

“And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Avram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock...So Avram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between me and you.’” (13:7-8)

Rashi cites the *Midrash* that tells us the rationale behind the justification of Lot’s herdsmen for stealing. They were wicked and grazed their cattle in the fields of others. When Avraham’s shepherds rebuked them for their theft, they would respond, “The land has been given to Avraham. He has no heir, so Lot, his brother’s son, will inherit his estate. Consequently, it is not theft. Ultimately, it will all belong to Lot anyway.” Their mistake was, of course, that as long as the Canaanite and Perizzite nations dwelled in the land, Avraham did not yet possess it.

Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, notes the extent that vested interests can play a role in dominating one’s ability to reason sensibly. Lot’s shepherds were not concerned with theft. Therefore, they arrived at an erroneous conclusion permitting them to graze their cattle in other people’s fields. Avraham’s shepherds, who had greater access and reason to believe that the land would ultimately belong to Avraham, did not dare graze on land that did not belong to them, because they did not believe in stealing! The perspective revolves around one’s *negios*, self-serving concerns. Lot’s people had no qualms about stealing. Thus, they developed a thesis which permitted their malevolent activities. Indeed, things have not changed much over the years. The names have changed; the wicked activities have a different veneer to them; regrettably, it is not only Lot’s shepherds that have acted in this manner.

We must understand why Avraham says to Lot, “Let there be no strife between us.” Why would there be any contention between the “masters?” The shepherds are quarreling – not Avraham and Lot. *Horav Bunim z.l., M’Peshishcha*, explains that students/herdsmen are a reflection of the *rebbe/owner*. *Chazal* illustrate this concept in *Pirkei Avos* when they distinguish between the students of Bilaam and those of Avraham, rather than differentiating between Bilaam and Avraham themselves. Because Bilaam could be shrewd and meticulous in the way he spoke, he might have fooled people with his guile and cunning, but the real Bilaam was manifest in the actions and speech of his students. From the students, one is able to discern the essence of the teacher.

Avraham said, “The fact that your herdsmen have no problem with taking other people’s property indicates that thievery is not one of your greatest concerns. Obviously, they learned to be lenient in regard to other people’s property from you. If theft is the problem, then the only solution is to separate from each other. You will live your lifestyle, and I will live mine.” It would be so nice if we would follow this same prescription today.