

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Lech Lecha

“AND AVRAM HEARD THAT HIS BROTHER WAS CAPTURED ...”
(BREISHIS 14:14)

Avraham focused only on their “brotherhood”

LOT, AVRAHAM’S NEPHEW was being held hostage in an attempt to extort ransom money from Avraham. The question immediately arises: Why does the Torah refer to Lot as Avraham’s brother, when in truth he was Avraham’s nephew? Rabbeinu Bechaye answers that this usage highlights Avraham’s sterling *middos* – Avraham focused only on their “brotherhood” and not on the previous fight between them. (Their shepherds had disagreed over grazing rights and Avraham suggested they part ways.) Rabbeinu Bechaye goes on to explain that Avraham, mindful of his love for his nephew, zealously took to battle, and fought with such heightened fervor that it was as if Lot was actually his brother.

The problem was solved in a quick and reasonable manner

Let us step back and examine the situation: Avraham Avinu, the paradigm of kindness and the epitome of selflessness, has a disagreement take place between his shepherds and those of Lot. The Torah does not report any anger between Avraham and Lot themselves, rather that Avraham approaches Lot, and proposes a way to keep their shepherds from bickering. His idea is accepted by Lot and they settle the issue in a calm and peaceful way by agreeing to separate from each other. The problem was solved in a quick and reasonable manner.

He would first need a session of mussar study

This is the same saintly *tzaddik* Avraham, whose home was a wide open four-way intersection of hospitality for travelling strangers. We will read in next week’s *parasha* how Avraham, at the advanced age of 99 years old, on the third and most agonizing day of recovery from the painful operation of *bris milah*, interrupts a “personal visit” from Hashem Himself to run out in the scorching heat after three idol-worshiping Arab nomads to beg them to enjoy his free food, drink and lodging. How much more would Avraham have sacrificed to save these strangers from mortal danger? What if they were not mere strangers, but close relatives of Avraham? It staggers the mind to think that such a zealous person – who later would rise up early in the morning to fulfill the command of Hashem to sacrifice his beloved son – would need extra motivation to save his nephew from danger, all because of a small disagreement.

How delicate and sensitive is the emotional response of a human being! Even our forefather Avraham would have been somewhat affected by some lingering hard feelings over their past disagreement, despite all his love for Lot and his kindness towards any person. Avraham felt that for him to properly exert himself to the required degree, he would first need a session of *mussar* study. Avraham needed to take a moment for introspection; time to concentrate on the special bond and relationship he shared with Lot. Only after this deliberation could Avraham summon all his energy and zeal to save Lot.

Two powerful lessons for us: One, how vulnerable we are – even small incidents can negatively affect our wholehearted response to help others in need, even in life-threatening situations. Two, the power of *mussar* – a simple act of focusing on basic, self-evident truths, such as the love we should feel for family members, can overcome negative forces and allow Avraham to not only act with proper zeal towards his nephew, but even go beyond the normal level and act as if Lot was truly his own brother! May we use the powerful tools of *mussar* to fight off negative influences, to strengthen ourselves and reach even higher levels of *z’rirus* and enthusiasm in serving Hashem.