The Origins of Human Violence and The Crisis of the Biblical First Family

Cain and Abel in Torah, Commentary, Midrash, Art, Poetry, Movies and Thought

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The Origins of Human Violence and The Crisis of the Biblical First Family

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ORIENTATION

Any Biblical story can be taught in an infinite variety of ways. On one pole is the **textual focus** in which any text can generate an infinite number of themes that makes it difficult to converge on a particular value. On the other pole the **thematic focus** uses the text for a predetermined point that sometimes forces the text. In this unit we try to get the best of both approaches. The text comes first in very small bite-size pieces followed by the brainstorming of questions. Then we focus on a few **kushiyot** (questions) and we reflect on a literary reading of the text in the light of these questions. Finally we build a conversation of commentators – both ancient and modern, both interpretations of **pshat** (contextual, historical interpretation) and of midrash (imaginative reconstruction). We do not here seek to evaluate the commentators as to how well they understood the historic text but only how they related to the theme and the questions. We seek to offer several conceptual models to each theme. Ideally the students will also be invited to join the process of intergenerational unpacking and extrapolating upon and interrogating the Torah in light of our burning issues of violence and human conflict.

Each unit is built around:
- a very brief unit of text, like Genesis 4: 1-2,
- a focal theme, like birth order and parental expectation
- specific kushiyot we have posed from a close reading of the text like why Abel’s name is not explained
- a conversation of commentators, like Rabbi Elazar, Erich Fromm, Rashi, and Nahum Sarna
- activities, like analyzing the artistic interpretation of Abel Pann or putting Cain or God on trial

Our major themes include:

**SECTION ONE: PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS – ADAM, EVE AND CAIN**  
(Genesis 4: 1-2)

**SECTION TWO: SIBLING RIVALRIES: CAIN AND ABEL** (Genesis 4:2-5)

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STARRING JAMES DEAN BASED ON THE NOVEL BY JOHN STEINBECK
INTRODUCING GENESIS 4:
THREE THEMES AND TWO METHODS AND ONE ART ACTIVITY

As educators we may let issues arise inductively and discursively from the text of the Torah or we can frame the big questions in order to define the universe of discourse of our study and then read closely for clues to that major question. The existentialist philosopher of Judaism, Abraham Joshua Heschel, insisted that the proper study of traditional text begins with these big philosophical questions for Jewish texts are attempts to answer them, not merely historical facts or maxims to be handed down from generation to generation – lest we forget. Heschel’s great fear was that we would forget the questions.

Below are three thematic framings by which an educator may introduce the student to the importance of the story of Cain and Abel so as to focus one’s attention and to arouse the associations from life and literature and the rest of the Torah that we wish our students to bring to the brief text we are exploring. As Judah Goldin, professor of Midrash, wrote: “Text and experience are mutually enlightening.” Thus the framing helps the students marshal experience to illumine the text and to identify existentially meaningful phenomena on which the text may shed its light for the student. While many Biblical subjects transcend the student’s world, here the story of Cain and Abel concerns an area of family conflict and sibling rivalry in which the students’ associations and feelings have much to contribute to illuminate the text and its commentators.

**Theme 1: The Question of Violence.**

The story of Cain and Abel is about violence – the first murder – so it serves as an eternal archetype. The early part of Genesis 1-11 is a series of etiological stories, stories constructed in mythical terms to provide answers to the essential questions of human life, of which there were many. How was the world created? How were people created? Where does sex come from? Why is childbirth so painful? How was language created? How were nations created? All these questions are "must" questions, the questions that must occur to human beings groping towards full consciousness of their existence. In that sense the often-asked question whether these stories are "true", misses the point. They are true in a very deep sense which may have nothing to do with the historical. They are true in the sense that they are stories which represent the deepest attempts of people to find fundamental answers to the most important questions that they have. They represent, to the people who first related them, the ultimate truths of their time.

The stories of Genesis 1-11 are true not necessarily because they happened but because they happen – the paradigm repeats – more or less as a model, not as a detailed predestined prophecy that forecloses free choice. They do not in fact offer us “causal explanations” of the origin of human phenomena but theoretical models of the factors involved in most similar cases expressed in the form of concrete first case. This style of explanation was typical of the seventeenth and eighteenth century when philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau spoke of the state of nature out of which the world of human culture emerged.

The story of Cain and Abel explores the meaning of - and the reasons for - violence between people. It is a story about why God's purported attempt to create a good world with good people created in the Divine image, ultimately failed to achieve its goals. It is a story about the deep impulses inside of people, the dark side of human nature, which can cause people to raise their hands.
against each other. It is a story both about why people attacked each other at the beginning of time and why they continue to do so today. In that sense it is profoundly contemporary.

Genesis 4 is not just about violence in general. It is specifically about one aspect of family violence, that plague of our world which features so commonly, and at first glance, so counter-intuitively in the headlines of our morning papers in which family members often become the greatest threat to each other on a physical level.

Theme 2: The Question of Sibling Rivalry.

The story of Cain and Abel is about rivalry between siblings, an archetype that shows us the worst scenario – rivalry turned to fratricide. The brothers derive from the same parents, the same race, both of them have ties to each other with common blood and common origin. Yet the hatred and jealousy comes between two brothers. Though fratricide is unusual within a nuclear family the rage and often the language “I could kill you” are frequent. It is a plague that causes parents to despair, forgetting, for the moment, the fact that so many of them were themselves part of the same tensions and rivalries when they were younger. It is not by chance that one of the primary themes of our first sacred text, is precisely the tensions between siblings. Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers – all of these represent variations on the same theme. They will continue well past the Torah into the other books of the Bible, but the family stories of the Torah provide the primary material for the examination of the subject. Just like numerous family sagas in modern literature, we see the first multi-generational family epic, characterized time after time, generation after generation, by the terrible rivalry and passions that occur when brothers and sisters clash deeply over the material of everyday life. If the first family is the archetypal model by which we come to understand ourselves and perhaps, if we are lucky, to transcend its limitations, then this story is about us.

Theme 3: The Question of Self-Control and Human Nature.

"Cain tried to control his rage but, as Buddha pointed out some time later, it takes practice to develop skill in self-control, and Cain was given no opportunity to acquire the skill. This is the reason God eventually agreed to mitigate Cain's punishment."-- David Curzon, The View from Jacob's Ladder, 17

The story of Cain and Abel is about the loss of self-control. It leads to introspection on God’s own advice and raises the question of our ability to act freely and rationally when passions crouch like demons to attack us. Rabbinic midrash in Breshit Rabbah develops the notion of yetzer hara – the inclination or passion for evil – in its treatment of Genesis 4:7.

Even after the warning from God, Cain seems unable or unwilling to master his passions and runs straight into an act which should have been avoided, which was counter productive but which he seemingly could not avoid. As such, he is a warning to all of us. If Hillel in a later generation is held up as a man whose self-control and lack of temper makes him a model for us, so, Cain, in this story represents the opposite, a terrible comment on the consequences of spontaneous passion which burst through the thin veneer of human culture that we have acquired over time.

Many of us know the reality of spontaneous anger which boils deep inside us and which we struggle to master with greater or lesser success. For those of us who recognize that as a part of us and a part of our behaviour, Cain represents a direct challenge. Can we control ourselves or are we doomed in
some way to pay the price of our violent impulses and to carry the mark of our weakness through the world?  Can we be giborim /heroes as defined by Pirkei Avot – hakoveish et yitzro / conquering our instincts?

4. Methods - Pshat and Midrash:
Two Approaches to the Search for Answers in the Torah

The story of Cain and Abel, became a timeless vehicle for the examination of the themes that we have outlined here (violence, sibling rivalry and lack of self-control), a form of narrative philosophical anthropology that begins to articulate but does not claim to solve all the problems. So it is hardly surprising that as each generation seeks to understand the perennial issues it returns to study the original model story.

What enabled them to do this are the many "holes" in the story. Gaps are inevitable in any complex story which attempts to tell itself in only sixteen essential verses. A modern novelist would take hundreds of pages to develop the powerful themes brought in the story. John Steinbeck took some seven hundred pages to work out some of the themes in his version, East of Eden. But the Biblical narrator took less than a page. The result, in inimitable Biblical fashion, are the holes. Some are obvious and hit us in even the most cursory reading: what did Cain say to Abel when they were in the field? Others only hit us on reflection and thought: why do Adam and Eve disappear? What did they have to say about the tragic events? And there are so many others.

The answers have been thought in two different mindsets, two different styles - Pshat and Midrash.

The midrashic commentators, old and new, had a more literary bent, more a style of fiction than non-fiction to express their own concerns and their own generation, exploring the prismatic story of Genesis 4 to do that. Their tool for doing this was the creation of midrash to fill gaps and to write or rewrite the story in a literary way. Early rabbinic generations during the Greco-Roman era in Eretz Yisrael developed classic midrashim often as part of their public sermons in the synagogue prior to Torah reading. Modern generations in the 20th century developed their own "midrashim" in the form of literary and artistic retellings, poems, art, dialogues, and introspective psychological musing. In this booklet we will draw selectively on the plethora of texts, literary and artistic, that provide the full multi-generational midrashic response in the widest sense of the word. We will explore all three of the themes mentioned here, one at a time, in the order in which they appear in the text, sibling rivalry, self control and violence, and we will attempt to draw the students into the text through an examination of the subjects examined. Our aims are to show the student the timeless nature of the issues and to illustrate how the specific text has served as a prism through which numerous scholars and thinkers in different generations have attempted to offer their opinions and to enter the endless debate. In addition to a careful pshat reading of the text, we will attempt to illustrate the richness and fascination of the midrashic process and encourage the participants to enter the debate and to identify as part of the process.

Pashtan versus Darshan: Strict Contextual Reading and Imaginative Reconstruction

1 Pshat commentaries, medieval and modern, write analytically rather than literarily and they seek to be loyal to the historical context of the Torah. However they too are often midrashic in the sense not of their literary form, but in the way they betray the subjective concerns and assumptions of their generation. Whether or not they are good pshat, they are also midrash – maintaining a certain deeply felt understanding, in our case, of the origin of human violence – and as such they too have a value independent of their scientific accuracy.
In this booklet we use a large amount of traditional sources and it is important to make a distinction between the two different genres of traditional commentary, peshat and derash, that were used to elucidate the meaning of the biblical text. They were different forms that co-existed in the rabbinic world and it is easy to confuse them for they often overlap and they share some common ground. But let us define them in comparative terms so as to emphasise the salient features of each genre and to enable both comparison and distinction between them. Let us immediately state that when we use the term derash or midrash here, we are talking of the narrative genre known as midrash aggadah rather than the legal genre known as midrash halacha, which shares some but by no means all of the features of aggadic derash that we are outlining here. Midrash halacha plays no part in our booklet and therefore we do not explain the specifics of the genre here.

There are many scholarly characterizations of midrash aggadah. Sometimes it is restricted to the classical period of its creation by the Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael during the Hellenist Greco-Roman period. Sometimes it is assimilated to the oral literature of popular legends as in the usual translation of Sefer Ha-Aggadah. We however will propose a characterization by its motives and underlying theories of Torah in contrast to the pashtan – both the contemporary scholarly pashtan and the classical medieval pashtan. For us these are schools of interpretation that continue to produce commentary even today and that continue to beckon our students to participate in the process.

Both derash and peshat aim to interpret the text of the Torah (or the other biblical books) and they tend to cover the same ground. They usually take their departure point from specific words or phrases in the Torah text. However, it is there that the similarity tends to end. The aim of the 'pashtan' is to try and uncover through the use of philological tools or other logical or historical methods, the real "one and only" original meaning of the text as spoken to its first generation of hearers, its author’s one-intent. The supposition is that there exists one correct meaning in the text and that precise methodologies gives us the best chance to elucidate this meaning by helping us separate our subjective from the objective meanings. The pashtan wants to try and recover the meaning of the text as it was given at a certain moment in time and knowing that the historical context of contemporary readers is different and therefore misleading when reading an ancient text because language, values, literary forms, institutions and other historical contexts change. The golden age of traditional peshat was in the middle ages among the scholars of Ashkenaz, Spain and North Africa. The locus of the peshat was often in a polemic with other scholars who needed to refuted such as Karaites reading Bible carefully but independently from the rabbinic tradition, such as Christian scholars and Jewish apostates seeking to prove Christological readings from the Hebrew Bible, such as mystical or philosophic allegorists of the literal Bible. Inspired by historical, philological, grammatical and literary sciences developed in the Arab world and sharing perhaps the historical approach of the Christian 12th century Catholic Renaissance, pshat scholars argued with others and among themselves. Modern historical critical pashtanim use more sophisticated methods but their goal is the same. Pashtanim seek to strip away an accretion of misinterpretations to get a more accurate, more original meaning.

The 'darshan' also tries to uncover the meaning of the text but the focal point of that meaning was the meaning that the text should hold for the generation of the darshan. The darshan also sees the text as coming from God at Sinai, but the departure point is the belief that the text had been given for all generations and that each generation had the right – indeed the obligation – of uncovering the meaning that God had intended it to understand. In fact God has prepared meanings for us and made them implicit in the text. The divinity and truth of the text is its multi-vocality, its polysemious nature – its pluralism of what might otherwise might be thought of as contradictory messages. Torah is expected to have 70 faces, not one. The Torah has a dynamism of open-text still
revealing itself rather than a closed canon. Misinterpretation by heretics or foolish ahistorical readers is less a threat than irrelevance to the pressing needs of today. The best example of the **existential pressure** that gives birth to midrash is Rivka’s search for the meaning of her unusual pregnancy of the battling fetuses – *vateleich lidrash et Adonai* (Genesis 25: 22). Torah is meant to speak to those different needs as the Rabbinic midrashic manna matches the tastes of young and old simultaneously.

The darshan read the text as a contemporary text rather than as a one-time historical text, still relevant, but retaining its original meaning. The tools of the pashtan tend to be objective – philology was the central one – but the tools of the darshan are largely subjective. The darshan applied a creative imagination to the text in order to squeeze out answers even if the evidence is inadequate, gaps must be filled. The pashtan also offers hypotheses to fill gaps but seeks to be much more circumspect about the gap between evidence and hypothetical reconstruction. For the pashtan the meaning of the text stayed the same even if circumstances dictated different implications from time to time. Different midrashic messages can stand side by side, without any feeling that they imply a fatal contradiction, something that is not possible in the world of peshat, where a single objective truth is valued. Argument is essential to pshat world of advance though comparative attempts to reach truth. However midrash seeks to add new possibilities every time a text is read not to complete a best-reading as the final goal of historical research. In fact the darshan joins the author of the Torah in creating new Torah, new narratives, not just new comments on a fixed text.

The world of the classical darshan was a public world. He worked among a public and the typical locus of derash was the synagogue with scholarly and on-scholarly listeners whose interest in Torah reading must be aroused and who need relevant new meaning as well as entertaining formulations. The darshan sees the job as bringing forth the relevance of the text, of bringing it nearer to a public which is in danger of losing touch with the vitality of the text, either for linguistic reasons or for reasons of the subject or values of the text. The darshan looks always to emphasise the moral ideas which would convince his audience of the contemporary relevance of the text. To this extent, this mode of engagement with the public makes the darshan more a popular educator than a scholar. Certainly the darshan would always look to find ways to connect his story to the text through a series of suggestive hooks in the original text through which to anchor the midrash, but having established the connection to the text, one could sail off on the wings of a powerful - and legitimate – midrashic imagination. If the pashtan tends to maintain a primary loyalty to the original text being explaining, the darshan looks to the audience whose spiritual needs for connection to the Torah take precedence. The present rather than the past has a higher standing. After all for the darshan Torah is always contemporary, while the pashtan is always aware of historical change.

Despite these differences pashtanim and darshaimim have shared a close reading of text – though they have different sense of what is a legitimate context in which to interpret it. They have shared a sense that the Torah has deep meanings to convey and makes a claim on us. In fact many pashtanim such as Ramban have held that there are many levels of reading the Torah beyond pshat, but when playing the pshat game of interpretation there are strict rules which the darshan will not be bound by.

**Educational Caveat**

Many students of middle and high school struggling for their own self-definition are uncomfortable with midrashic readings that are not right or wrong, true or false Many students critical of the “myths” that their have been “sold” as children are impatient with midrash as uncritical tool of searching to truth. Yet we believe those same students often can appreciate fictional literature and its
sense of truth and they often believe in subjective pluralist truth even more strongly than objectively verifiable truth. Thus offering two different approaches – pshat and derash – comparing their advantages and disadvantages offers resources to both the proverbial left and right-brains of our students, so that they can draw on these resources when they are ready.
5. AN ARTISTIC INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY – ABEL PANN

For educators interested in using an activity to introduce (or to summarize the first reading) of the text of Cain and Abel, we suggest the art of Abel Pann.

☐ The Russian/Israeli artist, Abel Pann, who derived great inspiration from the Bible, drew or painted a number of scenes from the story of Cain and Abel. We bring three of them here. The three scenes bring in all the family members. The first shows Abel, the second shows Cain and the last of the three show Adam and Eve with Abel. After reading the story in the Biblical text, look at each of the scenes. Try and identify the scene in the text if you can. If it is a scene that you think does not appear in the Biblical text, identify it and say that it does not appear.

☐ Imagine that there is a thought bubble (as in a comic strip) coming out of the head of each of the figures. What do you think it would say? Don't write this in comic strip language but in a short precise sentence or two which captures as precisely as possible the thoughts and feelings of the character at the precise moment represented in the picture.

☐ Draw a fourth picture that you think needs to be represented in order for the story to be filled out as well as possible. Which crucial scene would you put in? Why that one? What thought bubble(s) would you put in there for the figure(s) that you have drawn?

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2 We believe strongly that a brief introductory activity is worthwhile before we enter in depth into any of the main themes. Sometimes an introductory activity indirectly introduces the themes, before entering into the actual story and characters. At other times, as in the example given here, the idea is to introduce the overall story and characters before breaking it up into constituent parts as we do in the booklet.

3 Questions for the students will be marked, as here by a small white square. They are phrased in language which is aimed at the student. Questions or exercises for the educator will be marked with a small black circle. These will give suggested directions for the educator. Occasionally, both sets of questions will appear together in one exercise.
ASKING KUSHIYOT AND COMPARATIVE TRANSLATION
AS COMMENTARY

Before we begin to discuss and interpret Torah we read the Hebrew text and often translate or read a translation out loud. Then the analysis begins seeking kushiot of all kinds. The brainstorming of difficulties in our first encounter with the text generates the curiosity out of the detailed features of the text, the texture of what was once printed on textiles. Each thread in the woof and warp of the words woven into a tapestry can be identified and given a tug to see how it functions. The search for coherence, for an explanation that makes the flow of the narrative seem natural, must be delayed until the questions are made explicit and the possibility of more than one pshat or midrash becomes plausible. Closure is not desirable at this stage, nor do we wish to close off exploration by quick answers or by ruling out in advance what seem like simplistic or off-target questions. The rules of brainstorming make the students’ queries valuable in and of themselves in a safe atmosphere. Do not allow other students to put down their fellow student’s questions or even answer them too quickly. There is plenty of time to weed out false starts later. We can however push our students to make explicit what bothered them in the particular text on which we are focusing. We can solicit the underlying assumptions about the Torah or about human life that generate their curiosity or sometimes anger at a text. The list of initial student generated questions – each with the student’s name attached – can guide further study as the teacher focuses the broad sweep of questions on the ones to be explored in depth with various tools.

The engagement in this initial process of interrogation of the Torah is more important than the bottomline “knowing” of the plot or the answer to the question – what does the sentence say. The goal is text study, not merely summarizing what happened. Of course students do need the plot facts and they can learn them in many ways – charts, skim reading in English, even cartoon retelling of Biblical history. But our goal is to show how much more can be learned from close reading of a text whose story may be well-known, since Jewish learning always circles back on classical texts to rejoin the multi-generational conversation they generate.

Paradoxically the best translations may be the worst enemies of close text study inspired by student kushiyot. The new JPS translation, for example, seeks smooth, contemporary flowing English prose style. Its historical scholarship is impressive but it sometimes makes our lives as commentators too easy. Everett Fox’s translation based on the Buber-Rosenzweig German translation seeks to preserve poetic style (repeating roots, midrash on Hebrew names, bizarre words, ambiguous syntax, oral reading breath pauses) so that the “bumps” in the textual flow, the texture and form evoke curiosity. He never lets us forget that this is translation from a different language and culture and that its translation is the beginning of a Buberian dialogue with God who gives this text its authority and its claim on us. After reading a translation we have not yet understood the text but we are just ready to begin to identify its difficulties and to interpret it.

One solution to this problem is to compare various translations. If Hebrew is the language of study, then some teachers ask the students to translate the text in their own words and then compare their efforts with alternative translations. A seminal text like hashomer achi anochi can be learned by heart in Hebrew and then comparative translation applied. In fact comparative translation can raise the student’s awareness of the importance of learning Biblical Hebrew.

Below you will find a chart of three great translations of Genesis 4, each with a different style.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King James Version</th>
<th>New Jewish Publication Society, TANAKH</th>
<th>Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.</td>
<td>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.”</td>
<td>The human knew Havva his wife, She became pregnant and bore Kayin. She said: Kaniti/I-have-gotten A man, as has YHWH!</td>
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<td>2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.</td>
<td>2 She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.</td>
<td>2 She continued bearing – his brother, Hevel. Now Hevel became a shepherd of flocks, and Kayin became a worker of the soil.</td>
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<td>3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.</td>
<td>3 In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil;</td>
<td>3 It was after the passing of days that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to YHWH,</td>
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<td>4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering;</td>
<td>4 and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering,</td>
<td>4 and as for Hevel, he too brought – from the firstborn of his flock, from their fat-parts. YHWH had regard for Hevel and his gift,</td>
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<td>5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.</td>
<td>5 but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell.</td>
<td>5 for Kayin and his gift he had no regard. Kayin became exceedingly upset and his face fell.</td>
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<td>6 And the LORD said to Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?</td>
<td>6 And the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you so distressed, And why is your face fallen?</td>
<td>6 YHWH said to Kayin: Why are you so upset? Why has your face fallen?</td>
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<td>7 If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou dost not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.</td>
<td>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.”</td>
<td>7 Is it not thus: If you intend good, bear-it-aloft, But if you do not intend good, At the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon, Toward you his lust – But you can rule over him.</td>
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<td>8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.</td>
<td>8 Cain said to his brother Abel … and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him.</td>
<td>8 Kayin said to his brother Hevel … But then it was, when they were out in the field That Kayin rose up against</td>
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<td>9 And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”</td>
<td>9 The LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”</td>
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brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?
10 And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth to me from the ground.
11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand;
12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield to thee its strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.
13 And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

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!”

