

RABBI FRAND ON PARSHAS TOLDOS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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

This dvar Torah was 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). Good Shabbos!

The pasuk [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 pasuk. 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. The Dubno Maggid answered with a powerful truth which is particularly applicable 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 society 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, a person 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.

The columnist 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.

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 pasuk 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 [Baseball player Pete Rose] once said, "You're only as good as your last 'at bat'". 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 does not 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 a mensch, is ethical, 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.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Toldos are provided below:

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