

D'var Torah for Parshat Lech L'cha
by Rabbi Gewirtz

גַּם־לִלוֹת הַהֲלָךְ אֶת־אַבְרָם כִּי־צָאוֹר־וּבָהָר וְאֶחָלִים:
וְלֹא־נִשְׁאָר אֶתְּנָא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ לְשֵׁבֶת יִתְּהֻן כִּידְקָה רְכוּשָׁם רַב וְלֹא יִכְלְוּ לְשֵׁבֶת יִתְּהֻן
וְנִיהְרַב בּוּנָיו רְעֵי מִקְנָה־אַבְרָם וּבּוּנָיו רְעֵי מִקְנָה־לֹאָוט וְתִפְנְעַנִּי וְהַפְרַזִּי אוֹ יִשְׁבֶּב בְּאָרֶץ:
וְאָמַר אַבְרָם אֶל־לֹאָוט אֶל־נָא תְּהִי מַרְיבָּה בְּינִי וּבְינֶךָ וּבּוּנָיו רְעֵי קִרְבָּה אַנְשָׁים אַחִים אֱנֹחָנוּ:

And also Lot, who went with Abram, had flocks and cattle and tents.

And the land did not bear them to dwell together, for their possessions were many, and they could not dwell together.

And there was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and between the herdsmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanites and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.

And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no quarrel between me and between you and between my herdsmen and between your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.

Rabbi Ovadia Seforno, 16th century Italian commentary, notes the seemingly irrelevant detail, "and the Canaanites and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land". He explains that Abram was warning his nephew Lot of possible serious consequences of their shepherds' feud. The Canaanites and Perizzites would see kinsman quarreling, and conclude that the Hebrews were an ill-tempered tribe who would certainly not relate civilly to them. This could prejudice them against the Hebrews and perhaps threaten their safety.

It is natural that members of families and communities will have disagreements that sometimes descend to unpleasantness. But public discord carries serious risks. In our age of easy mass communication, it is especially important to remember the Seforno's observation. We might be motivated to avoid much strife altogether.