

START OUT LOOKING AT THE POSITIVE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemini

Start Out Looking At The Positive

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape #588, The Aveil and the Haircut. Good Shabbos!

This week's parsha contains the first detailed enumeration of all the kosher and non-kosher animals in the Torah. The two signs that determine the permissibility of an animal are whether it has totally split hooves and whether it chews its cud. The Torah singles out particular animals that one may not eat despite the fact that they possess one of the two signs of permissibility. The camel (gamal), despite the fact that it chews its cud, is not kosher because it does not have split hooves. The same is true with the shafan (hyrax) and arneves (rabbit). The pig (chazir) is forbidden because although it has a split hoof, it does not chew its cud.

The Medrash points out that in regards to all four animals, the Torah first mentions its kosher sign (the fact that it chews its cud in the case of the gamal, shafan and arneves, and the fact that it has a split hoof in the case of the chazir) and then mentions the sign that disqualifies it. Why does the Torah do this? Why not just get straight to the point? The kosher sign is really irrelevant, given the other disqualifying characteristic. Why even mention the irrelevant kosher sign, let alone give it "top billing"?

The Medrash comments: Even when the Torah tells us that a pig or camel is not kosher, it only begins by stating its praiseworthy characteristics. Even when the Torah says something is treife (forbidden to eat), still the Torah goes out of its way to present a positive description first.

The point of the Medrash is that if G-d sees fit -- even when talking about an impure animal -- to try to find something good to say about it... If G-d sees fit to always present a redeeming aspect of the animal first, how much more so should we -- when we look at another human being with all of his failings and shortcomings -- make every effort to find positive things to say before we offer any

negative assessment.

G-d is sending us a message here. When we look at someone or when we look at a situation, we should always attempt to accentuate the positive and see the value in the person or situation before we become totally dismissive.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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