

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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**Parashat Bereshit**  
**October 29, 2016**

**פרשת בראשית**  
**כ"ז בתשרי תשע"ז**

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 1:1-6:8

In this *parasha*, we read about *ma'aseh bereshit* (the Act of Creation); Adam and Chava's sin of eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad and their subsequent expulsion from *Gan Eden* (the Garden of Eden); Kayin's murder of his brother, Hevel; and the genealogy of Adam and Chava's descendants, culminating in the birth of Noach.

In chapter 4, we encounter Kayin (Cain), the worst mass murderer in history, as he wiped out a quarter of the world's population in his murder of Hevel (Abel). [Read this sentence tongue in cheek.]

ג וַיְהִי, מִקֶּחַץ יָמִים; וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה, מִנְחָה—לֵה'. 3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to Hashem.

ד וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ, וּמִחֲלֵבֶהוּן; וַיַּשֶּׁע ה', אֶל-הֶבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Hashem had respect for Abel and for his offering;

ה וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ, לֹא שָׁעָה; וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד, וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו. 5 but for Cain and his offering Hashem had no respect. And Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

ו וַיֹּאמֶר ה', אֶל-קַיִן: לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ, וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ. 6 And Hashem said to Cain: 'Why are you angry? and why has your face fallen?

ז הֲלוֹא אִם-תֵּיטִיב, שְׂאֵת, וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב, לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ; וְאֵלֶיךָ, תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ, וְאַתָּה, תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ. 7 If you do well, shall it not be lifted up? and if you do not do well, sin couches at the door; and to you is its desire, but you can rule over it.'

**ח** וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן, אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו; וַיְהִי בְהִיטָתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה, וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ. **8** And Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him.

**ט** וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-קַיִן, אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ; וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אֲנִכִי. **9** And Hashem said to Cain: 'Where is Abel your brother?' And he said: 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'

**י** וַיֹּאמֶר, מָה עָשִׂיתָ; קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ, צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה. **10** And Hashem said: 'What have you done? the voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground.'

**יא** וְעַתָּה, אָרוּר אַתָּה, מִן-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת-פִּיהָ, לִקְחוֹת אֶת-דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדְךָ. **11** And now cursed are you from the ground, which has opened her mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

**יב** כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה, לֹא-תִסֹּף תֵּת-כֹּחָהּ לָךְ; נָע וְנָד, תִּהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ. **12** When you till the ground, it shall not continue to yield to you her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer you shall be in the earth.'

**יג** וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן, אֶל-ה': גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי, מִנְּשֹׂא. **13** And Cain said to Hashem: 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.'

**יד** הִן גֵּרְשָׁתָה אֹתִי הַיּוֹם, מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה, וּמִפְּנֵיךָ, אֶסְתֵּר; וְהִיטִיתִי נָע וְנָד, בָּאָרֶץ, וְהָיָה כָּל-מֹצְאֵי, יַהַרְגֵנִי. **14** Behold, You have driven me out this day from the face of the land; and from Your face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it will come to pass, that whoever finds me will kill me.'

**טו** וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ ה', לָכֵן כָּל-הַרְגֵּ קַיִן, שִׁבְעָתַיִם, יִקָּם; וַיִּשֶׂם ה' לְקַיִן אוֹת, לְבִלְתִּי הַכּוֹת-אֹתוֹ כָּל-מֹצְאוֹ. **15** And Hashem said to him: 'Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And Hashem set a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

**טז** וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן, מִלְּפָנֵי ה'; וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ-נוֹד, קִדְמַת-עֵדֵן. **16** And Cain went out from the presence of Hashem, and dwelt in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden.

Many theologians and biblical commentators have posed the following question: How could Kayin be held responsible for killing Hevel if no one yet in the existence of the world had died? He could not have known what death is, nor what murder entailed, nor that it was wrong, and yet God holds him accountable for Hevel's death.

Various sources have suggested a number of answers:

- We know from the text that animal sacrifices occurred. Perhaps Kayin had not seen a human death, but he had certainly witnessed the demise of animals.
- Kayin must have been up to no good, enticing his brother into a field with only the two of them present, implying the premeditation of injury or worse for Hevel.
- According to one *Midrash*, Kayin kept hitting Hevel until he no longer moved. This would indicate multiple intentional blows for which he is culpable.
- Harming or killing someone is referred to as a *mitzvah sichlit* – a “logical commandment” – one which any reasonable human being should figure out to refrain from, whether or not Hashem has issued an actual commandment.

I would like to offer an alternative explanation. Perhaps Kayin was punished, not for the murder, but for the attempted cover-up. God opens the conversation with Kayin by asking, “Where is Hevel your brother?” A person who felt no guilt for what had just happened may very well have responded, “Over there. Something awful has taken place.” However, Kayin replied, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” He tried to deflect the blame away from himself. It seems that this is the point at which Hashem becomes angry. This may indicate that the punishment was not for the murder per se, but for the attempt to hide it from God.

As well as answering the posed question about the reasonableness of holding Kayin accountable for Hevel’s death, this explanation also offers us a moral insight. We all make mistakes, sometimes quite large ones. But when we do, we are expected to own them: to confess to them and to accept responsibility for our own actions. When we do not, we may suffer the proverbial “curse of Kayin.”

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Do you think that Kayin’s anger at Hevel was justified? Why or why not?
- How do you explain Hashem holding Kayin accountable for Hevel’s death?
- Has there ever been a time when you tried to cover up something you had done wrong? Was this the best decision at the time?