

A FINAL SOLUTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

Foundations For Jewish Learning

A Final Solution

If we could go back in time and prevent the first murder of history what a contribution that would be. Even if we could go back and learn the lesson of the first murder of history what a gift that would be for humanity. In this century alone, more people have been killed by governments and in war than the entire population of the world at the time of the Roman conquest of Israel, more than one hundred million people. (That's only one part of the picture, in one century and the century isn't over yet!) How is it that someone could commit such a heinous act? What was Cain's motivation? What was his mistake?

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (The Netziv) in his commentary on Torah makes a profound observation. After Hevel's offering was given greater Divine applause than that of his brother Cain, Cain reacted by becoming angry and depressed. Our sages tell us that the question of a wise person is already half the answer. If the A-lmighty asks a question, for sure there 's a great insight buried within. The A-lmighty asked Cain two questions, "Why are you angry and why are you depressed.?"

The Netziv points out that the word "why" was employed twice in the sentence. It seems that he was not being asked why he was in a bad mood, both angry and depressed, but how can you be both angry and depressed.

The Netziv analyzes that what draws out the energy of anger are situations when the power of our will is thwarted. Let's say that you're hurrying to an appointment and suddenly the traffic backs up, frustration builds to an angry state. We feel that things should be going our way and they are not. This is a bit foolish because we don't have control over the traffic and the truth is that the traffic doesn't really care. If someone in your house violates a serious rule of the house, endangering others, there may be room to express anger because this is a transgression within the sphere of our influence. Why should Cain be angry with Hevel? Did Hevel violate any known principle by being successful and gaining favor in the eyes of his Maker? Is it Cain's job to control his brother's actions?

"Why are you angry?" The A-lmighty asks. What frustration do you suffer from when your brother performs well? Let him be! He's not your prime business. You are your prime business.

On the other hand, the opposite of anger is depression. That comes when we feel no hope of

success. When we have no empowerment we are compelled to drop our hands and wait for the grievous result. We are depressed when we have no ball in our court, no court, and no racket even if a ball and court should miraculously appear. Who was Cain depressed about? Himself! Over whom should he have control? Himself! He gave up on himself and the energy of empowerment he focused on Hevel.

The Netziv points out that Cain was told by The A-lmighty that his emotions are normal and correct only his wires are crossed. He should be outraged at his own laziness and foolishness. That's where his power could be effective and should be focused. If his brother's accomplishments cause him to feel inferior, then it's the shadow of his own potential that haunts him.

Therefore, the A-lmighty gave him a pep-talk: "If you want to improve you can also be recognized and if you don't then you should know that there's a force that waits by the door ready to destroy you, but you can rule over him if you want." (Bereishis 4:8)

In the very next verse, something important seems to be missing. "And Cain said to his brother Hevel and it happened when they were in the field that Cain rose up and killed his brother Hevel." What did Cain say to Hevel?

The Malbim points out that Cain suffered from terminal superficiality. He says that when the Almighty said that "there's a force by the door that's ready to destroy you but you can rule over him!" Cain said to himself that that was in reference to his brother Hevel.

How was he to eliminate the chronic pain, the constant attack on his self-esteem that his brother represented? There are only three choices; 1) To live with continuous hurt 2) To improve 3) To eliminate the external stimulus.

Instead of lifting himself up, and using his jealous rage as a tool to reach his own potential, he sought to tear his brother down. (This is one of the prime motives for evil gossip-which is also tantamount to murder) Rather than working on improving himself, which was the toughest option, he decided to find for himself and his brother what he thought would be a final solution.

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