

## And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Avram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock; and the Canaani and the Peruzi were dwelling in the land. (13:7)

This seemingly innocuous *pasuk* is the source of much homiletic exposition by the commentators. Why does the *Torah* begin by saying that there was a "*riv*," "quarrel", between Avraham and Lot's herdsmen? In this instance, the *Torah* uses the word "*riv*," which is the masculine gender of the word. On the other hand, when Avraham speaks with Lot, he says, "*Let there not be a merivah between us*," using the female gender. The *Shlah HaKadosh* explains that Avraham sought to emphasize to Lot the gravity of *machlokes*, controversy, and its tragic consequences. He said a simple "*riv*," which is the masculine gender, can quickly swell in proportion and transform into a *merivah*, in the feminine gender, implying the ability to give birth to more and more strife. Avraham told Lot to stop the quarrel now, while it could still be contained, before it veered out of control. How true this is! How often does a simple argument within a community blow up into an all-out *machlokes*, with everybody taking sides? It takes a wise man to know when to quell an argument. It takes an even wiser man not to argue at all.

The *Avnei Azel* renders this *pasuk* homiletically, applying it to the strife that revolves around *Torah chinuch*, education. In the *Talmud Shabbos* 119A, *Chazal* state that Yerusholayim was destroyed because that prevented the young children from studying *Torah*. This means that *Torah* education, the *yeshivah* day-school movement, was not one of their priorities. When our children's education takes second place to everything else, the future of *Klal Yisrael* appears very bleak. For what do we need Yerusholayim, if there will be no Jews to inhabit it? This idea is underscored in *Sefer Eichah* 1:5,6, "*Her young have gone into captivity before the enemy. Gone from Tzion is all her splendor*." When the young have been taken captive, *Tzion* no longer manifests her splendor. The children are the hope, the future, the beauty of a community. If we destroy our spiritual heritage, we will be left with nothing but destruction.

The shepherds in this *pasuk* symbolize those who shepherd children. This alludes to controversy regarding the best manner in which to teach Jewish children. There is one *Torah* -- and one approach to teaching it - *b'ruach Yisrael sabah*," in accordance with the traditional approach.

*Torah* cannot be watered down or subjected to secular supplementation. The controversy often arises as to whether to follow the shepherds of Avraham, the path of *Torah chinuch* as forged by Avraham, or whether to follow the materialistic secular approach of Lavan. When this occurs, the Canaani and Perizi take control of the land; the children assimilate, because they have nothing with which to fortify themselves against the onslaught of the street/society.

*Rashi* questions the relationship between the second half of the *pasuk*, which tells of the Canaani and Perizi dwelling in the land, to the quarrel between the herdsmen. *Horav Zeev Weinberger*,

*Shlita*, quotes from "*Seforim*" that claims that the notion of these two pagan nations dwelling "peacefully" in the land is a critique against Avraham. The pagans "seem" to be able to get along, while Avraham's shepherds are embroiled in controversy! What happens among Jews is relative to the rest of the world. If everyone is at peace while we unfortunately are at strife, our discord becomes magnified.

*Horav* Weinberger takes a practical approach to understand the juxtaposition. There are those among us whose liberal perspective takes a dim view of those who criticize other Jews as long as we are in exile. They feel we should not wash our "dirty laundry" in public. We should ignore the spiritual shortcomings of some of our brethren in light of "public opinion." This is categorically wrong. Avraham was surrounded by pagans from all sides. Yet, when Lot's shepherds were acting inappropriately, he had no qualms about rebuking them. We must do what is right, regardless of who is watching. When other Jews are profaning the *Torah*, our primary concern should be to protest vigorously, with dignity - but never to ignore the disgrace because we are concerned about what the world community will say? We have to act with a demeanor becoming the Jewish People, but we must act.

We see this idea expressed in Moshe Rabbeinu's actions towards Dasan and Aviram, his two nemesis', who were fighting with one another. The *Torah* records two times that Moshe "went outside." On the first day, he encountered an Egyptian striking a Jew. On the second day, he came upon Dasan and Aviram clashing. What is the connection between these two encounters? *Horav* Weinberger suggests that although the Jews were subject to Egyptian captivity and their every activity was scrutinized, Moshe had no compunction about admonishing two Jews who were not acting "Jewish." While we should be cognizant of what the world around us thinks, this awareness should not constitute a primary factor in our behavior or policy formation.