Hevel his brother And he killed him.
9 YHWH said to Kayin: Where is Hevel your brother? He said: I do not know. Am I the watcher of my brother?
10 Now he said: What have you done! A sound – your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil.
11 And now, damned be you from the soil which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.
12 When you wish to work the soil it will not henceforth give its strength to you; wavering and wandering must you be on earth!
13 Kayin said to YHWH: My iniquity is too great to be borne!
SECTION ONE:  
PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS – ADAM, EVE AND CAIN  
(Genesis 4: 1-24)

Questions from the Text

Let us open by suggesting some questions that arise in the text.

1. Usually the birth of a person in the Bible is described or announced with a version of the word yadal. Here on the other hand, a more protracted description is given using the three words, ידע, ותהר, ותלד. Why?

2. What is the meaning of the word yada-ידע? Does it refer to sexual relations or to knowledge or to understanding? What is the relation of this verb and the exile from Eden where humans ate from the Tree of Knowledge? Did this act of knowing occur before or after the fall? Why might that matter? Why is Adam the subject and Eve the object in the first half of the verse and then why does Eve become the major actor?

3. Why was it Eve that gave the name to Cain? What is the meaning of the name and what, if anything, does the name and the way it appears say about the relationship between Eve, on the one hand, and Cain, Adam and God on the other? What is the meaning of the word את in the phrase "Kaniti ish et Adonai קניתי איש את ה?" What does all this say about the mother's expectations from the son?

4. Why is the way that Abel's birth is described so perfunctory at the beginning of the second verse? What might this tell us about the relations of Eve and Abel? Why does Adam disappear from the story?

The Family: Tensions and Expectations

The first verses of the story bring us straight into the new family situation following the birth of the second generation. Following some obscure comments expressing Eve's reaction to the birth of Cain (Gen. 4: 1), we are plunged into a whirlpool of difficult feelings, passions and jealousies which will ultimately bring the protagonists down into a vortex of violence.

Let us examine the new situation that is created with the birth of Cain.

The first instance of violence between humans is cited in the Bible in connection with the first children in the world, the second generation of the family of man, and it teaches us two things. First, there is a value judgment: violence stands in contradiction to the biological/familial love. The human who murders any human has betrayed his own brother and shed his blood, the shared familial blood. The lead words include dam, adam, adamah – hemoglobin, human, humus - as well as ach 'brother,' which is repeated seven times in this short chapter seemingly in order to emphasize the extent of Cain's betrayal. He should have looked after his brother ("Am I my brother's keeper?"), instead he killed him. This familial situation, the blood relationship, calls for responsibility between man and his fellow even in the absence of the explicit commandment "Thou shalt not kill''.

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4 In this first section we will actually deal only with the first verse and a half up to and including the words עלילה אשת ה in the second verse.
According to the Biblical history, all men are brothers in that they are descendants of the first man. The punishment of Cain can be seen as a warning against all bloodshed between men because it teaches men to see themselves as the sons of one and the same progenitor.

The second message of the family setting of the first murder relates to the causal explanation of the violence - the etiological question - how does it happen that brother murders brother? The story of Cain hints that this "unnatural" act grows precisely within the family framework. Those pressures and aspirations which could engender violence were created in the crucible of familial love. It is Cain, the son of parents with a history, memories, aspirations and disappointments, who murdered his brother. Fratricide does not occur despite the familial affinity to parents and brother but rather because of it. In order to understand man we must learn to appraise not merely his natural tendencies, inherent in all humans from birth, or the conflict and competition among material needs and interests; we must understand the family structure and its history. The story of the first murder is enmeshed in the story of the creation of the first family: "Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain..." Therefore we must follow the description of this family in the midrash in order to comprehend the burden with which the first son in the world was born and grew up, that son who was also the world's first murderer.

We begin our study of commentators relating to our question about the birth of Cain, the first human being born, from the vantage point of the father Adam and the mother Eve. As moderns we are taught to look for parental influences on the child that may be the key to his later violence. Our textual issue for Adam’s point of view is the word yada – “he knew.” However it seems as if the pshat approach has nothing to offer, it being so obvious from the context that yada means to have intercourse, to impregnate. Yet there are many synonyms for intercourse used in the Torah. What added literary associations and therefore psychological insights might be generated by looking at yada as intellectual or emotional knowledge. Here the classical midrashim are very fanciful and daring even if seemingly far from the pshat. Yet in the broader sense they too may contribute to pshat of the overall story.
On the Birth and Parental Background of Cain. Adam's Standpoint.

HA-ADAM YADA ET HAVA ISHTO⁵ - etc.

He knew how he had been robbed of his tranquility; he knew what Eve had done to him. R. Aha observed: 'The serpent was your serpent and you were Adam's serpent.'

Bereishit Rabbah Ch. 22

Genesis Rabbah explains the word "yada" - "knew" as evaluational knowledge, a deep comprehension of the results of the loss of paradise. It explains the word "yada" not only in sexual terms, but primarily as an act of knowledge, of discovery of a hidden truth. Adam has not gained new information but rather new wisdom in respect to the significance of these curses; "He knew how he had been robbed of his tranquility." The banishment was a disenfranchisement of Adam's possession for which he accuses the robber - Eve. "He knew what Eve had done to him". This new awareness leads him to draw a conclusion, to know that his wife Eve has victimized him, to know her true nature as a betrayer, a snake. There are two facets and two stages reflected in the process by which Adam gains knowledge: the awareness of the tranquility of which he had been deprived, and the awareness of the trick which Eve had played upon him. In both realizations, the first man loses some of his innocence and he becomes embittered.⁶

With regard to the awareness of tranquility we can say that had it not been disturbed, Adam would not have valued what he had. The significance of the tranquility and of the curse could only be known to Adam in retrospect, only after the banishment: "So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden..." (Genesis 3:23-24). This is the tragedy of Adam, that his knowledge did not precede his decision to sin. He only learned from bitter experience, once the damage was irreparable. All that which he succeeded in building east of Eden, with his family, will always be overshadowed

⁵ R. Huna and R. ' Jacob in R. Abba's name said:
No creature ever copulated before Adam. So the verb form of yada is, not written, 'man came to know' in the usual verb form vayeidah, but AND THE MAN MADE KNOWN where KNOW intimates that he made known sexual functions to all.(Breshit Rabbah 22)

The first midrash seeks to explain the linguistic problem related to the word "yada" - "And Adam knew his wife Eve" (Genesis 4:1). Why is the past tense form "yada" used and not "veyada", the present tense? What does "knew" mean - intellectual or sexual knowledge? The word "yada" refers to an action taken in the past, possibly before eating from the Tree of Knowledge and before the banishment from the Garden of Eden. Thus man's sexual activity is not related to the trauma of expulsion. In this line of thought, R. Abba bar Cahana explains the word "yada" not only in sexual terms, referred to by the Rabbis as derech eretz (the way of all flesh) but also as the dissemination of that knowledge ("hodea"), how to conduct sexual intercourse in a technical sense or the setting of a normative paradigm of reproduction for all creatures. The natural instinctive act of cohabitation for the purpose of reproduction is thus described as a civilized act which the first man discovered and practiced, after which he informed all the animals about it and instructed them in its practice. In this way the first man realized his purpose in the creation of the world: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it." Thus he carries on with the creation of the world in accordance with the divine plan. In creating the family, man expresses initiative and self-confidence as well as the sense of divine purpose. There is no sign in the midrash of a sense of curse deriving from the story of the banishment from the Garden of Eden in Chapter 3. The midrashic exegete R. Abba bar Cahana describes Adam's spiritual world as if the "knowing" of Eve is a direct continuation of the end of Chapter 2 in which she was created. If we understand Adam's relationship to his first-born in this sense, then Cain is a sign of virility and creativity, a reflection of man's mastery and leadership.

⁶ The snake came into her [Eve] and she became pregnant with Cain, as it says, “And Adam knew his wife Eve.” What did he know? That she was already pregnant [from someone else.] -- Pirkei deR. Eliezer 21
by the awareness of what was lost. The burden of the brilliant past and the bitter fall weigh heavily not only upon Adam and his wife but also upon their first-born son Cain. Cain who must work the accursed land with his father lives with a parental memory of a heaven on earth that devalues whatever he can accomplish. This is a paradigm of the visiting of the sins of the fathers upon the sons. The value question which emerges is how well man will succeed in living in the face of the awareness of the tranquility which has been denied to him. Will he respond with bitterness and the casting of blame upon others and the minimizing of the value of the present over that of the past, or with an attempt to come to terms with a difficult situation, to minimize the pressures wherever possible, and even to aspire to regain the dream hoping that God might change his mind and allow man to build a miniature Garden of Eden of his own.

The midrash suggests that Adam reacted by blaming his wife, by passing on the responsibility, as he did in his answer to God in the Garden: "The man said, 'The woman You gave at my side - she gave me of the tree, and I ate'" (Genesis 3:12). This is a double accusation, against God who gave him his wife, and the wife who gave him the forbidden fruit. It seems to Adam as though God had laid a trap for him in order that he fall into it. He is the passive victim of those who "give" him things. The awareness of the tranquility which had disappeared and an appreciation of its value as a result of the loss, was followed by the realization of the significance of Eve's trickery. "The man knew what Eve had done to him." The midrash does not describe the thoughts of Adam as tendentious blame, as the search of a guilty man for a scapegoat, as in Adam's first answer to God but rather as the legitimate mind set of a simple man who had depended upon his wife in good faith and who now discovers that she betrayed him and took advantage of this faith. Instead of fulfilling her natural function as a supportive help-mate who comforts him in his loneliness, she does him injury. In another source in Genesis Rabbah, (Par. 20:27), we find Eve demonized and identified with the treacherous snake.

"The man named his wife Eve (Genesis 3:20) - she was given to him for life and she gave him advice like a snake. R. Aha observed: 'The serpent was your serpent and you were Adam's serpent.'"

The midrash plays on the coincidence between the identical root and sound of the Hebrew name "Hava" (Eve) and the Aramaic name for a snake "Hiva". The same midrash of R. Aha is also cited in our midrash in order to show that Adam was aware of the true character of his wife Eve; "And the man knew Eve his wife" - that she was true to her character as indicated by the meaning of her name. Therefore the man called her by this name only after, and immediately after, he receives the curse.

In stark contrast to midrash of Eve, the Torah identifies the name Hava (Eve) with her role as mother of all living things (hai) - ("The man named his wife Hava -Eve - because she was the mother of all the living." - Genesis 3:20). Once man became mortal, the creation of children became a matter of urgency met by Eve. The creation of the family is, according to the Bible, a positive, creative reaction of Adam and Eve to their new status in the world and a continuation of their original mission: "Be fruitful and multiply..."

However, the homiletical exegesis of the midrash emphasizes the awareness of Eve as a snake who bites just as she has been bitten, who makes Adam capitulate just as she has been made to capitulate - all by deception. Thus the comprehension of Eve's deed is the continuation of the undermining of the harmony of the Garden of Eden which was supposed to be based upon complementarity and mutual aid (ezer knegdo). Not only did the economic condition worsen and the natural affinity for the land decrease; Adam's relationship with his wife was also undermined. In place of mutual love
there developed a instinctual struggle for mastery, as it is written with regard to Eve: "Your desire shall be to your husband". Joint and egalitarian control over the animal world was replaced by a hierarchy: "And he will dominate you," because Eve attempted to dominate him by deception. The affinity to God was also undermined by this ancient sin, so that God was forced to expel man from the Garden and to place guards at the gates, as God could no longer depend upon human fealty and must guard against further theft. All this is included in the awareness of the tranquility of which he had been robbed, as a result of the consumption of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is the background to the viewpoint of the first man as he faced the prospect of the continuation of his life, together with his wife, outside the Garden of Eden and the birth of their first son.

How does the midrashic presentation of Adam help us to understand the son, Cain?

If Adam is understood as the proud creator of life who sets an example for all creatures, then Cain too may well feel this urge for mastery, for setting norms for others to follow. That urge to fulfill the divine mandate ("Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it" – Gen.1: 28) to rule may well bring him into conflict with his younger brother who outdoes Cain's offering. Ultimately God appeals to Cain's desire for mastery over the world by asking him to turn it inward, to "rule" over his inner passions. (Genesis 4:7 "You will have dominion over it"). The Biblical language is reminiscent of Eve's curse - to be "ruled" by Adam. (In addition, the hierarchic relationship of Adam and Even which is born not of nature but of a curse may well carry over into the competition of the brothers and the resentment at the unequal relationship.)

However, if Adam is understood, not as the seminal progenitor, the proud creator, but as the reflective despairing exile, then he will convey a very different message to his son. If Adam knew his wife not as a partner in procreation but as a traitor of whom one must be wary, then he creates a pattern of suspicion and lack of mutual support and communication which will seriously affect Cain. When Cain fails in the offering he becomes depressed and angry but does not communicate with his family or even God. He does not find it in himself to struggle to change his fate constructively but wallows like his father in self-pity, a sense of betrayal and a reflex for blaming others. The rejection of the offering can easily be understood by Cain as a continuation of divine prejudice that led to his father's tragic existence as a toiler of the land and his own hopeless situation. Cain is the first son to bear the scars of his father's past - a life lived and lost before his own birth.
On the Birth and Parental Background of Cain. Eve's standpoint.

AND SHE CONCEIVED AND BORE CAIN. The sense of it is that she gave birth to a son, and she called his name “Cain” [from the word kanah, acquisition], because she said, “I have acquired a man WITH (the help of) the Adonai... "Et Adonai” means when God created me and my husband God created us by alone, but in the case of this one, we are co-partners with him.”

Rashi

This son will be for me an acquisition FOR God, for when we shall die he will exist in our stead to worship his Creator.” This is also the opinion of Onkelos who translated et hashem to mean "before God."...

Now she (Eve) called one son by a name indicating "acquisition," and the second one she called Abel, denoting "vanity" because man's acquisition is likened to vanity. But she did not wish to say so explicitly. Therefore, no reason is written for the name of the second son.

Ramban

AND SHE SAID: I HAVE ACQUIRED A MAN, etc.
R. Isaac said: "When a woman sees that she has sons, she says, 'Behold my husband is acquired in my hand."

Genesis Rabbah ch. 22

“I have acquired a man – ish - and God” (Genesis 4:1).
No place in the Bible is a one day old child called a “man”. Therefore I say that the “man” (ish) means “my man” (my husband), Adam. For after all that had befallen Adam on account of Eve, the events of the Tree of Life incident stood between them like a Satan. So Adam’s heart was not open to his wife as it once was “yesterday and the day before” (Gen. 31:2) due to the evil that she brought on him.

However when a male first born was born to Eve, she declared: “I have acquired my (husband’s) heart (again) for from now on he will relate to me as before. Typically the new mother is dear to her husband (as Leah the less loved wife of Jacob prayed after the birth of her firstborn son Reuben: atta yeh-havani ishi – “now my man will love me.” "Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, meaning 'look it is a son,' for she declared, 'It means: the Lord has seen my affliction for now my husband (ishi) will love me." (Genesis 29:32).

And Eve added: “I have acquired God (again)” – for her birth (fulfilling God’s prescribed

7 WITH THE HELP OF (ET) THE LORD.
R. Ishmael asked R. Akiba: “Since you have served Nahum of Gimzo for twenty-two years, [and he taught], Every ach and rak is a limitation, while every et and gam is an extension, tell me what is the purpose of the et written here?” If it said, ’I have gotten a man the Lord,” he replied, it would have been difficult [to interpret]; hence ET [WITH THE HELP OF] THE LORD is required.’ ...ET THE LORD [teaches this]: In the past, Adam was created from the ground, and Eve from Adam; but henceforth it shall be, 'In our image, after our likeness' (Gen. I, 26) : neither man without woman nor woman without man, nor both of them without the Shechinah.

8 based on Ecclesiastes 1:1 “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” referring to Solomon’s many possessions. Literally hevel refers to the transient breath of human being hinting that Hevel is not long for this earth.
Following the first line of Genesis 4:1, we shift from the perspective of Adam to that of Eve. After the act of intercourse which Adam initiated, Eve takes center stage. "...and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have acquired (purchased) a male (child) from the Lord. She then bore his brother Abel...." (Genesis 4:1-2).

Eve gives Cain his name relating his being to her actions; "I have acquired a male," I alone, by my efforts. Eve's words are directed towards the son without reference to the father who plays a minimal role in Chapter 4. There is no mention of Adam's relationship to Cain. In the midrash, "I have acquired..." which expounds Eve's point of view the birth is the central theme rather than the cohabitation, and it provides a basis for the mother's strong affinity - her claim to ownership over her son. Adam's attitude to the birth of his first-born son Cain, as well as to his son Abel after him, remains unclear, both in the verse itself and in the midrash. This eloquent silence suggests a stinging lack of relationship to Cain and the de facto transfer of the responsibility for his son to his wife. Eve, on the other hand, completely identifies with the first born and becomes completely tied to him, perhaps too much so. This is her acquisition for which she paid with her pregnancy and the birth with which she was in fact cursed: "And to the woman God said, 'I will make most severe your labor and your pregnancy. In pain shall you bear children.'" (Genesis 3:16)

What is the meaning of the acquisition? What is the significance of the effort involved in giving birth from the vantage point of Eve? How might her relationship with her son affect his personality, and contribute indirectly to what happens to him afterwards? The two midrashim on "I have acquired..." suggest two different ways in which to understand the significance of the birth in Eve's eyes. These parallel the two commentaries which we found in the midrash on "And Adam knew..." Parallel to the words of Abba bar Cahana, who presented man as the first propagator of the way of all flesh (sexual reproduction) to the rest of the creation, Rabbi Akiba explains that the innovative aspect of Eve's giving birth is the joint creativity of man with God. From this moment on, Adam and Even are partners in the primordial act; they are in fact creating in the image of God just as He did. In contrast, the other midrashic explanation is built upon the bitter memory of the past - the banishment from the Garden of Eden and the residue of a bad relationship between Adam and his wife, Adam knowing what Eve had done to him and Eve hoping that through the birth of Cain she could win back her husband's favor.

Let us first look at the midrash on "et Adonai", in which R. Ishmael disagrees with his colleague R. Akiba with regard to the linguistic explication of this phrase. The linguistic problem of "I acquired a son 'et' (from? with?) God" is a double one. What is the meaning of "purchase" or "acquire" in the context of birth? What is the connection between the birth of a "male" and the Holy One as expressed in the word 'et'?

The discussion of 'et' in this verse must be understood against the background of a more general exegetical disagreement between R. Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba. Each of these scholars founded a school of commentary based upon the competing teachings of various scholars: R. Ishmael was the disciple of Nehonia ben Ha-Kaneh while R Akiba was the disciple of Nahum Ish Gamzu. Nehonia ben haKaneh explains "et" as merely a conjunction used in the formal syntactic sense which does not add substantively to the meaning of the verse. Nahum ben Gamzu saw every "et" and "gam" ('also') in the Torah as an amplification or extrapolation of the verse's import to include something which would otherwise not have been included in the meaning of the verse. It is quite clear to R. Ishmael
that, according to the grammatical rules of Biblical Hebrew, the word "et" is necessary; without it, the phrase "kaniti ish et Adonai" would be very difficult to understand. R. Akiba vigorously protests that the word "et" could be "empty" of content, only for those "who do not know how to explicate the text". According to R. Akiba's system there are no extraneous words or even letters in the Bible. Every unit carries a substantive message for one who is trained homiletically to reveal the hidden word of God.

What does R. Akiba reveal through the use of his homiletic system? The secret of the unique creation of Adam and Eve by God, in the image of God, is now since the birth of Cain, to be shared with man. Man does not simply produce offspring like the rest of the creatures; he reproduces in the image of God which is also his own image.

By using this concept, R. Akiba solves a difficult theological riddle in Genesis 1:26. "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" The use of the plural hints at the fact that God is conversing with God’s Host and that man is created in conjunction with them and in their image and not by God alone. It would seem from this that God is not the sole creator. However, R. Akiba explains the verse as relating to the future, in regard to the creation of the descendants of Adam and Eve, beginning with Cain. R. Akiba understood "kaniti" as "I made" and "et" as "with" so that Eve is actually announcing that she has fulfilled the divine plan in creating a living being, together with Adam, and in their joint image. That is the radical meaning of creation - man himself is God's partner - with whom he must take counsel and through whom he can achieve his goals.

Eve, together with Adam and the Holy One, looks with pride upon this first-born son as their personal creation and as the climax of the creation. This son is intended to be a reflection of the partners in his creation not only physically but spiritually and emotionally as well. He may bring satisfaction and disappointment, honor or disgrace to those who created him. The failure of the son is not his private problem but the problem of his parents and creators. To the extent that the son identifies with his parents and internalizes their aspirations, he sees that his life's work is a continuation of their mission and that he carries their name and their image along with his own.

Great importance must be attached to the clarification of the expectations of Cain's parents if we are to understand Cain himself. The Ramban gives specific expression to the aspirations of Eve: "...who said, this son will be my acquisition for the Lord, and when we die he will take our place to serve his Creator." The word "et" is understood as meaning "for" or "on behalf of" and the word acquisition is understood as "an object belonging to someone". Eve and Adam created this human being not only as a result of the procreative impulse but also in response to man's mortality. Immediately after the pronouncement of the curse of death by God, Adam calls his wife Hava (Eve) the mother of all life, and they produce a son so that their life's project might continue.

In the opinion of the Ramban, the mission of Adam and Eve is the worship of the Creator. Perhaps this is the background to the decision of Cain to bring an offering to God in partial fulfillment of his parents' expectations. The deficiency of his offering was a disappointment to the Creator and its rejection certainly disappointed his parents who had created him in order for him to take their place in serving God. Cain was also disappointed in that he did not carry out his mission, that of the first-born son dedicated from birth to God.

The first part of the midrash on the phrase, "I have gained a male (child) for the Lord," adds a depth of dimension to the understanding of the parent's expectations. Their aspirations are nourished not only by their concern for the future of that which they had already established but by their desire to atone for their sins and the deficiency of their lives through the success of their son. This tendency is
given exemplary expression in the story of Adam and Eve. The birth is described immediately after
the banishment from the Garden of Eden, thus hinting that it is both a result of and a reaction to
banishment. As we noted in regard to the midrash, "The man knew Eve his wife", God's curses and
the sin in the Garden of Eden undermined man's affinity to nature, to his wife and to his God, and
also led him to place the blame for all this upon his wife.

In the midrash, the birth of the son is interpreted as Eve's reaction to her difficult situation and her
effort to overcome it. "When the woman saw that she had sons, she said, 'Behold my husband is
acquired in my hand."

Generally speaking, the midrash considers this woman as one who attempts
to regain the man's heart by means of sons who are desirable to him, apparently because of his male
vanity or his concern for someone to inherit him in an economic sense. In the words of the curse, the
woman's desire for the man is already a given but it is she who must ensure his desire for her and his
need for her in an artificial way. He dominates her by right, but by her ability to produce children for
him she is able to control him and influence him. This is a stereotyped popular description of the
relation between men and women, cited in the midrash in its popular formulation as an Aramaic
adage. Even if this "rule" is not valid for all women, it does appear to be a very perceptive
explanation with regard to Eve.

