

STARTING OVER

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we begin the Torah with the reading of Breishis. "Breishis barah Elokim [In the beginning of G-d's creation].[1:1]" The beginning of a new world. A blank slate with the chance to impact significantly.

Into that setting Adom Harishon [Adam, the first man] was placed. Adom had that fresh start. The opportunity to make real decisions which would affect the entire world. We, on the other hand, we're set in our ways. Hardened by habit. Molded by the environment. If only we had the opportunity that Adom had...

The Torah continues: "And the world was in an astonishing state of void, emptiness and darkness...[1:2]"

Huh? Sound familiar? Read the papers recently? Perhaps things haven't changed all that much. Perhaps we too have the incredibly powerful opportunity that Adom had. Perhaps that is what Chaza"l [the Sages] meant when they taught that every person is obligated to feel "the world was created for me." Not pride, not haughtiness. Opportunities. Responsibilities. To fill that void and emptiness and allow those that follow us to begin their odyssey, their opportunities and their responsibilities in a somewhat less dark world.

But we feel so far removed from the world's early years, we're so many generations later. What can be expected from us? Adom's sons, now, they must have had that clarity of mission...

Adom and Chava had two sons, Kayin and Hevel. Kayin worked the earth as a farmer while Hevel was a shepherd. "And it was miketz yamim [at the end of days], Kayin brought an offering to Hashem from the produce of the land (pishtan-flax). Hevel also brought (an offering) from the first-born of his flock. Hashem willingly accepted (by consuming it with a fire from heaven) the offering of Hevel but not the offering of Kayin. And it was when they were in the field, Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother and killed him.[4:3-5,8]"

The passukim [verses] don't reveal at the end of which days this episode took place nor do they reveal what was at the root of their dispute.

The Kli Yakar explains that Kayin and Hevel were at philosophical odds as to what was the essence of man and life. Kayin believed that there was no olam habah [world to come]--success in this world was the sole measuring stick of man. He chose to work the earth as that tangible reality was all that

was available to man. Hevel, on the other hand, believed that there was a world to come where man would reach his true essence and potential. He chose to be a shepherd, affording himself the solitude necessary for introspection and personal growth.

A deeper understanding in their choices of profession is revealed in the Medrash. Kayin chose land, Hevel chose moveable objects. The pleasures of this world are compared to land. While you're there you can enjoy it but it isn't going anywhere with you. It can be compared to one who travels to a foreign land to attend an auction. There he buys houses. While in that foreign land he can enjoy his purchases but once it is time to return, he must leave his accumulated assets for others. He can't bring them with him. That was the lifestyle of Kayin.

Hevel chose moveable objects. Fulfilling the will of Hashem while developing himself. Those 'moveable objects' which would accompany him from one world to the next, providing the 'building-blocks' of his eternal abode.

Kayin, true to his philosophy of life, had great difficulty spending his assets on spiritual pursuits. The party of life was still going on. But, as he grew older and began to slow down, as he realized that his assets were non-transferable, he began to grow jealous of what his brother Hevel had spent his life accumulating. "And it was miketz yamim," as he was nearing the end of the days of his life, "Kayin brought an offering to Hashem."

But, even at this point, what did he bring? He was only able to summon the inner strength to bring from the cheaper, lowlier produce of the land--he brought pishtan (flax).

Hevel brought from the first-born of his flock. The best of what he had, was brought as a korbon [sacrifice] to Hashem. Kayin was barely willing to pass up the tail-end.

When we pronounce the name of a letter we find that there is the revealed letter and then there are hidden letters. The letter 'koof' has a revealed 'koof' and a hidden 'vuv' and 'pay.' The Kli Yakar explains that the last letter of each of the letters of the word korbon--sacrifice ('koof's last letter is 'pay', 'reish' is 'shin', 'beit' is 'tuf' and 'nune' is 'nune') spells pishtan--flax. Even at the soul-searching point of 'the end of his days,' Kayin was only willing to give from the bottom of the barrel.

Hashem accepted Hevel and his offering, the culmination of his life-long efforts. Kayin and his offering were not accepted. Too little, too late.

Overcome with jealousy and I'd imagine a tremendous sense of frustration, Kayin stoops to the level of murdering his brother, Hevel.

Every person, every generation has their difficulties and their tests. Breishis--a time for us to begin again.

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha-insights is dedicated in mazel tov to Howie HersHKovich and Martha Vays in honor of their upcoming wedding. May they be zocheh to much happiness together and to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel.

Copyright © 1998 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).
