

*Shiur L'Yom Chamishi*¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS:	<i>Torah B'reshit:</i>	Genesis 4:1-16
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Isaiah 42:22-25
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	John 1:14

Sin lies at the door

[Genesis 4:6c]

Today's Meditation is Job 36:32-37:13;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Avot*, the *Prayer of the Fathers*

V'ha-Adam yada et-Chavah ishto – *And Adam was intimate with his wife Chava ... vatahar vateled et-Kayin* - *and she conceived, and gave birth to Kayin* **Genesis 4:1a.**

The idyllic *shalom* of our youthful days in Eden has faded into wistful nostalgia. The beautiful Royal Garden in which we began life walking and talking with the Creator of the Universe is just a faint memory. Now our home is a vast outback of thorns, thistles, dangers, and distractions. We compete with every other species of living creatures for air, for water, and for shelter. We live in the constant awareness that sickness, cataclysmic injury, or death could come upon us at any time. We live in fear of the unseen and anxiety over the unknown. Every possible course of action we consider is fraught with possibly disastrous consequences. Every morsel of food we ingest must come from the sweat of our brow. From time-to-time as we walk through this barren wasteland tantalizing mirages promising a *way back* to the *shalom* of the Garden present themselves; but, alas, pursuing them always proves to be disastrously disappointing – like chasing the wind! Oh my! What on earth happened to us? How did we fall so far ... so fast?

The Cruellest Taskmasters Are Our Own Fleshly Desires and the Vain Imaginations They Engender in Our Pseudo-Intellects!

It happened so quickly. We were created for Divine Romance – but self-will and pseudo-intellect – in the form of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life - have seduced us away from our Creator/Mentor. We listened to serpent speak. We *ogled* – then *grabbed* – then *tasted* – then *fed each other* - forbidden fruit. We then chose to try to cover up our folly with pathetic fig leaf aprons. When that didn't work, we desperately tried to shift the blame for our act of blatant rebellion to someone else. Adam blamed Chava. Chava through the serpent under the bus. What a fiasco! And *now look at us!* We are a shadow of who we were! Wide-eyed awe and joyful wonder at the Goodness of the Creator and the

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Beauty of His Creation have been replaced by self-obsession, mind-worship, and emotion-poison. These things are killing our inspiration, destroying our motivation, toxifying all our social relationships, and making us miserable – and useless. Once thanksgiving and praise poured forth from our grateful hearts; now the most we can muster is silly excuses, and into sarcasm and cynicism spew forth from our lying lips like three-week old sewage. Now we find ourselves spiraling downward into an understanding-darkening black hole of toxic narcissism. The strait gate and the narrow path that the Holy One blazed for us have disappeared from our consciousness. We have settled instead for a hair-raising road-trip with bad company, barreling full speed down the broad road that leads to destruction. Doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God have given way to *self-idolization*, *self-justification*, *religious arrogance*, *judgmentalism*, and *spiritual-sounding hype*. The Special Pressure Points of the Species Known as ‘Mankind’ are now being exposed, one by one. The lust of the eye has opened the Pandora’s box some call the *lust of the flesh*. The lust of the eye and flesh, working together, have built an unclean-spirit-protected stronghold known as *pride of life*. Self-will, curiosity, lust, envy, anger, and offense; gluttony, greed, sloth, and deception; haughtiness, hypocrisy, disgust, shaming, slander - and a thousand other destructive wormholes of thought and behavior - are now in play. *Cherubim* with flaming swords now stand between us and the tree of life. Is the Creator’s Dream for us – and the world He Designed – now unattainable?

Don’t panic; this, too, is all for good. The Holy One knows that if we are going to be able to handle the pressure generators of life – especially *sensual stimulation*, *social interaction*, *spiritual curiosity*, and *self-will* – we are going to need to recognize and understand the *pressure points*² common to our species. He wants to train us *to recognize and handle these pressure generators in ourselves*, of course; but He also wants to train us *to deal wisely – yet as gently and kindly as possible - with others of our species who suffer from the same vulnerabilities we do*.

This Has Been a Test!

Adam should have realized a big test was coming. Perhaps he did. After all, he had

² The pressure points of human beings include but are not limited to: 1. our physical senses - *i.e.* what we see, hear, touch, smell, taste; 2. our fleshly urges, appetites, drives, and desires; 3. our capacity to exercise free will; 4.our capacity to know delight, pleasure, adventure, thrill, and fleeting moments of feelings of 'happiness'; 5. our illusion of information, knowledge, intellect, reason, and logic; 6. our emotions – especially easily manipulated ones like anger, outrage, fear, sympathy, sadness, and jealousy; 7. our curiosity; 8. our thought life/self-talk; 9. our vanity/self-image; 10. our tendency to absorb mood, attitude, emotion, values, priorities, opinions, culture, and vocabulary environmentally and mirror what you see/are immersed in; 11. our craving to act as everybody and everything else's judge; and 12. our desire to be favorably judged and accepted by others. Don't worry, however - these 'pressure points' are the 'backdoors' the Holy One programmed into our software to allow Him access to do maintenance and install upgrades when we need them.