In his modern commentary Mikra Kifshuto, Arnold Ehrlich (1848-1918) explains the difficult
phrase "I acquired..." in this vein. Eve says, I acquired the heart of man - Adam - my husband,
together with God, and thus I have atoned for my sin which undermined the close relations between
myself and Adam and between myself and God. Ehrlich shows that this interpretation is a reasonable
one in the context of the Biblical peshat by reference to the birth of Reuven, the first-born of Leah,
the woman who was despised by her husband: "Leah conceived and bore a son and named him
Reuben, for she declared, 'It means: the Lord has seen my affliction for now my husband will love
me." (Genesis 29:32). It is Eve's hope that this son will serve as a means of repairing all that she
had spoiled in her life, so that she might bring the Garden of Eden back into her life. For this, Eve
was willing to suffer the pain of pregnancy and child-birth. According to Ehrlich's explanation, Eve
feels that with this birth she already succeeded in acquiring her husband's heart and God's pardon,
that she atoned for her sin before God and made compensation to her husband.

In our opinion this "acquisition" is in fact still shaky and is dependent upon the practical success of
the first-born. The giving of the name is only an expression of faith that the relationship with her
husband and with God will improve. Cain's failure could in fact bring about a worsening of her
position because she will be accused once again if her son defaults in his task as she herself did. In
order to gain his father's heart for his mother, Cain must represent his father with honor or at least
help him succeed in the backbreaking work of tilling the cursed soil. Perhaps this is why Cain
became a farmer, out of choice, and also out of a need to wrestle with the curse placed upon his
father. In order to gain God's favor for his mother, the first-born must carry out Divine laws and
make an offering, a gift of the fruit of the earth as an atonement for the fruit of the tree stolen by
Adam and Eve. His character must be better than that of his parents. The entire burden of
expectation and the residue of pain lie upon Cain's shoulders as he brought his offering to God, and
actually in everything he did in his life. The lack of success of his offering, the fruit of the land,
meant the non-justification of his very existence and the fresh loss of the Garden of Eden for his
parents.

His family history with the expectations of his parents supplies the answer to God's question, "Why
are you distressed and why is your face fallen?" It is also the basis for his assault upon his brother,
the rival whose offering was found acceptable. This success, which was a question of life and death
for Cain, made his brother his mortal enemy because Abel thus threatened to replace him as the
beloved first-born and to fulfill their parents' expectations which had first been assigned to Cain. On the basis of the midrash in Genesis Rabbah on the verse "I acquired..." we may suggest that one of the causes of violence is the strong expectations of parents in relation to their children's success in the competition of life. Failure in the face of expectations breeds tragedy.

We conclude with a quotation from Erich Fromm, one of the great humanistic psychologists of the 20th century, who was brought up in a traditional Jewish home and who wrote about the Biblical image of man in general and about Cain in particular.

The guilt feelings of the child who has not pleased his father or mother are very complex and hidden. Sometimes the guilt relates to the child's inability to love the parents sufficiently, especially if the parents expect to be the center of the child's emotional life. Sometimes the child feels that he has disappointed his parents' expectations. This is particularly true of the authoritarian family where demands are a central parental role. Nevertheless, despite the vast difference between the patriarchal Roman family head where the child is literally his property and the modern "patriarchs," there is still the persistent sense that children were brought into this world to give parents satisfaction and to compensate for their own disappointments in life.

Erich Fromm "Man for Himself"

**EXERCISE: BRAINSTORMING KUSHIOT**

Since we intend to spend a lot of time with midrashim of different kinds, both classic and modern, literary and artistic, the starting point has to be the questions that the students have. We therefore suggest that every time we come to a new section and a new piece of text, the initial activity should involve the students looking at the text and searching out (לדרוש) as many questions – kushiot - as they can find in the specific text. As we take our first block of text (Genesis 4:1- first part of verse 2), let them examine the text and list their questions. We have listed above a number of questions that a close study of the Hebrew text might reveal.

Let them share them one at a time and ask others to add their own questions as they connect up with the first ones suggested. Do not allow students to answer the questions prematurely or to denigrate any question as "stupid." But do convey the value of questions, the need to let them percolate rather than answering them off the top of one’s head. Inquire of those who pose a question – what really bothers you? Why is this an important issue to you? Are there any textual hints which connect up with your question?

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9 We now bring a large number of possible exercises each of which touches on the subject of family relationships within this first family. The suggestion is that you use only one or two of these (after this initial exercise on brainstorming, which we think is necessary for all). The idea here is to illustrate some of the possibilities of thinking creatively about the educational potential of a text. Some of the exercises are text based and others are more general although each exercise is meant to have an effect on the student who reads the Biblical text. Some of the activities stay with the Biblical characters: others focus on the students. The educator should examine them carefully and make his or her choice regarding the strategies that are right for the particular class.

10 We will open up each section of the booklet in a similar way, asking the students to look for their own questions. We see this as an essential skill that needs to be developed in order to make them into active readers. We suggest moreover that a list is taken of all the questions so that it can be referred to time and again throughout the process of examining the story. At each section's beginning, the new questions of the students should be added on to the ever-growing list.
EXERCISE: MARSHALLING OUR EXPERIENCE ON BIRTH ORDER: FIRST BORN – PLAGUE OR PRIVILEGE?

- Genesis 4:1-2 describes the birth of the first son of humankind and his first brother. It will go on to describe the first murder – perpetrated by one brother upon another. Perhaps birth order is an important issue here. In order to understand the situation of Cain and to examine the possibility that birth order might play a part in this story, let us do the following preliminary exercise.

- Let the students write down what they think constitutes the special situation of the first born child. Is it a position with more advantages or disadvantages? What challenges, if any, does a first born child have to face that other children are perhaps spared? What about the situation of the second born or the last born child? Does birth order play a role in the students' family?

- Run a discussion on the above questions. As the students answer, they should identify themselves by birth order. Perhaps give our colored stickers color-coded for first, second etc. children. At first glance, can they think of any ways in which the things discussed might have impacted the story of Cain? Would the story have been exactly the same if Cain had been the second child?

ACTIVITY: STRETCHING THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE FIRST FAMILY WITH MIDRASH

Traditional Jewish sources, especially though not exclusively, from the Rabbinic stream within Judaism had a great deal to say about the story of Cain and Abel. Here we bring a selection of four comments that are drawn from a variety of early and medieval sources, and that we analysed earlier on. Each of them individually, and all of them collectively, flesh out the kind of attitudes and expectations that the writers of midrash and the commentators suggest greeted the two children on their entry into the world and in their early years. We will now turn to this subject: what were the parents' relationship with and expectations of the two boys?

*AND THE MAN KNEW, etc. He knew how he had been robbed of his tranquility; he knew what Eve had done to him. R. Aha observed: 'The serpent was your serpent and you were Adam's serpent.'*

Bereishit Rabbah Ch. 22

*AND SHE SAID: I HAVE ACQUIRED A MAN, etc. R. Isaac said: "When the woman saw that she had sons, she said, 'Behold my husband is acquired in my hand." [i.e. a child binds husband to wife.]*

Genesis Rabbah ch. 22

*AND SHE CONCEIVED AND BORE CAIN. The sense of it is that she gave birth to a son, and she called his name Cain [from the word kanah, acquisition], because she said, I have acquired a man with (the help of) the Eternal...*

"Et Hashem (with the Eternal). When God created me and my husband God created us alone, but in the case of this one, we are co-partners with him."
"This son will be for me an acquisition for the Eternal, for when we shall die he will exist in our stead to worship his Creator." This is also the opinion of Onkelos who translated et hashem to mean "before the Eternal."... Now she (Eve) called one son by a name indicating "acquisition," and the second one she called Abel, denoting "vanity" because man's acquisition is likened to vanity. But she did not wish to say so explicitly. Therefore, no reason is written for the name of the second son. Rashi.

Go through the three texts and the four opinions (Rashi's comments are encapsulated in the piece from Ramban. The midrashim especially are hard and will probably reveal very little to the student unless they are slowly analysed and interpreted with guidance. Bring out the two possibilities regarding the situation of Adam at Cain's birth and the different suggestions regarding the way to understand Eve's comment in the first verse.

The phrase *kaniti ish* in Genesis 4:1 raises many questions. Who is the *ish* who is acquired? Which opinion is closest to the modern commentator Ehrlich, *Mikrah Kifshuto*:

“I have acquired a man and God” (Genesis 4:1). No place in the Bible is a one day old child called a “man”. Therefore I say that the “man” (ish) means “my man” (my husband), Adam. For after all that had befallen Adam on account of Eve, the events of the Tree of Life incident stood between them like a Satan. So Adam’s heart was not open to his wife as it once was...

However when a male first born was born to Eve, she declared: “I have acquired my (husband’s) heart (again) for from now on he will relate to me as before. Typically the new mother is dear to her husband (as Leah the less loved wife of Jacob prayed after the birth of her firstborn son Reu-ben: atta yeh-havani ishi – “now my man will love me.”)

And Eve added: “I have acquired God (again)” – for her birth (fulfilling God’s prescribed punishment of pain in childbirth) was a sign that her sin had now been forgiven.

Ask the students how each of the texts, subtly, changes the understanding of the story in the Biblical text?

Ask the students what, if anything, have all of the opinions got in common? Which questions were the Rabbis trying to answer? Were those questions on the initial list of the students? Without getting into the issue of how the opinions are arrived at, which, if any, of the opinions, (there can be more than one), gives a perspective that seems logical to the students given their own reading of the story as a whole? Why?

Get the students to write a long diary entry on behalf of one or both or the parents, recording their feelings on the evening before the birth of Cain.
ACTIVITY: HAPPY FAMILIES? WITH NORMAN ROCKWELL

What was the family background of the family of Cain and Abel? It is clear to all of us how important family background is in determining the character of any children. But one of the fascinating aspects of the story of Cain and Abel is that although on one level we know a great deal about their family story from the first chapters of Genesis, we know almost nothing of how that story affected them. We have the story of Adam and Eve and we have the story of the two children but the two stories are basically unconnected. The story of Adam and Eve includes a great deal of ups and downs. It is hardly a linear story of gradual and peaceful development. The deception, growth in human consciousness and self-awareness, that characterize the period in Eden added to the terrible trauma of the expulsion and the curse, with all the tensions and recriminations between the two adults, provide an enormously problematic background for the raising of children. It does not need to surprise us that the resulting family is dysfunctional to the point of extreme violence. The midrash, as we shall see, feels the gap and attempts to address it but this only serves to emphasise the fact that the Biblical story itself totally ignores that dimension leaving the two stories in a kind of detached limbo. Now it is inconceivable that the stories are not related. There has to be some kind of an impact - and maybe a great deal – on the part of the Adam and Eve/garden of Eden story on the character of the brothers and the interaction between them. Before we examine the midrashic story we bring here an exercise to try and fill the gap, pushing the students into a deeper reading of the situation in order to understand the underlying connections that are clearly there to be mined.

- Get the students to read very carefully chapter three of Genesis, noting carefully anything in the experience of Adam and Eve that could feed later into the type of family experience that would serve the background for the raising of the two sons. Let them list any important phrases or events that might have an effect on the two children born at the beginning of chapter four.

- They should now, in pairs or small groups, look at the following ten pictures of family life drawn from the repertoire of that great chronicler of twentieth century America, Norman Rockwell, who for decades supplied many of the covers for the magazine "The Saturday Evening Post", from which most of the scenes are taken.
Picture by picture, they should read carefully the family scenes expressed and described, and write down the relationship that each of these pictures depicts. Assuming that the individuals in each picture are part of the same nuclear family, what are the relationships of the different individuals within the families, as shown in the specific scenes?

Now they should look at the scenes against the background of what we know about the first family from Genesis chapter three and four. They should evaluate each scene. Could such a scene be part of the family story of Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel (and any other brothers or sisters that might have been born to the family)? Would it have been common or rare? Why?

Discuss the various responses for each picture in the group as a whole.
At this point, request that the students put themselves in the situation of family therapists who have been asked to help this "family of man". Let them imagine that after many sessions of work with them, they are asked to write a report on the family relationship and the different roles that each of the individuals plays within the collective. In addition they are asked to make recommendations and to suggest a prognosis for the future.

Bring them together and hear some of the reports. Let the students comment on the different scenarios.

Now give the students the following piece by American rabbi, Edwin Friedman. Read it out together. Discuss his "case study". Does it resemble theirs? Is it a good analysis? What do they think of the last line?

A Case Study of the Dysfunctional First Family by Edwin Friedman

Recent archaeological discoveries have revealed a "family workup" done by one of the ministering angels about twenty years after Creation. It is translated here from the original.

This is a family of four: mother, father, and two sons, fairly close in age. They came in because the sons have been quarreling a great deal, and both mother and father appear quite helpless to do anything about this. Most of the focus is on the older brother, who broods a lot, is extremely sullen, and is very jealous of his far more successful younger brother.

The younger brother is not aware of his advantage and thus never tries to hide his success, his easygoing manner, or the rewards of his prosperity. The older seems totally unable to understand why fortune does not smile alike on him.

It cannot be said that the parents, both of whom are only children by the way, show any significant favoritism. Yet I am quite sure it is something in their own style of life that is contributing to the very problem they want to solve.

At the beginning of their marriage, both husband and wife seemed to have lived in a very blissful state, naive, it appears, about what was happening all around them. Something - we're not sure what - changed that, and things have never been the same since. The husband growls continuously about his lot and why life has to be so difficult, whereas the wife never fails to remind him of how much pain she went through to bear him sons.

But it is more than their discontent that seems to be seeping down, particularly to their elder son. More pernicious still may be their attitude toward their discontent.

Neither husband nor wife seems capable of accepting responsibility for their own destiny. Both are always claiming that their lives would be far different were it not for how the other behaved. The man tends to blame his wife, and the wife tends to blame the environment ... Neither seems capable of taking responsibility for personal desires, loves, or hates. Each sees the other as causing his or her own pain.

Since neither talks much about their origins (they both seem to be cut off from their past), it is difficult to know how their own childhoods contributed to such irresponsibility, though there is a strong suspicion here that while they were growing up they had everything handed to them.
on a silver platter. Indeed, each seems to have led a youth totally absent of significant challenge ...

There seems to be no strength in this family at all, by which I mean the capacity of some member to say, I am me, this is where I stand. I end here and you begin there, etc.

It may be this constant expectation that the other should be his keeper that prevents each from taking responsibility for himself. And as long as this attitude persists in the parents, we can hardly expect the boys to act more pleasantly toward each other, still less at times to be watchful over the other. This situation will certainly leave a "mark" on one of them.

In a family like this, with no one able to tolerate his own solitariness, or, for that matter, anyone else’s, I fear the weakness in the children will never be corrected. Actually, my fantasies are worse. For, if the current inability each parent manifests to deal with his or her own pain continues, I fear that Cain's view of life will never truly focus on himself and, perceiving the source of all his problems in his brother, he may one day up and kill him.

Edwin H. Friedman
Cain is in the waiting room.

**DOCTOR** *(goes to door)*
Hello, Cain Ben-Adam. Come in.

*Cain lies down on the couch, Doctor sits. Cain sighs angrily.*

**NARRATOR**
In *Genesis 4:6*, the Lord says to Cain:

*Why are you upset? Why is your face fallen?*

**DOCTOR**
You seem angry or distressed. Why?

**CAIN**
[Tells story of offerings]* I offered some of my crops to God, as a gift, and he ignored it. Didn't bother me at first, until my brother Able brings him a dead sheep from his flock, and God gazed at it. Mine he didn't even look at.

**NARRATOR**
*Genesis 4:3-5.*

**CAIN**
That's why I'm so down in the mouth. Why shouldn't I be upset? It was my idea. God, didn't ask for anything, he didn't command me to give him a gift. And I worked hard on those crops: I had to plant and tend and water and nurture all those plants, and it took months... Abel does *bupkis*. Just follows the sheep around. And he sees my offering, decides to imitate me, and all he does is kill a little sheep. I actually contributed something to my offering, and you rejected it!

**DOCTOR**
I rejected it?

**CAIN**
I mean, He rejected, God rejected it -- and God rejected me.

**DOCTOR**
Did God really reject you -- or did God just not give your offering the attention you wanted?

**CAIN**
What's the difference?

**DOCTOR**
Hmmm.... What made you think that God wanted an offering in the first place?

**CAIN**
I don't know. It's just God is so ... arbitrary.

**DOCTOR**
And you think that's unfair.
CAIN
Yes, and I tell you something else that's unfair, I didn't want to take over the farm from Adam. I want to be free to do what I want and go where I want, whenever I want. Instead I have to work by the sweat of my brow to get bread for us to eat from the grasses of the field – all because my parents ate that stupid fruit….

NARRATOR
In Genesis 3:17 -19, God sentences Adam to toil for food in, "cursed be you from the earth" for having eaten from the tree of knowledge. (The inherent quality of restlessness within Cain comes from Ramban by way of Aviva Zornberg).¹

CAIN
I want to be an artist or a musician… "How many roads must a man walk down, before you call him a man." --- It's all my parents fault anyway. They started it. Do you know what our names mean, mine and Able's?

DOCTOR
Tell me.

CAIN
Mine means "creator" and his means "worthless vapor-breath".

NARRATOR
Cain is related to kanithi, from kanah, meaning to possess or acquire; it's also related to koneh, meaning to make or create.
Abel means vapor, breath, nothingness, worthless, vanity.

CAIN
I didn't pick those names; my parents did. Plus, when I was born Eve talked about how she created me together with God.

NARRATOR
Chapter 4, verse 1 is variously translated as:
I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD. (JPS)
I-have-gotten a man, as has YHWH! (Everett Fox)
I've created a man with YHWH. (Richard Friedman)

CAIN
Adam has still never said God's name. Did you know that? Not once. My mother, Eve, is the first and only person to actually say the name of God.¹¹ And she said it when I was born. She didn't say anything when Able was born.

DOCTOR
And, Cain, have you noticed that God speaks to you and doesn't speak to your brother?
CAIN
Oy, I never thought of that. That's even more I have to live up to!

DOCTOR
Keep your chin up. I am sure if you do right, you'll be rewarded. On the other hand, if you don't do the right thing--

CAIN
Right, not right. I've never heard that word before, what does that mean?

DOCTOR
You know.

CAIN
How? (Silence) How do I know?

DOCTOR
Cain, you just do.

CAIN
And if I don't do the right thing, then what?

DOCTOR
If you do not do right, sin crouches at the opening.

CAIN
Sin crouches at the opening. Are you always going to be so cryptic?

DOCTOR
Possibly.

CAIN
What kind of animal is a sin, and why does it crouch?

NARRATOR
God has not mentioned the concepts of "sin" or "right and wrong" before this moment. He told Adam not to eat from a certain tree, but not why or what the consequences would be. Adam and Eve are banished only because they didn't do what they were told. Therefore, Cain is the first human to be born with, and to be told of, morality and free will as inherent human qualities, neither of which God explains.iii

DOCTOR
Maybe you are being warned about the dangers that lurk in your own heart.

CAIN
If there's anything lurking in my heart, God put it there – just like he put that tree in the garden Eve keeps talking about….

DOCTOR
Whether God put it there or not, it's still inside you.

CAIN
"Sin couches at the opening" – what does that mean? The opening to what?

So Cain needs to consult:

Rashi's answer to that question is "Your sin will crouch over your grave on the day of judgment." Meaning your sin is with you not only until you die, but until judgement day.

However, Ibn Ezra answer is that "Sin is an impulse of your heart that is always with you." Meaning, yetzer-hara, evil inclination, is always inside a person, waiting to leap out. Ibn Ezra supports this by bringing Micah 7:5 "Sin is just inside the doors of your mouth," waiting to be spoken.

Sforno, on the other hand, reads it as "If you do not improve on your offering, then sin also awaits you, for such is the way of the evil inclination" emphasizing and that if we do not actively improve ourselves, and give constant attention to resisting our yetzer-hara, our weakness and vulnerability will fuel the likelihood of actual sin.

Nachmanides has an even different opinion: "At the door of your house your sin lurks causing you to stumble in all your endeavors." In other words, "You won't escape what you have done, it will stick to you for the rest of your days – i.e., it'll be on every job application you fill out.

Breishit Rabbah 22:6 interprets it the other way around: "Sin sits outside your door, waiting to be invited inside, where it will make itself master of the house." meaning that sin is not inside, it's outside, and it's up to you whether you let it into your life, for if you do, it ends up taking over.

The Midrash Psalms 119 says that "Sin stops at the door of the Beit Midrash (House of Study), so take yourself there and you will be safe." Good thing we're all here.

Everett Fox translates the phrase as "crouching-demon", while J H Hertz speaks of Sin as a ravenous beast, waiting to spring on the unwary…

Rabbi Yehuda Kil interprets "petach" as the opening of the mother's womb, the event first-born Cain felt he had accomplished. Thus, "sin crouches at the opening of the mother's womb" with all first-born children because of their expectation of privilege.

CAIN
That's all really interesting, but it doesn't really answer my question: How am I supposed to know how to "do the right thing"? I thought I was doing right when I offered God the fruit of my labor and that didn't turn out so good. Tell me! Tell me what you want!… I mean, what God wants!…

DOCTOR
I'm sorry. Our time is up for today.

CAIN (angry grunt)
I'd like the earth to open its mouth and swallow Able.

DOCTOR
One last thing for you to think about, Cain

DOCTOR
"Its urge is toward you
Yet you can be its master." (Pause)

CAIN
What does that mean?

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY: CLASS PHOTO BY Gershom Gorenberg

□ Read the following poem by American-Israeli journalist Gershom Gorenberg.

Class Photo

In the class picture my son brought home
from kindergarten are all the clues
that we will find once it's too late:
already, the girl at the top left turns
her face toward unnamed airports,
the boy below leans forward
and waits for the race to start.

Like a scrap of parchment found in caves
at the Dead Sea it will make sense
later when we find the rest,
the graduation shot and the end of boot camp
and the newspaper photo that will finally decode
the smile of the four girls in the second row
as the bared teeth of women wailing in grief,
and whose caption complete with name, rank
and unit and where the missile hit the APC [armoured patrol carrier]
will explain what God wrote in cipher and for which boy
(but never why) in the class photo my son brought proudly home.

□ What does the poet feel as he looks at his son's class photo? What is the poem suggesting about us? How do you feel about the poem and the ideas expressed within?

