



ECHOES OF RASHI

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THE IMPERFECT BEGINNING OF TESHUVAH

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל ה' גָּדוֹל עוֹנִי מִנֶּשֶׂא: (ד:י"ג)

Kayin said to God, "My sin is too great to bear!"

רש"י: "עוֹנִי מִנֶּשֶׂא" - בְּתַמִּיָּה, אֲתָה טוֹעֵן
עַל יוֹנִים וְתַחְתּוֹנִים, וְעוֹנִי אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לִטְעֵן?

"My sin is too great to bear" – This is a question: You bear the worlds above and below, and is it impossible for You to bear my sin?

Kayin says: "Gadol avoni mi'neso." On the surface, he sounds contrite. Kayin seems to confess, acknowledging that his sin is too great to bear. It appears to mark the first moment of human remorse, the first stirrings of teshuvah.

But Rashi overturns this reading entirely. Based on Kayin's continued defiance (as we see in pasuk 16), Rashi reads "Vayeitzei Kayin milifnei Hashem" – his fleeing from God – b'tmi'ah, as a challenge rather than a confession. Far from humbled, Kayin is indignant. He says to Hashem: "Ata to'ein elyonim v'tachtonim, v'avoni ee efshar lecha lito'ein?" – "You can bear the heavens and the earth, and You cannot bear my sin?" Instead of owning his crime, Kayin deflects it back toward Heaven and questions divine justice.

And yet, astonishingly, Chazal call Kayin the first baal teshuvah. The Midrash contrasts

him with Adam. When Adam later encounters his son and learns that he repented and was partially forgiven, he exclaims, "Had I known that teshuvah was possible, I also would have repented!" He then composes "Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos: Tov L'Hodos LaHashem."

This is remarkable. Kayin's teshuvah is weak and self-justifying, yet it is still teshuvah. There is no remorse, no clear acceptance of guilt, and not even a promise to improve. But the very act of speaking to God, of acknowledging sin in any form, begins the process.

Rashi thus teaches a humbling truth about repentance: Teshuvah can begin in layers, gradations, and fragile beginnings. Even a broken, half-hearted return is still a return.

WAS GOD TOO FAR AWAY?

וְלִשְׁתָּהּ גַּם הוּא יָלַד בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ אֶנוֹשׁ אֲזַי
הוֹחֵל לִקְרֹא בְּשֵׁם ה': (ד:כ"ו)

And to Sheis, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. Then it was begun to call God by name.

רש"י: "אֲזַי הוֹחֵל" - לְשׁוֹן חֲלוּן, לִקְרֹא אֶת שְׁמוֹת
הָאֱדָם וְאֵת שְׁמוֹת הָעֲצִיבִים בְּשֵׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקֶּבֶ"ה
לְעִשְׂתוֹת עֲבוּדָה זָרָה וְלִקְרוֹתָן אֱלֹהוֹת:

"Then it was begun [to call, etc.]" – The word הוֹחֵל must be connected in meaning with חוּלִין ("profane matters"), viz., calling the names of men and the names of idols after the name of the Holy One, blessed be He – making them the objects of idolatrous worship and calling them deities.

On the surface, this sounds like a turning point, as if humanity is beginning to reach toward Hashem in prayer.

But Rashi, based on Chazal, reads it in the opposite direction. “Likro b’shem Hashem” here means to misuse His Name, to apply it to others. People began assigning divinity to created things, to leaders, to statues, to the sun and the stars. This is the beginning of avodah zarah.

Rashi does not directly connect this shift to what came before, but the placement suggests a pattern. The earlier stories in the parshah have already described a world shaped by distance: Adam after the sin, Kayin after the murder, Lemech and his wives living with fear and uncertainty about the future. In each case there is consequence, with very little sense of return. The relationship with Hashem feels strained, even inaccessible.

When God is experienced that way, as distant, as a source of judgment without a clear path back, people begin to look for something else to hold on to. They turn toward what they can see and touch, toward figures and forces that feel closer and more responsive. Kings, statues, the sun, the stars. Anything that seems nearer than a God who feels far away.

