

DEVISING STRATEGIES

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayishlach

Devising Strategies

Sponsored by
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Today's Learning:
Keraitot 5:6-7
O.C. 255:3-5
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 66
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 3

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (24:6), "For through [wise] strategies, you can wage war for your benefit, and salvation is in abundant counsel." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; early 14th century) writes: King Shlomo informs us in this verse that devising strategies is an important activity. Indeed, a person cannot live in this world without having a strategy for acquiring his basic needs. G-d had promised Yaakov (Bereishit 28:15), "Behold, I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go, and I will return you to this soil; for I will not forsake you until I will have done that which I have spoken about you." Nevertheless, Yaakov toiled day and night and took other steps to amass wealth, as described at length in last week's parashah. Likewise, a person must try to protect himself from those who might harm him, just as Yaakov took steps to protect himself and his family from Esav, as described in this week's parashah. The bottom line ("sof davar") is that one should not rely on miracles.

On the other hand, R' ibn Shuiv continues, our Sages do criticize Yaakov for going too far. In their words, Yaakov "pulled the ears of a sleeping dog" (compare Mishlei 26:17). In fact, Esav had long ago forgotten, or lost interest in, what Yaakov had done to him. By reaching out to Esav, Yaakov unnecessarily reawakened Esav's old hatred. (Derashot R.Y. ibn Shuiv)

"Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Esav, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom."
(32:4)

The midrash says, quoting Mishlei (26:17): "Like one who seizes a dog's ears, so is one who grows wrathful over a dispute that is not his." [Says the midrash:] Hashem said to Yaakov, "Esav was traveling along, minding his own business, and you had to send him a message?!"

R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (1795-1874; German rabbi) asks: Does it not display good midot / character traits that Yaakov humbled himself before another person for the sake of ensuring peace? Why should he be criticized for this behavior?

He answers: Many commentaries question whether Yaakov's fear of Esav manifested a shortcoming in bitachon / trust in Hashem. In fact, it was appropriate for Yaakov to fear that he would be unworthy of G-d's protection because he might have sinned. However, that feeling should have been a private matter between himself and Hashem. To display it publicly was wrong because it could cause others to question Yaakov's bitachon. (In this respect, he acted unlike his grandfather Avraham who was not afraid to attack four powerful kings with a small army.) Had Yaakov ignored Esav, Esav would have assumed that Yaakov was confident of a miraculous victory, and Esav would have avoided Yaakov as well. (Sefer Ha'berit)

"I have acquired oxen [literally, 'an ox'] and donkeys [literally, 'a donkey'] . . ." (32:6)

Rashi z"l writes that using the singular form is more polite than bragging about having many oxen and donkeys. However, a midrash explains that Yaakov used the singular form to allude to his sons Yosef (who is referred to as an "ox" in Bereishit 49:6 and Devarim 33:17) and Yissachar (who is referred to as a "donkey" in Bereishit 49:14). What is this midrash teaching?

R' Dov Ber of Mezeritch z"l (second leader of the chassidic movement; died 1772) explains: Esav represents the yetzer hara. There are two aspects to the yetzer hara. On the one hand, the yetzer hara implants in a person an enthusiasm for sin. On the other hand, the yetzer hara causes a person to feel lethargic when it is time to perform good deeds.

Yosef is referred to in this week's haftarah (Ovadia 1:18) as a "lehavah" / "flame." The word "lehavah" shares a root with "hitlahavut" / "enthusiasm." Enthusiasm for mitzvot can be a very effective tool for fighting both aspects of the yetzer hara.

Yissachar, on the other hand, represents a sedentary lifestyle since "chamor" / "donkey" shares the same letters as "chomer" / "materialism," which often causes people to be sedentary. Sometimes, the way to avoid sin is by doing nothing. Our Sages say that if a person has an opportunity to sin, and he instead sits and does nothing, he is rewarded as if he had performed a mitzvah. (Torat Ha'maggid)

"I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done with Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan [River] and now I have become two camps." (32:11)

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l (Spain; early 11th century) explains why tzaddikim are so fearful of benefitting from G-d's kindness. First, the more that one receives from Hashem, the more one is obligated to "give back" in the form of higher and higher levels of Divine service. The righteous fear that they will be unable to live up to this demand and that they will become deserving of punishment, such that what started as a gift to them will turn out to be the opposite.