□ Write a set of three brief poems or prose descriptions taking as your framework a series of family pictures of members of the family of Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel. Decide at what ages for the characters, the pictures are taken and describe the characters in the picture (you can also draw them if you like!) and how they appear to you at the particular stage in the family story that the picture reflects.
SECTION TWO:
SIBLING RIVALRIES: CAIN AND ABEL (Genesis 4:2-5)\(^\text{11}\)

Questions from the Text

1. What is the significance of the division into two different professions on the part of the brothers? What, if anything, does this suggest about the position of Cain as first born son? Did the two brothers choose their professions or were the professions thrust upon them? How did Cain relate to the curse of the land that had afflicted his father? What is the significance of the farmer and the shepherd in Jewish tradition? Note that the end of Gen. 4 also deals with professions – new ones.

2. What were the motives of Cain and Abel respectively in the offering of their sacrifices? Were the sacrifices voluntary offerings of grateful humans, recognizing God's mastery and stewardship over the world, or were they compulsory offerings, demanded by God, in the spirit of the compulsory offerings that would characterize many religious systems including Judaism?

3. Why did God reject Cain's sacrifice but accept Abel's? Was there something wrong with Cain or was there something wrong with the sacrifice or the way that it was given? Does the rejection represent a wholesale rejection of Cain by God? How did Cain understand it? How did God understand it?

4. What was the effect of the rejection on Cain? What, precisely is the connection between God's rejection of Cain and Cain's violent act? Why would God's rejection of Cain have such strong results?

The Brothers: Sibling Rivalry.

We have attempted to suggest the necessity of understanding the family background in order to penetrate beneath the surface facts of the story, and to understand the urge to violence. We have suggested a number of directions through which we can attempt to assess the influence of a difficult parental background. Now we turn to the next part of the equation that we need to understand in order to move forward, the dynamics between the two brothers. The violence will not break out for a few more verses but the seeds of everything that follows are located in these four verses. It is here that the Tanakh begins to introduce the brothers and their relationship. As always the text leaves

\(^{11}\) Since the previous section dealt with the first part of the second verse, in this section we begin with the second part of that verse (ויהי البل).
many holes, revealing only in particular loaded words or other verbal hints, its opinion of what is really happening. We now try to analyse the complex situation that starts to develop.

**Professional choices: the farmer and the shepherd**

What significance is there in the fact that Cain was a farmer, a worker on the land while Abel was a shepherd worked with flocks? These two professions, together perhaps with the hunter, are the archetypal male professions of the pre-urban ancient world. They were often in conflict with each other which perhaps bears on the struggle that would destroy the brothers, but they existed side by side in the ancient world. But what was it in Cain or Cain's story that made him into a farmer? Was it something inherent in him that made him suited to life working on the land? Was it a loyalty to his father's profession? Was it a wish to somehow help his parents either overcome or shoulder the burden that had been put on them with the expulsion from Eden and the curse of the land? And why was Abel a shepherd? Was it an attempt to distance himself from his brother? Was it an attempt to help the family by complementing his brother's economic choice? Was there something in him that made him specifically suited to the profession of shepherd or unsuited to the work of farming?

The Biblical story seems to give us no hints and many of the commentators pass over this question, seeing it as marginal perhaps or seeing no possibility of addressing it productively. However we have a number of comments that are worth considering, though as so often in these cases, they might well say more about the commentator than about the situation described. We bring five of them here.

“One of them labors and takes care of living beings ... gladly undertaking the pastoral work which is preparatory to rulership and kingship. But the other occupies himself with earthly and inanimate things.”

Philo of Alexandria. 1st century.

“Now the brothers enjoyed different pursuits. Abel, the younger one, was concerned with justice, and, believing that God was present at every action that he himself undertook, he made a practice of virtue: he was a shepherd. Cain, however, was altogether wicked, and on the lookout only for his own profit: he was the first person to think of plowing the earth.”


“Now Adam took Eve and the boy to his home in the east. God sent him various kinds of seeds by the hand of the angel Michael, and. he was taught how to cultivate the ground and make it yield produce and fruits, to sustain himself and his family and his posterity.”

Life of Adam. Late Second Temple period.

רעה צאן – a feeder of flocks: Because the earth had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.

Rashi. Ashkenaz. 11th century.

“When Cain appeared she [Eve] realised from the appearance of his body that the raw material he was made of was very earthy, quite different from the raw material both she and her husband Adam had been made of. As soon as the twin Hevel was born she knew that [he was different and pure, far less earthy and coarse]. The name Hevel is reminiscent of הרוח הפיו breath, something lacking in substance.

Cain, having been made of coarser material, achieved mastery only over the earth itself, not over its beasts, its בעלי חיים, living creatures. Hevel, on the other hand, representing a higher
form of humanity, engaged in dominance over living creatures, such as sheep, etc.

Moses Alsheikh, Safed 16th century

Cain was immersed in all the enjoyments of the body and trained his generation in bad behavior. He destroyed the tranquility in which people had lived until then. By devising weights and measures, he created boundaries on earth, and built a city and a wall. -

-- Josephus, Antiquities, I:13

Cain was the first-born son to those two parents of mankind and he belonged to the city of man; the later son, Abel, belonged to the City of God....God, like a potter, “made out of the same lump one vessel destined for honor, and another for dishonor” (Romans 9:21). But the first one made was the vessel for dishonor, and afterwards came the vessel for honor. For in the individual man... the base condition comes first and we have to start with that, but we are not bound to stop at that... Hence it’s not the case that every bad man will become good, but no one will be good who was not bad originally. -- St. Augustine, City of God, XV:1

The first founder of the earthly city was...a fratricide; for, overcome by envy, , he slew his own brother...this is how Rome [also] was founded, when Remus, as Roman history witnesses, was slain by his brother Romulus... Both sought the glory of establishing the Roman state... In contrast, the earlier brothers, Cain and Abel, did not both entertain the same ambition for earthly gains; and the one who slew his brother was not jealous of him because his power would be more restricted...for Abel did not aim at power in the city which his brother was founding. But Cain’s was the diabolical envy that the wicked feel for the good simply because they are good. -- St. Augustine, City of God, XV:5

One of the most interesting ideas that we have here is what might be called the spiritual superiority of the profession of shepherding. The comments of Philo, Alsheikh and to a certain extent Josephus, all reflect a belief in the nobility of shepherding. For them it represents a higher profession, suitable for a more noble individual concerned with life and with justice. The worker on the earth is the man that has not reached the spiritual nobility enabling a person to be a shepherd. He lacks the sensitivity to work with live things (Philo, Alsheikh) or he is interested in coarse material pursuits for his own greedy egotistical reasons. These remind us of the stories told about Moses or David and suggest a cultural stereotype with very deep roots indeed. Rashi takes a different tack, suggesting that it was Abel's choice to look for a living away from the land which, he well knew, was cursed. Potentially, this puts Cain in a better light as someone who was prepared to throw in his lot with his family despite his innocence of his parents' sin which caused the curse to fall. Abel it seems is distancing himself somewhat. On the other hand it could be that Rashi is picturing Abel as a pragmatist who goes around problems rather than facing them with dogged determination, despite the fact that he is facing a lost cause. The Life of Adam, a late second Temple period source, puts Cain in the most positive light, supporting the family, with the help of a knowledge that was given to him by God. Let us examine the opinions of the students.

**EXERCISE: PROFESSIONAL SONS**

- The students should look at these two pictures which they might have already encountered by Abel Pann, the Russian Israeli artist, famous for his artistic depictions of the Bible. One shows Cain the farmer and the other shows Abel the shepherd.
• Let the students examine the text and make a list of any questions that come out of the text for them in this section. What things in their opinion need to be dealt with? Why?

• Ask the students to write down a list of thoughts and associations about the occupation that each of the two sons has chosen. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Is one a more noble profession in their eyes? Why do they think that each of the sons went into his respective profession? Do they think that it was a free choice or do they think that the family made the choice? How do they think that the parents would have felt regarding the choice of each of the sons?

• Discuss the ideas that the students come up with.

• Bring some or all of the five pieces that we have brought above. Get the students to put them in order of favouritism towards Abel or Cain. How do they explain what appears to be a clear bias on the part of the commentaries against Cain? Are they reading with hindsight through the prism of the murder? Is it a justified attempt to analyse the respective characters? Is there an inbuilt prejudice against farmers and towards shepherds? If so, can they explain why this might be? If they were trying to explain their understanding of this part of the story, what explanation would they suggest?
Finally, bring this poem by the Israeli poet Dan Pagis. It is a part of a longer poem called "Brothers" about Cain and Abel. This piece opens the poem.

Abel was pure and woolly
and somewhat modest
Like the smallest kid
And full of ringlets like the smoke of the offering
Inhaled by his Master.
Cain was straight. Like a knife.

What do they think that Pagis is saying? How might he explain the choice of professions?

Accepting and Rejecting the Sacrifices: Explaining God's Behaviour

Cain’s offering was brought with impudence; Abel’s with humility.
(Zohar, Midrash HaNe’elam, late-13th c., Spain)

We come now to one of the more puzzling and difficult aspects of the story. Why did God accept Abel's sacrifice and refuse Cain's? Cain himself as we shall see in a number of midrashic treatments is pictured as understanding this as a sign that an arbitrary and uncaring God rules over the world. On the face of things, we might be justified in agreeing with him. More than that, since the rejection by God appears to be one of the major links in the chain of the murder story, creating a jealousy and resentment in Cain that would culminate in the murder, if God had no reason to reject one sacrifice and accept the other, the God is somehow implicated in the murder. Thus it was imperative for the Rabbis to justify the behaviour of God and to suggest convincing reasons to justify God's choices. The key to them doing this was contained in the phrase מברכורות צאנו ומחלביהן applied to Abel's sacrifice but not to Cain's. Here was the distinction between the two sacrifices and it became the basis for a number of midrashim and comments. We bring three of them here.

CAIN BROUGHT OF THE FRUIT OF THE GROUND: of the inferior crops, he being like a bad tenant who eats the first ripe figs but honours the king with the late figs.
Genesis Rabbah

ABEL ALSO BROUGHT FROM HIS FIRST BORN LAMBS AND FROM THE FAT ONES.
From sheep never sheared and never involved in work: which had never been involved in any wrong doing.

GOD WAS ATTENTIVE TO ABEL AND TO HIS SACRIFICIAL GIFT. Since Abel brought a choice offering given generously and liberally, God was pleased by the offering.
Midrash HaGadol
If all kinds were valid for meal offerings, why did the Sages rank their quality? So that one would know which was the very best, which were equal in value and which was the least valuable; so that he who wished to earn merit for himself might bend his greedy inclination and make broad his generosity and bring an offering from the finest, from the very best of the species that he was bringing. Behold it is said in the Torah: ABEL ALSO BROUGHT FROM HIS FIRST BORN LAMBS AND FROM THE FAT ONES. GOD WAS ATTENTIVE TO ABEL AND TO HIS SACRIFICIAL GIFT.

The same principle applies to everything which is done for the sake of the Good God; namely, that it be of the finest and the best. If one builds a house of prayer, it should be finer than his private dwelling. If he feeds the hungry, he should give him of the best and the sweetest of his table. If he clothes the naked, he should give him of the finest of his garments. Hence if he consecrated something to God, he ought to give of the best of his possessions.

Rambam, Laws of the Forbidden Altar 7:11 Mishnah Torah.

Cain liked to work the land, and Abel liked to shepherd sheep, and each one gave of his labor and food to the other. When it was the evening of Passover, Adam said to his sons, “On this night the Israelites in the future will bring the Pascal offering, and you also should bring offerings to your creator. Cain brought what remained from his food: toasted wheat stalks, seeds and flax. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and their fat, sheep that had not been sheared for wool. ------- Midrash Pirkei de-Rabi Eliezer 21

One interesting question is whether the sacrifices were voluntary offerings of grateful humans, recognizing God's mastery and stewardship over the world, or whether they were compulsory offerings, demanded by God, in the spirit of the compulsory offerings that would characterize many religious systems including Judaism.

The first piece, from Genesis Rabbah, takes the second approach. These offerings are demanded by God as a king demands from his subjects. As such Cain's offering clearly falls short. He has failed to live up to the demands placed on him and this is not acceptable in God's eyes. As opposed to Cain's ingratitude towards God which expresses itself in the inferior quality of the offering, taken from the "leftovers" after he himself has taken his needs, Abel behaves in the opposite way. He gives the best of what he has. God, according to this, accepts Abel's sacrifice willingness since it is exactly that – a sacrifice, and one which he is willing to make. Cain does not give the honour that is demanded to his Lord. As such, it might be suggested, God's punishment in refusing the inadequate and unseemly sacrifice, is actually very light.

The second piece from the medieval Midrash Gadol, does not make it clear whether the offering was compulsory or voluntary, but it makes no difference. According to the author of this midrash, if the offering was compulsory, then once again Abel has done what he needs to do in the most positive, generous and giving way. Cain has not. If the offering is voluntary, Cain has coldly and calculatedly put his own economic and self-interest above his gratitude to and appreciation of God.

The third piece from the Mishneh Torah sees the principle of generosity enshrined in the Halacha with the example being taken from the story here. Whatever is given to God or is used in the service of God must be of the highest quality. Even if Cain had good intentions, he fell down in the implementation of the task. Moreover, according to Rambam, one of the reasons for an offering is to enable a person to conquer their natural greed and self-interest. This is one of the things that God
wants from people according to the Rambam. Once again, Cain loses and Abel wins. The reputation of God is saved. Cain is in disgrace.

EXERCISE: ACCEPTANCE, REJECTION

- Look at the list of questions that the students made at the beginning of this section. Ask them which question they think is the really 'big' question that has to be examined. If they come up with another question besides the reasons for God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice, make a case for this one and explain that this is the question with which you are going to deal right now. Why is this question a real problem, and why is it so important to find a convincing answer? Start by discussing it and clarify how important it is to find a defence or a rationalisation of God's behaviour. Remind them that authors of traditional midrashim invariably searched the text for clues as they settled to their task. Let them search the text and to suggest helpful directions.

- Invite them to write a comment or a midrash of their own around the possibilities that they have found in the text.

- Share their "offerings" and then turn to the three texts that we have brought here, all of which work generally in the same direction, taking their departure from the same phrase in the text\(^\text{12}\).

- Discuss Cain's behaviour in the light of the midrashim and comments. Does it seem reasonable? Would not many of us do the same? Do we not tend to make a careful assessment of what we can afford to give or what we are inclined to give or even how little we can get away with when we are asked to give something? Ask each to think of one example when they gave or shared something in a spirit that was neither generous or liberal and one example when they gave willingly and liberally. If we so often fall short in our giving, can we really be expected to act as Rambam expects us to?

- Finally draw attention to the phrase of Rambam, "so that he who wished to earn merit for himself might bend his greedy inclination and make broad his generosity". Explain Rambam's concept of offerings and sacrifices as an educational principle invoked by God to encourage us to transcend our baser and more selfish instincts. Can a system like this work? In the family? In school? In society as a whole?

\(^{12}\) It is a good opportunity to see the mechanics of the midrashic text since we have here quite a simple and transparent example of the process.
ACTIVITY: CAIN ON THE COUCH WITH ERICH FROMM AND PETER PITZELE

We have started to examine the complex make up of the family of Adam and have suggested that there are some difficult psychological and emotional tensions in the family background that produced Cain's outburst of violence. It is time to turn in this respect to Cain himself and try and uncover his own psychological make up. We suggest a two part activity that will bring us nearer to Cain and in so doing, might bring us closer to some of the darker parts of ourselves as "sons and daughters" of the first human family.

The following piece was written by the renowned German-American-Jewish psychiatrist, Erich Fromm. Fromm had a number of interesting and pertinent suggestions to make as he discussed the personality and psychological make up of the first murderer.

The guilt feelings of the child who has not pleased his father or mother are very complex and hidden. Sometimes the guilt relates to the child's inability to love the parents sufficiently, especially if the parents expect to be the center of the child's emotional life.

Sometimes the child feels that he has disappointed his parents' expectations. This is particularly true of the authoritarian family where demands are a central parental role...There is (often) the persistent sense that children were brought into this world to give parents satisfaction and to compensate for their own disappointments in life...

The Biblical report of Cain's crime and punishment offers a classic illustration of the fact that what man is most afraid of is not punishment but rejection. God accepted Abel's offerings but did not accept Cain's. Without giving any reason, God did to Cain the worst thing that can be done to a man who cannot live without being acceptable to an authority. He refused his offering and thus rejected him. The rejection was unbearable for Cain, so Cain killed the rival who had deprived him of the indispensable. What was Cain's punishment? He was not killed or even harmed; as a matter of fact, God forbade anyone to kill him (the mark of Cain was meant to protect him from being killed). His punishment was to be made an outcast; after God had rejected him, he was then separated from his fellow man. This punishment was indeed one of which Cain had to say: "My punishment in greater than I can bear."

Erich Fromm "Man For Himself"

- Divide the class into groups of three and give the Fromm piece to each group. They are asked to turn it into an interview on a serious talk show. One of the group should play the talk show's host and the other two should play Fromm and Cain. The task is to present Fromm's ideas, testing them out on Cain and hearing his response. The show's M.C. is the interviewer, moving constantly between Cain and Fromm. Cain, incidentally should be lying on a psychiatrist's couch.

- After the groups prepare their piece, take two or three of the presentations and watch them as a group. After each presentation, the rest of the group, in the role of
audience, is allowed to examine the actors and push them on aspects of the way that they have presented their portrayal.

- Next, together with the whole class, read the following long piece by the American Jewish psychotherapist and writer, Peter Pitzele, who uses biblical stories as a framework for examining some very deep emotional and psychological aspects of both the stories themselves and their contemporary audience of readers. He does this by examining the stories with a group and then playing out some of the aspects of the stories, asking for volunteers to take the central roles and finding out what the stories trigger off in them. He believes that this technique, which he calls Bibliodrama, allows a contemporary audience to get very close to the emotional heart of the stories and to find resonance inside of the participants. Here he reports on one particular encounter around the Cain and Abel story.

In the Midrashic enactments I have guided, the build-up to the encounter of the brothers begins as Cain and Abel are moved in their manhood to bring offerings to the Lord. Cain, “in the course of time” comes first.

Who will be Cain? I ask. And almost always there is a long pause, for we have heard the story, and it takes a certain courage and energy for a person to dive deep enough to find and feel that part of himself. I wait. After a while, several members of the group stand up - not all men - and step forward, often with a shrug or a sigh, an anxious glance. And who will be Abel? Again a pause; again there are volunteers. I need someone, too, to play God.

Why, I ask Cain when we have cleared a space in the center for our drama, why do you make an offering? Where does this idea come from? The first Cain speaks. "So often I heard my parents speak of the garden. I could feel their longing. When it came time for me to contribute to the family, I became a tiller of the soil: I have tried to make a garden for them. It took time, but now I have plants and trees that yield good things to eat, and fruit. Yes, even fruit."

"In my heart," says another Cain, "I compete with God. This garden is my way to make a substitute paradise for my parents. I shall show God that we can bring forth abundance even out of the ground He cursed."

"I bring my offering to show God what I have done. I myself. It is a display of my power to understand the processes of nature, how to sow and plant and harvest."

"No, no, this is not true at all. This offering is not egotism; It is made in a gesture of peace and reconciliation. My father has not spoken to the Lord since he left Eden, but he has told me stories, and I hope that by my offering God will return to communicate with my parents!"

And there is Abel, listening, eyeing his older brother from a distance.

Why, I ask, are you here?

"I too, must make some showing before the Lord. But what do I have? Nothing I have made with my hands, only what the Lord has given into my keeping. But among what I have I shall select the best."

And another Abel speaks: "There is a part of me that does not want to be left out of this. I am often alone on the hills with the flocks while Cain is close to home. Often I feel left out. But not now. What
if the Lord appears and I am not there to see Him? Cain will get some reward, and I shall get nothing."

A third Abel speaks: "Out there alone on the hills I feel close to God. Especially at night under the stars, I hear things in the wind and see things glint and dart in the heavens, and my soul has been drawn out of me into that warm darkness. Many times I have felt a rapture. But never until I saw my brother bring his offering did I think to give something back to the infinite Mystery from which all life comes."

Silence. -The brothers, stand, at first attempting to ignore one another. We wait to see what will happen.

Spontaneously Cain turns. "Copycat," he says. "take your bleating sheep off somewhere else. This is my spot; it was my idea:" "I can stand wherever I please. It's a free country." "Not here!"
"What a sorry-looking bunch of vegetables. That's sheep food."
"You let your sheep wander one more time into my garden, and I'll kill them."
"What do you know about butchering, garden man? I slaughter the sheep for our feasts, not you:"
"What else do you do with your sheep, boy, out there all by yourself?"

On the other side of this last insult are oaths, menace, and the threat of a premature enactment of what the myth delays until God has stepped in to tilt the balance. I hold the brothers apart and motion to the actor playing God. He enters and puts an arm around Abel and slowly draws him aside, and then both turn their backs on Cain. Abel, looking somewhat apprehensively over his shoulder, laughs. Nothing is said. The silence weighs on us as Cain, seeing God and Abel move aside, watches them for a moment, then looks down. His eyes are hooded, and he seems to be looking deep inside himself.

Turning to the group-as-audience I ask, "What do you imagine is going on inside Cain?"
"I hear the silent roar of his anger."
"I see him trying to figure out what he did wrong!"
"He's examining his whole life, searching for an answer."
"I feel him hating God."
"I see the wheels of revenge beginning to turn."
"He wants to punish God."
- "He feels he has lost his brother. He is alone."
And the text tells us that "Cain's countenance fell, and he was enraged."

Peter Pitzele, Our Fathers' Wells

Discuss the piece asking the following questions.

What is Pitzele trying to do in his explorations of the Biblical stories?

How do the students explain the intense involvement of the "audience" in the experience of the reliving of the Biblical stories? How can participatory theatre based on stories from thousands of years ago, possibly bring such deep passion to the fore, in a modern day group?
Do any of the students recognize any of the feelings expressed in the piece by Cain or by Abel as relevant to them in any of the situations of life in which they have found themselves?

ACTIVITY: THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY SONG - THE KING BRUCE VERSION!

A few years ago, Bruce Springsteen wrote a song which featured the characters of Cain and Adam and used them to talk about family relationships. The song was called "Adam raised a Cain".

The protagonist of the song reflects on his baptism, that same baptism that is meant to remove the stain of sin from the individual, to cleanse him spiritually and to enable him to be received as a pure soul, unspotted by sin, into the church. However, it is clear that the action has not worked. The child labours through his life under the burden of his father's shadow. He cannot come out from under that shadow and be accepted as an individual. His mother can call him by his "true name". With her he can be himself. For his father, and for everybody else, he represents his father's son and will spend his life paying for the sins and the past of his father. He has inherited the sins and the flames. He can never break free. "You are born into this life paying for the sins of somebody else's past". His father looks for someone to blame for his own failures and they have settled on him.

