

## **GUSH DAN** by Rabbi Dror Brama

**“Dan is a lion cub, leaping forth from the Bashan” (D'varim 33:22)**

The above Pasuk is, at first glance, unclear. The portion of the tribe of Dan was meant to be in the area which is now called “Gush Dan”, to the west of Israel, while the Bashan is situated to the east of the land, beyond the east side of the Jordan. After the Jewish People had conquered the kingdom of Og, the king of Bashan, this territory was, in fact, given to the tribe of Menashe:

“Yair, the descendant of Menashe, took the entire region of Argov until the border of the Geshurite and the Maacathite, and he named them, even Bashan, after his own name: Havvot-Yair”.

Why does Moshe connect Dan with the Bashan, the territory of the tribe of Menashe?

Rashi, following Chazal, explains that the intent is what, in practice, turned out to be the portion of Dan. The book of Shoftim relates how the tribe of Dan did not succeed in conquering its portion and eventually turned northwards, conquering the city of Laish, where it built up the city of Dan.

The difficulty with this explanation is that it appears from Shoftim that the members of the tribe of Dan acted improperly by transgressing the command of Yehoshua and Moshe to inherit their portion, and in so doing they attacked a city which was not included in the territory that had been allocated to them:

“Thus they took what Micha had made and the kohein who had been his. They came upon Laish, upon a complacent and secure people, and they struck them down by the sword and burnt the city down. There was no one to save them, for it was distant from Sidon, and they had no alliance with any person. It was situated in the valley which is near Beit-Rechov. They then built up the city and settled in it. They named the city Dan, after the name of Dan, their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but Laish was the name of the city at first.” (Shoftim 18:27-28).

If, indeed, this incident relates to territory conquered by Dan in the north, towards the Golan and the Bashan, why does Moshe praise them for their act?

Another question that can be asked is why did Moshe change the

imagery to that of a lion, when Yaakov blessed Dan, using the image of a serpent: "Dan will be a serpent on the highway, a viper by the path" (B'reishit 49:17)?

Perhaps the following answer can be suggested to both these questions. Moshe knew that the tribe of Dan would find it difficult to conquer its portion. It is in the nature of a serpent to wind its way around, and to attempt to bypass any obstacle it encounters. It does not confront obstacles or enemies head-on; but, rather, attempts to overtake these in a roundabout manner. This was the tactic employed by the children of Dan, when they vacated their portion in favor of places easier to overcome. But Moshe commands them to be like lions, like the tribe of Yehuda which confronted its enemies directly in order to overcome them. The Bashan is not the territory of Dan, and it is not the serpent's manner to "leap forth". Moshe blesses the tribe of Dan with extra strength, transforming them into lions, with a clear message: The Bashan is not their territory. It serves only as a starting point and spring board until attaining the ability to fight properly and to inherit their portion. Until that time, it is true, they are merely "lion cubs"; but they will quickly grow up and leap forth from the Bashan to inherit their true portion. 