

# WHAT HE IS, NOT WHAT HE'S DONE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Y. Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #73, Non-Kosher Medicines & the Bircas Hareiach (Scents).*

*Rabbi Frand respectfully requests that people should daven [pray] and learn for the benefit of Rabbi Yitzchak Isbee, that he should have a refu'ah shellayma [complete recovery]. Rabbi Isbee is a well known talmid chacham [Torah scholar] and is a respected Rav who has a congregation in Brooklyn, NY and is a personal friend of Rabbi Frand. Good Shabbos!*

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## The Crooked Will Be Made Straight -- Yaakov Will Become Yeshurun

In this week's parsha, we find a section that is one of the hardest sections to understand in the entire Torah. We find the parsha of Yaakov deceiving his father and 'stealing' the blessings from Eisav, for himself. This is a difficult parsha to understand, especially in terms of what we are taught -- "Give Truth to Jacob..." [Michah 7:20]. Yaakov Avinu is the Patriarch that represents Truth and here we find Yaakov involved in this charade, in which he 'steals' the Brochos.

A Zohar at the beginning of the parsha helps us understand this section. The Zohar comments on the verse "And afterwards his brother came out and his hand was holding on to the heel of Esav; and his name was called Yaakov" [Bereishis 25:26]. The Zohar states that Esav is compared to the Original Snake (nachash kadmoni). The force in this world that represents the Original Snake that tricked Adam and Chava into eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the personification of that Snake in this world, is Esav.

How does the Torah tell us to deal with that Original Snake? "And you will strike him in the heel" [3:15]. Against the powers of that Snake, you will not be able to make a frontal attack. To be successful against him, you must grab him by the heel, from behind. This is the only way to deal with the Snake and with Esav.

The Zohar says that when the verse tells us here that Yaakov's hand was holding Esav's heel, the Torah is setting the stage and is telling us how Yaakov Avinu -- in the future -- will have to deal with Esav. He is going to have to deal with him by attacking at the heel; he is going to have to deal with

him, sometimes, deceitfully and surreptitiously. That is the only way one can deal with that Snake.

This is what our Sages mean when they say (on the verse [Samuel II 22:27] "With a pure one, You show Yourself pure; but with a perverse one, You deal crookedly.") that you cannot always be up front and straight forward with a person who is a liar. Even Yaakov, the man of Truth, has a mandate from the Torah, that the way to deal with Esav is by 'heel,' which is connoted in Yaakov's name.

This, the commentaries say, is what the verse means when it says "And Yaakov was an 'ish tam' (a man who was simple) who dwelt in the tents" [25:27]. It does not say Yaakov was 'tam' (simple), it says 'ish tam' (a man who was simple). The former implies someone who is naive -- that is not what the Torah tells us about Yaakov. It says he is an 'ish tam' -- he has control over his 'temimus' (simpleness). He can control and use that simpleness. There are occasions when Yaakov will be straight and must be straight. But he is also a person that can control his simplicity and attack at the heel, if the occasion so requires.

This describes the whole history of Yaakov and Esav, and their respective descendants. There will be times in history that we as a Jewish people will not be able to deal with the descendants of Esav on a 'one on one', straightforward basis. We will have to duplicate the behavior of our father Yaakov.

No more clearly do we see this than in the chapter of the Blessings. In that chapter the verse says "Go please to the flocks" [27:9]. The Medrash says Rivka is hinting "Go take care of the needs of the nation, which is compared to sheep." Performing this masquerade and deceitful act sets the stage. The actions of the forefathers foreshadow the actions of the children. Your children, Rivka says, are sometimes going to have to deal with the more powerful Esav, with the Roman Empire, with the nations of the world. Sometimes, as a nation, we will have to resort to surreptitious types of acts. Why? Because the Torah tells us that there are times when that has to use the behavior of Yaakov.

But, points out Rav Elie Munk, Yaakov undergoes two name changes in the Torah. First, Yaakov is changed to Yisrael. Rash"i, over there, says that 'Yaakov' refers to a person who waits in ambush, but there will come a time when you will be called 'Yisrael' -- connoting an officer and a prince. You will then be able to deal with Esav, no longer surreptitiously, but as an equal.

However, we find, that even after Yaakov was called Yisrael, the Torah still, sometimes refers to him as 'Yaakov' and sometimes refers to him as 'Yisrael.' Why? Because Yaakov can not yet totally abandon the practices of 'Yaakov'. Throughout Jewish history, there were times when we as a people had to fall back on the tactics of 'Yaakov' and could not go with the name 'Yisrael.' When we are surrounded by 140 million people wishing to destroy us, we cannot always go with the 'high-road' behavior. We have to come back to the practices of 'Yaakov.'

