

פרשת בראשית

A fascinating question is posed regarding Kayin's offerings in this week's parsha. His precedence in the *pasuk*¹ compared to Hevel implies a sense of superiority as well as the notion that Hevel was simply following his lead, and the Ramban's statement² that both brothers "understood the secret of the *korbanos* and *menachos*" implies that Kayin had a high-level sacrifice. However, Hashem's response to Kayin's sacrifice implies the opposite; in fact, Rashi³ goes even as far as to say that Kayin had brought from the worst fruits! So how is this offering supposed to be viewed? If Kayin had in fact chosen the worst produce for sacrifice, **a)** why did he not select better fruits to offer, and **b)** how could he have done this having "understood the secret"?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that Kayin's actions represent that of a person's *middos*. Even if a person has all of the sweetest and high-caliber fruits in the world, he is unable to defer and give them up to others. Even if he does give it to another person, it is with an *עין רעה*, despite having an abundance of such prosperous produce. Giving can be so hard for a person that even when they are willing to provide, they do so with such a sense of reluctance and rancor that it almost undoes the generosity of their action!

Another question to be asked comes up in the context of Hashem not taking kindly to Kayin's sacrifices, angering Kayin and causing a fallen face. Why would this anger Kayin? Was he not aware of the execrable quality of his *korban*? Rav Nossan Tzvi Finkel explains that this comes from a similar character trait: a person can find it incredibly difficult to give of themselves, and even when they give over their worst, they nonetheless feel as if they have given up their all and are owed a tremendous amount of gratitude for their contribution. Kayin firmly believed that his gift would be accepted with love and appreciation, as he felt that he had given up everything, and when he failed to find favor in Hashem's eyes, his face immediately fell.

It is worth noting that while the Torah records a conversation between Kayin and Hevel, it refrains from disclosing what was said during the conversation. *Targum Yonatan* says that the two brothers discussed why one of their offerings was accepted and the other was rejected, arguing about the existence of judging and merit as well as *olam haba*, reward and punishment, with Hevel arguing the affirmative, and Kayin arguing the negative. The argument elevated from verbal to physical, culminating with Kayin striking his brother's forehead with a stone.

Such an explanation needs a tremendous explanation. How could a simple debate spiral into such enmity and eventually murder? Moreover, Kayin was on such a high level of being the first person in the world to understand the essence of giving *korbanos*; how could he deny a tenet of faith and say "לית דין ולית דיין"?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz answers that right after Hashem rejected Kayin's offerings, he fell into such a state of shock and disbelief that he lost control of himself without any sense of responsibility for his actions. In such a moment, a person may come to give control to the *yezter hara*, and fall to the

¹ במדבר ד:ג-ח

² רמב"ן בראשית ד:ג ד"ה ויבא קין

³ רש"י בראשית ד:ג ד"ה מפרי האדמה

deepest of pits: the rejection of law and order, bringing them to murder, heresy, and all sorts of dastardly things that a person would never consider whatsoever had they been given the ability to reconsider. The entire discussion between the two brothers came purely from the fallen face of Kayin where he simply lost control and fell to a point of no return, culminating with the murder of his brother and heretical denial of faith in Divine law and order.

This incident, says Rav Nosson Tzvi, illustrates the fundamental idea of a person's need to strengthen their "ability to take responsibility" is clearly present. Everything requires consideration, contemplation, and thought, because without it, a person may fall into a state of shock and anger, causing them to lose all sense of judgment and destroy both their lives as well as the lives of others; evidently, one must live with a sense of care, responsibility, and reckoning.

But how do we acquire this sense of responsibility that allows us to maintain composure even in the most difficult of situations? Rav Nosson Tzvi explains that the only way to do so is through the combination of learning *mussar* and davening to Hashem at all times. In today's world, remarks Rav Nosson Tzvi, people lack responsibility, and instead proceed recklessly without much consideration, let alone a proper calculation, choosing instead to simply act on their impulses without thinking about the potential ramifications or results.

Such a degree of responsibility is an essential foundation for success in any field. After all, our main ambition is to reach greatness in the Torah — through the proliferation of Torah. One cannot attain any level of greatness in Torah without responsibility; only one who accustoms themselves in their youth to maintain a level of responsibility will be able to influence others later in life.⁴

Besides for a person's responsibility to be responsible for themselves and fulfill their obligations to the world, says Rav Nosson Tzvi, they also must bear in mind the idea that of Bnei Yisrael is interdependent, the concept of "כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה,"⁵ as others observe and learn from their ways. This is the basis of Hevel's words against Kayin, the concept of law and order and ramifications for actions, and in turn, the lack of a degree of responsibility that ultimately led to Kayin's murder of his brother.

There are two obligations incumbent on the person to determine the extent of his responsibility. The first is the fact that a lack of responsibility will deprive a person of success in all walks of life, be it faith in Hashem, engagement in Torah, or any dealings in his life, for that matter, while second is because of the preparation for a person's Heavenly judgment, for a person who arrives in the Heavenly court accompanied by a promiscuous life devoid of control is ill-fated.

When a person knows that he will be held accountable for all his actions, he economizes his ways with reason and wisdom, refusing to waste away his life. It is incumbent upon us to learn both from the *sifrei mussar* as well as our rebbeim, seeking out their ways and guidance as well as how they clarified every matter and how they weighed every deed ever so carefully; only then will we be *zocheh* to have Torah and *yiras shamayim*.

⁴ שיחת מוסר, מאמר "מיגרא רמה לבירא עמיקתא"

⁵ שבועות לט.