

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

Cutting Your Losses

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי
לרפואה שלמה יוסף בן מלכה מטל | יעקב אליעזר בן חנה נשא

In this week's Parsha, Avraham is faced with a famine in Eretz Yisrael. He has two choices: either stay in Eretz Yisrael and face the famine or go down to Mitzrayim and put his wife in danger of getting taken. Both being bad options. The Ralbag learns the following lessons from here: "When a person is placed in a situation where he will for sure encounter bad, he should look at which choice will be the lesser evil, and choose that one. He should not neglect this evaluation of which one is worse due to the fact that he will for sure encounter bad. Rather, it is appropriate to choose the lesser evil and run away from the greater evil."

Upon initial analysis, it is difficult to understand what the Ralbag is addressing. Obviously when a person is faced with two bad choices, one worse than the other, a person will cut his losses and choose the lesser evil. Doing the opposite would be irrational. Why would we need to be warned not to neglect making a decision?

We can glean from here an insight into human nature. It would seem that a person has a natural tendency to throw in the towel and do nothing when his only choices are bad. Once a person has no choice but to face bad, he is blinded. He shuts down to focusing on which one is less and more, and tends to remove himself from making a decision. It is therefore critical that a person is aware of this tendency, especially since we are constantly faced with difficult decisions that both contain bad. This awareness will help a person counter it and weigh his options, allowing him to cut his losses and choose the lesser evil when need be.

The Ralbag goes further and explains what Avraham did

that illustrates this. He says "Avraham chose to go down to Mitzrayim to escape the famine in Eretz Canaan, even though it was possible that in Mitzrayim his wife would be violated. Behold this would not be a sin for Avraham, as anything done to Sarah would be involuntary, and therefore she would not be forbidden to him...and if Avraham would have chosen the suffering of the famine which could possibly lead to death over the possibility of what could happen to Sarah, it would have been an act of foolish piety..."

This is quite shocking! In the world of Hishtadlus there were two options, staying put and dealing with the famine or placing Sarah in a horrifying situation. Granted she would not be forbidden to Avraham, however the Pritzus of violating such a holy woman is a terrible option. We would have thought that once one of the options of Hishtadlus is such a horrific option, one is no longer required in Hishtadlus and Avraham should have had Bitachon and faced the famine. Yet we see from here that when one decides that they are obligated in Hishtadlus, they need to pursue the best course of Hishtadlus for their situation even if the ramification could be negative.

This idea has ramifications in how we approach Hishtadlus in our everyday lives. We know that Hashem runs the world, and Hishtadlus in truth does nothing in causing the results. Nevertheless, one has to approach how he performs Hishtadlus as if it is doing everything. This requires him to choose the option and place full effort in the best option. This is similar to what Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky ZT"L said regarding teaching general studies in Yeshivos, "What we have to do we have to do in the most proper way."