In the End of Days, however, our Sages tell us that Yaakov will go from the name of Yaakov and Yisrael to the name of Yeshurun, meaning straight (from the word 'yashar'). When the nations of the world will finally come to recognize the greatness of Israel, then Yaakov can be transformed into the name Yeshurun and will no longer have to deal with Esav with deceit and tricks.

This is what Yeshaya HaNavi means [Isaiah 40:4] when he says "... and the crooked will be made straight..." [v'haya ha'akov l'mishor]. Rav Munk says this refers to the name Yaakov becoming the name Yeshurun. We will abandon the practices which were forced upon us, those of 'Yaakov' and will strictly conduct ourselves according to the practices of 'Yeshurun' (straightness).

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### **To *Be* and Not To *Do* -- That Is the Question**

The verse says "And Yitzchak loved Esav, for game was in his mouth; and Rivkah loves Yaakov" [Bereishis 25:28]. There is a strange use of grammar in this verse. By Yitzchak it says "va'ye-eh-av", meaning "and he loved" -- in the past tense. By Rivkah it says "o-heves" meaning "she loves" -- in the present tense.

The Dubno Maggid once asked why there is this grammatical discrepancy. He answered with a powerful truth which is very applicable, particularly in our time: He said that one of the differences between the non-Jewish world and ours, is that in the former people are evaluated by what they do, whereas the Jew is evaluated not by what he does, but by what he is.

If one ever asks a child what he wants to be when he grows up, the child will answer "I want to be a..." doctor or lawyer or teacher. This is improper usage! The child was asked what he wants to *be*, and instead he answers with what he wants to *do*.

'Doctor', 'teacher', and 'lawyer' are professions, what you *do* -- not what you *are*. However, we are conditioned in this country that one's whole importance or value is based upon what one does.

A columnist recently wrote a piece in the Baltimore Sun complaining about the conversations at cocktail parties. While standing at a cocktail party, drink in hand, he will introduce himself to someone. When the conversation is not fifteen seconds old, he will be asked, "What do you do?"

The columnist writes that "in America you *are* what you *do*." If one does something important, then he is important. If one does something menial, then he's not important. The type of person that someone is makes no difference whatsoever.

He writes that he is so turned off by this line of questioning, that now, if anybody asks him what he does, he says he is an undercover agent for the IRS [U.S. Internal Revenue Service], at which time the conversation ends.

However, this writer identified a tremendous truth. We are preoccupied not with who we *are*, not with what type of person I *am*, but with what we *do*. This reflects a very non-Jewish outlook. It does not reflect the outlook of Judaism.

This is what the verse is hinting to us. "Yitzchak loved Esav (past tense) for game was in his mouth" -- because Esav, reflecting non-Jewish values, evaluated himself based only upon what he does. If he

is only what he does, then if he ceases to do what he does (e.g. -- hunt), he loses his value.

A grandson of Esav [Pete Rose] once said "You're only as good as your last 'at bat'" [Pete Rose]. He accurately reflected his society's values. He saw no inner importance, only the pragmatic importance of what he does. When he stops doing what he does "the love is nullified" [Avot 5:16].

However, a Jew is not what he does, but what he is. Whether he makes a lot of money or he doesn't make a lot of money; whether he does something which has status in the world or whether he does something menial - it makes no difference. If one is an ethical person and a mensch and one who Fears Heaven and Loves Israel, that is what counts. One is what he *is*, not what he *does*.

"And Rivkah *loves* Yaakov." Because Yaakov was loved not for what he *did*, but for what he was. The character of Yaakov, the qualities of Yaakov, the Truthfulness of Yaakov. These are constants. These are forever. Therefore the love for such a person is forever.

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## Glossary

**Brochos** -- Blessings

**Maggidim** -- preachers

**IRS** -- Internal Revenue Service (collects U.S. Income Tax)

**Mensch** -- literally "a person"; someone who acts in a dignified and proper manner

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## Personalities & Sources:

**Rav Elie Munk** -- (1900-1980) Rabbi in Paris; author of World of Prayer and The Call of the Torah..

**The Dubno Maggid** -- (1741-1804) R. Yaakov Krantz, the most famous of the Eastern European maggidim; best known for his parables which were collected and published in Ohel Yaakov and other works.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#73). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Non-Kosher Medicines and the Bircas Hareiach (Scents). The other halachic portions for Toldos from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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