



D'VAR TORAH

"PUTTING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS BEFORE OUR OWN"

Did Avraham do the right thing or wrong thing by going down to Egypt? On the one hand, God told him to go to Eretz Canaan, and that's where he should have stayed. He should have believed that God would provide for him. On the other hand, we know, אין סומכין על הנס, we don't rely on miracles. There was a famine; Avraham and Sarah needed food, so they had to put in the effort to get food, even if that meant leaving the land to which God told him to go.

This question was debated already by the Rishonim. According to the Radak, Avraham was being tested here, and He passed. In other words, he did the right thing. He knew that one may not rely on miracles and he made the decision to take his family down to Egypt. However, according to the Ramban, Avraham made the wrong decision. Avraham should have believed that Hashem would provide for him despite the famine. Therefore, by going down to Egypt, Avraham sinned. The Ramban says, though, that אברהם acted בשגגה. Usually the word בשגגה is used to mean, an unintentional sin. According to the Ramban that Avraham did the wrong thing and should have believed that Hashem would provide for him, why would this be considered an unintentional sin?

Rav Shimon Schwab, explains that Avraham did believe that Hashem would provide for him. He had full faith in Hashem to save him from the famine. However, Avraham didn't travel alone to Egypt. He brought his wife, Sarah, his nephew, Lot and הנפש אשר עשו בחרן, a whole myriad of people that Avraham and Sarah had converted to monotheism. Avraham was willing to rely on the salvation of God for his own sake, but he felt that it wouldn't be right to do so for the sake of the others with him. Although he fully believed that God would provide for him, solely based on faith, he couldn't rely only on faith to provide for the others with him. In this way, Avraham did the wrong thing, because he should have realized that God would save his followers because of Avrahams merit, but it wasn't purely wrong because he had in mind the best interest of others. That's why the Ramban calls it a שגגה. Granted he did the wrong thing, but it was tempered by a good sentiment, so it can be considered unintentional.

Our lesson from Avraham is that we need to be satisfied with what we have and trust that God will provide for us. However, we cannot be satisfied with what our friends, family or neighbors have. We have to always be looking to see what they need and what we can give to them. If we can do that then hopefully we will be given the Bracha that אברהם was given of משפחות האדמה. As the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks says, "Our greatest blessing is our ability to be a blessing to others."