

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bereishit

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey Silver
in honour of his parents, Label and Leona Silver,
and wishing the Beit Midrash a good Choref Zman

What Did Kayin Do Wrong?

Rabbi Sammy Bergman

In telling the tragic episode of Kayin and Hevel, the Torah leaves us with many perplexing questions. It would seem from Hashem's acceptance of Hevel's offering and rejection of Kayin's (Bereishit 4:3-4), that Kayin presented G-d with a flawed offering. Moreover, in response to Kayin's anger and disappointment (4:5), Hashem told Kayin that if he didn't improve, sin would "crouch at the door" (4:7), which suggests that Kayin had committed a sin and was obligated to repent. Yet, the Torah provides very few clues about what Kayin did wrong, or about the flaw in his offering. Instead, rather than clarifying Kayin's sin, the story indicates that Kayin acted righteously by originating the concept of presenting tributes to Hashem. Why did Hashem react positively to Hevel's offering, while ignoring Kayin's?

A Despicable Tribute

Rashi (4:3) suggests that Kayin chose the worst of his crop as his gift to Hashem. A midrash (Bereishit Rabah 22:5) goes a step further and explains that Kayin's offering consisted of "waste". Although the Torah doesn't explicitly denigrate the quality of Kayin's tribute, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (4:3) supports this approach by contrasting Kayin's offering to Hevel's which was "from the first of his flock". According to this approach, we can understand why Hashem rejected Kayin's gift. By offering the worst of his crop, Kayin showed his service was insincere.

However, according to Rashi, it's difficult to explain why Kayin was so upset by Hashem's rejection. Did he

expect G-d to embrace a tribute which consisted of waste? Furthermore, although the Torah doesn't specify that Kayin gave the best of his crop, it also never says he offered his worst.

Choosing the Wrong Profession

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (4:2) and Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenburg (Ktav ViHakabblah 4:3) both argue that Hashem didn't reject Kayin's offering because of its inadequacy. Rather, in responding differently to the brothers' tributes, Hashem rewarded Hevel for his choice to work as a shepherd while punishing Kayin for earning his livelihood by working the land (4:2). Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that working with sheep requires minimal physical strain and affords shepherds time and space to contemplate the wonders of creation. In contrast, working the land requires an intensive investment of time and energy, causing farmers to focus on earthly pursuits. Rabbi Hirsch adds that because they depend on the natural cycle for their success, farmers are prone to worship natural forces as gods. Rabbi Hirsch notes that while our monotheistic forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov all worked as shepherds, the Egyptians developed a pagan, agrarian society and despised shepherds (Bereishit 46:34).

Rabbi Hirsch and Rabbi Mecklenburg provide an explanation for Hashem's treatment of Kayin and Hevel which has a basis in the text. Furthermore, since Kayin may not have understood the problem with his occupation, we can understand his surprise when Hashem rejected his tribute. However, it's

difficult to suggest that Kayin was punished for simply choosing to be a farmer. The Torah dictates that Adam was sent out of the Garden of Eden to "work the field he was taken from" (Bereishit 3:23). Moreover, if Kayin's career choice was problematic, why didn't Hashem criticize him for it explicitly?

Failing to Cope With Disappointment

I believe that by not clarifying the reason Hashem didn't accept Kayin's tribute, the Torah intends to shift our focus. Instead of concentrating on the "problem" with Kayin's offering, the Torah emphasizes Kayin's reaction when Hashem chose not to recognize it. Rabbi Levi Gersonides (Bereishit 4:2-5) suggests Kayin's offering wasn't flawed at all. Rather, Hashem's decision not to accept Kayin's tribute reflected the volatility of the agricultural industry, in which a farmer can do everything right and still see no output from his field if the season brings insufficient rainfall. Similarly, Hashem decided, for reasons unbeknownst to us, not to respond to Kayin's gift.

Hashem told Kayin that instead of getting discouraged, if Kayin improved his character, he would soon experience Divine Providence. Hashem challenged Kayin to be loyal to Him even when Kayin's service failed to produce the desired result. Unfortunately, Kayin failed to heed G-d's advice. Kayin's anger and jealousy overtook him, and tragedy ensued.

