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**The First Workaholic**

Parashat Toledot tells the story of Yaakob’s “purchase” of the birthright from his older twin, Esav. Yaakob was cooking a lentil stew when Esav stormed into the house, famished from a day of hunting. Esav asks Yaakob for some of the food: “Pour into my mouth, if you will, some of this read stuff” (“Hal’iteni Na Min Ha’adom Ha’adom Ha’zeh”– Bereshit 25:30). The Torah adds in this context that Esav was forever more known by the name “Edom” as a result of this incident. The origin of this name, by which the kingdom that emerged from Esav would be called, is this request he made to Yaakob, that he feed him “Min Ha’adom Ha’adom Ha’zeh” – “some of this red stuff.”

The obvious question arises, why was this remark so significant that it became the source of Esav’s name? Why is Esav eternally known for his reference to a lentil stew as “this red stuff”?

To answer this question, let us address a different question: why did Esav refer to the lentils as “this red stuff”? Why did he not simply state, “Give me some of these lentils”?

Seforno (Italy, 16th century) explains that Esav was preoccupied with his hunting to the point of obsession. His mind was so intensely focused on his work in the fields that he paid little attention to anything else. We might say that Esav was the first workaholic. He was obsessed with his work and could not think about or concern himself with anything else. And thus, when he entered the kitchen that day, he did not take the time to notice what Yaakob was making. He saw “red stuff,” and this is what he asked for.

This is why Esav is forever known as “Edom.” His reference to lentils as “this red stuff” reflected his inability to pay attention to matters other than his work in the fields. And this was Esav’s fundamental flaw – he focused exclusively on worldly pursuits, and was thus unable to concern himself with more important and sublime matters.

This is also why Yaakob realized at that moment that he needed to acquire the birthright – the right of religious leadership in the family – from Esav. This status cannot be entrusted with somebody who lives with an obsession for material success. Yaakob thus tells Esav, “Michra Chayom Et Bechoratecha Li” – “Sell me your birthright like this day” (25:31). Yaakob pointed out to Esav that his life was characterized by the quality of “Kayom” – “this day” – living for the moment, for immediate gratification and worldly success, without looking beyond the immediate present to long-term aspirations. Yaakob demanded the birthright because it demanded a broad vision and lofty ambitions, which were completely foreign to Esav.

There is certainly nothing wrong with pursuing a gainful and fulfilling career. To the contrary, we must work to support ourselves and our families; this is our obligation. The problem arises, however, when the career or business takes over one’s life and becomes the totality of his existence. We should work, and work hard, but we must never allow our professional lives to become an obsession, which prevents us from focusing on family and religion. If we are too submerged in our careers to see the “lentils,” and we can take just a quick glance to see “this red stuff,” then we have become like Esav. We must ensure to maintain a proper balance between our professional obligations and the other important areas of our lives, and never allow our work to become our exclusive point of focus.