



Editor's note: This letter was reviewed by members of the Va'ad Roshei Yeshivah of Torah Umesorah.

THE RE-INVENTION OF YISSACHAR-ZEVULUN: A “PUSH BUTTON JUDAISM” DISTORTION

TO THE EDITOR:

IT'S NEW! IT'S DIFFERENT! AND IT'S WRONG!

A recent article (*Parashas Vayakhel-Pekudei*/March 10) spoke glowingly about a “modern-day version of the Torah’s Yissachar-Zevulun partnership,” an arrangement wherein members of a *kollel* would *daven* for the success of a local businessman’s venture and would share in the profits if the venture succeeded.

Innovations in *avodas Hashem* always have to be very carefully scrutinized, especially when, as is the case with the aforementioned “partnership arrangement,” there were no hurdles precluding such “partnerships” a hundred or even a thousand years ago. Yet we have no prior record of such practices. *Mosdos* in earlier generations would presumably have latched on to such a potentially lucrative fund-raising tactic if it were legitimate.

In fact, this arrangement does not stand up to scrutiny. It exemplifies several hashkafic weaknesses that are symptomatic of the general 21st-century mindset and which have begun to affect the thinking of our own community as well.

YISSACHAR AND ZEVULUN WOULD NOT APPROVE

We’ll begin with the 21st-century tendency to gloss over accuracy for the sake of journalistic effect. Whatever the legitimacy of the “partnership arrangement” described in the article it is most assuredly not a Yissachar-Zevulun partnership, “modern-day” or otherwise. The *halachos* of Yissachar-Zevulun relationships are complex, but the fundamental structure is not: Zevulun provides sustenance to Yissachar, who spends his time learning Torah. Part of the reward for the Torah learning accrues to Zevulun in exchange for his material support of Yissachar.

The only reward Zevulun can count on from a *bona fide* Yissachar-Zevulun relationship is spiritual. In no way is he “buying” a guarantee of success in his business enterprises nor does he have grounds for complaint if he does not achieve material success. An arrangement whereby a businessman provides support for Torah study in expectation of material and not spiritual reward is emphatically not Yissachar-

Zevulun. An arrangement whereby the support provided Yissachar is conditional on Zevulun’s material success — or anything else — is emphatically not Yissachar-Zevulun. Such arrangements are the antithesis of Yissachar-Zevulun. To use that term to describe them is a serious distortion that turns a venerable arrangement for support of Torah study on its head!

YISSACHAR-ZEVULUN RE-INVENTED:

A SYMPTOM OF “PUSH-BUTTON” *RUCHNIYUS*

In fact it is questionable whether such an arrangement is legitimate or effective at all, whether it benefits the businessman providing the funds, whether it benefits the *kollel* receiving them, and whether it benefits *Klal Yisrael*.

It is a true that, as we learn in the *haftarah* of *Shabbos HaGadol*, one may, as it were, “test” Hashem by attaching conditions to *tzedakah* donations. However, there are no guarantees regarding how the condition will be fulfilled, when it will be fulfilled, and even if it will be fulfilled.

We live in a push-button society. When we flick a switch, we expect the light to go on — it almost always does and we are thus frustrated when it does not. When we press on the accelerator, we expect the car to pick up speed and we are frustrated when it does not. We are, in general, a society that has become conditioned to expect instant gratification. “Click on the ‘Buy Now’ button to add the item to your shopping cart and it will be delivered tomorrow.”

However, cause and effect in *ruchniyus* isn’t nearly so simple, immediate or obvious. We understand the operation of a light switch and car; they are completely deterministic. But we understand very little about the *ruchniyusdig* factors that underlie the *hashgachah pratis* that determines what happens to us. We do know that giving *tzedakah* conditionally mitigates in favor of our condition being met. But we don’t know all the other factors at play, and thus predictability in any sense is impossible. And immediate gratification is usually not forthcoming.

BITACHON: YES. INSTANT GRATIFICATION: NO

Bitachon is a cornerstone of *Yiddishkeit* — the

proper attitude of a *baal bitachon* is to trust that Hashem is controlling events down to the last detail, that He “hears” our requests (and *tzedakah* conditions), that He wants to benefit us — and that He knows better than we do what is to our ultimate good. We may not get what we want when we want it, no matter how fervently we ask for it and no matter how much *tzedakah* we give. We are permitted, even required, to make our requests of Hashem. Having done so, we are required to assume an attitude of *kol man d’avid Rachmana l’tav aviv*.