been mentored personally by the Ultimate Rabbi – the Holy One Himself. Adam had not only been taught ‘human life as designed by the Creator 101’ by the One Who wrote the Book, He had actually been infused with the Author’s life force and wisdom. He had been given a long, up-close look at the way the Holy One thinks, not to mention opportunity after opportunity to observe first-hand how He works. He knew the Holy One is always *bara-ing*, always setting up counterbalances and friction-generators and synergistic encounters in order to bring out the best – by first bringing out the worst - in everything He has created. He knows the Holy One is always writing new chapters in His Great Masterpiece, each of which presents a new, paradigm-shifting, growth-inducing challenge for His protagonist to navigate. Remember how *tohu v’vohu* preceded **Light, BE**? Remember how dry, barren land – the ultimate desert - preceded the explosion of every kind of flora and fauna? Remember Eden before the Holy One planted all the trees? Remember Adam’s *lo tov* status of aloneness before the Holy One brought forth Chava? Adam Ben Elohim had been fully trained. He had been thoroughly counseled. He had been deliciously inspired. And he had been gloriously empowered. And then came an actual test – and everything he thought he knew flew right out the window.

Was Adam Not Prepared?

Knowing exactly the series of challenges that He had ordained for Adam to experience in connection with the quintessential serpent encounter, the Holy One had told gone out of His way to prepare Adam for those challenges. Like a teacher who is about to administer a test giving his students all the correct answers to the test in advance, the Holy One gave Adam the solution before he even faced the problem. He downloaded the answer to Adam’s test paper long before Adam even knew what the question was going to be. He told Adam specifically, before the test even started, ‘***Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die.***’ Genesis 2:16-17. What are we to make of this? What does it mean for us? Well, Dear Reader, this is exactly the way all the narratives, mitzvot, and mishpatim of Torah – as well as their specific location in the canon - are designed to work for us. The Holy One knows what tests are going to be coming our way, and in what week of the year they will manifest. So, He tells us clearly in advance, through the parsha of the week, how to prepare for and pass the test. Torah – and in particular, the assigned parsha of the week – is a ‘crib sheet’. He provides us a thorough bar review course. He personally invites us to walk with Him through a detailed, extensive, tailor-made board preparation program. All we have to do is remember – and act on – the ‘crib sheet’ He has so graciously given us. If we do not heed what He tells us, when He tells us ... ; well, that is going to be on us - not on Him.

Even having been given in advance the ultimate ‘crib sheet’ – *i.e.* the clear guidance of Genesis 2:16-17 - mankind badly bombed the initial test of free will. It happens. Go figure! Not to worry. There is still time to fix this.

Adam and Chava fell, it is true. As a result, every generation of the species these two begat now has to learn to face, it deal with it, overcome it, and get on with life, mission, calling, and destiny. Fallenness is now the dominant inherited trait of every human being’s DNA. But the pathway to *tikkun* is open, though narrow, is clear. Whether we will walk in that way is yet to be decided. It is just something that we will have to let play out - challenge by challenge, test by test, day after day, week after week, and generation by generation. ³

So ... Why Are Adam and Chava Still Breathing? Exactly What Kind of Mut [i.e. ‘Death’] is This?

Though Adam and Chava have fallen, they have not been zapped into oblivion by lightning bolts. They have not been stoned into oblivion. They have not been thrown into a dungeon. They walk around at will. They talk. They eat. They frolic. They communicate. They procreate. They live like you and me – indeed, they will continue to do so for a long, long time. With one exception, they are completely free to go – and set up residence - wherever they choose.

Hmmm. This is not at all how we expected it to be. Did not the Holy One say, regarding the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that ***‘in the day that you eat of it you will surely die?’*** Genesis 2:17. And now they have eaten – but yet they live. They are guilty as all get out, and everyone knows it. So why are they not dead? What meaneth this?

Sh’mon Kefa [*KJV* ‘Simon Peter] will later write: ***Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation. II Peter 3:15.*** Far from getting all upset, flying into a rage, and striking a well-deserved death blow upon Adam and Chava for their sins against Him, against each other, and against Creation, the Holy One has remained calm. He has stayed totally focused on the task at hand. It is almost like He knows something we do not. Well, that should not surprise us. He dwells outside time. He knows this situation – and Adam and Chava’s sin – was covered before it occurred. He knows because He personally took the death blow for them before He created them. He knows because He wrote the end of the story before the beginning. He knows because He has provided, on behalf of man, in the realm outside of time, a ‘lamb slain before the foundation of the world’. Because someone else has paid Adam and Chava’s penalty, the Holy One has suspended the sentence. He has given the defendants unadjudicated probation – and even established conditions for them to fulfill to rehabilitate themselves. Judges in America do such things all the

time. But the Holy One has gone a step further. He has even made and given Adam and Chava a new set of garments to wear – not prison clothes, but glorious eternal garments that cover both their self-perceived nakedness and the stain of their sin. **Genesis 3:21.** These garments carry the identity, and the purity, of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. He has even given Adam a very special *community service assignment to rehabilitate him*. He has assigned him ... *to till* [Hebrew *abad* – to labor in, work, and serve] *the ground from which he was taken.* **Genesis 3:23.**