**ADAM RAISED A CAIN by Bruce Springsteen**

*In the summer that I was baptized,*  
*My father held me to his side,*  
*As they put me to the water,*  
*He said how on that day I cried.*  
*We were prisoners of love, a love in chains,*  
*He was standin' in the door, I was standin' in the rain,*  
*With the same hot blood burning in our veins,*  
*Adam raised a Cain.*

*All of the old faces,*  
*Ask you why you're back, they fit you with position,*  
*And the keys to your daddy's Cadillac,*  
*In the darkness of your room,*  
*Your mother calls you by your true name,*  
*You remember the faces, the places, the names,*  
*You know it's never over, it's relentless*  
*As the rain,*  
*Adam raised a Cain.*

*In the Bible Cain slew Abel*  
*And East of Eden he was cast,*  
*You're born into this life paying,*  
*For the sins of somebody else's past,*  
*Daddy worked his whole life,*  
*For nothing but the pain,*  
*Now he walks these empty rooms,*  
*Looking for something to blame,*  
*You inherit the sins, you inherit the flames,*  
*Adam raised a Cain.*
Lost but not forgotten, from the dark heart
Of a dream,
Adam raised a Cain.

□ Look at the lyrics to the song 'Adam raised a Cain', by Bruce Springsteen. In pairs, try and work out what the song is all about. What is the feeling of the protagonist? How does he appear to feel towards each of his parents? In what way is he paying for his father's past? In whose eyes?

□ Why do you think Springsteen decided to reflect upon this particular family situation through the figures of Adam and Cain?

□ How do you understand the title of the song?

□ In what ways do you think that you can read the figure of Cain in the Biblical story through the prism of the song lyrics? Do you think it's a good way of looking at Cain? Can it supply insight into Cain's character and actions? If you needed more information about the figures in the song in order to decide on the answer to that question what would you want to know about the song's characters?

□ If you were to read the song through the prism of the Biblical story (instead of the opposite), how would it affect or change the reading of the song compared to a situation where the characters in the song had different names? If you needed more information about the figures in the Bible in order to decide on the answer to that question what would you want to know about the Biblical characters?
SUMMING UP ACTIVITIES FOR PART TWO:

TALKING WITH THE BROTHERS

Look at the following painting by the fifteenth century Flemish artist, Jan Van Eyck. He created the scene as part of an altarpiece that he made for the church of St. Bavo in Ghent.

□ What moment of the story does the story depict? Explain why you choose this moment from the text?

□ What do you think the artist is saying about the relationship of the brothers at this moment? How does he get the message over?

□ What would you like to tell each of the brothers at this moment if you could get through to them? If you could send to each of them a series of messages what would they be? Make a list for yourself of five things you would want to tell each of them.
If you could get in a time machine and return to this moment so that you were a participant in
this scene, and you could make one speech to both of them, what would it be? Prepare a
speech that you would make, including as many of the messages that you listed before as you
can. Practice and rehearse it so that you can recite it without notes and bring it to class!

**ACTIVITY: SIBLINGS! WITH BRUNO BETTELHEIM**

- Each person should prepare a list of times when they have felt anger and exasperation
  at someone specific in their family, if possible a brother or a sister.

- They should now choose one of the moments and reflect on it in writing or in an
  artistic depiction.

- In class, in small groups, the students should present their reflections to each other,
  discussing, after their presentation, why they felt an intense feeling of some kind
  when the specific incident occurred.

- Together with the whole class, make a list of the various types of incident and list,
  too, the different types of feelings that were felt during the incident. In a third
  column start to discuss and list the sort of strategies that can be used to deal with
  those exasperating sibling incidents.

- Refer back to Cain, explaining that the next step in the story (and in the process) is to
  try and understand what was going inside of Cain and choices that he might have had.

- Look at the following piece from psychologist Bruno Bettelheim.

*The Bible tells of God’s demands on man. As the story of Cain and Abel shows, there is no
sympathy in the Bible for the agonies of sibling rivalry - only a warning that acting upon it has
devastating consequences.*

*But what a child needs most, when beset by jealousy of his sibling, is the permission to feel that
what he experiences is justified by the situation he is in. To bear up under the pangs of his
envy, the child needs to be encouraged to engage in fantasies of getting even someday; then he
will be able to manage at the moment, because of the conviction that the future will set things
aright. Most of all, the child wants support for his still very tenuous belief that through
growing up, working hard, and maturing he will one day be the victorious one. If his present
sufferings will be rewarded in the future, he need not act on his jealousy of the moment, the
way Cain did.*

Bruno Bettelheim

How does the class relate to this idea. Do they think that this is good advice for a parent, or the
members of the class or God to have given Cain the chance arised? Why? Why not?
SECTION THREE: THE CONTROL OF SELF AND HUMAN NATURE
(Genesis 4: 6-7)

Questions from the Text

1. What precisely is Cain's mood after the rejection by God? What is the meaning of the word חרה HARA and how does it contribute to our understanding of Cain's subsequent explosion?

2. What is the meaning of the word שארו S’EIT lasho? Is God encouraging Cain, warning him or threatening him?

3. What is the nature of the internal struggle that clearly characterizes Cain? Has he got the power to master it and what, precisely, is the meaning of God's obscure challenge to Cain regarding sin?

4. How can we assess God's role here? Is there anything in God's 'behaviour' or in Cain's understanding of God's behaviour that might in any way have contributed to the tragic results of the story? Is there anything that we can learn from God's actions that can guide us in our attempts to approach people in pain?

Cain: the Price of Rejection.

In this section we concentrate on the internal struggle that clearly characterizes Cain as he goes through the emotional storm that follows the non acceptance of his sacrifice. Whatever the scars that he bears as a result of his upbringing and his interactions with his family, the picture that we get now is one of a man alone. The action now passes inwards to the soul of Cain. This is as it should be. When we come to try and understand any act of violence that an individual perpetrates, there are a number of aspects that we must evaluate. The immediate causes of the violence are likely to be found in a variety of external factors and stimuli. But we need to know also the inner state of the individual who commits the act of violence. External factors that might bring one person to violence will have very different effects on other individuals. The dark internal places in which decisions to act are taken, need to be understood as clearly as possible in order to assess a person's actions. This is especially true in the case of the 'loner', the person who lacks adequate external connections with others that would allow him or her to 'blow off steam' rather than commit a violent physical act in response to slights and humiliations, real or imagined. Thus, in this piece we try and penetrate the mind and the soul of the man about to murder his brother.
After his disappointment manifests itself in a great anger, which at this point is limited to Cain himself, without anyone else in the family being involved, God enters the picture. In a very obscure and difficult sentence (verse 7) God makes clear that there is some kind of a choice or challenge that stands before Cain. He has to make a choice of how to respond and what to do with his anger. The very obscurity of the verse has invited many Parshanim to step in and give their interpretation of the difficult language. In so doing, they reveal their understanding of the internal situation of the violent man. In the first two exercises in this short section, we concentrate on some of the different interpretations that have been suggested in Midrash and classic commentary.

Any examination of these sentences involves walking through a minefield of language. Many of the phrases and words mentioned here are unclear and/or ambiguous. It is clear that Cain is in a bad way, in the middle of some kind of internal storm, but it is not exactly clear what the nature of his mood is. Is it anger, disappointment, frustration? Is he angry or frustrated or disappointed at Abel, at God, at himself or at all three? It is clear that God tries to intervene. But the form of intervention is not completely clear. Is God warning Cain? Is God threatening Cain? Is God encouraging Cain? And finally why is God's attempted intervention ultimately so ineffectual? A large part of the answer to these questions will depend on a careful reading by each scholar of the language involved, but the truth is that despite this being an important tool in interpreting the scene, language alone is inadequate.

Firstly, we are deprived of the tone in which the words are said, particularly important in assessing the role of Divine intervention here. Secondly, some of the key words are genuinely ambiguous and if each authority looks at a different context where similar words appear in order to elucidate the specific word or phrase, we must recognize that the choice each makes follows from their own personal inclination and their perhaps a priori reading of the scene. Genuine ambiguity permits multiple readings. Such is the case here. Nevertheless in the 'take' that each authority has on the dynamics of the particular scene, we find some fascinating readings of this emotionally charged brief conversation.

Cain’s State of Mind

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger (1799-1866) was asked: What is the meaning of God asking Cain why his face has fallen? How could his face not fall since God had not accepted his gift? The Rabbi replied: God asked Cain, “Why has your face fallen? Because I did not accept your sacrifice or because I accepted your brother’s?”

"God did not ask Cain about his sins that had prevented his sacrifice from being accepted. Rather, he asked why Cain was drowning in grief. Excessive grieving over a transgression is worse than the transgression itself since it drags one into even more transgressions."

(Rav Y. Y. Trunk of Kutno, 1820-1893)

Let us begin by examining Cain's state of mind as God finds him. We have only the following Biblical phrase to guide us.

**Genesis 4: 5**

החר לכהימא ואיפל פני

The word *hara* can have different meanings. It is clear that the main association is anger but just as the Eskimos have dozens of words for snow, each indicating a different nuance, we need dozens of words for anger, since it a complex emotion with many different aspects. In Hebrew (and English) we have only a few words. None of them are precise in their indication of the sources of the anger but if we take the word *חרה* that appears here, it too can be understood in different
nuanced ways. It is normally translated as anger or wrath, but it has been suggested\textsuperscript{13} that a distinction needs to be made between חרה and חרון אף as it appears here. The former indeed should be understood as blazing rage but the latter appears to have elements of frustration and disappointment. In those places where we hear of a person that חרה or a similar verb form (e.g. 1 Samuel 15:11; 18:8; 20:7; 2 Samuel 6:8; Nehemiah 3:33; 4:1; 5:6), the individual suffers an anger born from deep frustration and jealousy without the ability to change the situation. In this reading Cain suffers from the deepest frustration following his rejection by God who accepted Abel's sacrifice showing a clear preference for the younger brother. This feeling of frustration and jealousy is so deep that it undermines Cain's ordered view of the world and sets him on the path to an irrational reaction which will ultimately burst forth in the great act of violence. In his frustration his face falls: he is unable to look at the world face on and his view of the world is conditioned by the things happening inside him, subjectively, rather than on the continuation of a rational assessment based on the real objective situation in that world. Cain shuts himself up in his body, and does not even respond when God turns to him and speaks. Cain's silence will not be broken till after the murder. In a sense, Cain's silence and refusal to communicate, even with God, can be seen as a payback and a response to God's silent refusal to accept Cain's sacrifice. Cain cuts God off since God had cut Cain off, and by so doing (in Cain's eyes) had caused the whole tragic chain of events.

EXERCISE: UNDERSTANDING ANGER

We suggest here a brief exercise to introduce the idea of the importance of the nuances in words in understanding the small subtleties of the scene.

- Begin this section, as usual, by asking the students to look at the verses in question and to see what questions come out for them from the text. If they have the Hebrew capabilities, ask them especially to pay attention to the Hebrew because in this section there are a number of issues of language on which we will be focusing.

- Ask the students to read the last part of verse five and all of verse six, where the two characteristics of Cain are described twice. Show the three translations that we have appended at the top together with the following additions:

  And Cain was very angry and his face fell (Koren Bible).
  And Cain was very wroth and his face fell (Chumash with Rashi edited by Shapiro),

Ask them how their understanding of the scene changes if they accept the meaning of חרה as anger or wrath on the one hand or distress on the other. How does our reading of Cain change if we accept one meaning rather than the other? How significant a change is it? Discuss in this context the importance of understanding the nuances of a single word.

- Now give them the list of places mentioned earlier and ask them to look up all of those scenes where the word occurs and to try and understand the common denominator of all of the scenes. Which of the two meanings seems closer to the common denominator? Are there any other elements common to all the scenes which need to be added in order to understand the scene before us better (bearing in mind that the translators could not use more than one or two words to translate the single word “vayihar” - חרה?\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} By Professor Joe Milgrom in an article that she wrote in 1983. Deep thanks to her for her suggestion and her general help especially with the artistic sides of the programme.
• Conclude by discussing finally the most accurate reading of the scene given the insights derived from the specific use of language.

Interpreting God's Mysterious Message to Cain with a Dictionary

We now come to one of the most perplexing of Biblical phrases as God comes onto the scene and addresses Cain. God opens by describing Cain's behaviour as it has already been described 'objectively' by the narrator and asking Cain for the reasons for his anger/frustration and his long face. This appears to be yet another example of the disingenuous strategies to open a conversation which we see time and again on God's part. But without waiting for an answer God sweeps on and addresses Cain in a turn of phrase both obscure and fraught with ambiguity.

הלוא אם תיטיב,שלח - ואם לא תיטיב,לפתת התשא אתו רוזך ואלך אתו תשוקתו ואתה תמשול ב-

Genesis 4:7

This obscure sentence turns, at least partly, around the unclear meaning of the word שְָאֵית, a word with a number of plausible meanings. Let us look at how a number of authorities have understood the sentence. We open up with the classic midrashic 'take' from Genesis Rabbah.

IF YOU DO WELL will you not receive a blessing as it is written 'And Aaron lifted (וישא) up his hand towards the people and blessed them' [Lev.9:22]
AND IF NOT, you will receive a curse as it is written 'and cause them to bear (השiamo) the iniquity of blame' [Lev. 22:16].

Another interpretation. IF YOU DO WELL I will forgive you AND IF NOT your sin will overflow the brim. Rabbi Berachiah in the name of R. Shimon bar Ami said, 'Blessed is he whose sin is forgiven (נשוי'. [Psalm 32:1] This means happy is he who is greater than his transgression but his transgression is not greater than he is, as it is written SIN CROUCHES AT THE DOOR.

Genesis Rabbah

The first interpretation sees the meaning of the word נָשָׁה as referring to possibilities in two different directions. According to this Cain has a choice that can be either a blessing or a curse. God, according to this idea is responding to the likely possibility that Cain is railing against God's arbitrary rejection of his sacrifice by blaming God for not running an orderly and moral world in which the righteous are rewarded. God here explains to Cain that indeed the world is based on the idea of reward and punishment and that there was a reason for the rejection of the sacrifice. If Cain wants to be accepted by God (the blessing) he must do better! If not he will indeed be cursed. This sees God's words as an encouragement to Cain. It is up to Cain to change the situation: it is in his power to do so. The second interpretation emphasizes God's ability to forgive: once again Cain is encouraged but God's mercy is mentioned to imply that Cain will have every chance of returning to Divine favor if only he makes the effort.
Cain’s Yetzer hara as the Key to Human Nature

We continue into the world of ambiguous readings by bringing two Rabbinic commentaries in which the different scholars understand the scenario in contrasting terms. Both commentators lived in very different eras. Ovadiah ben Jacob Sforno (16th century Italy) and Samson Rafael Hirsch (19th century Germany) were known in their own time for the wise insights of their commentaries and continue to be seen as important figures today.

הלוא אם תיטיב - IF YOU INTEND GOOD. [Improve] yourself, and strive that you should also be acceptable [to God].

שאת – THEN DO BETTER [or, you will be lifted]. Exalted heights ( QFont ) and elevated position await you, and will be yours.

Ovadiah Sforno (Italy, 15th-16th century)

We find the word שאת having the meaning of a specially privileged position, an honour, יתר שאת, as in Jacob’s last speech about Reuben, and indeed there too it is referring to the privilege of the firstborn, and just at the moment in which Reuben, the firstborn is declared unworthy of that honoured position. Exactly the same here. Cain, as the firstborn, had brought the “Offering of the Year”. In that offering, Abel was included as being represented too. But Abel did not see in Cain’s offering the expression of his sentiments, so he also brought an offering, an offering chosen in a different manner which expressed a different feeling, a different point of view. This offering was a silent protest against Cain’s worthiness for the honoured privileges of the firstborn. And God, in turning to Abel and not turning to Cain, thereby confirmed Abel’s worthiness and Cain’s unworthiness. This annoyed Cain and depressed him. But God said to him: Why does this annoy you, and why does it depress you with such hopelessness?

[It is only momentarily that I turned to Abel and not to you also. It still lies in your own hands. It only depends whether you will use the specially privileged position which, is due to you by birth and position].

Samson Rafael Hirsch, Germany 19th century.

It is fascinating to see that each of the two ideas in the midrash and each of the two Rabbinic commentators has derived their specific understanding of the word שאת from a totally different place. In fact, with nuances, each of the interpretations ultimately goes in the same general direction which emphasizes the ability of Cain to take control of his fate and to reverse the temporary misfortune.

As we continue to see the interpretations of the midrash and the two Rabbinic commentators on the rest of the sentence, the differences in emphasis become even clearer.

The next midrash in Genesis Rabbah gives the following multi-dimensional, multi-voiced interpretation of the last part of God’s comment.

AT THE ENTRANCE IS SIN, A CROUCHING DEMON. Not ירך (fem.) but ירך [masc.] is written here: at first sin is weak, like a woman, but then it grows strong, like a man.
R. Akiba said: At first it is like a spider's web, but eventually it becomes like a ship's rope, as it is written, "Woe to them that draw wrong-doing along with cords of deceit, and sin as with a cart rope." (Isaiah 5:18).

R. Isaac said: At first it is like a [passing] visitor, then like a guest [who stays longer], and finally like the master of the house. Thus it is written, "And there came a traveler to the rich man" (II Sam. 12 v 4): [this represents the Tempter] as a traveler who passes on; "But the rich man refrained from taking one of his own flock and of his own herd, to prepare a meal for the guest that was come unto him (ib.); now he is a guest; And he took the poor man's lamb and dressed it for the man that was come to him." (ib.): he is now the master.

R. Tanhum b. Marion said: There are dogs in Rome that know how to deceive men. One [a dog] goes and sits down before a baker's shop and pretends to be asleep, and when the shopkeeper dozes off he dislodges a loaf near the ground, and while the onlookers are collecting [the scattered loaves] he succeeds in snatching a loaf and making off.

R. Abba said: It [sin] is like a decrepit brigand who sat at the crossroads and ordered every passer-by to surrender his possessions, until a shrewd person passed by and saw that he was feeble, whereupon he began to crush him...

R. Ammi said: The Tempter does not walk at the side [of the street] but in the broad highway, and when he sees a person rolling his eyes, smoothing his hair [in self-satisfaction], and lifting his heel [in pride], he exclaims, 'This man belongs to me.' What is the proof? "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him". (Prov. 26 v 12).

R. Abin said: If one indulges his evil inclination in his youth, it will eventually rule over him in his old age. What is the proof? "He who pampers his servant in youth shall have him [the servant] become his master in the end" (ib. 29 v 21).

This long but very interesting midrash reads like an exercise in Rabbinic metaphor. Each of the Rabbinic authorities chooses a different metaphor to imply the same idea, namely that sin and temptation find an easy lodging in each person and if man does not exercise will power and determination the temptation to do evil will spread and ultimately be unconquerable. However, the greatness of mankind is the ability to conquer the evil impulse towards sin with will power. Thus the words of God to Cain are turned, typically, into a philosophical statement that beautifully captures the essence of the Rabbinic approach to the problem of human temptation. The Rabbis essentially internalized the idea of Eve or the snake that had led to the exile from Eden placing sin inside of each person rather than seeing it as an external force that each of us blame for our weakness.

- AT THE ENTRANCE IS SIN, A CROUCHING DEMON. Then sin also awaits you, and you will add wrong-doing to your sins, for such is the way of the evil inclination.

- TOWARD YOU HIS LUST (or desire). If you turn to him [the evil inclination] and succumb to your evil desires, as our Sages say, "The evil inclination within man grows stronger from day to day" (TB Succah 52a).
BUT YOU CAN RULE OVER HIM. You can overpower it [the evil inclination] through the Divine Image [within you] as our Sages say (ibid.), "Were it not that the Holy One helps him, he would not be able to withstand it, as it says: 'God will not leave him in his hand'. (Psalms 37:33).

Sforno

rescoř but whichever way one decides to take seems to have found a most deplorable misconception, against which one cannot protest too strongly. How, in certain circles, has this sentence been twisted to be used as a support, "from the Bible itself", of the theory that there is an element of evil lurking in the world that, like a wild beast, is lying in wait for men, full of avidity to spring upon them, eager to overpower them and "bring about their fall"? And yet on mature reflection and study, the sentence actually expresses the very opposite!

Compare all the places where rovetz referring to animals occurs. Not one single instance can one find where it has the meaning of a lurking, lying-in-wait attitude. Without exception it refers just to the most peaceful, undisturbed resting, with no incitement to attack or molest. Equally so, desire is not only never the expression for a hostile eagerness, but rather [as in Song of Songs, it is the expression] for the longing for a most valued possession, the most devoted longing for love!

It is apt that the word חטאת, sin, the appeal of the senses, is here given the masculine gender, rovetz. Its power is not to be underestimated. It has the power to master you, but it remains quietly behind your door. It does not come in to you by itself, uninvited. If it is at home with you, and finally becomes the master of your house, you must in the first instance have invited it in, set a chair for it at your table. By itself it remains quietly before your door. Moreover, all its desire is that you should master it and direct it. God has given sensuality an appeal to your senses, not that it should master and direct you, but that you should master and direct it, not that you should suppress or kill it, but "משהל" - regulate it, rule over it and direct it. That is its whole purpose and calling... And it is just on the correct control and use of our natural tendencies that the loftiest purposes of our life down here are found.

S. R. Hirsch

Sforno follows the direction of the midrash seeing sin as a lurking threat to all of us, but Hirsch takes a very different tack, reading the phrase with the optimism that expressed the atmosphere of the 19th century age of reason. Sin can of course lead to a person's downfall but there is no reason for that to happen. The man of reason can overcome it with the aid of reason and common sense. Sin is not an enemy out to get us but merely a force that the reasonable and capable person can easily master with the help of moderation and steady behaviour. The Rabbis of the midrash together with Sforno read God's remark as if it comes out of a classic Russian novel. Life is a high drama of temptation and failure. Hirsch on the other hand reads it more in the manner of a novel of English manners. Life is a small drama indeed. People should have no problem in mastering sin.

ACTIVITY: THE COMMENTATORS SPEAK:
PARSHANUT AND DARSHANUT.

☐ Read carefully the comments of the midrashic source or Rabbinic commentary for the first part of the sentence in which God appears to give a message to Cain (הלוא אם תיטיב,沙特 - (halo am mishb. shem)
Précis the comments of each thinker or source into a couple of sentences which give the essential points that they think that God wishes to convey. What do you think the particular comments of each thinker reveal about his own particular personality and viewpoint? Add your own comments to each of the thinkers’ ideas in a couple of sentences.

- In small groups, the students should now prepare a conversation between any two of the thinkers and a third figure, one of the students. The task is to prepare a small dramatic scene where the three scholars are discussing the interpretation of God's comment with the help of the contemporary student.

- After some of the groups present their scenes, discuss what the students thought of the different approaches. Which, if any, were interesting to them and caused them to see the text in any new ways? Do they think that the different interpretations represent equally valid readings of the text?

**SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISE: THE COMMENTATORS SPEAK AGAIN: MORE PARSHANUT AND DARSHANUT.**

Let us now move onto the second part of verse 7. Starting with the excerpt from the midrash we note that as usual in Rabbinic writing, different voices are woven into a tapestry of commentary without regard for the fact that the speakers lived in different generations. The finished product appears as a kind of conversation between different Rabbinic figures as if they are sitting down and discussing things calmly, over a cup of coffee with friends and colleagues. Let us move in to start separating the voices and understand what the Rabbis are saying in this midrash.

☐ Read the excerpt from Genesis Rabbah. Make a table explaining the comment of each of the six Rabbinic figures. What is each of them trying to say? Do they all agree with each other? Can you pick out any of the figures that are saying something a little different to the others, or are they exactly parallel reflections on the same subject?

☐ Why do you think that so many of them feel it necessary to bring a Biblical quote to back up their position? Some of the quotes are pretty far-fetched. How does it help them to bring the quotes? Wouldn't their opinions have looked sharper without the quotations? What does it tell you about their view of the Bible?

☐ Add your own comment in the same general spirit as the Rabbis but giving your own twist and emphasis, so that what you say is NOT just a parallel reflection. Where would you put your comment in the text?

☐ Use a Jewish encyclopedia or another reference source to find out who each of the six Rabbinic figures mentioned in the source was and when and where they lived. In what way is the literary form misleading? Why do you think that it has been written in this way? Do you agree with the approach or not? Why?

☐ Now take the extra two comments of Sforno and Hirsch. Which of the two comments most agrees with the previous midrash and which strongly disagrees? Go back to the encyclopedia and examine the biography of the one who disagrees. Is there anything there that might suggest the different approach taken?
Developing a Message: Taking a Tip from the Chassidim

The idea that each comment or midrashic statement or scenario is capable of providing a message is rarely shown better than in the specific layer of Hassidic midrash or story. The Chassidim were among the greatest of darshanim and parshanim and their use of the Biblical text to squeeze out contemporary messages for their times is almost unparalleled. As such it is useful to bring an example of the kind of way that they developed their insights from the texts. Let us take two small examples from the text that we are currently examining.

*Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger (1799-1866) was asked: What is the meaning of God asking Cain why his face has fallen? How could his face not fall since God had not accepted his gift? The Rabbi replied: God asked Cain, “Why has your face fallen? Because I did not accept your sacrifice or because I accepted your brother’s?”*  
Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim II, p. 308;

*God did not ask Cain about his sins that had prevented his sacrifice from being accepted. Rather, he asked why Cain was drowning in grief. Excessive grieving over a transgression is worse than the transgression itself since it drags one into even more transgressions.*  
Rav Y. Y. Trunk of Kutno, 1820-1893)

Professor Shai Cherry explains:
“Both comments are motivated by God’s seemingly insensitive comment that follows on the heels of God’s rejection of Cain and his sacrifice. If one reads God’s words (Genesis 4: 6) as though delivered in a taunting tone, we have to ask why God would be rubbing Cain’s rejection in his downfallen face? The Chassidic Rabbi Yitzchak Meir suggests that God was emphasizing the Why of the question. “Why has your face fallen?” How difficult it is to be happy for one’s brother when one is not enjoying similar success! A Chassidic addition to the Decalogue might be: *Thou shalt not begrudge your neighbor.*

Our Chassidic master is very sensitive to the wording of the verses. Cain first responds to God’s rejection with distress or anger (Genesis 4: 5), and only after with embarrassment or a sense of humiliation. Rabbi Yitzchak Meir assumes that God’s second question in verse six is not redundant. First Cain is angry at being rejected. He then feels humiliated when Abel’s offering is accepted.

In his comment, Rav Trunk (1820-1893, Poland) highlights the focus on joy and ecstasy that one finds in much, though by no means all, of Hasidic literature. There is a tendency among religious personalities to abuse themselves over their imperfections. Rav Trunk here suggests that self-flagellation is self-defeating. Rav Trunk’s reading of verse six emphasizes the word so. “Why are you so distressed?” It is entirely appropriate to be upset if the emotion facilitates self-improvement. The problem here is that Cain is so upset that his emotions are themselves a barrier to moral progress.

On Yom Kippur, in addition to forgiving those who have wronged us (including God), Chassidic wisdom suggests we need to forgive ourselves, too. “The beauty of Rav Trunk’s comment is that it not only gets God off the hook for being insensitive, it makes God both insightful and caring.”

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14 Itturei Torah, p. 44.
EXERCISE: MESSAGES FROM THE TEXT.

- Examine the two Chassidic texts on Gen. 4: 6, brought here. Next to each of them write the message that you think that the particular Chassidic commentator is trying to put over. Write, too, how you relate to the message. Is it a good message in your opinion, worthy of being transmitted or not? Why? Why not? Write also whether or not you think that the message actually appears in the original text. Has the writer genuinely inferred it from the text (parshanut) or has he imposed on the text a message that he wanted to put over anyway, using the text as an opportunity to do so (a form of darshanut)? Is the second technique an acceptable use of the Biblical text? Why? Why not?

- Construct around part or all of verse 6 a scenario that transmits a message that you think is a good one that you would like to get over to others.

  - Get the students together and let volunteers read out their version of verse 6 including the messages that they have selected. After each reading, discuss with the class what the message of the writer was. After taking sufficient examples, discuss generally the validity of such messages that are at least partly imposed on the text. Are they legitimate? Is it permissible to use the Bible for such purposes? Talk about the Chassidim as great practitioners of this practice but point out the common nature of the practice at all levels of commentary from the Midrash onwards and point out and discuss the issue of peshat and derash in the exegetical tradition.
On the Issue of Biblical Translation

One of the major issues that needs to be dealt with in any study of the Bible is the issue of translation. Over the centuries hundreds of translations of the Bible have been made into almost all the different languages in the world. The Bible is the most translated book in the history of the world and it is important to remember that the vast majority of human beings who have ever encountered the bible have done so through the medium of a specific translation. It might be thought, superficially that translating is principally a technical job and that the task of the translator is to get the general message across to the reader. A brief thought will be sufficient to realise that this is insufficient.

The Tanach is far more than a series of messages that a translator might wish to convey to the best of his or her understanding. The Tanach is written in a particular style and it is to a large extent the style itself in the original Hebrew that contained a great deal of the power of the text. This has been recognised by countless translators themselves and most translators have made some kind of an attempt to get beyond the mere transmission of the general sense of the text and to use the translation in order to try and convey some of the majesty of the text. However, it has been recognised by many that a great translation must go beyond both the transmission of the message of the text and the capturing of the dramatic power. There have been those who have realised that much of the message and the content of the text is actually contained in the form of the text. By its use of techniques such as alliteration, repetitive leading words, puns and verbal association, the Biblical narrator or narrators attempt to deepen whatever ideas they are tying to convey. Thus especially (although not exclusively) in recent years translators have placed emphasis on the attempt to convey some of these meanings through a subtle wordplay that in their mind conveys some of the intentions of the original narrators of the texts that have come to us through time.

One of the greatest and most conscious of these attempts is found in the great and important German language translation made in the 1920's by the two great German Jewish thinkers and scholars, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

Not only did they spend years on their translation but both of them and more particularly Buber, reflected on the process and on their aims in many essays and speeches that were published in those years. We bring here a selection of Buber's comments on what he and Rosenzweig were attempting to do in their translation.

1. The "Old Testament" has never before been translated by writers seeking to return to the concrete fundamental meaning of each individual word; previous translators have been contented to put down something "appropriate," something "corresponding."...

[For example] Abraham, complains that he will die' ariri; and what does that mean? All previous translations say, "without children." The etymology of the word, however, says something else, something more concrete and vivid, namely, "stripped naked" - for to these oriental people, children are a living garment and a
second body... That is why Abraham calls himself not "childless" but "childbare," "childstripped." To undertake a genuine translation of the Bible entails now and then venturing such words; whether posterity will receive them or reject them is not for the living to know.

2. This approach to rendering the text does not at all imply the obligation to retain the original word-order; that would often entail doing violence to German syntax. Luther's "let there be light" [Es werde Licht] in all its beauty diminishes the force of the elemental word, as Herder saw; but Herder's "be there light" [Sei Licht] makes the call that creates ex nihilo [out of nothing at all] sound like a conversational imperative. We have to re-order the words to attain the true equivalent in German, with its different sequence of subject and predicate: "Light be!" [Licht werde!].

3. [Biblical] scholarship [which sees the text as being the product of many human hands] may dissolve a sentence into genuinely or supposedly independent components; we however may consider and imitate the forged work of the totality - meaning by "imitate" not the stupefying attempt to repeat an established form in different matter, but the striving to create for that form, in the differently ordered language into which we translate, a correspondence or a series of correspondences. The auditory patterns of German can never reproduce the auditory forms of Hebrew; but they can, in growing from an analogous impulse and in exercising an analogous effect, correspond to them Germanically, can Germanize them.

To meet the demands of such a task, the translator must elicit from the letter of the Hebrew text its actual auditory form; he must understand the writtenness of Scripture as for the most part the record of its spokenness - which spokenness, as the actual reality of the Bible, is awakened anew wherever an ear biblically hears the word or a mouth biblically speaks it. Prophecy, psalm, and saying were originally born not of the pen but of the tongue; but the same is true of report and law. The holy text is for all uninterrupted antiquity an orally transmitted text - transmitted orally even where it coexists with a highly cultivated secular repository of writing.

4. The Bible seeks to be read as One Book] so that no one of its parts remains self-contained; rather every part is held open to every other. The Bible seeks to be present as One Book for its readers so intensely that in reading or reciting an important passage they recall all the passages connected to it, and in particular those connected to it by linguistic identity, resemblance, or affinity; so intensely that all these passages illuminate and explain one another, that they cohere into a unity of meaning, into a theological doctrine not taught explicitly but implicit in the text and emerging from its connections and correspondences. These linkages are not introduced by interpretation ex post facto; rather the canonical text came into being under the influence of precisely this principle, and we can legitimately presume that this principle was a factor in the choice of what the canonical text was to include and of which versions were to go into it. But clearly the same principle controls even the composition of individual portions. The repetition of homonymous [like sounding] or near homonymous words and word sequences within a passage, within a book, within a sequence of books, exercises a quiet power that nonetheless overwhelms the reader prepared to hear.

5. To assess what we have achieved is possible only on the basis of an impartial understanding of what we have attempted: to transmit the reality of the Bible to western men and women in a western language. This cannot be done - regardless of what greater
accomplishments may follow our own - by an "entirely different ordering" of the text; we cannot dissolve the unity of this book, whatever its genesis, into its component parts without robbing it of its life. Rather it can be done only along the path we have taken, only by remaining true to the words, the sentences, the rhythms, and the structures of the book.

6. We have, as I said, had in mind the Bible "aloud." We proceed from the notion that the Bible is a product of living recitation, and is intended for living recitation; that speech is its nature, and the written text only a form for preserving it. Hence our method of rendering its rhythm. Our translation is the first colometric translation... i.e. the first that gives the text its natural division into lines of meaning as these are determined by the laws of human breathing and human speech, with each line constituting a rhythmic unit.

7. We have attempted another thing not accomplished in previous translations: to distinguish synonyms wherever German permits, i.e. not to render two distinct Hebrew words by one German one, nor - at least within a single sequence - to render a single Hebrew word by two German ones. We have further attempted, in cases where a common root linked various words, to retain that link in German.

8. Those who listen will hear the higher meaning in the similarity of sound. A connection is established between one passage and another, and thus between one stage of the story and another - a connection that articulates the deep motive of the narrated event more immediately than could a pinned-on moral.

Let us now try and introduce some of these ideas to the students.

**ACTIVITY: CREATING AND TRANSLATING.**

- Ask the students to define the job of a translator. Now ask them to define the job of a Biblical translator. Discuss the two questions and point out the enormous responsibility of any would-be Biblical translator who takes on her or himself the task of mediating for the reader what many perceive as the direct word of God and all see as a text of immeasurable importance for human culture in general and for people's lives within that culture.

- Present to the students the following scenario. They are experts in the issue of Biblical translation and that they have been invited for the forthcoming world conference "On Biblical Translation" to prepare a paper on Buber and Rosenzweig's approach to the text in their great translation of the 1920's. Tell them that their working materials are eight fragments of Buber's writings that have recently come to light from his personal archive and give them some or all of the above pieces from Buber on Biblical translation. They should work singly or in pairs, going through the fragments and trying to reconstruct the method and the approach of Buber and Rosenzweig to the task of translation. As they prepare their paper they must not content themselves with explaining the approach but must add their own comments regarding the enterprise. How do they relate to the ideas expressed by Buber? Do they make sense? Do they seem logical? Illogical?

- Explain to the students that over the years many have supported the general ideas (such as they have been understood), while others have opposed them. As great experts on the subject, the students are being asked to give the 'last word' to the conference that they are
going to address. As such, their responsibility is very great, both to explain the system and to assess it.

- Let a couple of students give their papers (to the assembled conference of experts) and let the whole group discuss them.

SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISE: COMPARING VERSIONS.

- We reproduce here from above, the first seven verses from three significant English language versions of the text that we are examining in Genesis ch. 4. One is the classic old English translation, the 17th century King James version. The other two are fairly recent Jewish translations, of the Jewish Publication Society and of Everett Fox.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King James Version</th>
<th>New Jewish Publication Society, TANAKH</th>
<th>Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses</th>
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| And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.  
2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.  
3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.  
4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:  
5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.  
6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?  
7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. | 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,  
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.” | The human knew Havva his wife, She became pregnant and bore Kayin. She said: KanitiI-have-gotten A man, as has YHWH!  
2 She continued bearing – his brother, Hevel. Now Hevel became a shepherd of flocks, and Kayin became a worker of the soil.  
3 It was after the passing of days that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to YHWH,  
4 and as for Hevel, he too brought – from the firstborn of his flock, from their fat-parts. YHWH had regard for Hevel and his gift,  
5 for Kayin and his gift he had no regard. Kayin became exceedingly upset and his face fell.  
6 YWHW said to Kayin: Why are you so upset? Why has your face fallen?  
7 Is it not thus: If you intend good, bear-it-above, But if you do not intend good, At the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon, Toward you his lust – But you can rule over him. |
• The students should take all three and make a very careful comparison of the first seven verses that we have studied up to now. Each student must list up to three specific points (i.e. points that relate to specific details of the text) which make each of the translations distinct in these seven verses and must try and suggest, if possible referring to the Hebrew, why the particular emphasis has been made. If possible the students should attempt to venture an opinion on the particular usage. In addition the students should state which, if any, of the translations they would suggest for their school studies in Tanach, and make a case explaining why.

• Discuss the things that the students have found and wrap up this part of the discussion on the importance of translation and the need for each of us to be aware of the approach of the translation that we are using if that is the way that we study the text.

• Finally, discuss or debate formally the issue: should we make the attempt to study the Tanakh in the original Hebrew dispensing with translations?

• Note how Everett Fox translates Biblical names by their meaning. How then would you translate Hevel in light of the Psalm using his name:

Midrash on the Name: The Poetic Associations of Abel = Hevel

Tell me, O LORD, how long my time is, and the measure of my days. Oh, let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my lifespan only inches long; for You my existence is nothing at all; everyone's is like a passing breath= Hevel. So people walk about like shadows and their doings amount to zero = Hevel; they keep earning riches without knowing who will get them. (Ps. 39:4-7)
Reflecting on God's Problematic Approach.

From the results of the encounter between God and Cain it is clear that God's attempt to move Cain off the path to self-destruction and violence, failed. If we assume that Cain was not an inherently evil person but rather, as we have suggested in our analysis, a fragile and vulnerable person who was moved to act the way he did, through frustration and disillusionment, is there anything that God could have done differently to deal with the reality of Cain's disappointment, that might have produced different results?

Let us raise a number of possibilities.

1. In the phrase "ואל קין ואל מנחתו לא שעשע" it seems that God rejects both Cain and his sacrifice. From Cain's point of view this represents a total rejection of himself as a person. Psychologists warn parents to make a differentiation between a child and a child's actions when admonishing the child, and not to give the child the feeling that he or she is inherently bad, but rather to give the feeling that the action that she or he did was bad. In a similar vein, we can suggest that had God not given Cain the feeling that he himself was rejected but had rejected Cain's act as inadequate or problematic, there would have been more likelihood of Cain responding to God's suggestion in verse seven that it was possible to do better (a second chance).

2. God's way of opening up the conversation with Cain is perhaps problematic. Firstly we can suggest that the words "למה חרה לך ולמה נפלו פניך" is not a real open question. It does not open up the way for a response. There is no opportunity given for Cain to answer. God immediately sweeps on with a piece of advice or a warning, without entering into an open conversation with Cain. Especially if we read Cain as a closed and frustrated individual who bottles everything up inside of him, then it might well have been that a space in the conversation for a response on Cain's part might have facilitated the communication so necessary for a reconsideration of his position and a lessening of his anger.

3. In addition, the way that God phrases the pseudo-question gives no hint that Cain was in any way justified in feeling hurt. His feelings are not in any way recognised as having any validity here. Possibly, God's intention was to play down the seriousness of the situation and to encourage Cain by suggesting that the whole thing was really minor and an insufficient basis for feeling a deep hurt. But the way that it was done could certainly add to Cain's feeling of rejection. "Not only am I rejected but my feelings are not taken seriously". We can perhaps suggest that a different formulation might have had the effect of opening up Cain to the possibility of repentance and change.

4. Finally, God supposes that Cain can "get over his bad mood, and do better next time". However, it might be suggested that this advice, while valid in itself, does not take into sufficient account the darkness of Cain's mood and the extent that he has already slid down the steep slope to violence and self-destruction. It might be that nothing that God said would have been sufficient to bring Cain up to the point where he could reconsider his past actions and his way forward in a different light. But it is perhaps possible nevertheless to suggest that a different point of approach on God's part, rather than the rather hale and hearty encouragement implicit in God's words, (or alternatively, given a different reading, the finger wagging admonishment implicit in the words), might have effected the possibility of change and repentance (God's aims) on Cain's part.

In light of these comments, let us examine God's reaction with the students and see if there is anything that can be learned regarding the way that each of us treats people in pain.
ACTIVITY: CAIN IN PAIN

☐ As an individual, if you can think of cases, briefly record two instances where you intervened to help a friend who was feeling down. One instance should refer to a case where you were successful in your intervention. One case should relate a time when you were unsuccessful. Write down why you possibly succeeded in one case while failing in the second.

☐ Now in pairs, review and write down a description of Cain's situation at the beginning of verse six. What is his mood? How would he look to a person coming across him without knowing what was going on?

☐ You are a crisis intervention counselor working out a strategy for treating Cain. Your aim is to help him change his ways and to start reintegrating him into the human community, helping him to get over his disappointment with the recent past. You are only going to see him once. There is no time for a conventional long therapeutic treatment. This one time will have to suffice to start him on the road to recovery.

☐ Write for yourself a list of 'dos' and 'don’ts' of which you want to remind yourself, just prior to your first meeting with him. What strategies and tactics should you adopt which are best calculated to help him achieve your aims for him? Which strategies and tactics should you avoid?

☐ Now look very carefully at God's response in verses six and seven. Assess God's tactics and strategies. How good a job does God do? Write a brief report of no more than a few sentences, praising or critiquing God's 'performance'.

☐ Prepare a small scene of an interaction between a crisis intervention counselor and Cain as he appears at the beginning of verse six. Show the beginning of a brief encounter which will have the best chance of achieving your ends.

• As the educator, review and discuss some of the scenes prepared.

• After this, discuss what the pairs wrote about their assessment of God's tactics and strategies.

• Raise the question with the students. Are we allowed to critique God's behaviour in a scene like this? Why? Why not?

• End with the question: what are the things we have to bear in mind when trying to help someone who is hurting for whatever reason? The students can - and should, if appropriate - use the examples that they noted down at the beginning of the exercise.

ACTIVITY: INSIDE THE MIND OF CAIN

• The class should be divided into pairs or small groups and they have to make an arrow and circle diagram showing Cain's state of mind as he reacts to his different instincts. Factors that lead him towards a preparedness and determination to lash out in his anger towards Abel (not to kill him but rather to hurt him physically – to beat him up) should be marked with arrows.
pointing inwards towards the circle at the centre of which should be written the words "to hurt Abel physically". Factors that lead towards him not hurting Abel but to react in other possible ways should be marked by arrows that point outwards, away from the circle, pointing towards other courses of action (written) that might be considered. The stronger a particular factor is, the larger the arrow that represents it.

- In the larger group, the diagrams should be explained and the various factors on both sides should be listed.

- This should be followed by a discussion of Cain's state of mind and a consideration of whether it was possible for him to go in other directions and what it was that ultimately kept him on the path that led to the death of his brother.

An additional step can be added to this activity to make even more concrete the complex of ambivalent feelings that Cain must have felt.

- Prepare a number of pieces of string and colour them in two colours according to the number of factors that appear on the two lists. Attach one of the list of feelings on a card to each piece of string so that if, for example, there are ten feelings altogether, there are ten pieces of string with a card attached to each of them.

- Each string represents one of the major factors that appears on one of the two lists. Each pair or small group gets one of the strings with the attached one of the feelings of Cain. They must decide how long their string should be. Strong intense feelings should be represented by a short string. Less strong feelings should be represented by a longer string.

- One person must represent Cain. A representative of each pair or group should put one end of their string into one of Cain's hands (one hand for each colour, with the strings of each colour being on different sides of Cain). They should stand themselves at the distance that their string permits (i.e. the more intense the feeling and the shorter the string, the nearer the person must stand to Cain). That representative should explain why she or he is holding a long or a short piece of string. Finally "Cain" should be asked to react to the contrary feelings running through him and represented by the pieces of string of two colours running to both sides of him. How does it feel?

**ACTIVITY: CONTRASTING CAIN AND HILLEL – Keeping your cool!**

Hillel, the first century sage and early Rabbinic model and leader, has gone down in Jewish tradition as a man whose temperament was kind and extremely calm. We bring here the famous story of his
failure to lose his temper, even when greatly provoked. As such, he represents a model of a very different kind of behaviour to that exhibited by Cain who boils up with extreme anger, the moment that his sacrifice is not accepted.