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Summary

In this chapter, King David attempts to move the *aron* to Jerusalem. He brings an accompaniment of 30,000 people. The *aron* is placed on a wagon with Uzza and Achiyo, the sons of Avinadav, to bring it to the latter's home. David leads the nation in celebratory music and dancing. However, the joy is cut short when the ox leading the wagon stumbles, and Uzza reaches for the *aron* to prevent it from falling, and G-d kills Uzza for touching the *aron*. In response, David places the *aron* in the home of Oved Edom the Gittite, as he is afraid to continue to Jerusalem. (6:1-10)

However, when David hears that Oved Edom has been blessed, he realizes that while Uzza may have treated the *aron* improperly and was killed, it is possible to treat the *aron* properly. This gives him the confidence to continue to Jerusalem, dancing with abandon in front of the *aron*. (6:11-15)

David's wife, Michal, the daughter of Shaul sees him dancing, from her window. She is incensed that he would act in such a non-royal manner,

dancing in front of his subjects. Therefore, after David brings sacrifices and sends everyone home with parting food, she confronts him. In response, David chides her that there is nothing wrong with being willing to put one's stature aside to show respect for G-d, and in fact, the willingness to do that was his greatest honour. It was his willingness to do this, he claimed, that made G-d choose David and reject Michal's father as king. As punishment for her attitude, Michal either had no children, or no more children after that day. (6:16-23)

Insight

In many cases, passages in Tanach seem to implicitly (and rarely, explicitly) comment on earlier passages. One minor example appears in this chapter. When describing David's dancing, the navi uses the words *mefazez u-mecharker* (6:16). These are rare words, whose precise meaning is unclear.

Many of the stories in Melachim (as well as many of those found in Shemuel) are repeated in Divrei

HaYamim, which was written in the time of *Shivat Tzion*, the return to Israel after the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash and subsequent exile. Melachim, on the other hand, was written before the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash. According to the Talmud (Bava Batra 15a), Yirmiyahu wrote Melachim, while Divrei HaYamim was written by Ezra and finished by Nechemiah. In some cases, the stories have added details, in some they are missing aspects, and in some the stories seem completely different. Some classic commentaries, and many modern ones, have devoted much space to these differences. However, some of the differences are easy to understand.

In our case, Divrei HaYamim I 15:29 replaces the rare words with common ones that the readers will understand. Specifically, the verse uses *meraked u-mesachek*, dancing and playing. Thus, we have a case where a later book in Tanach acts a commentary to help us understand the earlier book.

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SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

**10:00 AM Sun. Oct. 18: MIDRESHET YOM RISHON, FOR WOMEN, with Shaarei Shomayim
Mrs. Sharon Fixler, Post-Flood Drama: The Tower of Bavel
Netanel Klein, Honi the Circle-Drawer: Can Man Interfere with Nature?**

**10:00 AM Wed. Oct. 21: Vaccination Ethics
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, a 4-part series on Zoom. Week 1: Risk vs. Reward
Register at <https://torontotorah.com/vaccine>; there is a fee**

**7:30 PM Wed. Oct. 21: Emotional Judaism, with Clanton Park and Shaarei Tefillah
Rabbi Alex Hecht, a 5-part series on Zoom. Week 2: Is Anger Ever Appropriate?**

DAILY

7:30 AM Sun-Fri Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Daf Yomi with BAYT (men), via ZOOM

**Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)
Mondays and Wednesdays: Gemara Taanit, Orot haTeshuvah
Tuesdays and Thursdays: Parshah, Tanach: Shoftim**

WEEKLY

Sunday Oct. 18

10:00 AM Gem. Shabbat w/ R' Aaron Greenberg (University)

7:30 PM Gem. Ketuvot w/ Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)

Monday Oct. 19

8:30 PM Gem. Shabbat, Chap. 15, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Tuesday Oct. 20

1:30 PM Megilat Esther, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

7:30 PM Shoftim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)

Thursday Oct. 22

1:30 PM Shemuel, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women)

8:15 PM Bava Metziah, w/R' Sammy Bergman (Univ. women)

8:30 PM Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Diena (men, advanced)

Friday Oct. 23

8:30 AM Parshah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University)

**11:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (advanced)**