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5786 Parshat Noach

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תשפ"ו Parshat Noach

Although this coming Shabbat we will read parshat Noach, we will focus here on an earth-changing event that occurred in last week's parsha, Bereshit, viz, the cold-blooded murder of Hevel by his brother Kayin. The Midrash Rabba (Esther 10) records Kayin as the "head of the murderers," and Hevel as the first victim.

קין ראש להורגים הבל ראש לנהרגים

Kayin is the head of all murderers, and Hevel is the head of all who were murdered.

This murder opened the gates for all subsequent murders. All hatred and competitiveness that future generations would see, and all murders and wars between men, began from Kayin.

To understand what was behind this murder and the lessons that we can learn from it, some background information will be helpful.

Rivalry between the brothers began from the moment they were born. The Sages derive, from seemingly extra words in the Torah, that Kayin was born with a twin sister and that Hevel was born with two twin sisters. Because the world needed to be populated, they were permitted to marry their sisters. Kayin married his twin, and Hevel expected to marry his twins, but Kayin claimed that since he was the eldest, *he* was entitled to the extra wife. Hevel countered that "since she was born with me, she was intended to be my wife, not yours." In the end, Hevel married her, but the Midrash reports that Kayin's wanting to marry Hevel's most beautiful extra wife after killing his brother, was part of Kayin's motivation for killing him.

The brothers also argued about how to divvy up the world. In the end, they resolved that Kayin would take ownership of all the land and that Hevel would take ownership of all portable objects, *i.e.*, animals, furniture, etc. Hence, Kayin worked the land, and Hevel raised sheep and cattle.

We see that from the world's very inception, men were always arguing about women and material things, looking to expand their stake in the world through amassing possessions.

It was then the 14th day of Nisan, and upon seeing the jealousy between his sons, Adam told his boys, "Sons, in the future, my grandchildren will bring a Pesach offering to Hashem on this day. Why don't the two of you do the same? Humble yourselves before Hashem and maybe you will realize that all comes from Him and your jealousy will disappear." Adam suggested that they bring a sacrifice from the material that they respectively toiled in.

Kayin, who was uber focused on amassing wealth, was too cheap to offer an expensive sacrifice. He therefore brought a sacrifice of his leftover flaxseed, his cheapest item.

His name "Kayin" (קַיִן) comes from the Hebrew word "Kinyan" (קנין), which means to legally acquire. In the Torah, ownership is based on exclusive ownership of one's possessions to the exclusion of all others. Hence, taking (without a purchase or receipt as a gift) someone's legally acquired object constitutes theft.

Like Kayin, our modern world perceives the ownership of material property as a measure of one's importance to the world. The more property you control, the greater the part of the world you control, and

the greater your influence. Ownership of assets gives a person the feeling of permanence and importance in the world.

The Torah perspective on wealth, on the other hand, is that all material matter belongs to Hashem, and that He lends it us as tools to use for our mission in the world. When we ultimately leave the world, we must leave all of our “stuff” here for someone else to use. Commensurate with one’s mission comes the material assets needed to accomplish that mission. Such a mindset keeps a person humble, understanding that his wealth is not his, and that Hashem can take it away from him at any time.

Hevel, on the other hand, a humbler man who didn’t need to be the first and the best at everything, was content to bring his sacrifice after Kayin. But unlike his brother, Hevel brought his finest fat and wool-laden sheep.

The Midrash (Pirkei D’ R’ Eliezer 21) teaches us.

הביא קין מותר מאכלו קליות זרע פשתן והביא אבל מבכורות צאנו ומחלביהן כבשים שלא נגזזו לצמר ונתעב מנחת קין ונרצית מנחת הבל שנ' וישע יי אל הבל ואל מנחתו רבי יהושע בן קרחה אומר אמר הקב"ה אל יתערבו מנחת קין והבל לעולם שמא חס ושלום אפילו בארג בגד שנא' לא תלבש שעטנז צמר ופשתים יחדיו.

