

Sending

By: Rabbi Yanky Tauber

"Empowerment" is an integral part of human life. It may be an employer assigning a task to an employee, a parent sending off a child into the world, or a master appointing a disciple to carry on his life's work. If we stop and think about what we're doing at any given point in our lives, we'll discover that, as often as not, we're doing something for someone else or sending someone else to do something for ourselves.

Sender-sendee relations are a complicated affair. On the one hand, the sender will be inclined to stuff the employee full of advice, lay all of his resources at the child's feet, radiate the whole of his own soul into the disciple's soul. After all, the sender wants the sendee to succeed (that's the whole point of the mission, isn't it?). On the other hand, the sender wants the employee to "take responsibility", the child to "be his own person", the disciple to "break new ground" (that's the whole point of the mission, isn't it?).

So there are many subtle judgments to be made. How much to give and how much to hold back. When to be involved and when to cut loose. To grant independence, but not to abandon. To empower, but not to overwhelm.

According to the Chassidic masters, the degree of empowerment that is possible is determined by the nature of the relationship between the two people involved. If only a casual relationship exists between employer and employee, the employer must keep his distance, lest he squelch all initiative on the employee's part. If parent and child are close, the parent can give more of himself before he crosses the line past which the child feels suffocated. And if a deep soul-connection exists between master and disciple, then the master can literally give everything he has and is without the disciple feeling that it is no longer "his own thing". Because such a disciple's relationship with his master *is* his life, *is* "his own thing."

In the 13th chapter of Numbers we read how Moses sent twelve spies to prepare the way for the people of Israel's entry into the Promised Land. One of the twelve spies was Hosea the son of Nun, whom Moses renamed "Joshua" ("May G-d save"). The name change, our sages explain, was a prayer: "May G-d save you from the conspiracy of the spies."

(Moses' fears were borne out. As the Torah relates, ten of the twelve spies returned to slander the land and convince the people to reject the divine commandment to take possession of it. Only Joshua and one other spy, Caleb, remained true to the purpose of their mission.)

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Which begs the question: If Moses recognized the danger inherent in the spies' mission, why did he send them? And if he had to send them, why didn't he pray for them all? And if, for whatever reason, he was not supposed to pray for them, why did he pray for Joshua?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains: The entire point of the spies' mission was that G-d had decreed that the time had come for the people of Israel to proceed on their path through history "on their own" -- driven by their own initiative and guided by their own decisions. For Moses to pray for the spies' success would have counteracted that purpose -- he would be empowering them in a way that made their right choice no longer *their* right choice.

Joshua, however, was the closest and most devoted of Moses' disciples. For Joshua, anything received from his master was not something imposed upon himself, but the very substance of his self. His master's words, thoughts and prayers were truly "his own", as much and even more so than anything he himself possessed.

Of course, the ultimate "sender" is the Creator, and the ultimate "sendee" is the soul of man, dispatched to the material world to make that most unG-dly environment a home for G-d.

And here, too, how much we receive in the way of assistance and empowerment is determined by the nature of our relationship with our empowerer. If we live separate from our source, G-d will limit His involvement in our lives, lest it impose upon the independence of action and freedom of choice that is so central to our mission. If, on the other hand, we desire and strive for His closeness, He will respond in kind, freely bestowing guidance and blessing.

For when we live in intimacy with G-d, our lives are no less our own. On the contrary: that intimacy is our own as much as any artifact of the self.

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