

# Grab What You Can! – Parashat Vayishlach

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**There is never a situation of a battle being completely lost; there is always something that can be done to help!**

*Parashat Vayishlach* finds Jacob leaving the house of his father-in-law, Laban, after living with him for 20 years. He had worked for 14 years in order to marry Laban's daughters Leah and Rachel, and another six years to raise the sheep. Jacob's brother Esau was still out for revenge. While Jacob hoped to make peace with him, Esau went ahead and hired an army of 400 strong men in order to wipe out Jacob and his family.

We are told that Jacob readied himself for the upcoming attack

in three different ways: with gifts, with prayer, and by preparing for battle. Jacob prepared a huge and plentiful gift package for Esau in order to appease him. The gift contained sheep, cattle and camels, all rich commodities of that time. He hoped to use Esau's desire for materialism to remove his anger from Jacob.

The second method was prayer. Jacob prayed to God with deep sincerity and intensity in order to be saved from his brother.

The third preparation was for the eventuality of war. Jacob was in a very dangerous situation. Esau had been baying for his blood for years, and the time for confrontation was at hand. Jacob knew that if his prayer was not answered and the gift was rejected, the consequences of this war could be very bitter. In his prayer, he mentioned that Esau was coming to kill "him, the mothers and the children." Jacob could not be sure that a miracle would be performed for him. He therefore decided to split his camp into two parts. This strategy, while extremely painful to implement, would at least provide a chance for half the camp to survive if the other half was killed. How does one decide which of his children to try to save? How does one make such harsh decisions in such trying circumstances?

Precisely from Jacob's actions, we learn a vital lesson for life: Even when the battle seems lost, don't give up all hope. There is never a situation of a battle being completely lost; there is always something that can be done to help. Jacob taught us to never throw up our hands in defeat or to succumb to despair. Even when things look bleak, do what you can to make the best out of a difficult situation.

*How does one decide which of his children to try to save? How does one make such harsh decisions in such trying circumstances?*

Reb Noson links this idea to a subject called "division of

advice.” This refers to a situation in which a person has to make a decision but does not know which way to turn. He grapples with all sorts of uncertainty and confusion and lacks any clarity. These are situations that all of us face quite often. We feel the same way that Jacob felt when Esau was closing in on him, trapped with no light at the end of the tunnel. We have no idea how to get out of this situation. This tends to lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair.

But we should know that, in fact, the battle is not lost. Jacob shows us that when we are stuck, with no way out, there is still always something that can be done to save the situation. He split the camp, so that at least “the remaining camp will survive.” It was not a pleasant decision to make, but it was the best he could do under the circumstances. Save whatever you can.



*“Division of Advice” is to save whatever you can!*

We often find ourselves in situations of doubt – for example, “Should I go on this business trip or should I stay at home?” There’s no one to tell us exactly what to do. But know that whatever decision we do make, there is always good to be found, always an opportunity to make the best of the

circumstances.

This idea manifests itself in many areas of life, both spiritually and physically. Starting a new learning program, deciding to get up on time each day, or even taking on a new diet. We start off by flying out of the blocks, only to find that soon we have slipped and have not met our goal. What happens then? Well, since I anyway did not achieve what I wanted to, I may as well give up on the whole plan. I broke my diet, so now I will eat waffles and ice cream every day. I missed the train to work, so I may as well stay in bed all day.

Please, no! This is exactly what Jacob taught us not to do. He was in a far more precarious position than breaking a resolution. Nevertheless, he did not say, "It's all or nothing." He understood the importance of grabbing whatever good one can. Without a doubt, we must always pray to God to help us. But we also need to know that when we are in the midst of a personal dilemma, we should do what we can to make the best of the situation.

*(Based on Likutey Halakhot, Rosh Chodesh 7)*