Kayin brought his sacrifice from his leftovers, toasted flaxseed. Hevel brought his finest, fattest sheep, loaded with wool. Kayin’s sacrifice was rejected, but Hevel’s was accepted. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha says, “Hashem has said, the sacrifice of Kayin shall never mix with the sacrifice of Hevel, even woven together in a garment. Therefore, the Torah commands us, (Deuteronomy 22:11) “Do not wear shaatnez - linen and wool together”.

What was behind Kayin's flaxseed offering, and what is the reference to *shaatnez*?

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh Bereshit 4:3) explains that both Kayin and Hevel intended to bring as a sacrifice the item that most characterized his domain. Flaxseed was Kaiyin's most "earthly" item, and Hevel brought the item that most epitomized his portable possessions, a sheep loaded with fat and wool. (I do not understand why this is, but I accept the Maharal's wisdom.) Not only that, each brought his offering to show off the importance of his domain and to diminish the importance of the other's. There indeed was evil intent on *both* of their parts in the "sacrifice" they brought to Hashem. The Maharal uses this to explain why Hevel's sacrifice did not in the end protect him from being murdered by Kayin because of his jealousy. Because Hevel's offering contained an element of malice, it was not a total merit and could not protect him.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha added that because these two items were pitted against each other in a competition whose results were catastrophic, the Torah would ultimately ban the weaving or wearing of these two oppositional items in one garment. Hence the prohibition of wearing *shaatnez*, wool and linen in the same garment.

(This law applies even today, and when one purchase a new suit, he takes it to a "*Shaatnez checker*" who examines the suit's various materials to make sure that there is no linen and wool together in the suit. He then

puts a tag in the suit indicating that it is *shaatnez* free.)



The Torah tells us (Bereshit 4:4,5):

וַיִּשַׁע יִדְוֹד אֶל הַבֶּל וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ
(ה) וְאֶל קִין וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְלוּ פָּנָיו.

4) Hashem turned to Hevel and his offering (a fire came down from heaven and burnt it), but to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn. 5) This annoyed Kayin exceedingly, and his countenance fell.

When Hashem saw Kayin's reaction, He said to him.

(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדֹדְךָ אֵל קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נִפְּלוּ פָנֶיךָ.

(ז) הֲלוֹא אִם תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֹקֶתוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ.

(6) And Hashem said to Kayin, "Why are you so annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen? (7) Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin rests at the door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it."

Here we have history's second human error. Kayin miscalculated and brought Hashem an offering of his most earthly possession, flaxseed, but Hashem rejected it feeling that it was inappropriate and that something more important should have brought.

Isn't this about us? Don't we also do things that we think are good and correct only to find out that we miscalculated and that things didn't go over so well? What does Hashem think when that happens? Hashem told us in His response to Kayin.

On the words "Why has your countenance fallen" the Seforno (d. 1549) comments.

ולמה נפלו פניך. כי כשיש לקלקול איזו תקנה אין ראוי להצטער על מה שעבר אבל ראוי להשתדל להשיג תקון לעתיד.

When a mistake can be corrected, there is nothing to get upset about and cry over spilled milk, rather, you should try to fix it for the future.

Hashem says to Kayin, "What are you upset about? You can fix your mistake! Just bring another sacrifice of your best stuff and I will accept it. It's as simple as that!"

Not only that, Hashem says,

(ז) הלא אם תיטיב. עצמך ותשתדל להיות גם אתה לרצון. שאת. רום המעלה
וההתנשא רובץ לפניך ומוכן שיהיה לך.

If you improve yourself so that you should also be desired by Me, you are destined to become elevated and achieve great heights.

The Vilna Gaon adds understanding to the Seforno.

הלא טובך בידך ובכחך, אם תטיב מעשיך זאת, תתנשא יותר ממדרגת הבל, כי
במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים צדיקים גמורים אין עומדים.

*Your good welfare is in your hands and within your power to achieve. If you correct this act, you will rise higher than even Hevel, **because the place where Baalei Teshuva (those who have repented for their wrong actions) stand, even completely righteous people don't stand, and I will accept your offering.***

The Torat Chaim explains why *baalei teshuva* stand even higher than the completely righteous.

