

Seven Ways Practical Application III

Vayishlach: Call off the Attack

In this week's parsha, Ya'akov prepares to return home and face Esav, the brother from whom he has purchased the family birthright. Esav has expressed that he wants to harm Ya'akov, and Ya'akov takes several measures in order to appease Esav.

In the exact same way, in our own lives, we must often make certain concessions to people in our verbal interaction, in order to facilitate functional communication.

Down to Business

Going directly to the personality realm, when one speaks to someone with the *middah* of *hod*, in most contexts, the dialogue will more often than not be fairly easy to navigate.

You: Hey, do you mind closing that door next time, so no one comes in and takes that stuff?

Hod: Ok, that's fine, sure.

However, when you speak with people who have certain personalities, such as *gevurahs*, *malchuts*, strong-minded *netzachs*, or anyone who has very strong sense of self, or the like, you will find that the communication is different. You may need to make small concessions to their ego or make it clear that you are not preparing to attack or making ad hominem criticisms of their statements.

You: Hi, I just want you to know that I think you do good work around here, and this is not a major issue, but can you please close the...

Them: Ok, yeah fine.

I am not recommending that one lie, debase oneself, toady to the person, or purposefully massage their ego. I'm trying to point out that you may find that the dialogue runs more smoothly, if you make it clear to the listener that your words are not meant as a direct attack on their person or if you acknowledge their ego.

You might think that if you do not preface your remarks as such that the person will ignore your statement or that they may only get in a little huff. However, it's important to note that, with these types of people, the conversation more often than not continues with unsmooth communication, usually consisting of defensiveness or nit-picking at the initial statement.

Defensiveness sounds like this:

You (decently pleasant tone): Please do XYZ, otherwise ABC will happen.

Them: Are you saying that I do that? I'm habitually doing that? So, you think I would do such a thing...ok maybe you/he/they do it, too?

Nit-picking, which you'll notice is very common, once you start listening for it, sounds like this:

You (decently pleasant tone): Please do XYZ, otherwise ABC will happen.

Them: Oh it will? Does it always happen? Doesn't seem like it will; I've never heard that. No one else is concerned.

I think it's rather nice, in most contexts, to preface ones remarks in confrontational situations with a statement that makes it clear that it is not meant as a direct attack on the listener. This declaws the listener and makes him or her feel as if the speaker is on their team.

Even in the dialogue with the *hod* that I brought earlier, one should do such prefacing, because the *hod* is likely to be sensitive or, possibly, feel attacked or personally put, down just as *malchuts* often feel. However, in the interactions with the other personalities, it is extremely important to do so, in order to attempt to have a full, proper conversation. Try saying, "I'm just passing along some information to the whole office" to make it a general statement; or

You: Hi, I hope you're well. I'm sorry to have to bring this up, and I don't think it's the norm for you, but I would like it if you would please close the door...etc. We need to keep a tight ship around here.

Them: Ah, ok, fine.

No doubt employees need pressure to be motivated and perform; there is no question that people respect rules and respond to realistic demands. However, it's up to the employer or manager to investigate what type of personality the employee has. *Yesods* respond much better to authority, when that authority speaks to the *yesod* in a language of mutual respect and teamwork. *Gevurahs* want and need authority to pressure them, otherwise they are likely to slack off and underperform.

Ya'akov

Ya'akov successfully navigated his potentially explosive encounter with Esav, but humbling himself to pray, prepare his family for the clash, and

sending gifts to feed Esav's ego. So to, we should make three-fold plan, whenever faced with a tense encounter. We should pray for Divine assistance, do our effort - 'hishtadlut'-, and humble ourselves to speak to people in way that they can process most effectively.

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