What does it all mean? It means that man has not been rejected by the Holy One. The Holy One will never forsake or abandon the crown jewel of His Creation. He will never, never give up on His Beloved ones. He has a Plan. And the powers and principalities – and most men - will never understand it. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow! Amazing grace indeed! I stand amazed! Oh for a thousand tongues to sing! It is well with my soul! I will sing of his love forever! How great Thou art - and how great is our God – indeed!

Welcome to the Prophetic Season of Thorns, Thistles, Unrealized Potential, Jealousy, and the Sweat of the Brow

This is no time to sulk. This is no time to whine. This is no time to adopt a victim mentality, take up an offense, or cop an attitude. This is no time to banter over issues of ideology, religion, philosophy, or morality. This is no time to engage in silly, unproductive arguments over right and wrong, good and evil, fair and unfair. This is the time to take the skills and raw materials and the empowering force of the breath of life the Creator has given, and co-labor with Him to make the best world we can. What feels like a demotion is actually an expansion of our sphere of influence. Before our impact was confined to a Garden; now the world is our oyster. The issue now on the table is whether mankind can and will - following the lead of the Creator, and lovingly guided by His Words – co-create in the larger landscape of earth something that bears as much resemblance as possible to the Garden the Holy One planted.

Can a man envision Eden bursting forth from every place – and situation – in which he plants himself? Can a man make every area of earth where his foot shall tread burst into bloom and teem with fruitfulness? With the empowerment of the Holy One, of course he can. All creation groans in eager expectation for the sons of the Holy One to arise and assume their true identity, connect with their true mission, and engage their true destiny. This is Adam and Chava's new challenge, and this is their appointed time to deal with it. So it is for you and for me. Take a look at the world – and at the people - around you. Look at each of the faces and lives and spheres of influence the Holy One has entrusted to you. This is your

assigned territory. This is your *garden-in-waiting*. You only have a few days, weeks or years to bring the scent and the wisdom and the majesty of the Creator into it. Use your time, your energy, your passion, your gifts of cognitive thought and communication, and all the resources the Holy One puts in your hands wisely! You have not been assigned to this garden to be its judge; you have been assigned to this garden to bring Heaven's Breath of Life into it!

An Environment That Calls Forth and Empowers Overcomers

The real mission of mankind is just beginning. Suspending and probating the sentence for sin, the Holy One has assigned a new and much larger workstation. He has sent mankind out into the vast, undeveloped outback with one task to perform – *i.e.* to *till* [Hebrew *abad*, meaning to labor in, for, or with] the *eretz* from which man was taken. **Genesis 3:23.** In this new realm of responsibility, the Creator's '*be fruitful and multiply*' empowerment will take on a whole new dimension of meaning. This environment does not accommodate – much less reward – whiners, complainers, takers, quitters, victims, or even mere survivors. Nor does it cater to personal comfort or convenience. This is an environment in which assessing fault, criticizing, and demanding one's own way is both counter-intuitive and counter-productive; this is an ecosystem where time is much better spent focusing on cooperation to develop, fine-tune, and implement workable real-time solutions. This is an ecosystem where great thoughts and high-sounding ideas are useless without hands-on execution and persevering follow-through. This is an ecosystem that calls for overcomers to arise – and transcend.

Are you up for it, Dear Reader? Welcome to your identity, your mission, and the destiny for which you were born.

The Mercy and Kindness of the Holy One Remains and Sustains

The leisurely lifestyle of Eden is now just a faint memory for Adam and Chava – and for us. Sent out from the Creator's beautiful Garden of Delight to a vastly different new environment we must learn to produce our own food – and food for the world - from soil that seems on the surface only capable of producing briars, thorns and thistles. But there is much more potential in the soil than we can see. The soil still has the Holy One's blessing on it. It is still responding to the Holy One's prophetic directive to: *bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth.*" **Genesis 1:11.**

By reason of the amazing lovingkindness and forbearance of the Eternal One their Maker Adam and Chava – and we their progeny - yet live. The breath of life still pulses in and out of their lungs – and ours - every few seconds. And as long as they have that breath of life, they have the hope of – and opportunity for - redemption.

So somehow in the aftermath of their exodus from Eden the prototypes of every man and woman who will ever live at least *found grace to forgive themselves and each other* for the foolish and tragic mistakes each had made that sealed their [and our] strategic decree of exile. Not only that, somehow they found comfort in intimate relations with each other – even after playing the blame game with each other in a very destructive way back on the day they donned fig leaves.

Out of respect for the couple’s privacy the Divine Chronicler has graciously spared us the details of their reconciliation. We are not made privy to *how many tears they shed*, to *what words they exchanged*, to *what emotional roller coasters they rode*, or to *what pathway they took to bayit shalom*. All we are told about the matter is:

V’ha-Adam yada et-Chavah ishto v’tahar

The man was intimate with his wife Chava [Eve] and she conceived
[Genesis 4:1(a)]

Hence in today’s aliyah the Divine Chronicler reports the first conception and the first birth. *Mazel Tov*, Adam and Chava! For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given! This is *good news*; and good news is what Torah – and you and I – are all about.

Good News!

Adam and Chava’s unbelievably *good news* means that, despite the events that just transpired in the garden, the Holy One has not changed or aborted the mission of the creature known as man one whit. Before the woman and man chose to *lo sh’ma*³ the Holy One, and *sh’ma* instead the serpent, the Holy One had declared mankind’s purpose in Creation. As we have previously discussed, Genesis 1 teaches us that man was *designed* and *Divinely empowered* for six specific tasks⁴:

1. to be the Creator’s 'shadow' upon the earth, revealing His characteristics and attributes into the world through real interactions in real time;

³ The Hebrew verb *sh’ma* [*shin, mem, ayin*, Strong’s Hebrew word #8085] is one of the most frequently encountered verbs in the Bible. , Sometimes translated “*he listens*”, sometimes “*he hears*”, and sometimes “*he obeys*”, this verb describes the proper response of man to the Voice of the Creator. To *sh’ma* means much more than either to listen or to hear. It means to *totally restructure one’s life based solely upon what one has heard*, forsaking all other ways besides that way explicitly spoken by he who has spoken. In the case of Torah, the speaker is, of course, the Holy One Himself. An example of what it means to *sh’ma* is found in the way a mother of a newborn baby responds when her baby cries in the night. No matter how tired the mother is, or how inconvenient it may be, or who may tell her just to let the baby cry, it will be alright, she is driven to respond, and does respond. Her reaction to the baby’s cry is a *sh’ma* response. She knows her baby’s voice. When she hears it she drops everything and responds because of the depth of the relationship – the bond – she has with the baby. We are to *sh’ma* the Holy One’s voice the way the mother responds to her baby’s cry – drop everything, listen to no other counsel, and respond appropriately, in a manner consistent with the relationship. To *lo sh’ma*, as Chava did with regard to the Holy One is not to *sh’ma*.

⁴ See Genesis 1:28.

2. to ‘bear fruit’
3. to multiply
4. to fill the earth
5. to subdue the elements
6. to rule over the other creatures the Eternal One created.

Even when Adam and Chava received from the Eternal One what we have come to think of as their ‘curse’, this six-pronged mission was not affected in the least. These things remain the purpose of mankind. These things remain the reason you and I are alive. It seems that the Eternal One wants us to know from the very beginning that the fulfillment of His purposes and plans is not contingent upon our perfection. It never has been. It never will be. He, all by Himself, has more than enough ability and every intention of bringing about the fulfillment of His plans for His Creation - *with or without our cooperation*.

Procreation? Or Co-Creation?

The first birth was thus the *down payment* on the ultimate fulfillment of the mission of man. Man and woman participated, of course, as the Eternal One intended - but the Eternal One brought about the miracle. The Eternal One took the seed of woman and of man, blended them together, and designed and formed in Chava’s womb a *new creation Adam*. This inaugurated a new type of creativity, one in which Man began to exercise the awesome privilege to ‘co-create’ with the Eternal One. And so it goes today. The mission of man on the *eretz* is still being fulfilled by *co-creation*. And the reason is nothing more than the Eternal One’s *chanan* [grace].

Could This Be the One – Or Should We Look For Another?

The Eternal One had promised, in Genesis 3:15, that the ‘seed of woman’ would come forth, and would crush the head of the serpent. As a result, in the conception and birth of every ‘new creation person’ the first man and woman co-created with the Eternal One was *the Messianic hope*. With each onset of labor pains, Adam and Chava had to wonder – could *this* be the one? Could *this* be the ‘seed of woman’ the Eternal One promised? Could *this* be the One Who will crush the serpent’s head? Is *this the Messiah* Who will make *tikkun* for the mess we made in the Garden? Could *this* be the One - or should we look for another? With this in mind let us look at Chava’s words upon the first birth and meditate upon the name she gave her firstborn son. Here is how Torah records it:

V’tahar v’teled et-Kayin

She conceived and gave birth to Kayin.

V’tomer kaniti ish et-Adonai

And she said, 'I have gained a man with the Holy One.'

[Genesis 4:1(b)]

Chava thereby initiated a practice that would be followed for generations by the ancients and patriarchs – a tradition according to which the mother declared his or her name at or very near the moment of birth. The practice Chava established regarding naming children was broken only upon the birth of Benyamin, when Ya’akov overrode Rachel’s choice of the name Ben-oni (*i.e. son of my iniquity, or son of my trouble*), and renamed him Ben-yamin, or *son of my right hand*.

The names the Biblical matriarchs gave their children were not ‘popular’ names, nor were they ‘family’ names, or ‘terms of endearment’. They were *descriptive* names. They were *prophetic declarations*. When the matriarch gave birth she *declared her innermost feelings* concerning the new life she, her husband, and the Holy One had co-created. And so we read in today’s aliyah of Torah that Chava declared, upon the birth of the first baby, *kaniti ish et-Adonai*, usually translated as *‘I have gained a man with the Holy One.’* **Genesis 4:1(b)**. Modifying the first word of her declaration [*kaniti*], she called the child *Kayin*.

Kaniti is the first-person possessive form of the Hebrew verb *kanah*⁵. This verb means to *have rights of possession over*, usually through *effort, purchase or barter*; hence, it is to acquire *at a price* [hence did Avraham *kanah* the cave of Machpelah as a place to bury Sarah⁶ and hence did Ya’akov *kanah* the field at Shechem⁷], or *by reason of creation* [hence does the Holy One *kanah* the heavens and the earth⁸]. In this case Chava makes it clear she claims possession of a son not by right of creation. And she acknowledges that the moving force that permitted her this joy was *none other than the Holy One*.

The name *Kayin* [traditional English Bibles ‘Anglicize’ it, rendering it ‘*Cain*’] is *quf, yod, nun sofit*⁹. The Hebrew consonants making up this name present a hieroglyphic picture, or mural. The picture is a stunning one. It is a picture of someone encircling, or surrounding, and entrapping [*quf*], with raised hand/fist [*yod*], the Messiah [*nun sofit*]. The prophetic implications of that name are vast. Now is not the time or place to delve into all of them. Permit me merely to point out at this point in our study that *Kayin definitely acted out his name*. And permit me to suggest as well that, in *Kayin* is the prototype of those who arranged and participated in the death of Yeshua, and of those who will always be jealous of, will rage against, and will attempt to destroy, everything and everyone associated with the promised seed of the Holy One. In *Kayin*, you see, is the prototype of the heart and mind and soul of everything that is anti-Messiah. *Kayin* is not the One. We must look for another.

⁵ *Kanah* is *quf, nun, hey*. Strong’s Hebrew word #7069, it is pronounced *kaw-naw’*.

⁶ See Genesis 25:10.

⁷ See Genesis 33:19.

⁸ See Genesis 14:19, 22.

⁹ *Kayin* is *quf, yod, nun sofit*. Strong’s Hebrew word #7014, it is pronounced *kah’-yin*.

The Second Son – Kayin’s Counterpart [and Perceived Competition]

But we are not yet finished with miracles. Note that, in connection with the second birth, our text omits any mention of cohabitation between Adam and Chava leading to the birth of the second child. The text does not say, as it did before, that Adam knew his wife, and she conceived. This time, in connection with this birth, Torah merely says:

V’tosef laledet et-achiv et-Havel

Again she gave birth to [Kayin’s] brother Hevel [Abel].

[Genesis 4:2]

Do not misunderstand me. I am not telling you that Hevel’s was an ‘immaculate conception’. But I am suggesting that the story of Hevel’s birth is recorded in Torah in the manner it is precisely because it was intended to allude to and prophesy the manner of the birth of Messiah. And I am suggesting that Hevel is in many ways a *prototype of the Messiah to come*.

Note first of all that the name *Hevel* [traditional English versions shorten and “Anglicize” this name to ‘Abel’] was an exception to the matriarchal naming approach discussed above with regard to Kayin and the children born to the patriarchs. Chava did not, it appears, name her second child, nor did she make any declaration at his birth. The way the text reads, it appears that it was the Holy One, as the author of Torah, who named this second child *Hevel*.

Let us look at the name *Hevel* to see if we can find any clues as to why the Holy One might have chosen it. *Hevel* is a Hebrew word made up of the consonants *hey*, *veit*, and *lamed*. Poetically the word is sometimes translated ‘breath’ or ‘vapor’. It is also sometimes translated as ‘vanity’, in the sense of hopes or plans that are ‘vain’, or which do not reach fulfillment. This is, in fact, the very word *kohelet* [i.e. the writer of Ecclesiastes] uses over and over again to describe the efforts of man to find purpose and meaning and fulfillment in life. In the original Hebrew text ‘the preacher’s’ famous declaration ‘*Vanity of Vanities, all is vanity*’ is actually “*Hevel, hevel’im, kol hevel*’. **Ecclesiastes 1:2.**

The Hebrew hieroglyphic presented by the name *Hevel* is that of a window [*hey*], through which the *ruach* - or breath of God – enters a household [*beit/veit*] to teach [*lamed*] something. I will let you sort that one out. But remember as you meditate on this hieroglyph that Hevel is a prototype of Messiah. And keep in mind what the Master said about the *Ruach* in John 14:15-17 and 14:26:

***I will ask the Father,
And He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever –
the Spirit of Truth.***

*The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him.
But you know Him, for He lives with you, and will be in you.*

*[T]he Counselor, the Ruach HaQodesh,
whom the Father will send in my Name, will teach you all things,
and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

Oh, and you might note as well, how the Holy One described Hevel. Torah says:

... vayehi-Hevel ro'eh tzon
... and Hevel was a shepherd of sheep

Hmmmmn. Hevel is described in Torah as a 'keeper' [Hebrew, protector, guardian, tender] *of sheep*. Does this description sound familiar? It is the kind of stuff Psalms are made of.

Thorns and Thistles Begin to Manifest In The Lives of Men

What we will quickly discover in the verses we study today is that the two sons of Chava are not exactly going to *get along*. Before we know it, they develop a serious interpersonal conflict. This is to be expected if you think about it. Man is made from the *eretz*. And since what the *eretz* is now producing - absent intensive co-laboring with the Holy One - is thorns and thistles, it is natural that men's lives and attitudes will produce thorns and thistles as well. In the context of the lives of men, thorns and thistles will take the form of *bad attitudes, negative emotions, critical speech, toxic flesh-indulgences, and self-obsessed and simultaneously self-destructive behavior*.

Do you recognize these *thorns and thistles*? This too, is part of what we as the sons and daughters of the Holy One are called and empowered to *overcome*. The consequences of failure to overcome the challenges of interpersonal conflict are just too great to bear – as we are about to discover.

Extracting Valuable Lessons From the Narrative of Prototypical Human Dysfunction

Consider the context in which the conflict between Kayin and Hevel manifests. It comes to the fore in connection with the different *manners of approaching and relating to the spiritual realm*. This issue truly seems to bring out the worst in men. It was so in the beginning, and it will be so until the end. It seems all men think they are experts – and insist others do things their way.

What is truly inside a person always seems to come out in the context of conversations about or dealings with Him – or those things - which science and logic cannot explain. Some men truly want to worship their Creator and King. Others just want to use spirituality – or their concept of God or gods or religion -

for their own selfish purposes. And the two approaches are always destined to collide, resulting in hard looks, harsh words, and all too often, absolute cruelty.

Nothing seems to make people meaner and harder to get along with than a little excursion into the intellectual realm of theology, philosophy, and/or ideology. Be careful, therefore, how wise in regard to spiritual things you allow yourself to think you have become, Dear Reader. Be careful how dogmatic, self-righteous, and indignant you allow yourself to become about things of relatively small importance in comparison to our grand redemptive mission – *i.e.* relatively unimportant things like [a] labels and titles, [b] *halakah*, [c] sacred vs. pagan Names, [d] what traditional blessings should or should not be spoken when, [e] when the new moon is recognized, [f] what anyone's tribal or national origin is, [g] what is and is not 'worship', and [h] what *mikveh* vs. baptism or *kiddush-HaMotzee* vs. communion are supposedly supposed to look like. Be very careful how much you allow yourself to add to or subtract from the Creator's instruction manual. Be very careful to honor tradition without venerating it, and to enjoy spontaneity without idolizing it. Reverence, wonder, awe, and humility are always subject to the most vicious attacks by people obsessed with self-promotion, walking in arrogance, and steeped in forms of religion without acknowledging or expressing the substance thereof.

The Next Act in the Great Play

Time has passed. The beautiful garden of delight is gone. Now patches of thorns and thistles grow where luscious orchards and vineyards once stood. Two new characters - brothers named Kayin and Hevel (English approximations 'Cain' and 'Abel') - have appeared in the narrative. Adam and Chava are 'old news'. All eyes are suddenly on the new kids in town.

Both of the newcomers have worked hard to carve out a niche for themselves. One approached the portion of earth-crust presented to him by the Holy One through the mindset and with the skillset of a husbandman/shepherd; the other approached his assigned portion of *terra firma* as a farmer. But each knew one thing – all men will ever be on this earth is sharecroppers. Each understood that the land he was tending and keeping, as well as all the produce thereof, belonged not to him but to the Creator Protagonist. Both knew that an accounting was required regarding what they used the land to produce. At harvest time, therefore, each man in turn came forth to return to the Creator an appropriate portion of what the land had produced.

First comes Kayin, then Hevel. Each holds his offering in his hand. Remember, however, that the Immaculate Protagonist of our story is Omniscient and Eternal. He knows these men far better than they know each other – or even than they know

themselves. Before Kayin planted his garden or Hevel mated his ram and his ewe He knew that there was 'aught' between the brothers. He knew what Kayin thought about – and was only awaiting an excuse to do to – Hevel. He knew, even before the offering was brought, what atrocities Kayin's bloodline was going to commit to pollute the earth in days to come.

Kayin approaches first, bringing *miperi ha-adamah* – i.e. some produce of the land. As Kayin is bringing forth a 'goodwill' presentation/approach, the Holy One sees not merely his offering, but what is in his heart. He sees how insanely jealous Kayin is toward his brother. He sees every drop of innocent blood Kayin and those of his bloodline will ever spill on the 'earth side' of His intricate Creation ecosystem by reason of that bitter root of jealousy. He sees obsession with material things, fascination with power, and addiction to ambition. He sighs deeply.