Later in history we learned tools that change that experience – teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah: ways to respond to, soften, and even overturn harsh decrees. But in those early generations, people did not yet know that a person can return, that distance is not final. When it feels like there is no way back, the human instinct is to seek substitutes that feel closer.

The first turn toward avodah zarah grows out of that space. It begins as a search for closeness after the relationship with Hashem has grown distant. When a person no longer

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experiences closeness to Hashem, he naturally begins looking elsewhere to fill that void. That search can easily end with created idols replacing the One Creator.

LEARNING TO LIVE OUTSIDE EDEN

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ
וּמִמַּעֲבֹבוֹ יְדִינוּ מִן הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אִרְדָּה ה': (ה"כ"ט)

And he named him Noach, saying, “This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil that God placed under a curse.”

רש"י: "זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ" - יִנַּח מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת עֲבֹבוֹ יְדִינוּ. עַד שְׁלֹא בָּא נֹחַ לֵאמֹר הִיא הָאֵרֶץ כְּלִי מַחֲרָשׁ וְהוּא הַכֵּין לָהֶם, וְהִיתָה הָאֶרֶץ מוֹצִיָּא קוֹצִים וְדוֹדָרִים כְּשׁוֹזְרֵי עֵשִׂים, מִקְלָלָתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרָאוּשׁוֹ, וּבִימֵי נֹחַ נִחָה, וְזֶהוּ יִנְחַמְנוּ, וְאִם לֹא תִפְרָשׁוּהוּ כִּךְ אֵין טַעַם הַלְשׁוֹן נוֹפֵל עַל הַשֵּׁם וְאַתָּה צָרִיךְ לִקְרוֹת שְׁמוֹ מִנְחָם:

“This one will provide us relief” – He will ease from off us the toil of our hands. For until Noach came, people had no agricultural instruments and he prepared such for them. The earth had brought forth thorns and thistles when they sowed wheat in consequence of the curse imposed upon Adam HaRishon; in the days of Noach, however, this ceased. This is what is meant by the word יִנְחַמְנוּ. If, however, you do not explain it in this

manner, but from the root נחם, “to comfort,” then the meaning you give to this expression will have no application to the name נח, and you would have to call him מנחם, “Comforter.”

Parshas Bereishis opens with drama: creation, Gan Eden, the first sin. It closes more quietly, but far more heavily.

We encounter a world living in the shadow of two falls – Adam’s fall and Kayin’s fall. Life stretches long, but it feels thin. People live for centuries, yet those years do not accumulate into something lasting. Children are born, generations stretch on, and then they disappear. The Torah records names, but offers almost no stories. There is continuity, but little sense of growth. Humanity exists, but it does not yet seem to be building.

Into that quiet decline, something new appears. Noach is born from the line of Sheis, not Kayin. For the first time since the naming of Adam and his immediate family, the Torah pauses to explain a name: “Zeh yenachameinu.” This child will bring relief. The very meaning of his name reflects the state of the world itself.

The word reaches back to Gan Eden. Life after the sin is marked by itzavon, by strain, effort, and a certain heaviness that settles over

existence. Chavah brings children into the world through pain and fear. Adam works a land that resists him, producing thorns and thistles. Sustenance comes only through effort. The world no longer gives easily.

When Noach is born, they are hoping for relief rather than redemption, which is still far away. “Mei’itzvon yadeinu” – that the burden might ease, even slightly; that life might become a bit more bearable.

Rashi places that hope in something very concrete. Noach first helps people live with-in the world’s difficulty; only later will he save the world from destruction. In his time, humanity begins to respond to the curse: to develop tools, to work the earth with greater success, to draw life from ground that had become resistant. The curse does remain, but it is no longer absolute. It begins to soften under human effort.

That is the meaning of Noach’s name: some easing of tragedy rather than its erasure. The struggle remains, but it no longer weighs the same.

Bereishis closes without resolution. It ends with a quiet shift. In a world shaped by loss and weight, the first sign of change is gradual: the emergence of human resilience, and the ability to respond, to create, and to begin easing the burden of life beyond Eden. ■

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