

United We Stand

Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Gruss Kollel (YU Israel)

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Parshas Lech Lecha

10th of Marcheshvan, 5786

The Parsha's Path

But the land could not support them staying together, for their possessions were great, and they were not able to stay together. And there was quarreling between the shepherds of Avram's cattle and the shepherds of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanites and the Perizites were then in the land. And Avram said to Lot, "Let there not be a cause for strife (merivah) between me and you and between my shepherds and your shepherds, because we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Separate now from me - if you go left, I will go right, and if you go right, I will go left." (13:6-9).

This week's Parsha features the famous story of the dispute between Avram and Lot's shepherds and, consequently, their parting of ways. A close examination of the story reveals a number of striking difficulties. Firstly, why does the verse repeat, *But the land could not support them staying together ... and they were not able to stay together?* Secondly, why does the verse mention that *the Canaanites and the Perizites were then in the Land?* Thirdly, why does Avraham say, *Let there not be a cause for strife ... because we are brothers?* Shouldn't there not be strife even with strangers?

The Malbim explains the passage as follows: The land could not support Avram and Lot staying together for two reasons: Firstly, *for their possessions were great*, and it was hard to ensure they both had adequate room. Secondly, *and they were not able to stay together*, as there began to develop a friction between Avram and Lot as Lot had already begun to stray from Avram's values. Normally, even in difficult situations, brothers and close family forgive each other over various encroachments and they make things work, but if there's friction between people, then it's very hard for them to be in such close proximity, and they will almost inevitably descend into conflict.

The seeds of friction that existed between Avram and Lot in their hearts, while theoretically

maintainable on its own, naturally matured into full-out quarreling between their servants. Yet even then, perhaps the quarreling could have been contained until it could ultimately be resolved. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that *the Canaanites and the Perizites were then in the Land*, and there was a real concern that it was only a matter of time before they would start paying attention to what was going on and decide to get involved, which would only mean disaster.

Thus, Avram said to Lot, *Let there not be a cause for strife between me and you ... because we are brothers.*" The reason why there was a cause for strife was precisely because they were brothers. If they were not brothers, then there would never have been a question about spreading out - the land is big, and they both could have found ample space for themselves. It was only because they were brothers and desired to join together to live in just one (tight) space that caused them to fight. Yet it is illogical that the cause of division should be the desire to be close. Thus, Avram told Lot, "I think we need some space. You can choose to go wherever you want, and I'll separate to the side. But I'll still always be right by your side to help you." The Malbim even homiletically suggests that Avram was telling Lot, "we are like one flesh with two hands. If you will be the left (weaker hand) then I will be the right, stronger one, or the reverse."

From how seeds of conflict unwittingly planted by leaders can mature in their followers to the inevitable exposure to, and danger of, external forces, the story of Avram and Lot's feud deeply resonates with the dangers of conflict today. Yet the Torah also shows us the key to dealing with these painful disputes. While Avram and Lot's difference in values was substantial, which posed serious problems - according to an additional approach in the Malbim, Lot's trespassing on others' property put both Lot and Avram in existential danger from the wrath of the Canaanites and Perizites - that did not impinge on their feelings of brotherhood. On the contrary, it was precisely *because* they were

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brothers that they so closely connected themselves and expected so much from one another, resulting in pain and dispute. The solution was to create a healthy distance - not to cut off contact, support, or love, but to give space for each party to live out their values and lifestyle. Just like a husband and wife sometimes need their own space for a few minutes, and like, *lehavdil*, G-d contracts Himself (*tzimtzum*) to make space for us, people are not always immediately on completely identical wavelengths that they can be fully connected all the time. From a distance, differences are more easily managed and contextualized, as we pray and strive for the day when you can once again fully unite in harmony.

Ultimately, Lot's descendent, Rus, would fully rejoin the people of Avraham and usher kingship into the Jewish people. We pray for the day when all of Klal Yisrael will fully be one and usher in a restoration of *Malchus Beis David, bimheira vijameinu*.

Deeper Meanings

Adapted from 5780.

And you shall be a blessing (12:2).

This week's Parsha recounts how G-d tells Avra(ha)m to journey on from his current place of residence to a place that G-d would tell him. In return, he is guaranteed to be made into a great nation, and that all the nations would be blessed through him (or use him as a paradigm for blessing). The Ramban notes that the Parsha's opening seems oddly abrupt and not typical of the Torah's style. The Torah does not introduce Avram as a righteous person as it does by Noach, nor does it tell us the reason for why G-d is telling him to move. Why is it so brief?

The Ramban suggests that in order to understand this, we have to recall the midrash at the end of last week's Parsha, when Avram was introduced. Based on that, we would already know that Avram was a very righteous person that stood up for monotheism, but who was unfortunately persecuted and scorned. In fact, the second to last

pasuk in last week's Parsha (11:31) tells us more or less explicitly that Avram was already planning on travelling to Canaan of his own volition to spread the message of G-d, but he tarried in Charan. The narrative in this week's Parsha is simply picking up where it left off, and G-d tells Avram to resume his quest to Canaan, for it would only be there that his name would become great and he would be a blessing.

In the Ramban's view, the climactic command of G-d for Avram to depart to Canaan that opens the Parsha is not the beginning of Avram's epic monotheistic mission, but rather a continuation. The essential moment that warranted revelation was not to take the first step, but the next step. He had to learn not to get sidetracked to sojourn in another land, but to focus on his ultimate destination with complete urgency. The Torah wishes to emphasize that greatness must come at a cost that is more than great ambitions - it must come at great perseverance and a never-ending will to climb higher and push forward.

As people get older, there is an increasing tendency to settle down somewhat and feel comfortable with one's place in life. It is crucial to recognize that every moment of our entire lives is given to us to climb higher, and to cling to our dreams with the same intensity that we once had. Lech Lecha - go for yourself- because it is only when we continue to move forward and persevere to the final step that we arrive at our final destination.

Goal of the week

If you're feeling pained by another individual or group, take a few steps back and just try to feel where they're coming from and what they're going through without judging them.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Yisroel Zev ben Menya Rachel, Masha Sarah bas Teiviah Leah, Gavriel Margoliot ben Malka.

Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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