

Kayin's Teshuva
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There is a story which I think about a lot during this time of year. You might say that I am a little haunted by the story. Faranak Morgolies in her book "Off the Derech" writes about a Chassid who goes to davening Yom Kippur and then leaves to drive to another part of town where he can smoke and eat a non-kosher lunch. He is one of the many people she interviews who grew up religious and then left this life behind. This Chassid is a little unusual, even in her book, since he retains all the outward appearances of a religious Chassid. When she asks him why he attends davening at all he explains that he loves the tunes. The story haunts me. I want to grab him by the lapels and tell him there is so much meaning in the Tefillot of Yom Kippur and all you are taking away is the tunes?! The problem is that on some level I could say the same thing to myself. What do I really take out of the Yomim Noarim to the rest of the year? Is it just a spiritual time with uplifting melodies? To some degree don't we all just go to shul for the tunes?

This story always pushes me to find something to take out of the Yomim Noraim which I can point to as "more than the tunes." This year the take away message solidified when I saw this Midrash about Kayin's teshuva.

Midrash Tanchuma (Bereishis 9)

Kayin said to Hashem "I killed Hevel but You created in me the evil inclination. You are the Guardian of everything and You let me kill him, so You killed Hevel. If you would have accepted my sacrifice like his I would not have been jealous of him." Hashem responded, "What have you done?! The blood of your brother cries out."

Kayin said to Hashem, "Do you have rumor mongers in Heaven? My mother and father who are on Earth do not know that I killed Hevel. You are in Heaven, how do you know?" Hashem said to him, "Crazy one! I shoulder the entire world!" Kayin responded, "You shoulder the whole world and you cannot bear my sin? **Hashem responded, "Since you have repented go into exile (instead of being killed).**

...כיון שהרגו אמר אברה מפני אבי ואמי שאין מבקשין אותו אלא ממני שאין אחד בעולם אלא אני והוא מיד נגלה עליו הקב"ה א"ל מפני אבותיך אתה יכול לברוח מפני אין אתה יכול לברוח ... ואף קין כך אמר אני הרגתי אותו בראת בי יצה"ר, אתה שומר את הכל ולי הנחת אותו להרגו אתה הוא שהרגתו שנקראת אנכי שאלו קבלת קרבני כמותו לא הייתי מתקנא בו. מיד השיבו מה עשית קול דמי אחיך צועקים ... אמר לפניו רבש"ע יש לפניך דלטורין שמלשינים את האדם לפניך, אבי ואמי הרי הן בארץ ואינן יודעין שאני הרגתי, ואתה בשמים מנין אתה יודע. א"ל שוטה כל העולם כולו אני סובל שנאמר (ישעיה מו) אני עשיתי ואני אשא אני אסבול ואמלט. א"ל כל העולם כולו אתה סובל ועוני אינך יכול לסבול גדול עוני מנשוא. א"ל הואיל ועשית תשובה צא וגלה מן המקום הזה שנאמר ויצא קין מלפני ה' וישב בארץ נוד

Kayin repeatedly tries to find ways to blame Hashem and then has the audacity to wonder how Hashem even knows about his sin. Then he seems to casually ask Hashem to just carry the sin. You would expect Hashem to really let him have it but instead Hashem is accepting of his Tehuva (repentance) and gives him a lighter punishment. What Tehuva?

With two stories let's try to answer this question and also bring home a message we can use about the chaggim.

The first story is about Rav Sadia Gaon. Every day he would lock himself in his room and would do a very sincere teshuva, crying and begging Hashem for forgiveness. On Purim when he was willing to answer any questions, one of his students mustered up the courage to ask him about this behavior. He asked what Rav Sadia could possibly have done so wrong in the last 24 hours which he had to again beg for forgiveness each day. He explained that every day he understood a little more about Hashem and Hashem's greatness. This caused him to reflect on how he had lived the last 24 hours and to be regretful of his behavior. "If I had just understood Hashem as I do now" he exclaimed, "I would have acted much differently."

The second story is about the Chofetz Chaim who was traveling selling his books when he stopped at an inn late at night. The inn keeper did not recognize his guest and was rather annoyed at being woken late in the night. He told the Chofetz Chaim that he did not have any room for him and finally when the Chofetz Chaim said he had nowhere to stay he allowed him to sleep on the floor near the stove in the kitchen where he could get a little bit of warmth. About an hour later everyone was woken by loud knocks at the door, a Chassidish Rav was about to arrive. The inn keeper excited about the prestigious guest begins to prepare lavishly and greets the Rav with a feast. As the Rav is entering he notices the Chofetz Chaim on the floor in the kitchen and asks in horror why the gadol hador is on the floor!? The inn keeper is very embarrassed and asks the Chofetz Chaim to forgive him saying that he did not know the identity of the Chofetz Chaim. The Chofetz Chaim responded that this would be a fair excuse if he had at least been treated as a normal person should. However, since no Jew should be treated this way this defense does not excuse his behavior.

The commonality of these stories is the idea that frequently when we have a greater appreciation of a person or of Hashem then our behavior is affected and we are brought to regret how we acted previously. Perhaps this is what happened to Kayin and why Hashem sees him as doing Teshuva. Kayin realizes that Hashem extends beyond the realm he initially thought. We know that Kayin brought a sacrifice, so he clearly understood Hashem but he seems surprised that Hashem was involved in his fight with his brother. He seems to have thought that Hashem was certainly present in the religious life he had but when it came to his personal, social or family life this was not a place where Hashem had any connection. He is amazed to learn that Hashem "shoulders the entire world" and is present in every aspect of our lives. Kayin accepts

this and is prepared to act on it, he asks Hashem to carry his sin in this area as well. Hashem accepts that Kayin has adjusted his worldview and is ready to commute his punishment.

This is the issue we sometimes face in trying to bring the high of the *chaggim* into our lives, we relegate Hashem to the shul but unconsciously act as if He does not belong in our social or working lives. It is not as easy for us to feel Hashem's presence when we are not surrounded by people fervently praying from *machzorim* but by coworkers typing on computers. This is Kayin's Teshuva and we must bring ourselves a consciousness of the fact that this is something we must take from the *Yamim Noraim*. It is not easy, but being aware of it will help us to create strategies to bring Hashem-consciousness into all areas of our lives. We must use the example of Rav Sadia Goan, always finding new areas to let Hashem in and not like the inn keeper who lost an opportunity to honor the Chofetz Chaim. We need to reflect on how we place reminders of Hashem and change our behavior at work, in family situations, in our social lives. With a new appreciation of Hashem's reach we can bring a change into our lives.