

Haim Sabato

Rest
for the
Dove

READING FOR SHABBAT

THE HARARI EDITION

TRANSLATED BY

Jessica Setbon

Shira Leibowitz Schmidt

Maggid Books

Contents

Preface *xiii*

Translators' Notes *xv*

GENESIS

Bereshit:

I Will Be Hidden from Your Presence 3

Noah:

Man of the Earth 10

Lekh Lekha:

Pillar of the World 17

Vayera:

He Sustains the Living with Kindness 22

Hayei Sara:

Perfect Offering 27

Toledot:

The Elder Will Serve the Younger 32

Vayetzeh:

Thus Have I Beheld You in the Sanctuary 37

Vayishlah:
Jacob Teaches Us the Lessons of Exile 43

Vayeshev:
Jacob Wanted to Settle Down in Tranquility 49

Miketz:
Indeed We Are Guilty 54

Vayigash:
I Will Also Surely Bring You Up 59

Vayeḥi:
God Will Surely Remember You 64

EXODUS

Shemot:
Appreciating Kindness 71

Va'era:
I Did Not Make Myself Known to Them 76

Bo:
You Shall Eat It in Haste 82

Beshallah:
This Is My God and I Will Praise Him 87

Yitro:
A Great Voice, Never to Be Repeated 91

Mishpatim:
Who Revealed This Secret to My Children? 96

Teruma:
Nothing Was in the Ark 100

Tetzaveh:
And It Shall Be on His Forehead Always 105

Ki Tissa:
While the King Was at His Table 110

Vayak'hel:
May He Establish Our Handiwork for Us 116

Pekudei:
And You Shall Be Guiltless 121

LEVITICUS

Vayikra:
Calling Precedes Speaking 127

Tzav:
It Shall Not Be Baked Leavened 130

Shemini:
On the Day of His Heartfelt Joy 135

Tazria:
On the Eighth Day 140

Metzora:
Good Tidings for Them 146

Aḥarei Mot:
Before God You Shall Be Cleansed 150

Kedoshim:
You Shall Be Holy 155

Emor:
I Should Be Sanctified 160

Behar:
He Shall Have a Redemption 167

Behukkotai:
I Will Not Reject Them 174

NUMBERS

Bemidbar:
The Levites Shall Be Mine 183

<i>Naso:</i>	
And I Shall Bless Them	190
<i>Behaalotekha:</i>	
When the Ark Would Journey	196
<i>Shelah:</i>	
The Land Is Very, Very Good	201
<i>Korah:</i>	
He Will Draw Him Close to Himself	206
<i>Hukkat:</i>	
From the Wilderness a Gift	212
<i>Balak:</i>	
That You May Know the Righteousness of God	219
<i>Pinhas:</i>	
A Man in Whom There Is Spirit	226
<i>Matot:</i>	
Cross Over to the Land	233
<i>Masei:</i>	
You Shall Not Bring Guilt upon the Land	239

DEUTERONOMY

<i>Devarim:</i>	
How Can I Myself Alone Bear	245
<i>Va'ethanan:</i>	
They Did Well in All That They Spoke	250
<i>Ekev:</i>	
To Serve Him with All Your Heart	255
<i>Re'eh:</i>	
You Are Children of the Lord Your God	259
<i>Shofetim:</i>	
Zion Shall Be Redeemed Through Justice	265

<i>Ki Tetzeh:</i>	
One Mitzva Leads to Another	271
<i>Ki Tavo:</i>	
You Have Distinguished God Today	276
<i>Nitzavim:</i>	
In Your Mouth and in Your Heart	281
<i>Vayelekh:</i>	
Strengthen Them in the True Law	286
<i>Haazinu:</i>	
He Found Him in a Desert Land	292
<i>Vezot HaBerakha:</i>	
The Heritage of the Congregation of Jacob	297

Genesis

Parashat Bereshit

“I Will Be Hidden from Your Presence”

When Eve, the mother of all humanity, gives birth to her elder son, she declares, “I have acquired a man *of (et)* God” (Gen. 4:1). She pins great hopes on this boy, the first child in the entire world, and names him Cain (in Hebrew, *Kayin*), from the word “acquired” (*kaniti*). What does “to acquire a man *of* God” mean?

Rashi explains, “I have acquired a man *with (im)* God. When He created me and my husband, He created us by Himself; but in this [through the birth of Cain] we are partners with Him.”¹ *Targum Onkelos* interprets *et* as “I have acquired a man *before (min kodam)* God.” In the same vein, Ramban comments, “She said, this son will be for me an acquisition for God, for when we die, he will exist in our stead to

1. Translations of Rashi are taken from *The Torah: With Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, Sapirstein edition, the Artscroll Series (New York: Mesorah, 1999).

worship his Creator.”² Malbim expounds, “She desired to dedicate her firstborn to God.”

Perhaps we can propound that this son will repair all of God’s gifts that his parents despoiled. God Himself created them in His image, crowned them with glory and splendor, and gave them an entire world. He brought them together under the wedding canopy, gladdened them, and placed them in the Garden of Eden. “See how pleasant is My world,” said God. “Try not to destroy it” (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:28). He gave them one single commandment to observe. Yet, the serpent enticed them, and they gave in to temptation and realized that they were naked. God then banished them from Eden, to work the land forever by the sweat of their brow.

Perhaps Eve hoped that her firstborn would be “acquired” by God for all his life, and be worthy of rectifying the damage done by his parents and restoring the original state of things.³

Time passes, and it seems that Cain succeeds in both endeavors. Plumbing the depths of his soul, Cain discovers the mystery of sacrifice.⁴ He feels profound thanksgiving, and longs to pray to his Creator. Cain brings before God an offering of the fruits of the earth. “God pays heed to Abel and his offering. But to Cain and his offering God pays no heed” (Gen. 4:4–5).

The Torah does not specify the reason that God did not acknowledge Cain’s offering. Maybe, as Rashi suggests, what he brought was of poor quality. Conceivably, Cain’s sacrifice did not come wholeheartedly. Or perhaps the Torah is implying that being a shepherd is preferable to being a tiller of the ground.⁵

The Torah conceals God’s rationale because the reason that Cain’s offering was rejected is not the point of the personal test that he faces, nor is it the message that the Torah wants to impart to us through this narrative.

2. Translations of Ramban are taken from *Ramban (Nahmanides) Commentary on the Torah*, trans. and ann. R. Dr. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1971).

3. In contrast, see Rashi to Gen. 4:1, who says that the pregnancy and birth occurred before Adam sinned and was driven out of the Garden of Eden.

4. See Ramban to Gen. 4:4; Malbim; and Hullin 60a, which says that Adam had already offered a sacrifice before Cain.

5. See commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch to Gen. 4:1.

Rather, the important question is, what will Cain do *after* he realizes that God does not “pay heed” to his offering? How will he behave *now*, from the moment he internalizes this rejection? This is the essence of Cain’s trial. This is what God Himself seeks to teach Cain and, through His Torah, to make clear to us.

What is Cain’s response? “Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (Gen. 4:5). Was he so angry and crestfallen because he desired to see God’s countenance, and his offering was not accepted; or because he was envious of his brother, whose offering was accepted? Is Cain a sensitive person who yearns for God’s presence with all his being, and is dejected because his prayer was rebuffed? Or is he tainted by the negative quality of jealousy, which removes a person from this world?

The first part of the description already suggests an answer: “Cain was very angry.” Where there is anger, there cannot be service of God. An angry person is likened to an idol-worshipper, from whom the Divine Presence withdraws (Shabbat 105b; Nedarim 22b). Cain’s face falls, which is the literal meaning of the Hebrew *vayiplu panav*. “Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” The *Or HaHayim* (Gen. 4:5) comments that until then, his appearance and countenance had reflected the image of God, but that now his spirit is broken, fallen.

