

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

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פְּרָשַׁת בְּרֵאשִׁית תשפ"ז

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וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקְם קַיִן אֶל הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ. (פרק ד' ח)

Cain spoke with his brother Abel. And it happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

All the major Mefarshim question our pasuk-what exactly did Cain tell Abel? We begin, as usual, by looking to Rashi for help. "(Cain) entered with (Abel) into words of quarrel and contention to find a pretext against him to kill him." And as Sifsei Chachomim elaborates that the phrase cannot be translated in the usual manner i.e., "Cain said to Abel," because the verse does not specify what it was that Cain said. The context, however, indicates that it was something which led to an argument and gave Cain a pretext to kill Abel. Rashi adds that "there are aggadic Midrashim about this" i.e., as to what their dispute concerned but leaves it at that. He is referring to Midrash Rabba which tells us that "Cain and Abel said: 'Let us divide the world between us.' One took the land and one took the movable property. This one said: 'The land on which you are standing is mine.' That one said: 'What you are wearing is mine.' That one said: 'Take it off.' This one said: 'Fly.' As a result: וַיִּקְם קַיִן/Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. R' Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R' Levi: Both of them took the land and both of them took the movable property. Regarding what, then, were they quarreling? Rather, this one said: 'The Temple shall be built in my domain,' and that one said: 'The Temple shall be built in my domain,'... and as a result, וַיִּקְם קַיִן אֶל הָבֶל אָחִיו... R' Huna said: 'An extra twin sister was born with Abel. Cain said: 'I will take her, as I am the firstborn.' Abel said: 'I will take her, as she was born with me.' As a result: ...וַיִּקְם קַיִן."

Ibn Ezra tells us that "It appears to me that Cain related to Abel the full account of the rebuke with which Hashem had reproached him." He is referring to the preceding pasuk, when after his korban is rejected, Hashem tells Cain, "הֲלוֹא אִם תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב/Why are you annoyed and why has your countenance fallen? Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin rests at your door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it." (Ibn Ezra concludes his piece with an interesting remark: "Those born on a dark day ask, how did Cain kill Abel since no swords were yet in existence? This is a foolish question. He could have choked him or killed him with a stone or a piece of wood inasmuch as there were thousands of stones and chunks of wood around.")

Ramban says that “...in my opinion, וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הָבֶל אָחִיו is connected to the next part of the pasuk, וַיְהִי בְהִיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה, meaning that Cain said to Abel, ‘Let us go out into the field,’ and then he killed him there in secret. It is possible that his intention in killing Abel was that the world develop from him alone, for he thought that his father would not have any more children. Furthermore, he was concerned that the primary development of the world will be from his brother, for, after all, his offering was the one which was accepted.”

Rav Meir Simcha presents an innovative approach which also focuses on Cain's understanding or perhaps *misunderstanding* of what Hashem told him just before, וְאֵלֶיךָ וַתְּשׁוּקֶתוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ. He believed that Hashem was telling him that Abel's intent and desire is אֵלֶיךָ, against you i.e., to take you down, and so, וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ-you, Cain, can therefore do whatever needs to be done to make him succumb. Exactly the opposite of Hashem's intent! וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן, according to Rav Meir Simcha is to be understood as Cain saying *to himself* that Hashem's words to him were וְאֵל הָבֶל-and as Radak similarly tells us וְאֵל כְּמוֹ about/concerning Abel i.e., and that he can proceed to eliminate Abel. And with this Rav Meir Simcha opens up for us a novel way to explain another unusually worded statement from Hashem to Cain, קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה /*The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground*. Why did Hashem have to emphasize אֵלַי? According to Rav Meir Simcha, it is very מִתְאִים for it was the misconstrued words of Hashem which propelled Cain to murder Abel. אֵלַי is כְּבִיבּוֹל Hashem saying that Abel's blood is directed at Me-at the words that I told Cain.

As one travels through the Meshech Chochma, being presented with a refreshingly creative approach to difficult passages is something we get used to!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
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