

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... please separate from me." (13:7, 8, 9)

Avraham *Avinu* spent a lifetime reaching out to the uninitiated, regardless of their beliefs. To Avraham, the most entrenched pagan was a person who could, and should be reached. Together with his wife, Sarah *Imeinu*, they converted thousands to monotheism. If so, why is it specifically his nephew, Lot, a person for whom he cared, that Avraham asked to leave his presence? What was Lot's transgression? Petty theft from the fields of others was without a doubt inappropriate behavior, but did it warrant a complete break in their relationship? What about *teshuvah*, repentance? Avraham made the attempt to convince everyone else. Why not Lot?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, Shlita, explains that, indeed, Avraham made the attempt to speak with Lot concerning his shortcomings. He pointed out to him that it was wrong to steal from people's fields – even if it was only some grass. One does not cross over the boundary of someone else's property. Had Lot replied with an excuse-- such as: they needed the feed, the sheep were starving and there was nothing else readily available-- Avraham would have pointed out that need does not acquiesce theft. Wrong is wrong, regardless of the circumstances. Need does not justify the evil.

Lot, however, did not attempt to excuse himself by saying that he needed what was readily available. Instead, Lot came with a *taanah*, a rationalization, of entitlement. It really was not theft. After all, Hashem had promised to give the entire land to Avraham. The Patriarch was getting on in years, and he had not been blessed with children. Thus, Lot felt that, since he would ultimately inherit the land from Avraham, he had a right to it now. Why wait for something that he would soon have anyway? He might as well enjoy it now.

When Avraham heard Lot's *lomdus*, analytical presentation, his baseless *halachic* dispensation in order to justify his theft, he decided that he would not waste his time arguing with *tzaddikim*, righteous individuals, who justify their miscreant behavior with loopholes or perverted interpretations of *halachah*. Such a person does not repent. Why should he? In his own eyes, he did nothing wrong! Avraham would rather deal with pagans, who knew nothing, than deal with those who knew enough to justify their deficient behavior.

There is nothing worse than a "little" learning, whereby the person thinks that now he knows something and he can even dispute others who are much greater and possess much more knowledge than he. One who does not know will invariably say that he either did not care or had no alternative; he was "driven" to act in the manner that he did. The individual who has learned somewhat-- received a decent high school education, followed by a "dip in the pool" of learning a some post high school *bais hamedrash*; who has picked up some of the modern day lingo

espoused by those who seek every opportunity to undermine Torah Judaism so that it coincides with contemporary society-- he is dangerous. The danger does not lie in the influence he might have on Torah Jews. They do not bother listening to him. It is the unknowing and the ones who are looking for a way out, for a way to act like Zimri and still demand the reward reserved for Pinchas, on whom the Lots of this world have the strongest impact. Our Patriarch taught us how to act when they want to partner with us: *Hipared na mei'alai*, "Please separate from me."