Of idol-worshippers, the prophet says, “When he will be hungry, he will be angry and curse his king and his gods” (Is. 8:21). But the spirit of one who worships God is never broken, and even if he is extremely distressed that his prayer was not accepted, his countenance will not fall. The Talmud (Berakhot 32b) teaches that if a person sees that his prayer is not received, he should pray again, as hinted at in the repetition in the verse, “Hope in God; strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope in God” (Ps. 27:14). One who has sinned should retrace his steps and correct his mistake. Anger, however, is no recourse.

“How can a living man complain [of his troubles]? A man [is responsible] for his sins,” says the mourner in the Book of Lamentations, and continues, “Let us search and examine our ways” (3:39–40). A “living man” has no reason to complain, for “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that evil and good emanate?” (v. 38) A person’s own actions are what lead to punishment, and so it is his

responsibility to rectify his mistakes. About whom can he complain, and about what? Instead of complaining and growing angry, he should scrutinize his own ways and repent, thereby meriting forgiveness.

Anger and fallen countenance stem from the negative attribute of jealousy, and not from a pious desire to be in the presence of God. The outcome is predictable: “Cain spoke with his brother Abel. It happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him” (Gen. 4:8).

The mishna (Avot 4:21) teaches, “Jealousy, inordinate desire and [the search for] honor drive a man from the world.” Desire triggered by visual stimuli removed Adam from the world, as it is written, “[The tree] was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6). Jealousy removed Cain from the world despite the request of his parents, embodied in his name Cain, that God acquire him, and that he stand before God all his life.

Other sets of brothers have behaved differently. God, who can see into the human heart, assures Moses that when Aaron will hear of his younger brother’s appointment to a superior position, not only will Aaron not be envious, but he will be sincerely happy: “When he sees you he will rejoice *in his heart*” (Ex. 4:14). A verse in Psalms describes the type of relationship that Aaron and Moses had: “Behold, how good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers in unity” (133:1). Cain, however, does not rejoice in the acceptance of his brother’s offering. Instead he is envious, which leads to wrath, and finally to his becoming crestfallen – a spirit removed from the Divine Presence.

God cautions him, however, saying, “Why are you angry and why has your countenance fallen? Surely if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin crouches at the door. It has focused its attractive power on you, *yet you can conquer it*” (Gen. 4:6–7). This is what is edifying in this episode. Instead of being envious and angry, a person should control the evil inclination, which crouches at his door. He should anticipate and confound it. And most of all, he must improve his conduct.

Cain could have conquered his evil inclination. His Creator, Knower of all secrets, asserts as much. But Cain did not listen. He was overtaken by impulse and driven wild with a jealousy that impelled him to kill his brother. Did Cain suppose that after that, God would accept his

offering? After all, he was a murderer, and from that moment on it would be said of him, “When you spread your hands [in prayer], I will hide My eyes from you; even if you were to intensify your prayer, I will not listen; your hands are replete with blood” (Is. 1:15). Did Cain think that he had made amends for that first transgression, of whose nature we are not told, but which had led to God’s rejection of his offering? This second time he sinned purposely: blinded by jealousy, his only desire was to eliminate his brother.

The mishna (Avot 4:2) teaches that “one sin leads to another.” Every sin that a person commits creates a barrier between his soul and God⁶ and clouds his vision.⁷ The light of the Divine Presence no longer shines on the sinner, and he moves farther away, tempted into further sin. Adding insult to injury, Cain becomes, in the words of Rashi (Gen. 4:9), “like one who steals the Supreme Knowledge,” one who tries to deceive God. Instead of admitting his deed, he denies it, saying, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (v. 9)

Cain’s punishment corresponds to his offense. He spilled his brother’s blood and hid it with earth, and so his curse is carried out through the earth. He “stole the Supreme Knowledge,” in arrogance, as if God does not watch over His world. Divine providence abandoned him, and he was hidden from God’s countenance. Malbim (Gen. 4:12) explains that Cain “was left to circumstances” and became “a fugitive and a wanderer.”

Cain is punished twice, and both punishments are similar to the ones his father received. Adam was cursed through his relationship to the earth; so was Cain. His father was sentenced to expulsion and banishment; Cain as well. But Adam was not totally exiled from the earth; he could still eat bread earned by the sweat of his brow. Cain, in contrast, was thoroughly cursed in his relationship to the ground, as it

6. See Is. 59, and Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance* 7:7. Translations of *Mishneh Torah* are taken from *Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah (Yad HaHazaka)*, ed. Philip Birnbaum, NY: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1985. [Translators’ Note]

7. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, *Orot HaTeshuva (Lights of Repentance)* 7:5. See a fuller discussion of this in the chapter on *Parashat Ki Tetzeh*.

is written, “it shall no longer yield its strength to you” (Gen. 4:12), nor would it allow him to rest his body.

Cain’s father was expelled, and so was he. Adam was exiled from the Garden of Eden, but he was not completely removed from Eden’s surroundings. Rather, he settled outside of Eden, and the blade of the ever-turning sword guarded the way to the Tree of Life. This explains the understanding of our sages that Adam would still have merited returning to Eden, if he could have proven himself worthy of passing the guard.⁸ Cain, however, was exiled from every place, condemned to be a fugitive and a wanderer. Everywhere he went, the earth shook under his feet. Radak (Gen. 4:12) comments that he roamed from place to place, “wandering like a drunk.” Providence deserted him, and he was left to the ravages of destiny: “whoever meets me will kill me” (v. 14).

God gave the Jewish people the glory of His name, as it is stated, “Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of God is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you” (Deut. 28:10). This glory was taken away from Cain, and no one would ever revere him again. God gave humanity dominion over all creatures, as it is written, “You gave him dominion over Your handiwork, You placed everything under his feet” (Ps. 8:7). For Cain, this dominion disappeared. He denied the purpose for which glory and dominion were given to him. They were taken from him because he spilled human blood, which contaminates the earth and banishes the image of God from the world.

The mishna (Sanhedrin 6:5) says, “While a man is suffering [from punishment for having sinned], what expression does the Divine Presence use? ‘I am burdened by My head; I am burdened by My arm!’” This refers to Deuteronomy 21:22–23, which speaks of a criminal being put to death. Even while a criminal is enduring pain, God says, “I am in pain.” How much more so, then, does God feel pain over the murder of an innocent person.

Most importantly, Cain’s right to stand before God in prayer and sacrifice was taken away, as Ramban (Gen. 4:13) explains. This is how Cain understood his terrible punishment, and this is why he said, “I will be hidden from Your presence” (v. 14). He could no longer perceive

8. *Sefat Emet to Parashat Bereshit.*

God's countenance. Prayer means to approach God; if one has spilled the blood of another human, who was created in God's image, how can he stand before Him? Truly, this is a terrible punishment. How can a person exist without the right to stand before his Creator?

Our discussion began with Eve's statement, "I have acquired a man with God" (Gen. 4:1), revealing the partnership between humanity and God in the miraculous first act of her creating new life in the world. This segment of the *parasha* ends with fratricide. It commenced with Cain's prayer to stand before God, his will to see His countenance, and his desire to bring Him an offering. It closes with the dreadful punishment of Cain's utter expulsion from God's countenance.

Cain did not succeed in restoring what his parents had ruined; he could not subjugate his instincts. Instead he plunged into a fit of jealousy and wrath. His countenance fell and his spirit disintegrated. Finally, he was expelled from the world.

Adam's son, who had been the reservoir of such hopes for *tikkun* (repairing, perfecting), failed. Will another of Adam's descendants succeed in achieving this *tikkun*?