

"Also, Lot who went with Avram had flocks, cattle and tents. And the land could not support their dwelling together for their possessions were abundant and they were unable to dwell together." (13:5,6)

The *parsha* relating to Lot is difficult to understand. Hashem's command of "*Lech Lecha*," His imperative for Avraham to uproot himself, to leave his country and birthplace, is considered one of Avraham's ten trials. Yet, Lot accompanied Avraham as a devoted student without being commanded to do so! He went along simply out of a profound desire to be with Avraham and to learn from him. If this is so, how did Lot suddenly transform into a greedy person, willing to throw it all away and live in the degenerate city of Sodom, just for the sake of material gain?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, z.l., infers from here that the stranglehold that material avarice has on a person is very difficult to overcome. Although Lot originally seemed to be committed to a life of spiritual pursuits to the point of self-sacrifice, his attitude changed when he acquired wealth. Suddenly he became consumed with an inordinate desire for material abundance. No longer could he continue to dwell with Avraham, for this would unduly restrict him. He could not be constricted in his quest for accumulating greater wealth. This submission to the material realm is a malady that can affect anyone at anytime, if he is not vigilant. It is a disease that consumes some of the finest and most dedicated individuals. In many cases, they are trapped before they realize it.

Horav Bloch cites *Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita*, who makes a noteworthy observation on the *pasuk* regarding Lot's basic character. The *pasuk* states "*And they captured Lot and his possessions, Avram's nephew*" (14:12). At first the *pasuk* seems inconsistent. Lot's possessions were so intrinsic to his personality that they are mentioned by the *Torah* even prior to describing his relationship with Avraham. The *Torah* emphasizes that he was not merely the nephew of Avraham who happened to have many possessions. Rather, he was the wealthy Lot who happened to be Avraham's nephew! Lot's possessions were an integral part of his life. They influenced his character and changed his personality, so that his relationship with Avraham became secondary. Lot's character at the beginning of his relationship with Avraham, his determination and conviction, were severely impaired by his exposure to his newly found wealth.

We still must endeavor to find the source of his problem. If Lot had been truly committed, could material wealth have made him so vulnerable that he would divorce himself from his spiritual upbringing and surrender to pagan beliefs? We suggest that there was a slight, but severe, blemish on his soul that had not been cleansed. This blemish was the source of his defection to idol-worship.

Lot was the son of Haran, Avraham's brother. Haran died in Uru Kasdim at the hands of Nimrod, the evil king who attempted to have Avraham killed, for expounding his monotheistic belief in

Hashem. When Haran witnessed his brother being thrown into the fiery furnace, doubt plagued him. Should he proclaim his belief in Hashem or not? He decided that he would wait in order to see what would happen to Avraham. If Avraham were to emerge from the flames unscathed, then he would proclaim his own belief in Hashem. If Avraham were to perish, then Haran would profess belief in Nimrod. Avraham, of course, was saved, while Haran, who did not merit a similar miracle, was consumed by the flames.

Now, let us look at Lot, the son of an individual whose belief in the Almighty was at best ambivalent. Should we expect this vacillating belief to disappear by itself? Whatever indiscretion was manifest by Lot had its roots in his ancestors. Sin is a process which begins with an imperceptible blemish and slowly matures into a blatant transgression. Haran's ambivalence led to his son's distinctive separation from the Almighty.