

Parshat Lech Lecha 5776

This week's sedra tells us about the separation of Lot and Avram.

"And Avram said to Lot....Please separate from me; if to the left then I shall go to the right and if to the right, then I shall go to the left." 13:8,9. According to the Sforno, by right and left Avram meant north and south. In the previous chapter Avram was described as travelling southwards and Rashi comments that he was travelling towards Yerushalayim, the most holy part of the of the land. Rabbi Shimshon Refuel Hirsch says that in order to separate from Lot, Avram was prepared to give this area up to protect his people from lot's ménage. Avram's choice was limited as he had to seek isolation. But since Lot had given up living Avram's way of life, the whole land lay open to him.

"And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the whole plain of the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere..." 13:10. Lot would have found Avram's approach to separate rational as wandering around inhospitable regions would not have suited Lot since he wanted a rich lush district. *"Lot lifted up his eyes..."* and saw things that were attractive to him. The words *"like a garden of G-d"* in 13:10 refers to trees and plants; *"like the land of Egypt,"* to grain and produce. The River Nile was one of the four rivers that came from Gan Eden and for Lot it was like seeing Gan Eden. Rashi states that the streams would be good for his flocks. Lot looks up and "sees" but his perception is limited-it was what was attractive in his eyes at that moment. Lot could not see the immorality of Sodom and Gemorrah; since he was blinded by what he saw.

Lot's behaviour towards his uncle is questionable. Like Avram, Lot had also left Egypt a rich man. He could have afforded to live anywhere. He could have asked his uncle to choose which portion Avram wanted, but he didn't. He didn't even speak. He just looked on the surface and not deeply enough to see the real consequences of choosing where he did, and went.

The Abarbanel states that as long as Lot was in the presence of Avram, Avram's ability to prophesy departed. Hashem did not speak to Avram whilst Lot was with him, so Avram could not fully develop his relationship with Hashem. So, should they not have separated earlier? Avram felt it was more important to spend time with Lot than to talk to Hashem. This is repeated in next's week's sedra when Avram breaks off a conversation with Hashem to welcome strangers. He understood that to walk in the way of Hashem was to fulfil the precept of bein

adam lechavero. The Abarbanel continues by saying that Avram did not want to separate from his nephew but the battle between the shepherds became the reason for him to do so. Rashi states on verse 7 that Avram had not yet received all the land promised to him because of the presence of the Canaanites and the Perizzites but Lot felt his shepherds could legitimately let the flocks graze on the land, as Avram had no heir and Lot thought it would all come to him eventually. On that bases Lot considered they were not stealing. Their behaviour was justified in Lot's eyes.

Avram was worried that he would be attacked by these tribes so Hashem concocted the dispute to enable them to separate. The Abarbanel continues that Avram's sensitivity and compassion made him say to Lot that it is the shepherds causing the separation and not Lot himself. Avram said that they should not fight, and that even when they go their own ways they must keep in touch. Avram wanted peace but how does Lot respond? He is fine with that and had no problem with a parting of the ways. He shows the extreme opposite of what Avram represents. Lot runs from the kedusha of Avram all the way to Sodom. In a sence, running away from Hashem.

The Abarbanel explains that despite this separation, Avram and Lot were very close, like brothers. Their facial features were very similar. Avram was troubled by what happened, so Hashem then reveals Himself to Avram in verse 14. Hashem understands that Avram is feeling upset at the loss of his only family apart from Sara. So Hashem now speaks with Avram as Lot is no longer there. He is reassured that he will have children. *" And I will make thy seed like the dust of the earth..."* 13:16. The decision to separate was a fateful one for Lot. He settled in Sodom and rose to a prestigious position whilst trying to remain loyal to the precepts he had learnt from Avram. A difficult challenge. Avram did not forget his nephew and comes to his aid when Lot is captured. Although the two separated intentionally, the bonds that linked them remained. We this surface again some generations later with the story of Ruth, the descendant of Lot's progeny, Moav and her reunion with Abraham's people.

This week the Jewish community is celebrating Shabbat UK. Around the country and all over the world, shuls, mosdos and individuals are reconnecting. This is an inspiration to connect to all Jews and never separate ourselves from the community. The example first set by Avraham Avinu.