

Parshat Bereishit 5776

And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain got up to Abel his brother and killed him.

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי
בְהִיּוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל
אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

The פסוק writes 'וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו', but קַיִן doesn't say anything in the פסוק, so what did קַיִן and הֶבֶל actually speak about?

רש"י writes that קַיִן spoke to הֶבֶל in order to try and get him into an argument in order to find a justification/pretext to kill him. The רמב"ן says that קַיִן spoke to הֶבֶל and tricked him by getting him into a field and then killing him in secret. The אבן עזרא says that קַיִן was upset that Hashem didn't accept his קרבן but accepted הֶבֶל's. קַיִן then complained to הֶבֶל and said it was unfair. After הֶבֶל disagreed with קַיִן and told him he had sinned by not bringing the best of his crop for a קרבן, קַיִן killed him.

The מדרש תנחומא writes that before קַיִן killed הֶבֶל, קַיִן and הֶבֶל spoke together and agreed to split the world into 2 halves. קַיִן took all the earth/ground. הֶבֶל took all the mobile objects (animals, birds etc.). They agreed that each one should not have benefit from the other. As soon as the deal was struck, קַיִן said to הֶבֶל: 'get off my land!' and chased him all the way to the valleys and mountains before he attacked him. Initially הֶבֶל (the stronger of the two) beat קַיִן to the ground. קַיִן cried out to הֶבֶל: 'my brother, don't do evil to me.' הֶבֶל released קַיִן from his grip and קַיִן killed him. That is what the פסוק means when it says: 'וַיִּקָּם קַיִן' ie: he got up from הֶבֶל's grip and killed him.

In previous פסוקים רש"י speaks about הֶבֶל having two twin sisters and קַיִן having one. The אורח חיים posits that there was an extra sister available for marriage. קַיִן said he was the firstborn and she should be his. הֶבֶל said that she was born with him so she should be his. They fought and הֶבֶל died.

The רמב"ן gives two explanations for קַיִן's erratic behaviour: (A) קַיִן wanted only his descendants to rule the world and not הֶבֶל's. He didn't want to split the world, therefore he killed him. (B) קַיִן didn't mind sharing the world to a certain extent. He just wanted to be the stronger brother and rule most of the world; not all of it. He realised when Hashem accepted הֶבֶל's offering, that he was the lesser brother. He therefore killed הֶבֶל in order to gain the title of 'the most powerful.'

How did הֶבֶל die?

- The מדרש תנחומא says that הֶבֶל was inflicted with bruises and wounds due to the stones, hands and feet of קַיִן. His soul did not leave his body until he was hit in the neck.
- Rashi in סנהדרין on: דף לו' says that קַיִן killed הֶבֶל with a sword. The גמרא writes that קַיִן made many bruises and wounds on הֶבֶל. The משנה on the previous דף says that the reason why the פסוק uses the term דמי אחיד (plural) instead of דם (single) is because קַיִן killed him and prevented הֶבֶל from having children; קַיִן killed הֶבֶל and his children. In addition, it writes that there was so much blood that it covered all the trees and stones in the whole surrounding area. The גמרא writes that the blood of הֶבֶל was swallowed up by the ground. This was the only time in history that the ground opened up for a virtuous reason; as opposed to קְרָה (which was to remove evil.)
- The אבן עזרא says that הֶבֶל was killed by strangulation or by being hit with stones and sticks.

How does this whole episode connect to שְׁעֵטָנוּ? The רמב"ן in פרק יט פסוק יט ויקרא says that the principle of שְׁעֵטָנוּ is that a person should not tamper with Hashem's world. שְׁעֵטָנוּ or any kind of crossbreeding changes and defies the work of creation and implies that Hashem did not make the world perfect. Anyone who makes/wears שְׁעֵטָנוּ is 'despicable and pointless' and impinges on Hashem's plan for the universe.

רש"י quotes the מדרש תנחומא who says that קַיִן's offering was of flax seed and הֶבֶל's was wool (as before no-one was allowed kill animals and eat them.) The תנחומא writes that Hashem said after this whole murder event: 'the offering of a sinner (קַיִן's offering of flax) should not be mixed with the meritorious offering (הֶבֶל's offering of wool).' He then writes that for this reason שְׁעֵטָנוּ is אסור.

The first murder in world history was done for immoral and selfish reasons. What קַיִן did destroyed the very fabric of Hashem's purpose for us in this world because like שְׁעֵטָנוּ the action of killing another human being tampers with Hashem's world order.