Our masters taught: It once happened that two men made a wager with each other, agreeing that he who was able to arouse the anger of Hillel would win four hundred zuz. So one of them said, "I will go [first] and arouse his anger." Since it was before the onset of Sabbath, Hillel was washing his hair. The man went, passed by the door of Hillel’s house, and called out, "Is there a Hillel here? Is there a fellow named Hillel around this place?" Hillel pulled his robe on and went out to him, saying, "My son, what do you wish?" "I have a question to ask." "Ask, my son, ask." "Why are the heads of the Babylonians round?" "My son, you have asked quite a question. The answer is that their midwives are unskilled." The man left, stayed away for a while, then came back, calling out, "Is there a Hillel here? Is there a fellow named Hillel here?" Again Hillel pulled on his robe and went out to him, saying, "My son, what do you wish?" "I have a question to ask." "Ask, my son, ask." "Why are the eyes of the Palmyrians bleary?" "My son, you have asked quite a question. The answer is that they live in a [windswept] sandy country." The man left, stayed away for a while, and again came back, calling out, "Is there a Hillel here? Is there a fellow named Hillel around this place?" Once again Hillel pulled on his robe and went out to him, saying, "My son, what do you wish?" "I have a question to ask." "Ask, my son, ask." "Why are the feet of the Ethiopians so wide?" "My son, you have asked quite a question. The answer is that they live in watery marshes." "I have many questions to ask," said the man, "but I am afraid that you may become angry [at me]." At that, Hillel wrapped his robe around himself, sat down before the man, and said, "All the questions you have to ask, go ahead and ask." The man asked him: "Are you the Hillel who is called patriarch of Israel?" "Yes." "If you are the one, may there not be many like you in Israel." "Why, my son?" "Because on account of you I just lost four hundred zuz." "Calm your spirit. Losing four hundred zuz, and even an additional four hundred zuz, was well worth it, [for you have learned that, whatever the provocation], Hillel will not lose his temper."

T.B. Tractate Shabbat 30b-31a.

- Write a dialogue between Hillel and Cain or a story about them in which Hillel acts to persuade Cain to try and respond in a different way and points out the reasons behind his (Hillel's) approach to anger and self-control. Work in to your treatment the story of Hillel and the man who tried to anger him. Draw on your knowledge – from yourself and your friends and family – about how anger actually works in people. On the assumption that very few of us are capable of working according to Hillel's formula or of living up to his standards, how could he try and effect a changed attitude in Cain?

- Let the members of the group write a note to themselves regarding where they tend to stand on the continuum from Hillel (at one end) to Cain (at the other) in situations
which objectively justify great anger. Are they more like Hillel (in their own eyes – i.e. do they manage to control and deal positively with such situations) or are they more like Cain (i.e. explosive, emotional and beyond the claim of rational behaviour)?

- Now put a very long piece of masking tape in a line along the floor of the classroom. At one end put a card with the name Cain. At the other end, put a card with the name Hillel.

- Ask each member of the group in turn (if they are willing!) to place him or herself on the continuum of the tape according to how they think they react. They should (if they are willing) explain why they think they belong at that point on the line.

- When they have finished with that, ask them all together to stand where they would like to be on the line.

- Ask the members of the class how many of them moved to a different place on the line. Discuss with those people who did move, why they moved themselves, how they would like to react and what stops them from doing that.

- Explain that it is time to move to the next part of the programme, which deals with the act of violence itself.
SECTION FOUR:
THE MISSING DIALOGUE BEFORE THE MURDER:
“CAIN SAID TO ABEL…” (Genesis 4: 8)

Questions from the Text

1. Why did Cain kill Abel? What do the missing words indicate about the reasons for the killing? Was the conversation that is hinted at by the text connected with the narrative of the story as it appears in the text?

2. Does the conversation that is hinted at here have wider implications for the human condition or does it only have meaning and ramifications for our understanding of the specific story that we are encountering here?

The Missing Sentence

One of the fascinating unknowns of this Biblical story occurs in this sentence in what appears to be a lacuna in the text. Whenever you have a verse that begins with Ploni says to Almoni, you expect to hear what Ploni said to Almoni. Here, in this example from verse eight, we receive silence rather than speech. This presents another tailor-made moment for the commentators to fill in the gap. The words "Cain said to Abel his brother…" appear immediately before the act of murder and generations of commentators have reasonably assumed that whatever was said between the brothers had a bearing on the subsequent murder and quite plausibly reveals the direct cause of the murder.

There are two major approaches among the commentators.

1. One possibility has been to connect the act of violence directly with the particulars of the preceding story and see it in terms of a response to the tensions already outlined.

A good example of this first tendency, drawing on a number of older sources is brought in the 18th century Ladino commentary "MeAm Loez"

According to [one] opinion, the conversation was as follows: Cain suggested that they take a stroll in the fields, and when they were alone, he said, "It seems that God shows favoritism. That's why your offering was accepted and mine wasn't."
"Heaven forbid," answered Abel. "That's not true at all. I am better than you, and my offering was of higher quality. That's why it was accepted."
"There is no judgment! There is no Future World! Good people don't receive any reward, and the wicked receive no punishment," exclaimed Cain.
Abel replied, "You don't know what you're talking about! Of course God will give good reward in the World to Come. He will, also punish the wicked for their misdeeds."

This began a debate. But before long, tempers flared, and ....

MeAm Loez
Radak, R. David Kimche, has a similar 'take' on the scene.

**CAIN SAID** means that he told his brother about God's reprimand and he blamed him: "It's your fault etc," and got angrier and more upset. However, Cain did not attack Abel in his father's presence out of respect for [fear of?] his father. He kept his grudge until they were both together in the field – one grazing and one farming. Then Cain argued with Abel as a result of the anger and jealousy that he already harbored and killed him.

R. David Kimche

Radak sees the actual words irrelevant (and therefore missed out rightly by the Torah) since the real argument between the brothers occurred earlier and this was but a repeat or a continuation of the original quarrel in a more neutral place. The field, for him, is chosen as neutral territory where the argument could develop freely. The important thing was not to hold the argument under their father's nose and thus the field was the ideal place.

Rashi too shares with Radak the irrelevance of the specific words of the conversation between the brothers but for another reason.

**AND CAIN SPOKE TO ABEL** He began an argument, striving and contending with him, to seek a pretext to kill him. There are midrashic explanations of these words but this is the plain meaning of the text.

Rashi

It is interesting that Rashi who is very often happy to quote received midrashic comments and explanations, here distances himself from such a tendency. For him, it seems, not only is it important to place the sentence within a context of solid peshat, but it is wrong or at least tangential to do anything else. This is not the place for that. His reading itself is striking. The reason that the text does not quote the words of Cain, in Rashi’s opinion (like that of Radak) is not due to a lacuna of any kind. The words themselves are irrelevant. Cain was going to "get" Abel any way that he could and was determined to create the right scenario. Therefore he kept on needling him until finally tempers were roused and Cain got his 'legitimate' opportunity. The text according to this was right to stress the irrelevancy of the words by leaving them out hinting to us about Cain's approach and state of mind. One major difference between this reading and the preceding ones is that Rashi clearly sees the whole thing as premeditated on Cain's part and rejects the possibility that the argument developed out of the emotion of the moment (or, for Radak, a previous moment!).

Another example of the same general insistence of situating the sentence within a contextual context can be found in the Ramban (13th century Spain) who solves the issue of the missing dialogue in a way similar to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Torah by the Jews of Egypt in the third century BCE:

...*In my opinion it is connected with the following words of the Torah: “and it came to pass, when they were in the field,” meaning that Cain said to Abel, "Let us go forth into the field" and there he secretly killed him.*

Ramban

Ramban, as we see, once again takes a story-contextual approach to the subject in which the solution to the question draws on a realistic reading of the scene. The content of Cain’s words to Abel do not necessarily teach us about his motives but about his premeditated intention (as in Rashi's reading) to kill his brother. Drawing him to the field may mean a place far from civilization as the Zohar
emphasizes\textsuperscript{15}, but in any case, it sounds like a place which is Cain-the-farmer's territory (unlike Radak).

2. There is however, a completely different interpretative approach to filling the gap in the dialogue. All the explanations that we have seen up till now, situated the conversation within the contours of the story and sought to explain the conversation in terms consistent with the action and mood of the narrative. But this peshat approach was rejected by some authorities who sought to move away from the particular narrative of the story and to present the reasons for the murder (and the subject of the conversations) in archetypal terms, filling in the gap in the text by giving voice to the Rabbis' own reading regarding the primary cause of strife and violence in the world. The classic text on this is from Midrash Rabbah and we bring it here.

AND CAIN SPOKE UNTO ABEL HIS BROTHER, etc. (Genesis 4:8).
About what did they quarrel? 'Come,' said they, 'let us divide the world.'
One took the real state and the other the movables [the sheep with their wool].
The former said. 'The land you stand on is mine,' while the latter retorted, 'What you are wearing is mine.' One said: 'Strip'; the other retorted: 'Fly [off the ground].' [Buzz off!] Out of this quarrel, CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL, etc.

R. Joshua of Siknin said in R. Levi's name: [No, there is another explanation based on the competition over their sacrifices to God]. Both took land and both took movables, but about what did they quarrel? One said, 'The Temple must be built in my area,' while the other claimed, 'It must be built in mine.' ...Out of this argument, CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL, etc.

Judah b. Rabbi said: Their quarrel was about the first Eve. Said R. Aibu [No! that is not possible], The first Eve had returned to dust. Then about what was their quarrel?
Said R. Huna: An additional twin was born with Abel, and each claimed her. The one claimed: 'I will have her, because I am the firstborn'; while the other maintained: 'I must have her, because she was born with me.'\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} The Zohar has, predictably, a very unique take on the situation reflecting the cosmic battle between good and evil forces that transcends personality and human will. This is succinctly brought in the commentary of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Safed commentator Moses Alsheikh.

The Zohar, on the other hand, describes Cain as representing the negative elements in the universe, whereas he sees in Abel a symbol of the positive, constructive elements, forces of purity. The author of the Zohar views fields, deserts, open spaces as symbolising the negative forces of impurity whereas the civilised part of the world is seen as representing all that is pure and constructive in the universe, all that is holy, Cain had told his brother all that God had told him in a friendly manner. At that time Cain was in complete control of himself. It was only when the two were in the field, in the part of the world which represents the negative, the impure, that Cain suddenly arose and attacked Abel and killed him. In essence, Cain attacked everything that was holy, sacred, wholesome; Abel represented this. This is why he became the victim of Cain's sudden outburst.

Moses Alsheikh

\textsuperscript{16} Cain in Islamic Tradition – The Love Angle and Fratricide

The Arabic names of Cain and Abel are Habil and Qabil (Abel, Cain) by the same paronomasia that appears in pairs like Jalut-Talut, Yajuj-Majuj, The Koran (Sura 5:27/30) relates the essence of Genesis 4 with later aggadic accretions: as Qabil had slain his brother, God sent a raven to show him how he might conceal the body of his brother... (cf. also Sura 33:72). The motif of learning burial from the practice of a raven is derived from Jewish sources (Tanh. B. 10; Gen. R. 22:8; as well as Pd-RE ch. 21, where it is Adam and Eve who emulate a raven by burying their murdered son).
Professor Shai Cherry explains the midrashic debate succinctly:

“The first thing to appreciate in these midrashim is the Rabbis’ total lack of discomfort with presenting multiple interpretations. These three dialogue boxes appear one after the other in our rabbinic text. The Rabbis were true believers that the Torah has 70 faces. As for content, these ancient comments strike an amazingly contemporary chord. Speculating on the roots of human violence, the first darshan suggests that aggression is rooted in acquisitiveness, our rapacious greed. Part of what’s interesting in this series of explanations for fratricide is the claim that this impulse is universal. The darshan doesn’t blame Cain, alone. Abel’s avarice warrants equal condemnation. Some commentators have linked the name Cain to the word koneh, meaning owner or one who has acquired. But this comment in Genesis Rabbah claims that both brothers share this trait. As RaMBaN later states explicitly, perhaps what the darshan is indicating is that all acquisitions are ultimately hevel, evanescent.

While for our first darshan the love of money is the root of all evil, for our second, it is religion. (Since the killing of Abel was preceded by religious offerings, this explanation comes closest to a peshat drash.) Ostensibly, the real estate has been divided equitably; but there’s a desire for a monopoly on divine access. Such a monopoly was enjoyed by the priests when the Temple stood in Jerusalem. In the ancient world, tribal deities were attached by an umbilical cord to a particular piece of sacred space and geographically confined to that people’s territory. Second Temple Judaism tried to maintain both a House of the Lord, i.e. the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as the theological conviction that the Lord fills the heaven and earth. The Talmud calls the Temple the “navel of the world,” implicitly relegating the other lands, and those peopling them, to the periphery. Could our comment be a daring critique of temple-centered religions, the jealousies they provoke, and the wars waged in their name?

Helen of Troy may have launched a thousand ships, but according to our third darshan, Cain and Abel’s sister was her prototype. And from where exactly did this alleged sister come? There is no mention of her in the biblical text. Perhaps the biblical author saw nothing wrong with assuming the presence of other people not specifically mentioned in the text, such as Cain’s wife. Alternatively, the biblical editor or redactor may have lifted our story from another source that referred to such a person. However, neither proposed solution would conform with the Rabbis’ assumptions about the Torah. For them the Torah, when properly read when properly read when properly read, contains everything. So the Rabbis maintained that each additional et in Genesis 4: 1-2 “She gave birth to et
his brother, *et Abel*” hints at the births of twin sisters\(^{21}\) who do not come explicitly into play, and are therefore birthed in midrashic space and textual silence, until later in our drama. \(^{22}\)

Is this midrash yet another example of “blame it on the woman”? I doubt it. The point of the midrash, demonstrated time and time again in human and non-human communities, is reproductive rights. On a personal level, who gets to have sex? On an evolutionary scale, whose genes get to make it into the next round?

Money, religion and sex: a concise, if not exhaustive, inventory of the sources for conflict according to our rabbinic sages. And, to emphasize the point that these are universal human urges, there is no single aggressor or victim. Both Cain and Abel are equally complicit in what seems to be a natural inclination toward cupidity, religious exclusivism, and concupiscence.”

### ACTIVITY: SEEKING THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

- Show the text of verse eight to the students. Ask them to list any puzzling question that comes out of the text.

- Put the questions on the board. If the question regarding what was said is not listed, (and it is hard to believe that it won't be) list it! Explain that this is the question that you wish to work on for the moment.

- Discuss with the class how they see the connection between the first part of the sentence and the second part. Do they see the conversation/discussion/argument as connected with the murder? Examine the arguments for. Are there arguments against?

- Tell the group that the assumption is going to be that the two parts are connected and that the interaction between the brothers actually led to the murder. Explain that this means that the subject must have been of cardinal importance to Cain and Abel. Now, in pairs, get them to prepare a dialogue of the missing conversation and get some of the groups to read/act out their dialogues, and to explain why they wrote what they did.

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\(^{21}\) An extra twin girl was born with Abel. Cain said, “I shall take her because I am the eldest son.” Abel said, “I shall take her because she was born with me. “ Abel married her. She was the most beautiful among women, and Cain said, “I shall kill Abel my brother and take his wife.” Why did Adam not marry his daughter? In order that Cain marry his sister. - -- Midrash Pirke de-Rabi Eliezer 21; Talmud Yevamot 11a; Midrash Bereisheet Rabbah 22:7; Talmud Sanhedrin 58b

\(^{22}\) Shai Cherry writes: Because biblical Hebrew is such a fluid language, it needs “markers” to prevent confusion due to ambiguous word order. One such marker is *et*, which indicates the direct object. It is never translated, though it makes translation possible. Remember the first sentence of *Genesis*? If we didn’t have an *et* before the Hebrew words for *heaven* and *earth*, we might think that they themselves were the gods responsible for creating the fullness of the world. But since we do have an *et* before each of those nouns, we know that they were the created objects, not the creating gods. Although Cain and Abel’s sister is not part of the biblical story we have in front of us, she nevertheless fulfills an important exegetical and legal function. We know that Cain takes a woman and has a child (v. 17). But the only other woman explicitly mentioned in this part of the Torah is Eve. Sex with your mother — that was a problem for the Rabbis. So, the rabbinic solution was to marry Cain off to his sister. Sex with one’s mother is both incest and adultery, assuming Dad is still around, as he is in our story. Sex with your sister is *merely* incest. So, *et* solves the exegetical problem of whom Cain took as a wife, while minimizing his transgressions.
The text is showing us that there was a breakdown in communication between the brothers. This breakdown led directly to Abel’s death. (Mei Shiloakh)

- We suggest starting from the first set of Rabbinic explanations brought above, in which the conversation between the brothers is directly linked to the contextual narrative. Bring two or three of the Rabbinic opinions and discuss the Rabbinic versions of the conversation, comparing them to the students.

- Now give them the last text from Midrash Rabbah and get them to study it asking them to work out how many opinions there are among the Rabbis concerning the subject of the discussion. 23

- Discuss the Rabbis' different opinions in the midrash. Ask the students what they think is really going on here. Do the Rabbis really believe that the discussion between Cain and Abel was concerning the Temple, for example? If not, why are they suggesting this? Explore the idea that the Rabbis are having an archetypal discussion over the primary root causes of violence in their own times.

- Ask the group which one of the three (or four) reasons, material greed, religious fanaticism, sex and feelings of personal tension with roots in family jealousies is the most convincing major cause of violence in the world today? Or would they suggest any other factors?

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23 There are either three or four: is the argument over Eve one of familial jealousy on the part of children competing for their mother's attention as some have done or is it sexual in origin? The same question can be asked for the idea of the sister that appears in the last verse. If you see familial jealousy in one of the cases and sexual jealousy in the other, we are talking about four opinions regarding the origins of violence rather than three. The first two are clearly material possessions and greed on the one hand, and religious tensions on the other.
MODERN THINKERS PRE-FIGURED IN THE MIDRASH

We have examined the different opinions suggested by the midrash regarding the origins of violence as expressed in the quarrel between Cain and Abel. We have seen three basic approaches. The first approach suggested that the root cause of the argument that led to the murder was competition over possessions. The second approach suggested that the roots of violence should be sought in religious or ideological competition and jealousy. The third approach suggested that violence is a result of sexual competition between people, either for their mother's love or over a prospective lover.

It is fascinating to see that these three opinions – that violence stems from competition over material possessions, religious belief or sexual jealousy, put forward by the Rabbis of the early centuries of the common era in their midrashic discussion of the story of Cain and Abel, all foreshadow modern ideological schools of thought which seek to understand the origins of human jealousy and violence in those same three spheres.

Let us briefly spell the different ideas out.

HYPOTHESIS #1. Violence comes from competition over material possessions.
I ideological Solution: Socialism.

The roots of this approach in modern terms date back to the enlightenment. Jean Jacques Rousseau claimed, for example that the roots of violence occurred at the moment when the first man put a fence round his material possessions and claimed them as his. For Rousseau this was a violation of the natural law in which all property was held in common and people took whatever they needed from nature, satisfying themselves with whatever they needed for their personal existence. Accumulation of property for Rousseau was the source of all evil and he identified the claiming of private property with a fall from grace which could only be remedied if men were to band together to set up a society based on co-operation and lack of material competition.

This ultimately became a full-fledged theory of political socialism. The idea of property as the root of all evil found many supporters who demanded in different ways that the world should be changed in order to create a fairer system of allocation of resources. It was clear to many that a system in which men accumulated property, in accordance with the effort they expended in their labour, should replace a system where property and ownership was based on a mixture of power and heredity.

Marx turned this into a sophisticated economic critique based on the idea that the world was constructed in such a way that the 'have classes' banded together to protect their interests against the unpropertied classes who needed to work together to invert the system and to revert to a more just and natural system of common ownership. The world, believed Marx, was moving in that way in any case because of the greed and the economic forces which would ultimately open up tensions in the existing system and cause revolutionary changes in the structure of society.

For these thinkers, the evil at the heart of the world was material greed and economic injustice.

In 1975, the radical British songwriter, Leon Rosselson, wrote a song on this very subject. He took the words of a 1649 pamphlet written by Gerrard Winstanley, a leader of the extreme communitarian group, the Diggers, who existed in the years of the English Civil War. From the words of the pamphlet, he constructed a song which expressed the Digger philosophy of sharing the wealth of the
In 1649 to St. George's Hill
A ragged band they called the Diggers came to show the people's will
They defied the landlords, they defied the laws
They were the dispossessed reclaiming what was theirs

We come in peace, they said, to dig and sow
We come to work the lands in common and make the waste ground grow
This earth divided we will make whole
So it may be a common treasury for all

The sin of property we do disdain
No man has any right to buy or sell the earth for private gain
By theft and murder they took the land
Now everywhere the walls spring up at their command

They make the laws to chain us well
The clergy dazzle us with heaven, or they damn us into hell
We will not worship the God they serve,
a God of greed who feeds the rich while poor folk starve

We work and eat together, we need no swords
We will not bow to masters, nor pay rent to the lords
Still we are free, though we are poor
Ye Diggers all, stand up for glory, stand up now!

From the men of property the orders came
They sent the hired men and troopers to wipe out the Diggers' claim
Tear down their cottages, destroy their corn
They were dispersed - only the vision lingers on

Ye poor take courage, ye rich take care
This earth was made a common treasury for everyone to share
All things in common, all people one
They came in peace - the order came to cut them down.

Leon Rosselson
HYPOTHESIS #2: Violence comes from religious competition over different truths. Ideological Solution: Religious toleration.

In modern terms one of the first thinkers to develop this approach and to critique different religious groups for their claims to exclusive religious truth, was Spinoza. He not only critiqued and ridiculed the claim, but castigated the political implications of such claims, pointing out the terrible cruelties that monotheistic groups, equipped with their confidence in the superiority of their own claim over all other claims, used to oppress members of other groups. For him religious claims and political claims seemed inseparable and he ridiculed the claims to exclusive truth that he saw used as tools of oppression in the world around him.

Ultimately this would develop into a movement for religious toleration which put forward the position that no state should persecute people who belonged to a minority religious group unless these people were genuinely undermining the interests of the state. If they were loyal to the state where they resided, none of them should be discriminated against on the basis of religious belief. One of the most famous champions of religious freedom was Gotthold Lessing, the enlightened German playwright, who wrote his famous play Nathan the Wise in 1779, basing himself on the idea of the equal truth contained in the three monotheistic religions. According to Lessing, the proof of a religion’s truth was the way in which its followers acted in a godly and moral fashion. The degree to which different religious groups internalized religious values was the only meaningful way to prove religious truth.

In the end, religious toleration became a dominant strain in post Enlightenment politics and the dominant mode of religious political behaviour in the west. The Jews, of course, became a tolerated religion, due to the prevalence of the doctrine, which paved the way to their emancipation. However, it did not stop the feeling of religious superiority and God given right that continued to hold sway over many religious groups in different countries including the Christian west, and paved the way for a new critique that was heard especially in the 1960’s. Perhaps the best articulation of this critique came from another young radical Jew, Bob Dylan, in his famous 1963 song, With God on Our Side, a great favourite among young liberals and socialists the world over. We bring the words here.

Oh my name it is nothin’
My age it means less
The country I come from
Is called the Midwest
I was taught and brought up there
The laws to abide
And that land that I live in
Has God on its side.