Then comes Hevel, bringing *mibechorot tzono uvehelvehem* – i.e. the firstborn [plural] of his flock and the fattest/choicest. As was the case with Kayin, the Holy One can see far beyond the physical offering that is being made. He sees the heart. He sees innocence. He sees gratitude. He sees fear of Heaven, love of its King, and delight in its ways. He sees that Hevel does not share the dark energy that his brother harbors in his heart - at least at any level of Creation-menacing toxicity.

Hence, the Holy One extends delight and favor to Hevel; but only quiet, reserved compassion for Kayin. Ah, dear Kayin, why are you downcast ... first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

What is Going On Here – and Why Does the Holy One Want Us to Know and Understand This Story?

The 'brother's keeper' narrative of Torah starts with Hevel seeking and reaching out to the Holy One. He does so with an attitude of pure awe and thanksgiving. He brings forth the firstfruits of his flock. He humbly worships the Creator of all things, expecting nothing in return. He was not making a religious show. He was not trying to impress anyone. He was not showing off his spirituality in front of Kayin. He was not trying to earn the Holy One's favor or manipulate Him into doing something for him. He was simply acknowledging – with humility and gratitude - the Holy One as the Source of everything good in his life.

That is the whole point of presenting firstfruits. To make a presentation of firstfruits is a very significant action – an action that proclaims total trust in the Holy One's goodness, kindness, and faithfulness to His Covenant undertaking to us. To give firstfruits or firstborn – when we have no guarantee that any further harvest is coming - is to declare that 'even if I do not get any more than these from

the earth, it is more than I deserve – and I trust you to provide exactly what I need according to your wisdom and your goodness’.

And then there is the approach of Kayin. Kayin did not set aside his firstfruits. He did not approach the Holy One with trust, gratitude, and humility. He waited until his crop was in. Then he proudly approached with ‘offerings’ of the crop he felt he had worked hard to produce.

The difference between firstfruits and ‘offerings’ from abundance is *huge*. All offerings other than firstfruits constitute merely portions of a greater whole chosen by the offeror from an existing supply. The offeror – unlike the presenter of firstfruits - knows how much he is going to be able to keep for himself. Giving offerings means a person considers the crop *as belonging to him* – and takes the attitude that he is being magnanimous, and doing the Holy One *a favor*, as it were, by presenting an offering from his much larger whole. A person who does this does not really exhibit any trust in the Holy One, and hence often does not really want, much less welcome, the Holy One’s involvement in his life. A person who gives an ‘offering’ in this manner often merely wants to do the minimum he thinks necessary to *appease* the Holy One, and *keep him ‘fat, happy, and out of his business’*. Why? Because in his heart he considers the crop he has produced in connection with his tilling of the ground to be the product of *his labor alone*, independent of the Holy One. He thus wants to ‘buy the Holy One off’ [keep Him out of his business] with a gift he, in his own judgment, determines appropriate.

Kayin’s approach is a common one today. It is an approach that says *human effort* is the important thing, and is what earns man whatever he gets. Kayin was therefore the first *humanist*, and the first *legalist*, and indeed the first ‘*religious*’ man. Hevel was the exact opposite. Hevel seemed to know and recognize that, if the Holy One did not choose to bless a man, all that man’s labor was for naught. The reason Hevel approached the Holy One with his firstfruits was not to appease the Holy One, or to earn His blessing, but simply and gratefully to share the joy of the coming harvest with Him. Hevel’s approach acknowledged the Holy One as the moving force behind everything. He saw the Holy One as the source of every good and perfect gift. He saw man’s efforts in this life as at best an exercise of the awesome privilege to co-operate with the Almighty, and a precious opportunity to work alongside the Master of Creation. Hevel trusted *the goodness and creative genius of the Holy One*. Kayin trusted *only the strength and ingenuity of Kayin*. The two approaches to life are *totally incompatible*.

***Where is the Holy One
While All This Interpersonal Conflict is Raging On?***

It is often thought that the Holy One somehow rejected Kayin [Cain] as a person, but this is clearly not so. While the Holy One did not “look with favor” on Kayin’s attempt to approach Him through “some of the fruits of the soil” (instead of *first* fruits, as were brought by Hevel), He never - even after the unthinkable act of violence Kayin committed - abandoned or rejected Kayin as a person.

Despite Kayin’s twisted way of looking at life the Holy One loved him every bit as passionately as He loved Hevel. The Holy One did not desert Kayin. He was actively engaging Kayin both before and after Kayin set a trap for Hevel and killed him. In verse 5 of our aliyah, when Kayin became angry and depressed and began to wallow in self-pity the Holy One visited him to give Kayin another option. He personally *sought Kayin out and spoke tenderly to Him*. He lovingly *called him out of his anger and depression and assured him that he was neither less loved nor less valuable to the Holy One than his brother*. But even so, the Holy One did not “mollycoddle” Kayin. The Holy One spoke in what we in this generation would call “tough love”, pointing out Kayin’s sin, and warning Kayin of the dangerous position in which he had placed himself by indulging himself in anger and resentment toward his brother and in self-pity instead of dealing with his real problem - his coldness and lack of love for the Holy One, and his pride in self-accomplishment.

