



*Parshat Vayechi*  
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**Becoming a Multiplier**  
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I was recently speaking with my son Sam about a book he was reading that he was raving about. He said it was giving him so much to think about every day when he went to work and interacted with his colleagues. The book is Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter by Liz Wiseman.

Have you ever read a book that articulates a concept that you have never quite heard that way, but it totally captures reality? You say yes! O my God, yes! I never saw it before, but what she writes is so true. And helpful. It is going to help me take up my game!

Here is Liz Wiseman's core thesis. There are two kinds of leaders, what she calls Multipliers and Diminishers. A Multiplier makes the people around him or her better. More ideas. Higher morale. Higher productivity. Hands go up, ideas pop, energy soars, everyone feels invested, problems are solved. The self-confidence of others goes up. There is a greater sense of team. By contrast, a Diminisher makes the people around him or her worse. Fewer ideas. Lower morale. Lower productivity. The self-confidence of others goes down. Little sense of team.

Liz Wiseman tells a great story about a Diminisher who became a Multiplier. In Michigan, in the 1970s, there was this incredible high school basketball talent named Earvin Johnson, Jr. He was unstoppable on the court. He was just so much better than any other player. His coach told him: whenever you get the ball, shoot. And he did. Because no one on the other side could stop him, he usually made his shots. He would score 52 out of his team's 54 points, and his team would win. Earvin Johnson, Jr. liked that. His coach liked that. The other players

on the team liked that. The team was undefeated, and they were on the team, what was not to like?

But one day that all changed for Earvin Johnson, Jr. He was coming out of the locker room after another victory, with a smile on his face. But he noticed that the parents of his teammates who were waiting to pick them up were not smiling. He read their body language. They were wondering: why is our son on this team? How is he making our team any better, how is the team making any better? This is just the Earvin Johnson show. He is taking up all the oxygen.

Upon seeing their faces, Earvin Johnson, Jr. decided to change up his game. His purpose was no longer to score 52 out of the team's 54 points. It was to get *his teammates* to score and to contribute to the victory meaningfully. In that moment Earvin went from Diminisher—he made his teammates worse—to Multiplier. He made them better. That is also the moment that Earvin Johnson, Jr. became Magic Johnson.

Liz Wiseman interviews 150 leaders throughout the world, and the people they lead, and she finds that Diminishers diminish impact by 50%. A worker contributes *half* of what they could contribute if they were motivated in a healthier way. But a Multiplier makes the people they work with *twice* as productive.

How we treat people makes all the difference in the world. The promise of her book is that *everyone* can become a Multiplier. And while it is important to become a Multiplier at work, it is also important to become a Multiplier at home. To become a Multiplier with your spouse. With your children. With your extended family. With your community. How can we amplify and magnify good will, good faith, and good impact?

I want to offer you three teachings from her book that connect directly to Jewish values.

Since our secular New Year is approaching, let me frame these three teachings in terms of New Year's resolutions, so that *you* can become a Multiplier in 2019.

Here is the first difference between a Diminisher and a Multiplier. A Diminisher thinks that he or she is the smartest person in the room, and that "people won't figure it out without me." I am the genius. I tell you what to do. You do it. By contrast, the Multiplier thinks that everyone in the room is smart, that everyone has a gift to give, that they can figure it out. The Multiplier does not want to be the genius, but the genius maker. I am not the smartest person in the room. I want to work with you so that *you become* the smartest person in the room.

*This core difference is embodied in the Jewish value of anivut, humility.* The Multiplier is humble enough to know that other people are talented and smart. Liz Wiseman quotes the rock star Bono who says that after a person met with British Prime Minister Gladstone, you left feeling that he was the smartest person in the world. But after you would meet with his rival Benjamin Disraeli, you left thinking that you were the smartest person. Guess what one adjective is used to describe the greatest leader in the history of the Jewish people. Moses is described as the most humble man on the planet.

So here is your first New Year's resolution for 2019: Can you have a deep respect for the wisdom, smarts, and talent of other people in your life? Can you believe that your kids, your elderly parents, some other person you are worrying about, will figure it out?

I was recently with parents who had both gone to Ivy League colleges. Their son was at an elite college, but he did not love it. He did not love the school work. He also did not love where it led. His parents both had high powered white-collar jobs that he did not want. Plus, he could identify something he *did* want to do, even though it was out of the box. He wanted to drop out of college, go to chef school, and become a professional chef. His parents were initially

reluctant. A chef? Our son? That is not what we do. But that is *just* what he did. For the last number of years he has been working as a professional chef, and he has never been happier. His once reluctant parents are now very happy not only because he is happy, but also because whenever he comes home, he cooks up a storm and is trained to leave the kitchen immaculate. Happy son. Chef-quality food. Sparkling kitchen. Our son figured it out. Without us. Humility.

This core humility leads to the second big difference between the Diminisher and the Multiplier. The Diminisher *tells*. That is their verb, *tells*. I am going to *tell* you what to do because I know what to do. By contrast, the Multiplier *asks* or *challenges* or *invites*. I am going to ask you a question or challenge you to think about a problem or invite you to engage a dilemma because I believe in your ability to offer something valuable. Do you tell, or do you ask?

*This propensity to ask questions is deeply Jewish.* When Isadore Rabi won the Nobel Prize for physics, and was asked what prompted his career of scientific inquiry, he answered that every day when he got home from school, his mother would say: “nu, Isi, did you ask a good question today?”

How often do we ask a good, open question?

That ability to ask a good question leads to a third crucial difference between the Diminisher and the Multiplier, and that has to do with the vibe that you create. The Diminisher has the truth, makes the decision, and tells people what to do. The vibe then becomes are other people doing what the Diminisher wants them to do, which leads to micromanagement, which leads to tension and anxiety. By contrast, the Multiplier creates a liberating effect. By asking people what they think, by inviting their voices, by respecting their contributions, the vibe is not anxiety but curiosity; not tension but openness. What wonderful things will you create? When

that is the question, people produce their best work, and they are happy doing it.

Pirkei Avot is on point. *Aseh lecha rav, ukenei lecha chaver*, get yourself a teacher who becomes a mentor. How do you do that? The teaching goes on, *hevei dan et kol haadam lechaf zechut*, assume that everybody has something to offer. Everybody has something to teach us. If we are open to that, we learn from them, we create a vibe of friendship and openness.

Liz Wiseman tells the story of a young man named Derek Jones who comes from a poor section of Detroit. At 18 he joins the Navy. He works hard, comes early, stays late, and shines, graduating first in his computer network class. He is given a plum position on one of the Navy's newest, most expensive, most technically complicated ships. Derek's first boss is a Diminisher. Derek's morale and self-confidence plummet. He becomes utterly ineffectual. He is spiraling down, ready to drop out of the Navy, when his old boss is replaced with a new boss. The new boss is a Multiplier. The new boss lets him know, in word and in deed, I believe in you. My money is on you. This ship is blessed to have you. Derek Jones was the same person. He had the same highly important and complicated engineering position on the same cutting-edge ship. With a Diminisher as a boss, he was almost out of the Navy. With a Multiplier as a boss, he regained his old form and started shining and thriving again. How we treat people makes literally all the difference in the world.

How many Derek Jones are there in our lives, people, whether at work or at home, whose trajectories are directly shaped by how we treat them, what we do, how we behave. Let our New Year's resolution be: let's be better at being with other people, especially those whose lives we shape.

Humility. Good questions. A warm vibe. May we all become Multipliers. May we all amplify good will, good faith, and good impact in this new year. Shabbat shalom.