Ran Bar-Yosafat recently finished an "Iron Man" competition in Spain: 3.8km (2.4 miles) of swimming, 180km (112 miles) of bike riding, and a marathon run of 42.2km (26 miles). But the message Ran asked me to pass along is not only pertinent to sports competition:

"The date of this competition was fixed a long time in advance and no one could have predicted that it would coincide with an extreme heat wave in Europe. Around 1,800 people entered the race, but only 1,400 completed it. This means that 400 competitors, nearly one in four, quit in the middle, which is a very rare occurrence in a race of this kind.

What happened? Some of the competitors insisted on keeping up a fast pace, consistent with their training, not understanding that this was just not possible in such heat. I understood at the outset that there was no chance I could break my own personal records and only thought about what I had to do in order to finish the race.

It's important to recognize that this kind of competition involves a serious investment of time. Participants spend thousands of hours in training and it is truly disheartening to see those around you simply faint in the middle of the race because of a refusal to slacken their pace. Medical teams kept evacuating participants who decided they wanted everything or nothing. So they ended up with nothing. Even an iron man must understand what it means to be flexible.

In contrast to those who did not finish, I and many others stopped at every refreshment station along the way and made sure we had plenty to drink. There were times when I stopped running and walked, without embarrassment. I also stopped to pray Mincha (the afternoon prayer), something that others might consider a waste of time, but in the end I finished with a big smile while holding an Israeli flag, which I had carried with me the entire way. The race did take an hour and a half longer than I expected, but I was satisfied with the result.

It seems to me that there is a profound lesson to be learned from such a race: Due to a strong desire to be number one, we can fall to the side of the road, and not only in a
competition like this. But it's possible to walk part of the way instead of run, to pedal slowly and to stop and rest every now and then. The main thing is to keep going -- in every area of life -- at the proper pace."

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