In addition, we are taught that the primary reward for mitzvot is in the World-to-Come. However, this applies only to the righteous. Regarding the wicked it says (Devarim 7:10), "He repays His enemies in his (the enemy's) lifetime to make him perish." In their humility, tzaddikim are afraid that they are in the category of the wicked, not the righteous, and any kindness that they receive in this world is actually their eternal reward. (Chovot Ha'levavot: Sha'ar Avodat Ha'Elokim ch.6)

"Then he [the angel] said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.' He [Yaakov] said, 'I will not let you go unless berachtani'." (32:27)

Most commentaries understand the word "berachtani" as being related to "berachah." Yaakov said to the angel who had wrestled with him, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (Germany; died 1217) offers a different interpretation. He writes that "berachtani" is related to "berech" / the upper legs near the "yaraich" / hip. "I will not let you go," Yaakov said to the angel, "until you cure my hip that you injured." When we read that Yaakov was left limping, it means he was in pain. However, his dislocated hip had been repaired. (Ta'amei Mesoret Hamikra)

"Therefore Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the gid ha'nasheh / displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov's hip-socket on the displaced sinew." (32:33)

R' David ben Shmuel Hakochavi z"l (Spain and Provence; died approx. 1330) writes: Our Sages say (Chullin 100b) that this verse was actually taught at Sinai, but it was written in context. [In other words, we do not observe the prohibition of eating an animal's gid ha'nasheh because it originated with Yaakov's sons, but rather because G-d commanded us in the Torah to observe such a prohibition.] This law teaches us two lessons:

(1) That we should distance ourselves from those things from which our forefathers distanced themselves.

(2) That we should use the occasion of eating to recall what befell our forefather Yaakov. (Migdal David: Azhara 183)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

15 Kislev: This date was observed among Lithuanian Jews as a fast day for members of the chevra kadisha / burial society. One reason this date was chosen is that it never falls on Shabbat. (Luach Davar B'ito p. 369).

On this date in 5564 (1804), R' Avraham Danzig, author of Chaye Adam, and his family were miraculously saved from a fire that destroyed the courtyard in which they lived. Because this day was observed as a fast day (see above), they observed the following day as a personal Purim. (Chaye Adam, postscript to the laws of Purim)

On this date approximately 1,800 years ago -- the exact year is in dispute -- Rabbi Yehuda Ha'nassi z"l (known simply as "Rabbi"), the editor of the Mishnah, passed away (Luach Davar B'ito p. 369). Even after his death, Rabbi would return home dressed in Shabbat clothes, not in shrouds, to recite kiddush for his widow. R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (Germany; died 1217) explains that tzaddikim never die; rather, they can move between this world and the world of souls, and they are obligated to perform mitzvot when they visit this world. Thus, Rabbi could recite kiddush. The Gemara states that Rabbi stopped returning for Shabbat when his visits became known to a neighbor. (Ketubot 103a; Sefer Chassidim * 1129)

16 Kislev 1657 (2103 B.C.E.): Noach's ark rested on the Mountains of Ararat, according to the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua in Rosh Hashanah (11b- 12a).

December 15: A Jew in the diaspora who made a neder / vow prohibiting to himself a specific food or a specific action "until the rains" becomes permitted to eat that food or take that action upon the first rain after this date. (See Rema, Y.D. 220:18)

19 Kislev 5559 (1798): R' Shneur Zalman z"l of Liadi, founder of the Chabad chassidic movement, is released from prison where he was held on trumped-up charges.

21 Kislev 5705 (1944): R' Yoel Teitelbaum z"l, the Satmar Rebbe, is saved from the Nazis. (Luach Davar B'ito p.380)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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