

The Art of Making Good Choices

Throughout the course of our lives we are required to make weighty decisions that impact ourselves and those around us. We tend to believe that the greatest challenge to the right choice selection is in the arena of logic. This misconception often causes us to make poor decisions. In this week's Parsha, the Ralbag shares with us the secret to making good choices.

The Torah states (Bamidbar 32:1-5) "And the children of Reuven and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle, and when they saw the land of Ya'azer and the land of Gil'ad, and behold – the place was a place for cattle. The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and they said to Moshe and to Elazar the Kohen, and to the princes of the congregation, saying: 'Atarot and Divon and Ya'azer and Nimra and Cheshbon and Elaleh and Sevam and Nevo and Be'on, the land which God smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle.' And they said, 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not bring us over the Jordan.' Moshe agrees to their request, on the condition that they join the rest of the Jewish people in conquering Eretz Yisroel."

"A person who has the opportunity to reap a personal benefit cannot be partial, and his vision is clouded."

The Ralbag derives from here a lesson in Middos. He says, "It is improper for a person to make a choice motivated by personal benefit, unless there was extensive contemplation." This lesson is drawn from the fact, that the children of Reuven and Gad later regretted their decision. After Eretz Yisroel was conquered, they realized that their choice had serious repercussions. It caused their children to be vulnerable to veering from Hashem, and them to build an altar (Yehoshua 22:10). In addition, now based on their location, they were more susceptible to attack from their enemies. The Ralbag explains that their failure to see these negative outcomes, was driven by

their desire for a place for their cattle.

Upon further reflection, criticizing the children of Reuven and Gad seems a bit out of line. Moshe Rabbeinu, who loved and cared for them more than any leader in the history of the world, had accepted their request! This would lend the ultimate credence that their choice was founded on sound reasoning. Can we fault them for acting based on such logic, without the protest of their unparalleled leader?

It is apparent from the Ralbag that a person is expected to recognize that clarity can't be achieved while wearing blurry glasses. A person who has the opportunity to reap a personal benefit cannot be partial, and his vision is clouded. Therefore the children of Reuven and Gad are faulted because they should have deliberated further and questioned their logic, despite it being compelling and seemingly approved by Moshe himself.

From this Ralbag, we can glean a powerful insight that can be helpful when making important decisions that involve personal benefit. Although our personal biases impair us from seeing clearly, this handicap can be compensated for, through considerable deliberation.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לרפואה שלמה רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה