



גאולת האדמה

The Land's Redemption

■ Kayin and His Sin

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה.
*After some days, Kayin brought an offering to G-d from
 the fruits of the land.* (B'reshit 4,3)

Kayin (Cain), the first son of the first man, was also the first to initiate a sacrificial offering to G-d. A farmer, he brought his offering from the fruits of the land, the results of his own labors. His younger brother Hevel (Abel), a shepherd, followed in his footsteps, and also brought an offering to Hashem from what he did best: from the first-born of his sheep.

How were these sacrifices received by Hashem? The Torah is very clear: *“G-d turned to Hevel and his offering, and did not turn to Kayin and his offering”* (verses 4-5). Seeing that G-d had rejected his sacrifice, Kayin suffered terrible disappointment, shame, and frustration – leading him to commit the grave sin of smiting his own brother to death.

Why, actually, was Kayin's offering not accepted? After all, he brought it totally voluntarily, and was the first to think of the idea altogether. To answer this, we must return to the story of the sin and punishment of his father Adam. After Adam ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, not only was he cursed, but the land, too, was cursed – apparently because of him: *“The land is cursed for your sake”* (3,17). As a result, the land became overgrown with thorns and thistles, rendering agriculture very difficult: *“Thorns and thistles it shall grow for you, and you will eat the grass of the field; by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.”* (verses 18-19)

Hevel therefore decided to abandon working the accursed land, and went into the sheep-raising business. Kayin, on the other hand, chose the difficult mission of “repairing the earth” – a demanding challenge that required tremendous strengths. The first-born son, Kayin rose to the occasion, but

despite his best efforts, the earth was not “repaired,” and his offering of fruits of the earth was not accepted.

As we saw, G-d rejected not only the offering, but also Kayin himself: “.. *and did not accept Kayin and his offering*” (verse 5). Why did Hashem reject Kayin as well?

Kayin, it turns out, had great potential and tremendous strengths. But when he was tested with the rejection of his sacrifice, he misdirected them – towards murder. Seeing Kayin's lethal potential, G-d determined that he was not the right man for the critically important job of “repairing the earth,” and sent him far away from the earth: “*You shall wander the land like a nomad*” (4,12), without striking permanent roots in any location.

■ Questionable Verses

To understand this more deeply, let us quote a fascinating point in the name of the Talmudic Sage Isi ben Yehuda (Yoma 52a-b):

Five words in the Torah can be read either with the preceding passage or with the passage afterwards, and none of them can be resolved conclusively. They are: *se'et, meshukadim, machar, arur, and kam.*

The first of these words is שאת, *se'et*, from the description of Kayin's punishment for killing his brother:

הָלוֹא אִם תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב, לִפְתָּח חַטָּאת רִבְּץ׃

For if you do good, then se'et [it shall be forgiven]; and if you do not do good, sin lies in wait at the door... (4,7)

Why does Isi ben Yehuda say this verse is unclear? Is it not obvious that the word *se'et* applies to the beginning of the verse, “*If you do good*”? To apply it to the words that follow it, “*if you do not do good*,” would mean that Kayin's sin will be forgiven if he does not do good – an illogical premise. Secondly, if the word is applied to the second phrase, this would leave the first phrase dangling with no conclusion!

Rather, we must understand as follows: The word *se'et* can apply to both phrases at the same time! Hashem is telling Kayin that there are two possible ways in which he could be forgiven:

1. Smoothly and easily, by virtue of his improving his ways and performing good deeds
2. Harshly, if he continues to sin - leading to failure, the learning of the appropriate lessons, and repenting.

Both of these are possibilities and both lead to forgiveness. But the verse continues with a stern warning to Kayin: “There is a third possibility as well – and it is totally unacceptable: If you actually cave in to the tremendous forces within you, you might hurt others along the way... *If you do not do good*, you are liable to be caught by the sin crouching at your door. *You must rule over your urges and strengths.*”

G-d is hinting to Kayin that He foresees that Kayin will not control his strengths, but will rather allow them to take over, bringing catastrophe upon both himself and his brother. As long as there is no sign that he can overcome his inclinations, there is no chance that he can rectify his father’s sin and the curse of the land. With the curse of the land still in full force, an offering from its fruits cannot be accepted.

■ Noach, Man of the Land

This brings us to the story of Noach. When he was born, his father Lemekh said:

זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִמַּעֲצָבוֹן יְדִינֵנוּ מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָהּ ה'.

*He shall comfort us from our work and the toil of our hands,
from the land that was cursed by G-d. (5,29)*

Lemekh prayed that his newborn son would succeed in repairing the accursed earth. And in fact, after the world was destroyed by the great Flood, Noach attempted to return to this ancient task, building an earthen altar upon which he offered an animal sacrifice. He thus intended to combine the efforts of both Kayin and Hevel, by taking earth (Kayin’s expertise) as the basis for a sacrifice of animals (Hevel’s specialty). This sacrifice was accepted willingly by Hashem:

וַיַּרַח ה' אֶת רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל לְבֹ

לֹא אֶסַף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוֹר הָאָדָם...

*Hashem smelled the pleasant aroma, and said:
I will no longer curse the earth for the man...* (8,21)

The word בְּעִבּוֹר, translated here as “for,” can also mean “because of.” That is, it can mean that the earth was punished because of man, or on his behalf. The same phrase was used previously in a similar context, when Adam was given his punishment:

אָרְרָהּ הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוֹרְךָ...

The earth will be cursed for/because of you... (3,17)

Why should the earth have to pay the price for man's sin? The answer is that it is not being punished, but is rather being made to adapt to man's new level. That is to say: The earth provides for man's needs. It originally functioned on a high level, with ready-made trees to nourish high-level mortals. But after man was taken down a notch as a result of his sin, the earth was brought lower as well, so that man, on his new, low level, could still, somehow, enjoy its benefits – albeit *“by the sweat of his brow”* (3,19) – and not die. This is what is meant by *“the earth will be cursed on your account.”*

Accordingly, in the future, when man once again repairs his ways and his soul, the earth, too, will be raised up. We see this process beginning before our eyes: Working the land has been made easier with modern equipment, just as giving birth, Chava's punishment, has been made less painful by modern medicine. In addition, the status of women has been upgraded, and men no longer rule over them – the other aspect of women's punishment – as they once did. The world is coming closer to its final rectification of the sin of Adam and Chava, leading to its ultimate redemption.

■ The Grape Vineyard

After Noach built the altar and offered upon it animal sacrifices, he sought to take another step forward in his bid to repair the earth. He wished to bring it to a higher level, on which the earth would no longer serve only as an altar for sacrificial offerings, but would also provide the sacrifice itself. *“Noach, man of the earth, began and planted a vineyard”* (9,20). In short, he wished to accomplish what Kayin had tried, but failed, to do.

Noach “planted” himself in one set location on the earth, as opposed to the wandering Kayin, and planted a grape orchard there. His hope was that the wine he would produce there would serve as an offering to G-d, just as wine would later serve for libations upon the Holy Temple altar. However, he failed dismally, and his hopes were dashed. Instead of offering the wine upon the altar, he drank of it and became intoxicated, ending up lying naked on the ground in disgrace.

Noach was thus the second person to discover the tremendous difficulty involved in repairing the earth and redeeming it from its curse. It was this that led our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov to choose to be shepherds like Hevel, and not farmers of the earth like Kayin.

■ The Tower of Bavel

Five generations after Noach, during the times of Peleg, people decided to gather in one place and build a giant city, with a tower reaching to the sky: *“They said one to another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly’ ... And they said, ‘Let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’”* (11,3-4)

The potential for repairing the earth was here. They settled in a permanent location, and they worked with earth-based clay and bricks. Under these conditions, they could truly have constructed a Holy Temple for the sake of G-d's Name and His honor –thus also ridding the earth of its curse. But they did not. Instead of building the tower for G-d's honor and enabling Him to dwell within it, they attempted to do the opposite: Enhance their own names, at G-d's expense. Once again, the earth, its rocks and bricks were desecrated.

Let us note that our holy forefathers did not build themselves houses, nor did they plant vineyards and work them. The time was not yet ripe for such permanence. Instead, they dwelled in tents and traveled from place to place with their livestock.

But there was one exception.

■ Yaakov's House

When Yaakov Avinu ran away from his brother Esav, he left the Land of Israel for the home of his uncle Lavan. He made a vow that if he would return safely, he would build a house for G-d: *“And this stone that I have placed as a monument will become a house of G-d.”* (B'reshit 28,22)

His hope was that this would be a permanent House of G-d, instead of the tower built for idol worship by previous generations not far away (in Shin'ar, near Lavan's hometown of Haran/Aram Naharayim). It would thus be a great rectification of the curse of the earth and of the Tower of Bavel. Yaakov understood that the place on which he lay (when he dreamt of the ladder and the angels; B'reshit 28) was hallowed ground, and that the rectification of the land – via the construction of a permanent house for G-d – should start right there.

וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר: מַה גֹּדֵל הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם בַּיִת אֲ-לֹהִים וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם.

Yaakov feared and said, “This place is replete with awe! It must be the House of G-d, and this is the gate to Heaven.” (verses 16-17)

Years later, however, on his way home, he seemed to forget his oath, and built a house for himself instead of a House of G-d: *“Yaakov traveled to Sukkot, and built himself a house and huts for his livestock”* (33,17). It was this sinful delay, the Medrash tells us (B'reshit Rabba to B'reshit 35,1), that led to his daughter Dina's fall into the hands of Shechem ben Hamor. In any event, as soon as he remembered, Yaakov hurried on to Beit El, where he did fulfill his vow, building a House of G-d. But the delay was significant; it was a lost chance to release the earth from its curse.

