

And there was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Avram's livestock, and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. (13:7)

Avraham *Avinu's* cattle went out with their mouths muzzled, specifically so that they would not eat what did not belong to him. Lot did not seem to maintain this stringency. His animals ate whenever and wherever they pleased. This caused friction between the two. As a result, Avraham asked Lot to separate from him, to choose any area that he pleased, and he would go elsewhere. This way they could remain "friends," and Lot could do as he pleased without suffering the pain and rebuke. *Rav Yosef B'chor Shor* explains further that Avraham was concerned, "What would the neighbors say when they saw two close relatives quarrelling with one another?" This would create a *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name, that such a devotee of Hashem as Avraham could quarrel. It just did not look good.

What was Avraham's concern? Anyone who knew Avraham and Lot was well aware of the intrinsic differences between the two. Furthermore, everyone was aware that Avraham's animals were muzzled, and Lot's were not. Why would anyone remotely think negatively of Avraham? Furthermore, Avraham *Avinu* had an inn that functioned 24/7 to welcome and assist travelers and anyone who was in need. Who would think that a person of such elevated moral standing would steal? Clearly, Lot would be considered the "bad guy" in this dispute.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, posits that human nature always veers to the negative. Thus, while they all knew that Avraham was righteous, an individual of impeccable character, if there was a vestige of negativity about him – however remote – they would believe it. *Rav Galinsky* quotes the *Yerushalmi Yoma 2:2*, which teaches that *Rav Yanai* was compelled to do some work in his vineyard during *Chol Hamoed*, the Festival Intermediate Days, because it was a *davar ha'avud*, something which would otherwise be lost. Everyday labor is prohibited during the Intermediate Days unless it is for a *davar ha'avud*, which incurs a loss. Any thinking person would realize that, if *Rav Yanai* was working on *Chol Hamoed*, it was a *davar ha'avud*. Nonetheless, everyone who observed this act of labor immediately went to work in their own vineyards. After all, the *Rav* was doing it – why not I? The following year, he made his field *hefker*, relinquished ownership, so that there would not be any misunderstandings. Then, no one questioned his actions. Why? *Yalpi mikalkalta v'lo yalpi mitakanta*, "People (choose to) learn from the misconduct and not from the repair." In other words, people tend to look for the negative; it is what they want (or, at least, have no problem) to believe.

A young father attending the private *minyán* of the *Chazon Ish*, became very cross with his young son who was making noise during *davening*. The *Chazon Ish* later told the father, "Your son learned two lessons from you today: one should not make noise during *davening*; it is permissible to lose one's temper and become angry. Which one do you think he will remember?" Indeed, the *Chazon Ish* writes (*Emunah u'Bitachon*) that, if a *rebbe* has inappropriate *middos*, character traits, the students will be influenced by them – despite all of the other wonderful lessons he

teaches them.

This is a powerful lesson for all of us. No one remembers the hard work, dedication, long hours, generosity and all of the positive contributions that a person has made – if it comes in contrast with one (albeit minor) error. Human nature is not perfect, and neither are people. Nonetheless, human nature tends to focus on the imperfection. It always makes a person feel good that he is better than someone else. This is especially true of those who only seek out the negative attributes in others, precisely because they realize that they have nothing positive to manifest about themselves.