

And Avram said to Lot, “Please let there be no discord, please, between me and you... for we are kinsmen (men who are brothers)... Please separate from me.” (13:8,9)

It appears that the reason for them to separate from one another was their kinship. If they were not kinsmen, would discord have been more acceptable? Strife is strife – discord devastates – controversy destroys. Does it make a difference if the fight is between brothers or two unrelated individuals? *Chazal* (cited by *Rashi*) teach that Avraham *Avinu* and Lot had similar countenances. Does it make a difference whether or not they looked alike?

The simple explanation is that Avraham was concerned with the fact that he and Lot looked the same. Imagine, one day Avraham is seen in the *bais hamedrash*, *davening* with fervor, learning diligently with great passion. When he leaves the *bais hamedrash*, he can be found carrying out acts of *chesed* for all people. Avraham appears to be an unceasing powerhouse of spiritual activity – until the next day, when he is seen wobbly leaving the bar, paying a visit to the local house of idol worship, etc. People begin to wonder: Is Avraham for real? Is he a chameleon who changes his image to suit himself? Avraham told Lot: “I have a lofty, spiritual mission to reach out to humanity and teach the world about Hashem. If my reputation is sullied as a result of our matching appearances, people will view me in a negative light and, consequently, ignore anything that I might have to say.”

Our Patriarch was simply being realistic. Alternatively, *Pardes Yosef* explains that when two opponents argue and one is an undisputed *tzaddik*, righteous person, and the other is unquestionably a *rasha*, wicked, a *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem’s Name, is unlikely to occur. People will simply assume that the *tzaddik* represents all that is good and just, while the *rasha* represents evil, those who would destroy anything spiritually positive in Jewish life. When the positions are clear, people assume that the *tzaddik* was compelled to take a stand against those who would usurp Torah and *mitzvos*. When the lines of demarcation are blurred, however, when both sides present themselves as exponents of Orthodoxy, fighting for what is right and just, a strong possibility exists that a desecration of Hashem’s Name will result. Clearly, both of them cannot be righteous. One must be a fraud. Such talk, although possibly incorrect, is damaging and plants the seeds for a *chillul Hashem*.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, suggests another approach toward understanding why the fact that Avraham and Lot were family, that brotherly sentiments existed between them, was, in and of itself, sufficient reason for separating from one another. When Hashem instructed Avraham to uproot himself, leave his home, his birthplace, his community and his family, Avraham took Lot along with him. Why? Was Lot not part of his family? Was he not supposed to leave his family? Lot was a nephew. That is family. Apparently, he took Lot because Lot, as a student, was so subservient to him that Avraham viewed Lot to be a part of his own household – not a member of his father’s household. Hashem told Avraham to leave his father’s household. Lot was a member of his family.

All this was good and true as long as Lot remained Avraham's student. When an issue arose, Lot did not offer an opinion. Whatever Avraham, his *Rebbe*, said was sufficient. He did not have his own opinion. Everything went in accordance with Avraham's ruling. Once Lot became his own spokesman, when he no longer refrained from offering his personal opinion, even differing with Avraham, as was the case in their present discord, Lot reverted to becoming part of Avraham's father's household. He was no longer family. *Anashim achim anachnu*, "We are kinsmen," both members of my father's household. We are on an equal basis. That is sufficient reason for separation.