והטעם לפי שבעלי תשובה כיון שטעמו טעם איסור קשה עליהן לפרוש ולקיים
המצות וטורחן מרובה לכך שכרן יותר מרובה

The reason for this is that sinners, having tasted the forbidden, find it harder to separate themselves from it to do mitzvot. Therefore, they have to exert themselves more to perform the mitzvot and thus receive more reward for them.

Hashem understands that we are human; He made us! Humans are prone to making mistakes. That's par for the course. But don't let the mistake get you down; you don't have to live with it. You are able fix it by doing teshuva. And when you do teshuva, you will be on a higher level than even someone who never made the mistake.

Rabbi Yosef MiSalant (d. 1866) adds another powerful point learned from the words, *“If you improve yourself.”* Why didn’t Hashem say clearly, *“If you do teshuva.”*

He answers that when one is a jealous person, his jealousy will bring him to commit the greatest sins. It was Kayin’s jealousy of Hevel’s sacrifice having been accepted that led him to kill. But there is a type of jealousy that is positive.

The Sages teach us, קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה - *jealousy among scholars increases Torah wisdom.* When one scholar is jealous of another’s wisdom and uses his jealousy as inspiration to become more knowledgeable so that he can out-do the other scholar, although it is not the best option, it is not forbidden. That is the message that Hashem was giving Kayin. You can turn your jealousy into a positive thing if you use it as an incentive to grow.

This concept applies to all good qualities. It is acceptable to be jealous of someone else’s good qualities and use that jealousy as inspiration to better yourself.

The next thing we read, how Kayin responded to Hashem’s advice, baffles us. The Torah says,

(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בֵּהִיּוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ.
(8) Kayin spoke with his brother Hevel. And it happened when they were in the field, that Kayin rose up against his brother and killed him.

What was the discussion that preceded Kayin’s act? Although the Torah doesn’t inform us, the Midrash fills us in.

Kayin said to Hevel, *“What’s going on here? Is Hashem playing favorites? There is no Judge or justice in the world!”*

Kayin didn't get it. Because he could not entertain the thought that he had done something inappropriate, he concluded that all is random and that there is no G-d in the world.

Hevel responded, "What are you talking about? Of course there is. My deeds and sacrifice are more desirable, so my sacrifice was accepted and not yours." Hevel's words hit home, and at this point Hevel started feeling haughty.

Kayin said to Hevel, "Didn't we have a deal that I own all the land and you own all the portables?" "Yes we did," responded Hevel.

"So get off my land; you are standing on my land!" said Kayin. "And you are wearing the wool from my sheep! Take it off!" replied Hevel.

Kayin started chasing Hevel to kill him, but when they actually began fighting Hevel got the upper hand. When Kayin appealed to his brother's sense of decency ("How will it be that our father will be left with only one son?" Hevel spared him. When Kayin got up from under Hevel, he killed him.

Even after Hashem's advice, Kayin could not accept that there was something wrong with him or with his sacrifice. He thought such a thing is not possible. His first explanation for his bad fortune was to deny Hashem and attribute the matter to happenstance. When Hevel suggested a clear and logical explanation for the matter, incriminating Kayin, Kayin couldn't handle it and killed the messenger. "It's all your fault! Why do you have to be such a goodie-goodie and do everything right so Hashem will accept you deeds and sacrifice?"

Does this sound familiar? It is so much easier to point the finger at others and blame them for our problems. This way we don't have to confront them.

Moreover, when someone else does good, it does not make us bad. We are not worse, because he is better. We each have our own personal relationship with Hashem, and He has different expectations from each of us based on our unique constitution.

It is difficult to understand how Kayin could ignore Hashem's simple "fix" and resort to such a drastic solution to his problem. The Torah is obviously teaching us how low a person can sink if he does not put effort into perfecting his character.

Now what? Hevel is dead. What is Hashem going to do now?

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדֹד אֶל קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי.

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה.

