



LET GEORGE DO IT

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Mikeitz, Chanukah 5782

The forces that drive a human being are complex and not easy to fathom. We frequently make certain assumptions about ourselves and others and fail to accurately predict reactions and outcomes. We tend to underestimate certain people's strengths and overestimate others' ability to accomplish.

A case in point can be gleaned from a circumstance mentioned in this week's *Parsha*. The *pasuk* (*Bereishis 42:1*) tells us that after the famine set in, *Yaakov Avinu* became aware that food was available for purchase in *Mitzrayim*. He turned to his sons (who were not making a move to go to *Mitzrayim* to buy food) and asked *למה תתראו*. According to the *Seforno* – this means *why do you look at each other?* Why do each of you look to the other to be the one to go? The *Seforno* applies the *Gemara in Bava Basra (24b)* to describe their inaction – “(the contents of) a jointly owned pot (of food) ends up being neither hot nor cold.” In modern parlance, the saying goes: “Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

“Why do each of you look to the other to be the one to go?”

When more than one person is in charge of a project, there is a very great risk of a lack of individual accountability, and that leads to inaction. “Death by committee,” is a truism in human behavior, that putting several people in charge frequently results in no one being in charge, and the task or project never gets done.

It is very difficult to understand how this can be applied to the sons of *Yaakov*, especially in this situation. These are individuals of the highest caliber who do not shrink from taking on responsibility, even when the greatest level of self-sacrifice is required. Nor, does it seem that anyone in their situation, facing starvation, would be lacking motivation to do what is necessary for their and their family's survival. So what is the *Seforno* telling us?

Perhaps we can explain it that on some infinitesimal level, there was a weakening of resolve and accountability due to there being others who could perform the required mission of purchasing food in Egypt. This small error in acknowledging individual responsibility resulted in a larger misjudgment concerning whether or not to go at that time. Although it is hard to fathom how such great people could be subject to this manner of thinking, we nevertheless see it was indeed so. And, if it could happen to the great progenitors of the tribes of Israel, it could happen to anyone.

There are many attributes and mindsets that people possess that enable them to accomplish great things. Self-confidence, clear goals, and proper motivation are just a few. It is important as well, to be fully aware of the obstacles that could stand in one's way.

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We have an example here of how the greatest of the great were sidetracked in fulfilling a responsibility, because on some level they thought someone else could take care of it. Even though it should not in any way justify inaction, and the matter at hand was life-threatening, they fell short.

This human weakness comes in various forms. Relying on others as we mentioned, getting disheartened due to experiencing unexpected setbacks, feeling one is all alone and being unable to handle detractors are all very real circumstances that one must contend with. We need to be aware that it is very easy to lose focus and resolve on whatever project or goal we would like to achieve. Potential rationalizations abound that can derail progress towards something we are trying to attain. Finding an inner power that can help compel a person to carry on despite these forces is key to finding ultimate success.

A striking example of this is how *Avraham Avinu* left *Ur-Kasdim* with his father *Terach*, both of them intent on reaching *Eretz Canaan*, yet only *Avraham* actually made it. The *Seforno* there (*Bereishis 12:5*) explains the difference was the commitment each one possessed towards reaching their goal. Outwardly they both were committed, but *Avraham* had a fiery zeal that enabled him to withstand and persevere despite the many challenges along the way.

We all have high hopes for our children's success in life. We tend to focus on their academic intelligence and try to develop their inborn skills and talents. This is a great gift to give our children. However, what may be even more critical to their journey to a life of accomplishment, is to help them develop a sense of responsibility and commitment to a goal. Of course, we need to role model such commitment. We also need to devise tasks and projects where we include the children and even assign them meaningful roles that help them develop their responsibility 'muscles.'

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As we celebrate *Chanuka*, let's remember that it was this sense of responsibility engrained in the *Chashmonaim* that enabled them to save the Jewish People from spiritual annihilation. Let's help our children carry on this great legacy by enabling them to accept challenges instead of solving their problems for them. They will be encouraged to lead the way, light the way. This is the ultimate *Chanuka* gift that will help ensure they live a life of fulfillment and accomplishment.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos* and illuminating *Chanuka*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann