
פרשת בראשית

פרק ד פסוק ג-ה

ג וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמַיִם וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לִּי-הוֹה:
ד וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִפְּכֻרֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֶלְבֵהֶן וַיִּשַׁע יְ-הוָה אֶל-הֶבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ:
ה וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו:
הז"ל

מִפְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה: זָרַע פְּשֻׁתָּן הָיָה, וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם הוּא מִפְּכֻרֹת צֹאנוֹ, לְפִיכָּה נֶאֱסַר צֹמֵר וּפְשֻׁתָּן,
שְׁנֵא' (דְּבָרִים כ"ב:יא) לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שַׁעֲטָנִי, אָמַר הַקַּב"ה אֵינוֹ דִּין שְׂיִתְעַרְב מִנְחַת הַחוֹטֵא עִם מִנְחַת
הַיִּצְחָא. (תַּנְחוּמָא א ט)

מושג

לְפִיכָּה נֶאֱסַר צֹמֵר וּפְשֻׁתָּן... אָמַר הַקַּב"ה אֵינוֹ דִּין שְׂיִתְעַרְב מִנְחַת הַחוֹטֵא עִם מִנְחַת הַיִּצְחָא.

Translation:

For this reason it is forbidden to have (clothing) with both wool and flax... Hashem said it is not logical to mix the offering of the sinner with the offering of the innocent.

Explanation:

קַיִן and הֶבֶל held diametrically opposite views concerning man's relationship to the material world. קַיִן rejected the physical world, choosing the life of the ascetic, while הֶבֶל felt that G-d wanted man to enjoy all things material while retaining the spiritual as his primary focus. This difference is displayed in their names (their nature), their professions and in their choice of offerings and helps explain קַיִן's extreme reaction to Hashem's rejection of his sacrifice. Our Musag sees the prohibition to mix wool and linen (flax) as a symbol of mixing these two philosophies.

The fact that Hashem accepted הֶבֶל's lifestyle over that of קַיִן helps guide us in understanding the Torah's attitude concerning the approach one should have towards the material world.

Looking in the Pasuk:

There are various hints in the wording of the Pasuk that point to קַיִן bringing a meager offering which the Midrash symbolizes as flax seed. The main hint is in the comparison of his offering to that of הֶבֶל. By קַיִן no mention is made of בִּיכּוּרִים or of any type of especially choice fruits, whereas by הֶבֶל both are mentioned. Also of note is the fact that קַיִן does not seem to hold ownership over his land while הֶבֶל calls the flock his own. The above, combined with קַיִן's perplexing reaction to the rejection of his offering speak volumes as to his personal philosophy regarding material possessions.

NOTES

The Midrash from which our Musag is taken comes to explain the source of the Torah's prohibition to wear a mixture of wool and linen (flax). While the prohibition is generally viewed as a חוק, a law with no known reason, the Midrash uses the story of קין והבל and the offerings they brought to explain why the Torah prohibited mixing the two.

The Midrash teaches us that the offering קין brought was seed¹. The first question we must ask is: How did the Midrash know this?

The מדרש רבה teaches:

ויבא קין מפרי האדמה מנחה לה' - מן הפסולת, לאריס רע שהיה אוכל את הבכורות, ומכבד למלך את הסייפות, והבל הביא גם הוא מבכורות צאנו ומחלביהן וכו'.

The Midrash points to the fact that הבל brought the first of his flock – מבכורות צאנו – while קין did not do so. The concept of bringing first fruits מראשית פרי האדמה (a Mitzvah which the Jewish people will later be commanded) does not appear to be important to קין. The offering of הבל is described in glowing detail, while the offering of קין lacks any descriptive adjectives. Therefore the Midrash compares קין to one who kept his first fruits to himself while gifting the king with the lesser fruits. The fact that the quality of his offering was in itself lacking is echoed in the words of the מדרש רבה quoted above: מן הפסולת. Rashi includes this thought in his commentary as well: מן הגרוע: מן הפסולת. While it is probably impossible to really know what measly gift קין offered, the Midrash mentions flax seed. We might propose that this is because flax seeds are barely fit for human consumption and are usually planted and not eaten.² Therefore, flax seed accurately represents that which קין brought.

As mentioned above, הבל makes sure to bring מבכורות צאנו, the firstborn animal which is known to have the finest meat. According to the תרגום אונקלוס the added word ומחלביהן comes to teach us that he brought the fattest ones³. The תרגום ירושלמי here translates as 'the fattened ones', meaning the animals were overfed to ensure that the choicest meats would be brought as an offering to Hashem. According to this translation of the word ומחלביהן the contrast between קין and הבל is quite clear. While קין did not even bother to bring his first fruits, הבל was going out of his way to prepare a special offering of thanks to Hashem. Thus wool, a symbol of the luxurious⁴ benefits we receive from animals, accurately represents הבל's gift. Flax and wool thereby demonstrate the polar opposites of the offerings of קין והבל and, as the Midrash says שיתערב אינו דין, it is simply not logical that the two should be mixed.

While the Torah does not tell us why Hashem accepted הבל's gift and rejected קין's, the מדרש תנחומא calls קין חוטא. This seems to be a result of his measly offering. On the other hand, the acceptance of הבל's sacrifice seems to be directly connected to the high quality of his offering. The Rambam in his משנה תורה⁵ writes that there is an important lesson to be learned:

שהרוצה לזכות עצמו יכוף יצרו הרע וירחיב ידו ויביא קרבנו מן היפה המשובח ביותר שבאותו המין שיביא ממנו, הרי נאמר בתורה והבל הביא גם הוא מבכורות צאנו ומחלביהן וישע י"י אל הבל ואל מנחתו, והוא הדין בכל דבר שהוא לשם האל הטוב שיהיה מן הנאה והטוב, אם בנה בית תפלה יהיה נאה מבית ישיבתו, האכיל רעב יאכיל מן הטוב והמתוק שבשולחנו, כסה ערום יכסה מן היפה שבכסותו, הקדיש דבר יקדיש מן היפה שבנכסיו וכן הוא אומר כל חלב ליי וכו'.

¹ See Rashi מפרשי האדמה ד"ה who quotes the Tanchumah regarding the flax seed. The תרגום ירושלמי (יונתן בן עוזיאל) also translates the פסוק as flax seed.

² See בבא בתרא צב.

³ The Pasuk cannot mean that he brought the fat of the animal as a sacrifice rather it is to be understood as he took from the fattest ones. This is consistent with the understanding in the Talmud (זבחים קטז).

⁴ See next note.

⁵ סוף הלכות איסורי מזבח

What is truly perplexing is the nature of קין's reaction. ויחר לקין מאוד ויפלו פניו, the Torah tells us that קין was extremely angry and terribly disappointed. Put simply, what exactly was he expecting? Did he think Hashem would bless him for his flax seed? If anything, his only reaction should have been one of embarrassment! Perhaps even more difficult to understand is why קין brought the offering in the first place. We must remember that it was his idea to bring an offering and that הבל brought only after קין as the Torah states: והבל הביא גם הוא. If קין was not willing to part with his material possessions why bother with offerings at all?

Based on the commentary of the ⁶ העמק דבר we may suggest a compelling explanation to the entire episode. קין and הבל held diametrically opposing philosophies concerning man's relation to the physical world, philosophies that are reflected in one choosing to become a farmer while the other decided to become a shepherd. קין believed that man should live a simple life taking only his bare necessities from the physical world. Thus he was a farmer, subsisting on his hard labor and living by the creed בזיעת אפיק תאכל להם. To קין each moment wasted on the physical disrupted one's focus on the true goal of man; to connect as fully as possible to the spiritual world. קין realized that the only things we truly have in this world, the only thing that remains with us forever, are the spiritual pursuits through which we acquire everlasting life. He dedicated his life to this acquisition as his name itself infers קניתי איש את ה'.

הבל on the other hand believed that Hashem wanted man to enjoy the physical world and to take full advantage of the luxuries it could provide. He therefore became a shepherd, enjoying all the benefits animals make available to man. He ate meat and dairy products, and drank milk. He used the wool of his flock to provide warm clothing in the winter and soft mattresses on which he would sleep. He was a man of הבל הבלים, living his life in the lap of luxury, focusing his efforts on the frivolities of life. His name perfectly represented his approach to life.

We might even suggest that each was born with strong leaning towards these approaches, their choices of profession being a natural outgrowth of their character. Their names thus described their natures, which would explain why the Torah does not say that הוה gave birth to a son and called him קין, but rather that she gave birth to קין and she gave birth to הבל. Additionally, we now understand why קין brings from האדמה, but not אדמתו, while הבל brings not from הצאן but from צאנו. Even the land that קין worked he did not wish to consider his own, while הבל did not hesitate to consider his material possessions as his own.

It was therefore קין, the man of the spirit, who first realized that man was obligated to offer gifts to Hashem. הבל followed his brother's lead. ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה⁷, each one brought their offering to Hashem from that which was 'in their hands'. קין, who eschewed the physical world and subsisted on the bare minimum, brought the most meager gift possible for this was man's portion in the physical realm. הבל, who lived on the 'fat of the land' brought the finest and fattest, for to him this was man's portion. It is altogether likely that קין looked at his brother as a sinner; someone whose focus on his material needs would lead him far astray from the calling of the spiritual world.

We can only imagine קין's disgust upon looking at his brother's sinful offering. He probably expected G-d to immediately display his obvious displeasure towards הבל's wayward actions. But, then the unthinkable happens; Hashem accepts הבל's offering but not his! קין cannot begin to comprehend what has transpired. Hashem did not only reject his offering but his entire way of life! He was the one who dedicated himself towards the spiritual and now source of all things spiritual chooses his materialistic brother? קין's extreme anger and dismay make perfect sense.

⁶ Written by the (נפתלי צבי יהודה ברלין) נצי"ב, 19th Century Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Volozhin.

⁷ בראשית לב:יד

Hashem answers קין that while the ascetic lifestyle is certainly an ideal one (הלא אם תטיב שאת), it is not meant for everyone. In fact, such a path will lead most to sin (אם לא תטיב לפתח חטאת רובץ). The path to spirituality for most must include the physical as well. Hashem gave us the physical world to enjoy, but, at the same time, challenges us not to let it become the primary focus of our existence⁸. G-d's acceptance of הבל's offering serves as guide for future generations outlining Divine expectations. Hashem wishes us to enjoy all aspects of the material world but to remember to dedicate the fruits of our labors towards serving Him. (In fact almost all of the great individuals in Tanach were wealthy. The fact that our Avos were all shepherds and not farmers would seem to bear this out. The ideal of a Torah Jew living an impoverished existence does not seem to be evidenced almost anywhere in early Torah sources⁹.)

The נצי"ב concludes his incredible commentary on this episode with a unique understanding of why הבל killed קין. He bases his idea on two peculiarities in the text. In פסוק ח we read:

ח ויאמר קין אל-הבל אחיו ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין אל-הבל אחיו ויהרגהו:

The נצי"ב wonders what it was that קין told הבל and why הבל would be in a field and not grazing his flocks in a pasture. He concludes that קין tried to convince הבל to be a farmer as he was. He tried to change הבל's nature and turn him into a farmer to fulfill the ideal of שאת תטיב. He brought הבל to the שדה and tried to 'educate' הבל in the art of farming. When הבל proved to be too slow a learner קין beat him as any good teacher would. Eventually, these beatings led to הבל's death.

A tremendously important lesson could be learned from the above. קין's real sin was in trying to 'modify' הבל to be more like him. This perhaps explains further the prohibition of mixing the flax and the wool. The Torah seeks for us to perfect our nature not change it. The man of flax should not try and become the man of wool or vice versa. The two must not be mixed¹⁰.

Questions for Further Thought:

- There are two places where the Torah permitted mixing wool and linen: in the clothes of the כהן גדול and in תכלת בציצית. Why do you think the Torah allowed for these exceptions?
- Can you think of examples in which the Torah extols the value of the material world?

⁸ Perhaps the best known example of this is the נזיר who, according to one opinion in the גמרא (תענית יב.), must bring a sin offering because he abstained from enjoying wine

אמר שמואל: כל היושב בתענית נקרא חוטא. סבר כי האי תנא, דתניא: רבי אלעזר הקפר ברבי אומר: מה תלמוד לומר (במדבר ו') וכפר עליו מאשר חטא על הנפש, וכי באיזה נפש חטא זה? אלא שציער עצמו מן היין, והלא דברים קל וחומר: ומה זה שלא ציער עצמו אלא מן היין נקרא חוטא, המצער עצמו מכל דבר ודבר על אחת כמה וכמה

⁹ Whenever I mention this point I am always challenged with the משנה in (פרק ו משנה ד) which seems to clearly teach the opposite:

כף היא דרפף של תורה, פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה ועל הארץ תישן וסני צער תחנה ובתורה אתה עמל, אם אתה עשה כן, (תהלים קכח) אשפירך וטוב לך. אשפירך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא:

However a look at Rashi's commentary on this Mishnah proves our contention:

לא על העשיר הוא אומר שיעמוד בחיי צער כדי ללמוד תורה, אלא הכי קאמר: אפילו אם אין לאדם אלא פת במלח וכו', ואין לו כר וכסת לישן, אלא על הארץ – לא ימנע מלעסוק בתורה דסופו ללמד מעושר.

¹⁰ Perhaps I might be so bold and add a social commentary on the lesson הבל's death might teach.

When we try to change the הבל's of the world into becoming like the קין's of the world we are courting disaster. המבין יבין