

Let us separate. (13:9)

The question is well-known. Avraham *Avinu* reached out to an entire pagan world in order to teach the people the verities of monotheism. He converted many. His nephew and close disciple, Lot, was one of these many souls whom Avraham brought closer to Hashem. Yet, when Lot manifested an attitude that was inappropriate; when his ethical standards came into opposition with those of Avraham, the Patriarch bid him, “Good day,” and separated himself from him. Why did Avraham have patience for everyone (certainly his pagan candidates left much to be desired), but not Lot? Why was Avraham so firm in demanding that he and his nephew part ways? Furthermore, it is not as if Avraham were unaware of Lot’s moral and ethical shortcomings. Yet, he reached out to him, because he had hoped that perhaps he would succeed in convincing him to alter his deviant lifestyle. Lot’s actions came as no surprise to Avraham. Why did he make such an about-face and divorce himself from his nephew? Does a disagreement among their herdsmen warrant such a harsh reaction?

Horav Moshe Neriyah, zl, addresses the source of the controversy between Lot’s and Avraham’s shepherds. *Va’yehi riv bein roei mikneh Avram u’bein roei mikneh Lot*, “There was quarrelling between the herdsmen of Avram’s cattle and those of Lot’s cattle” (ibid 13:18). *Chazal* describe the nature of this controversy: The animals of (belonging to) Avraham *Avinu* would go out muzzled (for fear that they might eat from the fields of others without permission), while the animals belonging to Lot were not muzzled.” Lot’s herdsmen excused their actions, claiming, “Hashem told Avraham, ‘To your seed, I will give this Land’ (ibid 12:7). Avraham is barren, unable to have children. He will pass from this world and Lot, his nephew, will be his heir. The animals are eating from their own (or what will eventually one day be theirs).” Alternatively, when Avraham’s shepherds accused Lot’s shepherds of stealing, they would respond, “Stealing? You are the ones that are acting inappropriately by depriving animals of a proper, nutritious meal. You keep them muzzled, thereby not permitting them to eat more, when it actually belongs to them.”

We see from the arrogant manner in which Lot’s herdsmen presented their claim to whatever produce their animals ate, that it was not simply “them” talking. They had a “*rebbe*,” mentor, who *paskened*, ruled, and guided them. They followed their mentor’s definition of right and wrong, proper and inappropriate. Apparently, if they were to permit themselves to allow their animals to eat from anywhere they chose, it would be with Lot’s direction and blessing. *Rav Neriyah* sees this not as a case of petty theft, but rather, as the espousal of a perverted and malignant ideology which permitted them to do and take what they wanted because, after all, one day it would all be theirs.

In other words, Lot’s herdsmen implied: “We follow the direction of our mentor, Lot, not Avraham.” Once Lot had become a “*rav*” and a “*posek*,” it was too dangerous for Avraham to be in his proximity. Controversy based upon perverted ideology is no longer a “difference of opinion.” It is a scourge that destroys. We have no room for negotiation with corrupt ideology. The time had arrived for *Hipared nah meialai*, “Let us separate.” Lot’s further actions indicated that it was much more than a momentary difference of opinion. Lot was opposing Avraham across the board, because he

now believed in himself and in his ability to define and determine what was right and what was wrong. He was not privy to Avraham's standards. He was doing it his way. He had his own standards. He was his own *rav* and *posek*. It is sad how today we see that the more things change, the more they really stay the same.