■ The Earthen Altar

In Parashat Yitro, we read the instructions for building an altar:

וְאִם מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה לִּי,
 לֹא תִבְנֶה אֹתוֹן גְּזִית כִּי חֶרֶב הִנֵּפֶת עָלֶיהָ וַתְּחַלְלֶהָ.
*...if you make Me an altar of stones, do not build them of
 hewn stones, for you have raised your sword upon it and
 desecrated it.*

וְלֹא תַעֲלֶה בְּמַעֲלֹתַי עַל מִזְבְּחִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִגְלֶה עֶרְוֹתֶךָ עָלָיו.
*And do not ascend via steps to My altar,
 in order that your nakedness not be uncovered upon it.* (Sh'mot 20,22-23)

Two admonitions are provided regarding the construction of the altar: It may be made of earth, but not of stones hewn by metal utensils, and it must not have steps, but rather a ramp. These two prohibitions are designed to distance the altar from both “sword” (warfare, killing) and “nakedness” – precisely the sins of Kayin and Noach, respectively.

■ The Cluster of Grapes

We read in Parashat Sh'lach that when the Scouts sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to Eretz Yisrael returned after 40 days, they brought with them a giant cluster of grapes – so large that it had to be carried on a pole by two people. They wished to show the nation that the products and people of the land were disproportionately large and unwelcoming. Once again, we encounter wine and grapes and their grave consequences.

What is particularly intriguing, however, is that at the end of Sh'lach, we are also taught the commandment of the Mincha offering (as an addition to regular sacrifices). The Mincha is totally earth-based, comprised of fine wheat flour mixed with oil, together with a libation of wine upon the altar.

By combining the Mincha and the story of the Scouts, the Torah wishes to emphasize that the guarantee for a successful sacrificial offering from the earth depends on actually settling the Land. In fact, the verse that introduces the Mincha passage is this:

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ מוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם...

*When you come to the land of your habitations that
I give you...* (Bamidbar 15,2)

It is very clear: The rectification of the earth will occur only in Eretz Yisrael, and only when Bnei Yisrael arrive there and settle in it. Orchards and vineyards must be planted there, houses are to be built there, and the Holy Temple with its Mincha offerings is to be established there. Only in this way is the way paved for a final rectification of the “curse upon the earth.”

The basis for this concept – that the Nation’s arrival in the Land is the rectification of Adam’s sin, which also took place in the Land of Israel – is found in the Medrash Rabba (to Vayikra 25,2), which states:

R. Yehuda ben Pazi derived: “Who will uncover your eyes from dust, O Adam, that you were unable to fulfill the commandment [not to eat from the tree] for even one hour – while your children are commanded not to eat *Orlah* and in fact wait three years! [As is written:] “*When you arrive in the Land and plant fruit trees, you may not eat of the fruit for the first three years...*” (Vayikra 19,23)

R. Huna said that when Bar Kapara heard this, he said, “My sister’s son R. Yehuda has taught well.”

That is, by not eating *Orlah*, the first three years’ fruits of Land of Israel trees, we rectify the sin of Adam HaRishon.

The Torah also promises that the Land will wait patiently for the Nation of Israel to redeem it:

וְשָׁמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ אֹיְבֵיכֶם הַיְשָׁבִים בָּהּ.

It will be desolate for your enemies who dwell in it. (Vayikra 26,32)

This means that when we are in Exile, it will remain accursed and desolate. Why? For our own sake - so that our enemies will not be able to truly settle it! The land will remain desolate until our final redemption arrives, and at the same time, the process of redeeming the land from its curse will also be completed. As the Prophet Amos prophesized:

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם ה' וְנִגַּשׁ חוֹרֵשׁ בְּקֶצֶר וְדֹרֵךְ עֲנָבִים בְּמִשְׁךְ הַזֶּרַע
וְהִטִּיפוּ הַהָרִים עֵסִיס וְכָל הַגְּבָעוֹת תִּתְמוּגְגְנָה.

Behold, the days will come, G-d says, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes - him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

וְשִׁבְתִּי אֶת שְׁבוֹת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנוּ עָרִים נְשֻׁמוֹת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּטְעוּ כְרָמִים
וַיִּשְׁתּוּ אֶת יַיִןם וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גִנּוֹת וַאֲכָלוּ אֶת פְּרִיָהֶם.

And I will return the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall build the desolate cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat their fruit.

וַיִּטְעֲתֵימָם עַל אֲדָמָתָם וְלֹא יִנְתְּשׁוּ עוֹד מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם,
אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ.

And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land that I have given them, says the Lord your G-d. (Amos 9,13-15)