Being *matzdik es haDin* is a fundamental Jewish trait. We say, “*Posei’ach es yadecha u’masbia l’chol chai ratzon* — Hashem satisfies the desire of every living thing,” and we follow it immediately with, “*Tzaddik Hashem b’chol drachav v’chassid b’chol maasav*,” a declaration that all the ways of Hashem are righteous — even if an immediate desire is unfulfilled. When the Beis Hamikdash was completed Shlomo Hamelech asked Hashem to respond favorably to the requests of the non-Jews who came to pray there — knowing that, while non-Jews would lose faith if their prayers weren’t answered in an obvious way, Jews would not.

Faith, patience and acceptance, are characteristic of Jews. They are uncharacteristic of the general 21st-century population. Thus we have to hold fast to our values or we risk being sucked into the vortex of the prevailing and antithetical 21st-century value system.

BUILDING WALLS AGAINST FALSE VALUES

Indeed, these false values have already begun to leach into our thought processes, and the “partnership arrangement” described in the article is symptomatic of a creeping trend toward facile religious devices that are expected to yield instant and foolproof gratification. It is akin to other contemporary manifestations of the same disease: seeking “*segulos*” as a “push-button” means to achieve desires, consulting “*mekubalim*” in the expectation of immediate results, responding favorably to flyers from *tzedakah* organizations filled with “case studies” of people who, with disaster staring them in the face, make desperate pledges and are miraculously and instantly saved.

Like those other quick-fix religious tricks, the “partnership arrangement” sets false expectations. A businessman with an imminent deal is expecting a concrete positive outcome when he enters into this partnership — whatever the “fine print” of the



From Regis to Riches
Several years ago, after having engaged many Tzedakah/Ozvezon partnerships in the South and having found financial success for both the client and the donor, I was approached by a local business leader asking, "Can you help me with my business?" At the time, Goldberg was struggling...

Going Nationwide
"Since the St. Louis success has spread throughout the country, several years ago the Cleveland office decided to follow suit and started to bring in clients and the St. Louis office to help with the program. It's a great challenge to take on a more challenging role because of the greater number of clients and the need to help the client with providing the idea to potential partners."

Now, every evening when the Cleveland office members sit down to learn, they recite the names of the office's previous partners. Over the years the office has made hundreds of thousands of dollars through its partnerships. Each office holds a local office with big stars for the future. The goal is to have a star one-third of its annual budget to come from such partnerships.

Three principles that help people get the office into Cleveland are: Partner in the client's success. Each office must be able to work with the client's success. Partner with the client's success. Each office must be able to work with the client's success. Partner with the client's success. Each office must be able to work with the client's success.

“contract” may say. That expectation is reinforced when he is assured by Rabbis, whom he presumably respects, that this arrangement “works.”

What will his reaction be if and when the deal falls through — as it very well might, since, as noted earlier, Heaven cannot be manipulated by flicking a switch? A *yeridah* in *bitachon* is likely. A diminution of respect for *talmidei chachamim* is inevitable. And the more common such “partnerships” become, the more pervasive the *yeridah* in *bitachon* and diminution of respect will become in our general society.

Moreover, conditioned now to view donations to *mosdos* as business deals more than as *mitzvos*, the businessman will be much less likely to make a donation in the future — after all, he’s seen that it’s a “bad deal,” why enter into it again?

Our *kollelim* are supposed to be bastions of *Toras emes*, beacons of light to their respective communities. It is saddening to see some of them inadvertently peddling spiritual snake oil instead.

A proponent of the “partnership arrangement” enthuses in the article, “The concept is to make Hashem your business partner. When you’re negotiating a deal you feel that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is with you. The extra confidence it brings is a wonderful feeling.”

May we all realize that Hashem is “with us” all the time, not just when we’ve pushed the right button, that *davening* earnestly to Hashem on our own behalf is far more effective than outsourcing the job to others, that proper *hashkafos* and *bitachon* provide all the “extra confidence” one could ever need — and may we be *zocheh* to *u’mal’ah haaretz dei’ah es Hashem* and to a complete *geulah b’karov!*

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