

Parshat Breishit – M'varchim Hachodesh

October 17, 2020 – 29 Tishrei 5781

Annual (Genesis 1:1-6:8): Hertz p. 2

Haftarah—Machar Chodesh: (Hertz p. 948)

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Torah Portion Summary

The Torah begins with God's creation of the world. Light, heaven and earth, the oceans and dry land, the heavenly bodies, plants, animals, and finally the first human beings – all are created in six days. God then blesses the seventh day, Shabbat, the day of rest. The human beings are placed in the Garden of Eden "to till it and tend it," but when Adam and Chava (Eve) disobey God's commandment and eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they are expelled. Chava gives birth to two sons. When they are grown *Kayin*, the elder, kills his brother, *Hevel*, and is punished by God. Adam and Chava have a third son, *Sheit*, and the Torah relates the 10 generations from Adam to Noach. The parsha concludes with God's sorrow over human wickedness.

I. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. (B'reishit 2:21-22)

1. Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: The text says *va-yiven* (fashioned), which can also mean, "He considered well (*hitbonen*) from what part to create her." God said: I will not create her from Adam's head, lest she be conceited; nor from the eye, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the neck, lest she be haughty; nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip; nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy; nor from the hand, lest she be light-fingered; nor from the foot, lest she be a gadabout – so He made her from the rib, a part most modest and chaste. Still, even though, as He was creating each and every member of her body, He kept saying, "Be modest, be chaste," "You spurned all my advice" (Mishlei 1:25), for all the aforementioned undesirable qualities are in her. (B'reishit Rabbah 18:2)
2. A Caesar once said to Rabban Gamliel: "Your God is a thief, for it is written, So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs. Rabban Gamliel's daughter said, "Leave him to me and I will answer him." She said, "Send me a police officer." "Why do you need one?" [Caesar] asked. She replied, "Thieves came to us during the night and took a silver pitcher from us, leaving one of gold in its place." "Would that such a thief would come to us every day," he replied. "Ah!" said she, "was it not Adam's gain that he was deprived of a rib and given a wife to serve him?" (Sanhedrin 39a)
3. This does not imply that God changed His mind but rather to draw our attention to the precious nature of this partnership and to teach us that it is not good for man to be alone. For this reason the Holy One willed it that man should be without woman for a brief period and then afterwards introduced her so that she would be dear to him after he had felt something was lacking without her. (Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto, 1800-1865, Italy)
4. That she may have the form of man and his faculties (qualities), differing from him only in "the physical vessels" (i.e. sex) – this being the difference between them, (otherwise) both have the possibility for (the attainment of) perfection, (be the measure) abundant or meager. (Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno, 1475-1550, Italy)

5. Rabbi Yirmiyahu ben Elazar said: When the Holy One created Adam, He created him hermaphrodite, as is said, “male and female He created them... and called them Adam” (Bereishit 5:2). Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: When the Holy One created Adam, He made him with two fronts; then He sawed him in half and then gave him two backs, a back for one part and a back for the other part. Someone objected: But does not Scripture say, He took one of his ribs (*mi-tzalotav*)? Rabbi Shmuel replied: *Mi-tzalotav* may also mean “one of his sides” as in the verse “and for the other side (*tzela*) of the Tabernacle.” (Shemot 26:20) (B’reishit Rabbah 8:1)

Sparks for Discussion

Everyone knows the story of Adam’s rib, but what is it meant to teach us? Does it mean that men and women are fundamentally equal or that they are fundamentally not equal? Our commentators offer different explanations implying very different understandings of the relative status of men and women, and relationship between them. What do you imagine God had in mind? Was Chava an afterthought? Was Adam a rough draft?

II. Cain said to the Lord, “*gadol avoni minso.*” (Bereishit 4:13)

1. *Gadol avoni minso*: (1) My punishment is too great to bear! (Etz Hayim); (2) My iniquity is too great to be borne! (The Five Books of Moses, Everett Fox); (3) Is my iniquity too great to be borne? (The Stone Chumash, ArtScroll)
2. My punishment is too great to bear – All the commentators agree that he admitted his sin and that the meaning of “bear” is similar to “forgive,” as in the phrase “forgiving iniquity” (Shemot 34:7). But in my opinion... the meaning is that this punishment is too great, I cannot bear it – and the correctness of this interpretation is borne out by the continuation. (Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, 1092-1167, Spain)
3. My sin is greater than I can bear – The correct plain interpretation is that it is a confession. *Kayin* said: “It is true that my sin is too great to be forgiven, and “You are righteous, O Lord; your rulings are just” (Psalm 119:137) even though You have punished me exceedingly. (Ramban--Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, 1194-1270, Spain)
4. In the form of a question: “You (God) bear the worlds above and below and my iniquity can you not bear?” (Rashi--Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105, France)
5. How do we know that *Kayin* repented? It is said, “*Kayin* said to the Lord, my iniquity is too great to be forgiven.” (Vayikra Rabbah 10:5)
6. *Kayin* came with craftiness when he said, “Is my sin too great to bear?” *Kayin* said to God: Master of the Universe! Is my sin greater than that of the six hundred thousand Jews who will sin against You in the future [referring to the golden calf and the spies], and whom you will (nonetheless) forgive?” (Sanhedrin 101b)

Sparks for Discussion

The words spoken by *Kayin* are wonderfully ambiguous. *Avon* can mean iniquity (sin) or punishment. *Minso* (bear) has no pronoun associated with it, so *Kayin* might be speaking about himself or about God. What did *Kayin* mean by these words? Was he filled with remorse for his terrible deed? Was he upset about being punished? Was he asking God for forgiveness? What makes people rein in their evil impulses? Is it a sense of sin (i.e. the knowledge that the action being contemplated is wrong) or the fear of punishment? Are there other factors that come into play? Is guilt such a bad thing?