

וְהָיָה
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The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 31a) relates that a gentile asked the sage Hillel to convert him, but on the condition that he learn only the *Torah She'bichsav* / Written Law, and not the *Torah She'be'al Peh* / Oral Law. Hillel agreed to teach him.

On the first day of their lessons, Hillel showed the gentile the letters of the *Aleph-Bet* and taught him: "*Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Dalet*," and so on. The next day, Hillel reversed the order of the letters. (*Rashi z"l* writes: For example, he may have told the gentile that an *Aleph* is a *Tav*, a *Bet* is a *Shin*, and so on.) The gentile said to Hillel: "That is not what you told me yesterday." Hillel replied: "You see that it is impossible to learn what is written without relying on an oral tradition. Didn't you rely on me for this? So, too, rely on me regarding the *Torah She'be'al Peh*, and accept its interpretations." [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Avraham ben David z"l ("*Ra'avad*"; Posquières, Provence; died 1198) writes similarly about the first verse in our *Parashah*: "*Bereishit bara Elokim* / In the beginning of *Elokim's* creating..." He writes: The *Kabbalah* / Received Oral Tradition is the foundation of all *Mitzvot*. ("*Kabbalah*" in this context does not refer to mysticism, but to received tradition--though *Ra'avad* was, in fact, one of the foremost Kabbalists of his era.) Without a *Kabbalah*, *Ra'avad* writes, how would we know what words mean--for example, how would we know that "*Bereishit*" means "In the beginning," or that "*Elokim*" is a Name of G-d? Therefore, we should rely on the sages of earlier times, who received all the details of the *Mitzvot*, as well as how to derive the Oral Law from the Written Law, from their fathers, and they from their fathers. (*Peirush Ha'Ra'avad L'Beraita D'Rabbi Yishmael*)

בראשית

Shabbat

R' Reuven Sasson *shlita* (rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Ramat Ha'sharon, Israel) writes: Man was created on the sixth day of Creation. This teaches us that man was not created for the purpose of working all week. Rather, his calling was to prepare for *Shabbat* and immediately "enter" it. That was meant to be his "place."

However, man sinned and was expelled from that idyllic state. Thereafter, he would need to repair what he had damaged. He was cursed (*Bereishit* 3:19), "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread"--as a result of which he would need to work six days a week. Man was expelled from the Garden of Eden, the place where he belongs, to a place that lacks perfection, a place where he must toil to rectify that which is damaged.

R' Sasson continues: It is written in earlier works that Adam's sin damaged him only externally; his *Neshamah* / soul, his internal essence, was left unblemished by his sin. The existence of an unblemished *Neshamah* is what guarantees that mankind will eventually succeed in repairing itself. The fact that the inner self is already in a perfect state drives man to search for that part of himself and causes the *Neshamah* to influence man's outer self.

Phrased differently, R' Sasson continues, a sin causes a person to become separated from himself; it is an act of treason towards oneself. This is the deeper meaning behind the question that *Hashem* asked Adam after his sin (*Bereishit* 3:9), "Where are you?"--Where is your true essence? Why have you allowed yourself to become enslaved to the serpent and its belief system?

R' Sasson adds: R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) offers a similar explanation for the verse (*Yechezkel* 1:1), "I was in the midst of the exile." R' Kook writes: The true "I"--whether of the individual or the community--can be revealed only in a state of purity. When man sinned, he could not give a clear answer to the question: "Where are you?" (*B'ohr Panecha: Shmot* p.54-55)

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“And Lemech said to his wives, ‘Adah and Tzilah, hear my voice; wives of Lemech, listen: Have I slain a man by my wound and a child by my bruise? If Kayin suffered vengeance at seven generations, then Lemech at seventy-seven!’” (4:23-24)

Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi z”l (Spain; 1320-1376) writes: The entire story of Lemech is an enigma that can be understood only in light of our Sages’ explanation that Lemech’s wives did not want to bear children because those children would be the seventh generation from Kayin, when *Hashem*’s promise to punish Kayin was destined to be fulfilled. Lemech tried to assuage his wives’ fears with a *Kal va’chomer* / *a fortiori* argument that *Rashi* z”l describes as absurd. Why was this story recorded in the Torah? R’ Nissim writes that it is meant to inform us that even though they knew that the world would soon be destroyed, they did not repent. Had they done so, they would have been saved as Noach was. Instead, Lemech made an absurd argument that *Hashem* would postpone punishment almost indefinitely, and that is why the Flood came. (*Peirush Ha’Ran Al Ha’Torah*)