Eternal Lessons for Dealing With Interpersonal Conflicts

We can see from this aliyah that the most important thing we can do when an interpersonal conflict arises is to find the Holy One, and discuss the matter with Him. We cannot control any other person’s actions or attitudes, but we ourselves can get the Holy One’s perspective, and “do what is right” [not, of course, what *we think* is right, but what *the Holy One says* is right]. We can cast off anger and resentment and self-pity as garments that are too “small” for us. We can focus on our relationship with the Holy One, and the purity of our heart, and let the relational “chips” fall wherever they fall.

Remember, Dear Reader, that neither your worth to the Holy One nor the divine plan the Holy One has for your life is defined by what any other person thinks of you, whether any other person likes or dislikes or approves of you, or whether, in human eyes, you “measure up” to someone else’s expectations or standards. You are the Holy One’s. You are precious in His sight. And learn from today’s aliyah this truth: *whatever the situation, the Holy One passionately desires to speak the truth into your innermost being*. You don’t have time to indulge in such things as *anger, self-pity, or resentment*. You don’t have time to compare yourself with anyone else - either in pride or in shame. Bless the Holy One, and live the life for which He has called you. You simply can’t afford the consequences of letting

yourself be offended. You *haven't got time for the pain*. None of us do.

Questions For Today's Study

1. What was the difference [in the Holy One's eyes] between the firstfruit offering brought by Hevel and the "some of the fruit" offering brought by Kayin?

[A] What does each offering tell you about the heart and attitude of the one who brought it?

[B] Upon which did the Holy One look with favor and why?

2. Verses 6 & 7 are a direct revelation of the heart of the Holy One. What does this message from the Holy One to Kayin teach us about Him? About sin? About the Holy One's will for us?

3. What did the Holy One say was crying to Him after Kayin killed Hevel?

4. What or who was cursed as a result of Hevel's murder? What was the curse?

5. What did the Holy One do for Kayin in order to protect him from the punishment that was due for him?

6. In today's Haftarah we are shown a picture of Israel when it, like Kayin, got caught up in its own ways and abandoned the ways of the Holy One.

*But this is a people robbed and plundered;
they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison-houses:
they are for a prey, and none delivers;
for a spoil, and none says, Restore.*

*Who is there among you who will give ear to this?
who will listen and hear for the time to come?*

*Who gave Ya'akov for a spoil, and Yisra'el to the robbers? Didn't the Holy One?
He against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk,
neither would they **sh'ma** His Torah.*

*Therefore he poured on him the fierceness of his anger, and the strength of battle;
and it set him on fire round about, yet he didn't know;
and it burned him, yet he didn't lay it to heart.*

[Isaiah 42:22-25]

The Holy One did not "mollycoddle" or "baby" His beloved - He "poured out" His burning anger - a measured amount, that is - with a totally redemptive purpose. Yet they, like Kayin "did not take it to heart".

[A] What did the Holy One do to Israel?

[B] What brought this on?

[C] What was His purpose in doing these things?

7. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading Yochanan [John] tells us that the Torah has

been demonstrated for us in an earthly form, through the 33 years of the life of Yeshua Maschiach [the Messiah].

*The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory,
such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

[John 1:14]

[A] What two things does Yochanan say the Torah has done?

[B] What does Yochanan say we as human beings have been able to see as a result of this?

[C] What two characteristics did Yochanan say Yeshua Ha-Maschiach manifested?

*May you see through all the interpersonal conflicts and stresses of life
to the Divine Purpose for which you were created,
and may you be enveloped in His grace and His truth.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Job 36:32-37:13

*He covers his hands with the lightning, and commands it to strike the mark.
The noise of it tells about him, and the cattle also concerning the storm that comes up.*

*Yes, at this my heart trembles, and is moved out of its place.
Hear, oh, hear the noise of his voice,
the sound that goes out of his mouth.*

*He sends it forth under the whole sky, and his lightning to the ends of the eretz.
After it a voice roars. He thunders with the voice of his majesty;
He doesn't hold back anything when his voice is heard.
God thunders marvelously with his voice.*

*He does great things, which we can't comprehend.
For he says to the snow, 'Fall on the eretz;'
Likewise to the shower of rain, and to the showers of his mighty rain.*

*He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he has made may know it.
Then the animals go into coverts, and remain in their dens.*

*Out of its chamber comes the storm, and cold out of the north.
By the breath of God, ice is given, and the breadth of the waters is frozen.
Yes, he loads the thick cloud with moisture.
He spreads abroad the cloud of his lightning.
It is turned round about by his guidance,
that they may do whatever he commands them on the surface of the habitable world,
whether it is for correction, or for his land,
or for lovingkindness, that he causes it to come.*