

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, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen." (13:7, 8)

Some people love to quarrel. It gives them something to do. Decent people, however, understand that strife is destructive, regardless of the motivation. If one is in a community, no matter the size, and a quarrel begins to ensue, he should distance himself from there as if from a contagious plague – because that is what quarrels lead to. At first, the Torah writes that a *riv*, quarrel, commenced between Avram's herdsmen and those of Lot. When Avram spoke to Lot, he referred to the quarrel as a *merivah*. Why the change in spelling? The **Shlah Hakadosh** explains that this is what usually evolves during a quarrel. At first, it is a *riv*, simple, small argument. With time, it becomes a full-blown *merivah*, with everyone taking a part in the "festivities."

In his *Emunah Sheleimah*, *Horav Tzvi Nakar, Shlita*, relates the following incident, which took place in the beginning of the twentieth century. In one of Europe's large cities, there lived a distinguished Jewish family whose daughter had reached marriageable age. Being a wealthy family with access to most everything, her parents sought a spouse for her with whom she could carry on their family legacy of Torah and *chesed*. She was a lovely girl and deserved a fine *ben Torah*. The fact that she was wealthy did not hurt. *Baruch Hashem*, in a short time she met a wonderful *ben Torah*, and the two seemed to "hit it off" nicely. It became a *shidduch*, and the two became engaged to be married. The entire city, people from all walks of life, joined in the festivities, as the two young people prepared for the road to matrimony.

Shortly before the wedding, the *chassan*, young man, asked to break the engagement. He was not prepared to marry this girl. Nothing could be done to change his mind. Apparently, he had heard *lashon hora*, slander, about his bride to be, which turned him off. There was nothing to say. He was not going through with the marriage. People in the public eye, who have accumulated wealth or have been fortunate in other areas, often become victims of sick people whose self-hatred provokes a jaundiced outlook on life in general and successful people in particular. The bride's family had fallen victim to one such individual or group whose only pleasure in life was to hurt and inflict damage on a family and an innocent young girl – whose only offense had been her family's success.

Nothing lasts forever, even perpetuated evil. The young lady once again became engaged to a wonderful young man. The family prayed fervently that nothing would happen to this match. So far so good, and the young couple was married amidst great pomp. The festivities reflected the overwhelming joy experienced by the bride's family. In the back of their minds, the threat of slander still lurked, but they hoped that whoever had earlier hurt them was satisfied with the pain

and havoc wrecked against them. With great trepidation, they hoped that the worst was behind them.

Three days into *Sheva Brachos*, seven-day nuptial celebration, the *chassan*, groom, gave his wife a letter. She began to read, and, suddenly, her face turned white. By the time she had read the entire letter, her body was shaking with fright and anger. The letter, from beginning to end, was filled with slanderous lies about her. She looked at her husband, and, in a shaky voice, asked, "Do you see what this person has written about me? I? Since when have I been afflicted with a deadly, contagious disease? I am a member of the *Maskillim*, Enlightened Jews, who are for, the most part, apostates? My moral compass is deficient, and I have had a number of unholy liaisons? Do you believe any of this?" She then calmed down and asked, "Why are you showing me this?"

Surprisingly, her husband began to smile, "Absolutely not! This is the work of a deviant mind. Indeed, I received this letter a day before our wedding. I read the entire letter with a heavy heart. Nonetheless, I sincerely believed that this could not be true. After meeting you, I became certain that you have impeccable character, and this entire letter is a fabrication. I kept the letter, because I wanted you to see the terrible effect of slander. It can destroy an individual and shatter the lives of entire families."

That marriage lasted for many years, as the two grew old together sharing in the incredible *nachas* of seeing their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren all remain deeply committed to Torah and *mitzvos*. Their oldest son lived in an Eastern Europe community, in which a dispute broke out that affected the status quo of the community. People began to take sides, with slanderous accusations hurled by each side. This son, having been raised in a family whose legacy concerning the terrible effects of *machlokes*, controversy, was prominently drummed into the hearts and minds of its descendants, made a decision. Despite knowing that it would hurt him financially, he picked himself up and moved his family elsewhere. People questioned his sanity. A few years later, the Nazis arrived and wiped out the entire Jewish community; the community to which he had moved was not affected by the war.

I always wondered what happened to the slanderer who had once foiled the girl's engagement and almost did the same to the next one. Was he punished? I realize now that his punishment was to live with himself! Obviously, he was a bitter, negative person, whose hatred for another Jew was so obsessive that it had destroyed him.

One more story. I just saw a story quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith, which he had heard from *Horav Avraham Pam, zl*, which shows how supposed *frumkeit*, misplaced religion, can play a role in stoking the fires of strife; how irrationality can take over a dispute, causing two parties, who are actually sane, thinking people, to act atypically.

Radziner chassidim wear what they consider to be *techeiles*, *Tzitzis* with blue-dyed thread. Their *Rebbe*, **Horav Gershon Chanoch Leiner, zl**, had, in 1889, extracted it from a type of squid, called

a cuttlefish, which he believed was the *chalazon* fish, the dye from which *techeiles* was derived. A number of Europe's distinguished *rabbanim* agreed with the *Radziner's psak*, while others did not. Thus, there were those who asserted that the *mitzvah* of wearing *techeiles* be revived, while others were in opposition. Thousands of Jews, many of whom were not *Radziner chassidim*, wore *techeiles*. Certainly, those who were *Radziner chassidim* wore *techeiles*.

Discord is bad enough when one is alive, but in this case, it extended beyond this world. A *Radziner chassid* who lived in a small town died. His family insisted that he be buried in the *Tallis* that he wore during his lifetime (which is the prevalent custom). The *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, whose members did not ascribe to the *Radziner chassidus*, refused to bury the deceased with a *Tallis* of *techeiles*, claiming that it would be a disgrace to the other dead who were not buried with *techeiles*. The deceased's family countered that their father had worn *techeiles* during his lifetime; the other dead had not.

A tremendous *machlokes*, controversy, broke out, with everyone taking sides. A *machlokes* brings out the worst in people, and it is common for those individuals who have very little involvement with the community to wake up suddenly and climb out of their self-imposed holes, just to add to the fires of strife. It did not take long before news of this dispute reached the ears of the *Chafetz Chaim*. The sage refused to take a position and render his *halachic* perspective on the subject. He did, however, offer the following comment: "I do not understand. To protect the honor of the dead, scores of Jews are vilifying and pouring out venomous words against the living! Does this make sense?"