of study, and the tribe of Yissachar are already acclaimed in the Bible as experts in this field (Divrei HaYamim Alef 12:32).

In a broader sense, Yissachar's studies equipped them with the wisdom and vision to assess the events of the times: the verse in Divrei HaYamim calls them "people who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do".

In that sense Yissachar's strength was in policy and Z'vulun's in tactics.

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“The” Festival

Rabbinic works place Sukkot on a pedestal.

They don't call it "a" but "the" festival – BECHAG, adopting a phrase from Melachim Alef 8:2.

One reason is that whilst the Torah commands us to rejoice (D'varim 16:15) it was not until the extreme joy of Sukkot in Second Temple times that there arose a saying that whoever has never seen the Sukkot celebrations has never experienced real joy.

Perhaps the supreme joy of Sukkot derives from the fact that it falls just after the holiness of Yom Kippur, and the Kotzker Rebbe used to say, “Joyfulness is the outcome of holiness.”

Another possibility is that this festival stresses universal peace, in contrast to Pesach, which stands for freedom, and Shavu'ot, the symbol of moral law.

In time to come, the redemption of the whole of mankind will be symbolised by every nation and individual assembling under the sukkah of peace. This ultimate aspiration gives Sukkot a unique purpose and flavor.

From the psychological point of view, the sukkah represents the frailty of life but also the certainty of God's protection, which is the greatest lesson of faith.