

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [337]

Such is the Power of Repentance, and I Did Not Know⁷

Insights into Genesis Rabbah 22:13

(Thank you to my son Ilan, for bringing this story to my attention)



Albrecht Dürer | Cain Killing Abel | The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Background to Our Story (What you need to know to better understand the story)

Genesis Chapter 3

¹ Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" ² The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. ³ It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, ⁵ but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." ⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." ¹¹ Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman You put at my side — she gave me of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate."

¹⁴ Then the Lord God said to the serpent,

*"Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be*

*Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl
And dirt shall you eat
All the days of your life.
¹⁵ I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel."*

¹⁶ And to the woman He said,

*"I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
In pain shall you bear children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."*

¹⁷ To Adam He said,

*"Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'
Cursed be the ground because of you;
By toil shall you eat of it
All the days of your life:
¹⁸ Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
But your food shall be the grasses of the field;
¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return to the ground —
For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return."*

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. ²¹ And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

²² And the Lord God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!"²³ So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken.²⁴ He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis Chapter 4

¹ Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of the Lord." ² She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. ³ In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil; ⁴ and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering, ⁵ but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. ⁶ And the Lord said to Cain,

*"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?
⁷ Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right*

*Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."*

⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ The Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ Then He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! ¹¹ Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth."

¹³ Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear! ¹⁴ Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth — anyone who meets me may kill me!" ¹⁵ The Lord said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him. ¹⁶ Cain left the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Psalm 92:1-2

מְזֻמָּר שִׁיר לְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:
טוֹב לְהַדוֹת לַיהוָה וּלְזַמֵּר לְשִׁמְךָ עֲלֵינוּ:

A psalm. A song; for the sabbath day.

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, to sing praises to Your name, O Most High,

The Text: Genesis Rabbah 22:13

וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלְּפָנֵי ה' (בראשית ד, טז)

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רַבִּי חָמָא בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק אָמַר, יֵצֵא שְׂמֵת, הִיךְ מָה דְאַתְּ אָמַר (שמות ד, יד): הִנֵּה הוּא יֵצֵא לְקִרְאָתְךָ וְגו', פִּגְעַע בּוֹ אָדָם הֲרֵאשׁוֹן אָמַר לוֹ מָה נַעֲשֶׂה בְּדִינְךָ, אָמַר לוֹ עֲשִׂיתִי תְּשׁוּבָה וְנִתְפַּשְׂרְתִּי. הִתְחִיל אָדָם הֲרֵאשׁוֹן מְטַפַּח עַל פָּנָיו, אָמַר, כִּי הִיא כְּחָה שֶׁל תְּשׁוּבָה וְאֲנִי לֹא הֵייתִי יוֹדֵעַ, מִיָּד עָמַד אָדָם הֲרֵאשׁוֹן וְאָמַר (תהלים צב, א): מְזֻמָּר שִׁיר לְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וְגו'. אָמַר רַבִּי לִוֵּי הַמְּזֻמָּר הִנֵּה אָדָם הֲרֵאשׁוֹן אָמְרוּ וְנִשְׁתַּפַּח מְדוּרוֹ וּבָא מִשָּׁה וְחָדְשׁוּ עַל שְׁמוֹ, מְזֻמָּר שִׁיר לְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת טוֹב לְהַדוֹת לַה' וְגו'.

"Cain departed [*vayetze*] from the presence of the Lord, and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (Genesis 4:16).

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Rabbi Ḥama said in the name of Rabbi Ḥanina bar Rabbi Yitzḥak: He departed joyfully, just as it says: "Here he is going out [*yotze*] to meet you [and he will see you and he will rejoice in his heart]" (Exodus 4:14).

Adam the first man encountered him [Cain]. He said to him: What became of your sentence? He [Cain] said to him [to Adam]: I repented and reached a settlement.

Adam the first man began beating himself on the face, saying: Such is the power of repentance, and I did not know. Immediately, Adam the first man stood and said: "A psalm, a song for the Shabbat day..." (Psalms 92:1). Rabbi Levi said: Adam the first man said this Psalm, but it was forgotten from his generation, and Moses came and reintroduced it in his own name: **Psalms 90–100 are attributed to Moses (Bava Batra 14b and Rashi).** "A psalm, a song for the Shabbat **Shabbat is expounded in the sense of repentance [teshuva].** day. It is good to give thanks [lehodot] **Lehodot is expounded in the sense of confession [vidui].** to the Lord..." (Psalms 92:1–2).



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? How does Rabbi Hanina bar Rabbi Yitzhak learn from the verse in Exodus that Cain left God's presence joyfully?

Bonus ? Cain repented and reached a settlement. What settlement did Cain reach?

Bonus ? From Adam's reply to Cain, we see that he knew what repentance was, but he just didn't know the power of repentance. What is the power of repentance?

? Why did Adam beat himself in the face?

Bonus ? Why do you think Adam didn't repent after being confronted by God in the Garden of Eden?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Rereading Psalm 92: "A psalm, a song for teshuvah (repentance). It is good to confess to the Lord..." (Psalms 92:1–2). Why is confessing to the Lord good?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from This Text.

- ! The power of saying I am sorry: a lesson Cain taught his father.



Our short story brings us back to the beginning of humanity, when both Adam, the first human being, and Cain, his first son, transgressed God’s will. In our story, Cain teaches his father and all of us the power of repentance. There is weight to our actions. If we have the power to hurt, we also have the power to take a step toward healing. When we apologize, we open the door for the other person -or for God- to meet us in that place of open communication. Our story reminds us that the ability to say “I am sorry” not only doesn’t make you weak but empowers you and opens new doors for you.