“Hashem said, ‘My spirit shall not tolerate man forever, since he is but flesh; his days shall be a hundred and twenty years’.” (6:3)

R’ Moshe ben Nachman z”l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: Hashem is saying that His Spirit will not remain within man forever, for man is flesh like all living things that crawl on the earth, like birds, domestic animals, and wild animals, and he is not worthy of having the spirit of G-d within him. The idea is that *Hashem* made man upright (*Kohelet* 7:29) so he would be like the ministering angels by virtue of the soul that *Hashem* placed within him. Instead, however, man pursues matters of the flesh, his material desires, until he is like an animal. Therefore, I will no longer preserve My Spirit within him.

(*Be’ur Ha’Ramban Al Ha’Torah*)

We say daily in *Shacharit*, “The preeminence of man over beast is *Ayin* / nonexistent.” R’ Chanoch Zundel z”l (Poland; died 1867) comments: Man’s powers are a microcosm of all the powers in the world, and in this way he is elevated above animals. However, that is true only if he uses his powers to pursue Torah study and *Mitzvah* performance. If, however, he uses his powers to pursue the same goals that animals pursue, then the difference between him and beasts is nonexistent.

In his commentary to *Ne’ilah*, where the same phrase appears, R’ Chanoch Zundel writes: “*Ayin*” (“אין”) is an acronym of “*Adam Yesh Neshamah*” / “Man has a soul.” The real difference between man and beast is that man has a Divine soul. If man does not choose to make that the focus of his life, then there is no difference between him and a beast.

(*Etz Yosef in Siddur Otzar Ha’tefilot*)

“Hashem Elokim formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul.” (2:7)

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim’s Sha’arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) notes that the Torah does not say, “And man had within him a living soul.” Rather it says, “And man became a living soul.” He explains:

Ancient philosophers believed that man’s greatest achievement is honing his intellect. Abstract knowledge was glorified, while the imperative to use one’s intellect for good was downplayed. As a result, the importance of the Torah, with its requirement to actively perform *Mitzvot*, was denied, as was belief in *Techiyat Ha’metim* / resurrection of the dead. After all, of what value is man’s physical existence, compared to his abstract intellect?

That, says our verse, is not the Torah’s perspective. The Torah teaches us not just to use our intellects, but to let our intellects transform us—not to “have” living souls, but to “be” living souls. (*Mei Marom* I p.58-59)

“Elokim said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth . . .’” (1:28)

R’ Levi ben Gershon z”l (Provence; 1288–1344) writes: It is fitting that you know that this *Mitzvah* was taught at *Har Sinai* along with all the other *Mitzvot* of the Torah, for the Torah was not given little-by-little. The entire Torah was given by Moshe, as the Torah and Prophets reinforce many times—for example (*Devarim* 33:4), “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov,” and (*Malachi* 3:22), “Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant.” Moshe Rabbeinu achieved a unique level of prophecy, so it is fitting that the entire Torah be given through him. Thus, we find that the *Mitzvah* of *Milah* / circumcision, which was commanded to Avraham, was repeated to *Bnei Yisrael* (*Vayikra* 12:3), “On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” It is appropriate that the entire Torah be taught at once because it all serves one purpose: to bring about mankind’s success. (*Perushei Rabbag Al Ha’Torah*)

“Kayin spoke with his brother Hevel. And it happened when they were in the field, that Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him.” (4:8)

Midrash Rabbah relates: About what were they arguing? This one said, “The *Bet Hamikdash* will be built in my portion,” and this one said, “The *Bet Hamikdash* will be built in my portion.” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Moshe Yechiel Epstein z”l (1889-1971; *Ozharover Rebbe* in New York and Tel Aviv) writes: Our Sages are teaching how low a person can fall because of haughtiness. Of all things, Kayin and Hevel were discussing the *Bet Hamikdash*. There was no acrimony or hatred, as we read, “Kayin spoke with his brother Hevel”—as two brothers discuss something. Suddenly, “Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel”—he was still his brother—and killed him.” How is this possible?

R’ Epstein answers: Kayin knew that *Hashem* preferred Hevel, and that he (Kayin) should subdue himself before his brother. Nevertheless, his haughtiness prevented him from doing so, with the result that we know. (*Be’er Moshe*)