(יא) וַעֲתָה אָרִיר אֶתָּה מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת פִּיהָ לְקַחַת אֶת דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדְךָ

(יב) כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה לֹא תֹסֵף תֵּת כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נֶעַ וְנָד תִּהְיֶה בְּאָרֶץ

9) Hashem said to Kayin, "Where is Hevel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" 10) Then He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11) Therefore, you are cursed more than the ground, which opened wide its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12) When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a vagrant and a wanderer on earth."

The Midrash relates that because of Kayin's act, all the wild animals wanted to kill him. Since Man was created *בצלם אלקים* (in the Image of Hashem), his G-dly image naturally projected awe upon the animals. However, once Kayin killed Hevel, which violated his "Image of Hashem" by treating a human being like an animal, Kayin lost *his* "Image of Hashem" and he appeared like a meal to all the wild animals. Kayin became a fugitive who constantly feared for his life.

The heavy curse that Hashem gave Kayin shook him up, and finally, after trying to evade the magnitude of his evil act, he owned up to it and said,

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל יְדֹדָהּ גְדוֹל עֲוֹנִי מִנְשׂוּאָה.

13) Kayin said to Hashem, "Is my iniquity too great to bear?"

The Sages explain that with these words, Kayin did teshuva. In effect, he was asking Hashem to forgive him for his sin. And, indeed, Hashem did forgive him by putting a sign in his forehead to restore his awe on the animals so that they would not kill him.

The Sages learn a profound lesson from Hashem's accepting Kayin's teshuva. Kayin repented only because he was afraid of the consequences of his act. He did not have genuine remorse for what he did, but because he couldn't handle the difficult life of a fugitive, he asked Hashem to forgive him.

The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Kanievsky זצ"ל (D. 1984), explains a difficult Midrash with this concept.

The Midrash relates,

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה כב פסקה יג

פגע בו אדם הראשון א"ל מה נעשה בדיןך א"ל עשיתי תשובה ונתפשרתי התחיל אדה"ר מטפח על פניו אמר כך היא כחה של תשובה ואני לא הייתי יודע מיד עמד אדה"ר ואמר (תהלים צב) מזמור שיר ליום השבת וגו

Adam met his son Kayin and asked him, "What happened with your judgment?" Kayin replied, "I did teshuva and was pardoned." Hearing this, Adam started to slap himself in the face. He then said, "The power of teshuva is so great? I had no idea!" He immediately stood up and said Psalm 92, "A psalm a song for the Shabbat day!"

What does the Kayin's teshuva have to do with that psalm? The Rabbi answers.

The Talmud (Tamid 33b) explains that we say Psalm 92 on Shabbat as a reference to the ultimate eternal Shabbat after the Mashiach comes.

בשבת היו אומרים מזמור שיר ליום השבת מזמור שיר לעתיד לבוא ליום שכולו שבת
ומנוחה לחיי העולמים

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 91b) brings an argument between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua whether the Mashiach can come if the Jewish people do not do teshuva. Rabbi Eliezer says that if the Jewish people do not do teshuva, Mashiach will not come. Rabbi Yehoshua said, "Hashem has already promised that the Mashiach will come, so he must come. If the people haven't done teshuva before it's his time to come, Hashem will set up a king whose decrees are as cruel as Haman's, and the people will *have* to do teshuva.

Adam thought that this type of teshuva doesn't count because the person is regretting his action only because of his suffering. If that's the case, Mashiah may never come, because Rabbi Yehoshua's plan won't work. When Adam heard that Kayin's teshuva was accepted even though it resulted from duress, he suddenly realized that the Jewish people can also get out of exile with a teshuva sparked by difficulties. Therefore, he said the psalm for the ultimate redemption, the eternal Shabbat.

May we each learn from Kayin's downfall and from his redemption that no failure is final when one turns back to Hashem with sincerity. May the awareness of Teshuva's limitless power inspire us to correct our missteps, elevate our character, and bring our world a step closer to the peace and holiness of that ultimate Shabbat.