

And Avram said to Lot, “Please let there not be a fight between me and you and between my shepherd and your shepherds, because we are brothers.” (13:8)

Klal Yisrael is destined to experience various *galusim*, exiles. The last exile is America, a country that has been good to us, despite its permissive and pervasive society. We are allowed to practice our religion, build *mekomos HaTorah*, institutes of Torah – schools, *shuls* which follow their unique Torah traditions. We need not fear a pogrom. While this does not mean that everything is great, it just shows that, in comparison to the previous exiles in our tumultuous history, America is by far the easiest. Yet, it is called *galus*, because we must contend with an almost constant attack on our spiritual/moral beliefs, our children exposed to media which most often undermines everything their parents teach them at home.

Every *galus* has its unique *nisayon*, challenge. The European *galus*, which ended with the tragic murder of six million of our brothers and sisters, presented the challenge of extreme poverty. Hunger was a way of life. Yet, despite the abject poverty to which we were subjected, we built *yeshivos*, *batei knesses* and *batei midrash*, *chadarim* and *Bais Yaakov*. *Kollelim* were established and even the simple Jew spent his “free” time learning Torah. *Horav Elyah Svei, zl*, was asked what the *nisayon*, challenge, of the American *galus*, would be? He replied that it would be affluence. Veritably, poverty will not end. Enough people will continue to require support. Many people, however, will be blessed with material abundance. Their *nisayon* will be: spending their G-d-given wealth appropriately. How many people, organizations, institutions, can one support? This will be the *nisayon* of America.

Having said this, let us peruse the opening *pasuk* which relates what was becoming a serious contention between two of the wealthiest men in the world: Avraham *Avinu* and his nephew, Lot. Avraham spoke to Lot and said, “We are brothers. Let us not allow a difference of opinion between our shepherds to affect our relationship. After all, we are brothers.” *Rashi* quotes the *Midrash* that teaches that when Avraham said, “We are brothers,” he was not referring to their biological relationship, but rather, to their facial resemblance. If Lot and his shepherds were stealing, and Lot’s visage was remarkably similar to that of Avraham, it would create a problem for the Patriarch.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, expounds on the similarity quotient between Avraham and Lot. The physical body is a representation of one’s *neshamah*. The body/soul connection to which we all ascribe does not work on the basis of an esoteric adhesive that binds them together. Glue can bind two dissimilar objects together. Body/soul does not work this way. One’s physical features are a manifestation of the spiritual force from which they stem. In other words, our *neshamah*, soul, plays a leading role in determining our physical appearance. Obviously, Hashem is the Creator and only He can create, but He connects soul and body according to their similarities. We now understand the concept that *Chazal* teach, that every physical entity has a spiritual dimension. The mere fact that it exists is proof positive of a Higher force that nurtures it.

Avraham's and Lot's external physical appearances resembled one another. This means that they also shared similar spiritual qualities. When Avraham *Avinu* told Lot that they were brothers because they resembled one another, he intimated that they shared a focal point in their service to Hashem: the *middah* of *chesed*, lovingkindness. This attribute is as distant from discord as can be.

The *Mashgiach* points out that Lot's extraordinary wealth was not in his own merit – but in the merit of Avraham *Avinu*. Lot traveled with Avraham. The Torah seems to emphasize this. Indeed, *Rashi* (Ibid. 13:5) comments that the source of Lot's affluence was his traveling with Avraham. Clearly, the Torah is conveying an important message to us concerning Lot's wealth and his proximity to Avraham. Lot's wealth was a direct result of his connection to Avraham.

Let us digest this. Had Lot been using his G-d-given brain, he would have realized this and acted appropriately. Hashem did not bless him with wealth for no reason. If Lot's wealth was connected to Avraham then it was incumbent upon him to use that wealth in accord with the way Avraham would have.

Rav Wolbe concludes with a powerful statement from *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*. On one of *Rav Shteinman's* trips to the Diaspora, he was asked why it was necessary to have so many young men learning in *Kollel*. Throughout our history, this way of life was uncommon. Men learned whenever they had opportunity, but they did not spend their entire days devoted to learning. (Sadly, this question is not uncommon, and, in many instances, the result of pure ignorance – not antagonism. This man at least had the decency and deference to ask – not criticize.) *Rav Shteinman* countered that actually the opposite should be asked: Why do we need such a high percentage of affluent Jews? [Affluence and using one's wealth appropriately can be a difficult *nisayon* – which many fail to overcome.] Throughout history, many Jews have been wealthy, but not nearly in the proportion to the wealth we have today. He explained that Hashem is providing for those who devote their lives to Torah. The reason that so many Jews are wealthy is that so many *avreichem* are learning Torah full-time. They require support. It should be one's greatest privilege and honor to provide that support. If fewer men would be learning, the number of wealthy individuals would diminish. Spiritual bounty begets material prosperity. The physical/material is the result of the spiritual – not the other way around.