



In Memory
of our beloved

David Schwartz

who fell in battle
27th day of the month of Tevet, 5784
(8 January 2024)

David wrote thoughts on each of the weekly Torah readings taken from the core of the Torah that he studied in depth with his unique spirit. The Torah thoughts were originally published on the occasion of his marriage to Meital.

His Torah insights are shared now for the elevation of his pure soul and for the sanctification of his blessed memory

Breishit

From "Le'David Barchi Nafshi" ("Of David, Bless the Lord, O My Soul")

Words of Torah according to the weekly Torah reading by David Schwartz, z"l

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Parasha Insights

The parsha of *Bereishit* begins with a detailed and extended description of the days of creation. At its opening, the Torah sets out how the world was founded in order of the days of the week, leading up to the creation of man on the sixth day, and the cessation of work on the Sabbath. After this description (in chapter one), the Torah returns to the creation story in chapter two and onward, with a focus on the creation of man and the nature of life in the garden of Eden. In this context, the Torah presents the story of woman's creation, and recounts the sin of Adam and Eve, with the counsel of the snake and the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. That famous sin causes their exile from the garden of Eden. Next we come upon the birth of Cain and subsequently Abel (*Hevel*), born from their mother, Eve (*Chava*).

There are many different topics in the initial chapters of *Bereishit*, but the attention is clearly focused on the story of creation. We might infer from this that the dispute between Cain and Abel (in chapter four) is of secondary significance and could have even been presented elsewhere. Yet, the Torah does devote a great amount of attention to the story of the two brothers in the parsha of *Bereishit* indicating that it is integral to the main subject. On the outside Cain and Abel are similarly presented as being born to the same parents at the same period of time and place, thus sharing similar circumstances at birth, and there also doesn't seem to be any external differences in their nurture which may have caused the two of them to move in different directions.

It is worth noting that except for the terse details about the professions of the two brothers, the Torah does not devote attention to other aspects of their lives until they bring their offerings to God. The lack of information denies us an opportunity as readers of the text to independently identify the root cause of their dispute. We are forced to look for hints in the little information provided to us.

In addition, the terse description of the Torah leaves us with a great question when we are told about

the acceptance of the offering of Abel and rejection of Cain's. "And God turned with favor unto Abel and to his offering. But to Cain and his offering He did not turn." (4:4-5) Our sages focused on the obvious question here of why Cain's offering was accepted. As a general rule, the sages connected the distinction between the acceptance and rejection of the offerings to the original intent that accompanied the offering. We see then that the offerings that they presented were different in nature, but that does not show us a distinction between the characteristics of the brothers themselves. In light of this understanding, Rashi interprets the simple meaning of the verses that Abel brought "from the first of his flock" to mean the best of the flock, and notes that Cain's offering "from the fruit of the land" means "the worst." In other words, Cain just brought an offering from whatever he already had prepared. This explanation explains why Cain's sacrifice was rejected, but it does not necessarily reflect negatively on Cain's personality. I will now seek to show how the conflict between the two brothers was based upon a specific and fundamental difference in their personalities. A careful reading of these verses also provides us with a practical and relevant lesson for our time.

Since the external manner in which they were nurtured was similar, in my humble opinion we should focus on their different behaviors in response to the events of their lives. To explore the differences between the brothers in depth, we may take a broad view of their actions by considering what might be implicit in the Torah's verses, which may offer insight to their different characters.

In a straightforward reading of the verses about Adam and his son Cain, there are many points of comparisons and parallels in the language used by both of them. When Adam sinned with the Tree of Knowledge (*Etz ha-Da'at*), he was punished by being exiled from the garden of Eden and was cursed. "Cursed be the ground because of you." (3:17) "So God banished humankind from the garden of Eden to till the ground from which it was taken." (3:23)



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When the Torah records the punishment of Cain for the sin of fratricide, the language is similar, and the punishment is also parallel. "Therefore you shall be more cursed than the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (4:11) "Since You [God] banished me this day from the ground ..." (4:14) In both cases God turns to the sinner with a direct question regarding his location; and in both instances the ground is cursed and the sinner is banished to a different place.

An additional parallel is the way in which the Torah emphasizes the profession of Cain as a toiler of the ground. After the expulsion from Eden, the default occupational choice was working the ground (as it was for this reason that man was sent out of Eden). Yet the Torah emphasizes that working the soil is Cain's profession, in order to highlight how he continued and was being dragged along after the path of his father.

It seems to me that the essential point is that Cain's preference was just to continue following a worn path. He brought an offering from the "fruit of the ground," which Rashi interpreted to mean "that which fell into his hand." He shows no willingness to initiate. Cain just thoughtlessly followed what his father had done.

With this parallel in mind, a picture is formed that shows Cain as a passive bystander, a follower who lacks ambition to innovate or make progress. He moves like the leaf that is blown about by the wind, driven about by other forces. Time after time the Torah compares the stories of a father and his son in order to advance an understanding from which it can teach lessons from their differences. The parallel helps lead us to more fully understand the underlying meaning of the brothers' offerings and why Cain and his offering was rejected.

In contrast to Cain, Abel is presented as an innovator, an architect, and/or as a man who takes action. Unlike his father and unlike his elder brother who represented "the way of the world" at that time, Abel founded a new initiative, embracing a start-up profession as a sheep herder. When the verses mention the sacrifice of the brothers, the Torah emphasizes that Abel brought, "from the best of the firstlings of his flock," an action that definitely needed intention with the strength and effort that comes with initiative.

The Torah verses thus point to a fundamental difference between the brothers that essentially explains why the offering of one is received over the other. Abel was an active innovator and creator. His positive qualities were manifested through his life. For this reason he merited that his offering was received by God.

The great lesson, therefore, for us is the realization that God does not seek passive followers who by necessity tread on the same path of those around them. Positive work that does not integrate new ideas and hopeful ambitions alongside it can lead man to religious degeneration and ultimately cause man to fall into bad situations, as is what happened to Cain who murdered Abel. The Torah pushes us to hope for the future, to make progress, and to find new pathways to be productive at every moment in time. This is our responsibility in the wider sense, and also our specific religious role. Thus the critical and fundamental realization that the man who is not consistently expecting progress is not just standing in place but also falling backwards is advanced here by the Torah. With this critical realization, we may understand as well why the parsha concludes in chapter six by looking into the depths of the soul of man. "And the Lord saw how great was human wickedness on earth - how every thought of the human only amounted to evil all the time." (6:5)

Man left alone in his nature is pulled downwards. In order to grow stronger and rise from the everyday life surrounding us, we need to lift ourselves up and find hope and renewal. In this, we can find our hidden strength. It is clear therefore why the Torah allots so much space and attention to the topic of the brothers, and specifically in our parsha with which the Torah begins.