Oh the history books tell it
They tell it so well
The cavalries charged
The Indians fell
The cavalries charged
The Indians died
Oh the country was young
With God on its side.
Oh the Spanish-American
War had its day
And the Civil War too
Was soon laid away
And the names of the heroes
I was made to memorize
With guns in their hands
And God on their side.

Oh the First World War, boys
It closed out its fate
The reason for fighting
I never got straight
But I learned to accept it
Accept it with pride
For you don't count the dead
When God's on your side.

When the Second World War
Came to an end
We forgave the Germans
And we were friends
Though they murdered six million
In the ovens they fried
The Germans now too
Have God on their side.

I've learned to hate Russians
All through my whole life
If another war starts
It's them we must fight
To hate them and fear them
To run and to hide
And accept it all bravely
With God on my side.

But now we got weapons
Of the chemical dust
If fire them we're forced to
Then fire them we must
One push of the button
And a shot the world wide
And you never ask questions
When God's on your side.

In a many dark hour
I've been thinkin' about this
That Jesus Christ
Was betrayed by a kiss
But I can't think for you
You'll have to decide  
Whether Judas Iscariot  
Had God on his side.

So now as I'm leavin'  
I'm weary as Hell  
The confusion I'm feelin'  
Ain't no tongue can tell  
The words fill my head  
And fall to the floor  
If God's on our side  
He'll stop the next war.

Bob Dylan

HYPOTHESIS #3: Violence comes from sexual jealousy and competitiveness.  
Iedical Solution: Freudian Psychoanalysis.

The third approach was pioneered by Sigmund Freud who as a result of his researches and observations, came to an opposite understanding of human nature to the socialism of Rousseau and Marx, outlined briefly above. He critiqued the socialists for their insistence that humankind was good at root, but had been spoiled by the property system which had made people selfish possessive and aggressive.

Freud observed that man was not good at all but had become good externally as civilisation imposed a code of behaviour which demanded that people restrain their natural impulses and behave according to the demands of cultured social codes. Underneath the surface of civilized human beings, believed Freud, was a boiling subterranean sea of passion, sexuality and aggression, a human libido that could be controlled up to a point by each individual, but which caused neurosis and hysteria if denied its proper outlet. His claim that sexual desires and fears lay under the surface of the human mind was shocking to the world to which the claim was made. Likewise his claim that terrible cruelty lay in wait under the calm exterior of each human being was seen as scandalous by a horrified and disbelieving public at the turn of the twentieth century. However, the terrible atrocities of the First World War appeared to bear a lot of his ideas out.

His claim that mankind was not, in fact, by nature, such a good creature, and still retained animal instincts underneath the veneer of respectability and culture, seemed tailor-made for the first part of the 20th century. His 1915 pamphlet, "Thoughts for the Time on War and Death", collected his thoughts together on the nature of collective aggression. It is natural for the human being to involve himself in war and acts of aggression, said Freud. Underneath the surface of every human being, said Freud, there is a primitive savage, unhappy with the restraints of civilization. For Freud, aggression began with the untamed passions of the individual.

William Golding’s classic 1954 novel Lord of the Flies, captured Freud’s ideas about the darkness at the heart of mankind and the thinness of the veneer of civilization that could disintegrate into anarchy, lawlessness and immorality with unsuspected ease. His portrayal of the cruelty and barbarity underneath the surface of a group of schoolboys marooned on an island is a chilling parable for our time and a warning – if one is needed today – about the ease with which civilized people throw off the trappings of culture and revert to a native savagery. We bring just one brief
quote, describing the situation after the death of Piggy, one of the boys. The piece is symptomatic of the style and tone of the book.

*Ralph looked at him dumbly. For a moment he had a fleeting picture of the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches. But the island was scorched up like dead wood - Simon was dead - and Jack had... The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy.*

*William Golding*

Three modern theories about alternative roots of violence, each of them parallel to one of the midrashic ideas in the text from Genesis Rabbah.
EXERCISE: MODERN THEORIES OF VIOLENCE

- Give the students the text of Genesis Rabbah, and the following table. Explain to them that there are either three or four ideas in the text. If they count four, they should run the last two together to form three different ideas regarding the roots of human violence.

- Let them fill in the table, in pairs, as well as they can. We suggest that this can be an "open exercise" which allows them to search out information in books, encyclopedias or internet sources.

- Discuss the answers they have found, emphasizing the linkage between Rabbinic theories and modern ideologists and thinkers. How do they explain the fact that the text brings so many totally different ideas? Which among the theories expounded by the Rabbis is the right one? Is there one? Why? Why not?

- Take the opportunity to talk a little about the different theories and discuss with them their opinions of the different theories. Which do they favour? Which, if any, seem totally ridiculous to them?

- Perhaps show them the words of the three literary sources (the two songs and a prose piece) that we have brought. Ask for their opinions. Do they know any other literary texts that would fall into these categories?

- If they were present in the times when the midrash was written, would they add their voices to one of the three theories, or would they add another theory of their own? How would they formulate it in the kind of language that the midrash uses?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory contained in text</th>
<th>Authorities mentioned by the text</th>
<th>Roots of violence according to the theory</th>
<th>Modern thinkers or ideological schools who have suggested similar ideas</th>
<th>My personal opinion regarding the theory as a major explanation for human aggression</th>
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BIBLIODRAMA – A TECHNIQUE FOR DRAMATIC MIDRASH

In part one we referred to a technique called Bibliodrama, a term coined by the American scholar and educator Peter Pitzele, for a specific dramatic technique of exploring the Biblical text as a form of modern midrash. There we saw an application and description of a bibliodramatic scene and explored some ideas around the description. But now we would like to suggest moving further into the technique and actually doing it. It can be done at any point in the story but we place it here, because the unknown conversation between the brothers is a wonderful opportunity that can be explored through the technique. We bring an abridged form of an introduction that Pitzele has written explaining parts of his technique. Here we bring detail of three possible educational/dramatic strategies that the educator can use.

**Bibliodrama: The Tools**

**The essence of Bibliodrama is the act of voicing and playing a biblical character. One can do this singly or in a group with others. No props or devices are needed to accomplish this. When the warm-up is sound, the invitation made safe and appealing, the scene and characters clearly defined, then the act of voicing and playing is as easy as a somersault. However, for the would-be director there are a number of tools that can support and extend this bibliodramatic move.**

**The Empty Chair Strategy**

Chairs can be a useful prop and can be used in many ways. For example, you can place an empty chair in the center of the room and tell the players that this chair represents God, and that they are to stand as near or as far from that chair as they feel represents their closeness or distance from God. Characters may then be questioned about their feelings, relationship, history with God). Once these tableaux are created, the facilitator’s task is to interview the participants in role and to help them tell the group a little about themselves. Often other characters will take part in asking characters questions.

Often it will be helpful to ask people once they have chosen the character and become it, to locate that character in time and space. "You tell me you are Miriam? So at what point in your story are you coming before us?" Sometimes the participant may answer immediately and with certainty. "I am Miriam; I have just seen my brother's wife Zipporah." Other times when the character draws a blank you may need to present some of the options: 'Are you Miriam as a young girl, as the leader
crossing the Red Sea, as the dancer, as the prophetess, as the woman who challenges her brother, as the stricken Miriam, as Miriam dying?"

The empty chair serves both to concretize a dimension of the character and provide a staging point for its expression. Using the chair also cleanly demarcates the playing space from the group space, the stage from the audience. To reach the chair one moves from audience to participant, from self to role; and then returning to one's seat, one steps out of the role and back into the place of observation.

Empty chairs may be used to sculpt a scene before one actually has people play the parts. You may place chairs side by side, or three chairs together with one off alone - you and the group may play with the relationships between the characters. Once the chairs are arranged, their positions - opposition, alliance, isolation - help the players warm up to the parts. The chairs give some form and control to the interpretive direction of a scene. The chairs support the players and move them in a certain direction. Rearrange the chairs, and new bibliodramatic interpretations present themselves.

The Echoing Strategy

Echoing is part of the art of listening. The technique can help you to help your players enter more fully into their parts. Let's say we have been reading the story of the birth and adoption of Moses. Using a variety of indirect methods, we may be looking at the social condition of slavery, thinking about repressive regimes, discussing the role women play in the opening chapters of the book, noticing literary motifs, studying the Hebrew, talking about our own experiences of feeling trapped, threatened, exiled. All these are part of the repertoire of methods of Bible study. But then, as the director, I might invite the group to zoom in on Moses' sister, Miriam. We might wonder what it was like for her to see a baby brother born in the time of the edict. Such speculation is still indirect (we are talking about her), until a moment comes when I say, "I wonder what Miriam would say to us if she could tell us about this time in her life." I say this in almost a musing manner, and I let the silence hang a bit, see whether a head comes up or whether anyone takes the cue. Then making my question fully direct: "Would anyone like to speak for a moment as Miriam? Tell us, Miriam, what is this time like for you?" Here in slight shifts I move from the indirect (I wonder what Miriam would say...) to the direct (Tell us, Miriam, what this time is like for you).

Worst case (I have never seen it happen, but it is our fear): no one speaks.

Then you as the director might wish to offer your own speculation as Miriam. You might begin saying, "Well, I think Miriam might say the following if she were here to tell us her story:

"This is a cruel time for me. I am caught between impossible choices. On the one hand, I cherish this little baby. On the other hand, his every cry threatens my life and those of my brother and mother and father."

Then you might say, "I wonder if there is another Miriam here who might have something else, or something different, to tell us?" You hope that your words have primed the pump. But let's say that, again, no one picks up on it. The silence that greets you may be the silence of resistance, but it also may be a silence which is suddenly filling with the enormity of that family's life. With no one else willing to play at that moment, you let go of the game, perhaps with some words like "Well, it was just a thought to talk to Miriam, to imagine her words; it's a kind of midrash. Maybe we will try it again some time." And you go on with the study session. You have planted a seed.
More likely, someone does respond to your invitation, or does offer a variant Miriam to the one you proposed. "I think Miriam would be scared," someone offers.

Hearing this, you notice that the phrasing is still indirect (Miriam would be afraid instead of I, as Miriam, am afraid). Your task here is to shift it into direct speech: "So, you are Miriam, and you are scared," you say gently, moving the participant into the role.

"Well, yes," perhaps with a slight shrug or a nervous laugh. Where is this going? This is different.

"And why are you scared?" you ask, persisting, but in a tone that is caring rather than confrontational. Students, adults perhaps more than young people, are so used to thinking there is a right answer, that even in a method so evidently open and imaginative as this one, students may still feel cornered by any interrogation. You take the role of the concerned friend rather than probing director.

"Well, she's scared be...."

"I'm scared because....," insisting gently that the role be played

"All right, I'm scared because this little baby could get us all in trouble. In big trouble."

"Yes," I say, and echoing "My parents broke the law, and we are living in whispers. Is that right?" referring back to the participant.

"Yes, I mean, what if he were discovered? What if it were found out that we were hiding him?"

"What could happen?"

"We could get into big trouble."

"Ah. Like...?"

"I don't know. I don't want to think about it. All I know is that we have to be very secret, very quiet. Like you said "whispers.""

"It's hard," I say...

The Talking Object Strategy

You might ask people to choose inanimate objects from the Biblical story and to become those objects. After they choose an object, you might ask: "Do any of you wish to tell us anything about yourself?" Here is an example of what I heard a woman say in an adult Torah group:

"I am the reed ark that carried Moses down the Nile." "Tell me more about yourself."

"Well, what do you want to know?" "Who made you?"

"I don't know" (This response is not at all unusual and represents an important and challenging moment for the facilitator. The participant is, for a moment, caught in a dilemma. It is not yet clear
whether she can give full rein to her imagination, making up a story out of whole cloth, or whether she has to adhere to the information - or lack thereof - in the Bible. The task of the facilitator at this point is to encourage imagination to invent the story).

"Well, someone must have made you, and though your story is not told in the Bible, perhaps you can let us in on some of your secrets." Or, "I know we do not know in a factual way anything about you, but in this exercise you are free to make up a story. I'll ask you a few questions, and you can just see what answers come to mind"

The important thing here is, in the spirit of play and invention, to encourage the role-player to let her imagination respond.

"OK. Moses' father made it"

"Made me," I say, gently correcting the speaker back into role.

"OK. Made me."

"Did he talk to you while he was making you?" "Not actually aloud"

"But you could read his thoughts?" "Not his thoughts, his feelings."

"Ah hah And what were those feelings?" "He was sad, and he was angry."

"I see. And did you know what you were being made for?"

"Yes."

"And that was?"

"To carry the little infant down the Nile." "How did you feel about this assignment?"

"It was a huge responsibility. I wanted Moses' father to be very careful. To weave me well and to caulk me well. I did not want to leak, or tilt over."

"And did he build you well?" "Yes, very well."

"Yes. I want you to know what it felt like to carry him down the river. It was like being his mother."

In the closure to the class where the woman played the reed ark, she expressed her surprise at how vivid the scene had become for her. "I really see Moses' father bending over in candlelight and weaving the basket. It was amazing, and as the basket I had feelings, too. It was harder to say Goodbye to the baby than I said."

And another group member, speaking to her, said, "I never thought about the ark before as a kind of second mother, a womb. I mean I guess it's obvious, but it made me realize how many times Moses was mothered and passed on. The little ark is like a metaphor for how transient his childhood must have felt for him."

Though these comments have a degree of adult sophistication, this exercise lends itself well to young kids, to families, and particularly intergenerational groups. Kids may not have the same ability to
comment on the objects as adults, but they are far less inhibited in representing them in the first place. I'll never forget the kid who, playing Joseph's coat, said, "It was scary when the brothers tore me into pieces and splashed blood on me. They were so mad. Like wolves."

A rabbi once said of this work that it created "a level playing field." What he meant was that this method does not privilege knowledge or book-learning. As a result it is possible for men and women, boys and girls, of all ages and familiarities with the Bible to enter into a midrashic community together in which what is valued is imagination, empathy, and certain expressive abilities.

**ACTIVITY: BIBLIDRAMA**

Use verse eight as the basis of a Bibliodrama using one of the techniques mentioned by Pitzele.

**ADDITIONAL EXERCISE: THE CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENT**

- Ask the members of the class over the course of a week to collect any newspaper clippings they can find that bear on the subject of the roots of violence tracing it to one of the three or four causes discussed, or any other major cause that was discussed the previous time.

- Let them bring in all of the pieces they have found and let the pieces be divided into groups according to the causes mentioned. Divide the group up into as many sub-groups as there are piles of clippings, and give each group a pile.

- Each group has to take one of the causes and prepare a case backed by their clippings in which they argue why "their" subject is the primary root cause of violence.

- Now develop the debate.

- At the end, out of the character they took on for the debate, discuss with them how they see the primary causes of violence.

- In the end bring the discussion round to the Cain story and to the Rabbinic midrash and suggest that the Rabbis were essentially carrying on in their own terms the same discussion/argument that the group has just had. Ask why the Rabbis did it in terms of the Cain and Abel story whereas the group is more likely to use arguments from newspapers to create their case

**CAIN THE INNOCENT VICTIM: Modern Readings**

We have presented two approaches of the classic commentators on the story. The first is based on peshat readings while the second based itself on far-reaching derash. For the last few exercises we have stayed with the second approach. However, if we return to the peshat for a moment, it is striking that in just about every case Cain is seen as having started the argument through his words. There are those who see it as pre-meditated and those who see the murder arising from Cain's inability to suppress his anger in the heat of an argument, but Cain, it is who is blamed.

Some modern readers of the story have taken a different approach which takes the burden off Cain and shifts it elsewhere. We bring three examples of slightly different versions of such a scenario.
Elie Wiesel presents the following scenario.

*Cain spoke to his brother Abel. What did he say? We don't know. Perhaps he simply repeated to him the words he had just heard. It hardly seems to matter. Cain, grief-stricken, wanted to – had to – unburden himself. All he wanted was someone to talk to, to commune with. To feel a presence. And break his solitude. To have a brother, an ally when confronting God.*

And Abel? Abel remained aloof. He did nothing to console his brother, to cheer him up or to appease him. He who was responsible for Cain's sorrow did nothing to help him. He regretted nothing, said nothing.

Elie Wiesel

*Or did God wish to make the point – even then – that injustice is inherent in the human condition? (Elie Wiesel, Messengers of God, p. 44)*

*Cain tried to speak to Abel, but the words wouldn't come.*

Sandy Eisenberg Casso

*Cain and Abel, a misunderstanding of love.*
*Cain just wanted to hug him hard*
*And strangled him. Neither of them understood.*

Yehuda Amichai

Elie Wiesel's reading of the story reminds us, perhaps, of some of the things that we suggested earlier regarding the lack of empathy that appears to be shown by God in the story. Here the failure is that of the brother, Abel, who fails to hear the voice that is calling out to him. The failure is that of not listening, of not empathizing, of not understanding and reacting to the pain that is next to us. The sin is that of the bystander, the one who doesn't intervene but rather turns his back, refusing to see, to hear and to touch. It is the sin of apathy and uninvolved and it does not need to surprise us that such a reading comes from Wiesel, who passed through the reaction of a whole country of 'Abels' on his way to Auschwitz.

Martin Buber, once talked about a young man who asked to see him and discussed many matters with the great philosopher. Shortly afterwards, Buber heard that the young man had committed suicide and mourned deeply. When approached by those who sought to comfort him by telling him that he could not have known since the man asked to talk about things which had no connection to his inner plight, Buber responded that this was no comfort to him. He had heard the voice of the young man, he said, but he had not heard the voice underneath the voice. This then was Abel's failure.

In a similar vein, Sandy Eisenberg Casso, sees the problem as one of lack of communication between the brothers but states that the failure resulted from Cain's inability to approach his brother and say the things that needed to be said. The blame here is not on Abel, but neither is it on Cain. Inability to speak, inarticulateness, especially on the part of one who is suffering deeply and is caught up inside in his own pain, is no sin. Cain was not evil. He was merely inarticulate.

Finally we have Yehuda Amichai's striking reading; according to Amichai's midrash, the Tanakh got the whole thing backwards. Cain approached Abel in a surfeit of love and enthusiasm. Cain killed Abel through the force of his love. Abel was strangled by love and not by hatred. We fail to
understand each other's positive impulses and the barrier of suspicion that separates and alienates mankind – there are those who would say specifically 'men' – can lead to us misreading the motives of those who reach out to us, sometimes with tragic circumstances. Who was the poet thinking of specifically when he wrote these lines? A parent? A friend? Himself? It hardly matters. There is a warning to us all in the story says Amichai. But it is not the warning that the moralists and commentators have embraced. Three striking readings of the text that take the finger of blame away from Cain and perhaps, point it in the direction of everyman, of all of us.

EXERCISE: WHO'S TO BLAME?

- Ask the students to look at the text of verse eight. They should bear in mind that our tendency and the tendency of commentators in the tradition has been to see Cain as the initiator of the crime (pre-meditated or not) and thus the one responsible. Their task is to write a brief scenario explaining what is really happening in this sentence, such that the burden of guilt and responsibility is taken off Cain. They can write a version which puts the blame on Abel or any other character in the story or which removes it completely.

- Let volunteers read out some of their versions and after each one open up a brief discussion asking the question "so who's guilty?"

- Now bring two or three of the modern suggestions above, and do the same with them. What is the real message of each of these writers? Why do they interpret verse eight of our story in this way? Who or what do they hold responsible for the violence, if not Cain? Are these approaches credible? Are the writers legitimately using the story to get their message across? Are these acceptable midrashic approaches in the eyes of the students? Why? Why not?


- Your city (or Jewish Federation) has decided to try and deal with the troubling problem of violence among youth in the city (or the Jewish community), which has reached troubling proportions. They have appealed to a number of representative youth frameworks and schools, including your school to be expert witnesses and to suggest ways to deal with the problem, and it has been decided that this class will be the school's representatives for the committee. The task of the class now is to research the subject and to prepare recommendations for the committee.

The central questions that the class has been asked to research and to think about are these.


- 2. Why does violence exist among youth? What are the major reasons that it appears to exist? Does it appear among all young people or only where certain restraining frameworks or educational frameworks are lacking? How important are factors like television, cinema, alcohol and drugs in stimulating violence?
3. How widespread is the phenomenon of violence among youth? Does it exist in the Jewish community? In the school? Have the members of the class encountered it outside of the school? Can they document cases of violence either inside or outside the school? How widespread is it? Is it limited to certain age groups, classes, ethnic groups, locations etc.?

4. What if anything should be done about it? The members of the class are asked to suggest a number of recommendations for dealing with violence among youth in the city generally (or in the Jewish community). If there is indeed violence also in the school they must bring a number of recommendations to deal with it.

- This can be a major project or it can be much more limited. Whichever you decide to do in your particular class, we suggest dividing the students into three initial groups. Each group should have one of the first three questions to examine. If you want to turn this into a large scale learning project you can include examinations of the general issue by using some of the many websites or books that deal with the issue. In addition there are numerous films that deal with the subject either within a school context or within a wider societal context. You might want to break down each group into sub groups and give each group a specific aspect of the subject to examine. Testimony should be taken from students in the class and they are free to talk to other students in different classes or even to prepare a proper research project which will include interviews with officials in the community or the city. It is possible to invite officials, youth workers or social workers and psychologists to share their perspectives with the class.

- After the initial research has been done it should be fed back into the particular sub-group which should then prepare some kind of a report to give to the whole class.

- After this stage, the whole class can work out a strategy to be used in preparing the answer to question number four. Recommendations can include such subjects as a code of behaviour inside the class and the school (if indeed it is an issue there), and a system for monitoring it, recommendations for a campaign against violence in the Jewish and general community, details of a public relation campaign etc. etc.

- Whether or not to go beyond the class exercise and indeed to prepare or mount a campaign inside the school or the community we leave here as an open question.
In the first part of the booklet we examined the family background of Cain and suggested how many aspects of Cain's background, family relations, parental expectations, sibling rivalries with Abel etc. might well be understood to have impacted on the terrible murder. However, there is no attempt here to suggest that this should necessarily excuse Cain's conduct or even detract from his responsibility. At most, it is possible to see some of the above considerations as mitigating circumstances that are insufficient to remove the responsibility from the shoulders of Cain. On the whole readers of the timeless text have seen Cain himself as responsible for the act of violence and have condemned him as such. The idea that the individual has ultimate responsibility, both morally and legally, for his or her own actions, is a cornerstone of biblical and western morality as one. Our present story, up to now, is one of the primary texts that tends to build that idea. The idea of "ואתה תמשול בו" that we have already encountered implies the idea of individual responsibility and the ability of each individual to control her or his actions.

However, it is time to turn to two major questions that are brought up in the next two verses. How does Cain, the criminal, respond to the idea of his guilt and responsibility? We might see him as the guilty party but does he himself react that way? And secondly, are there other considerations that need to be looked at with respect to his guilt? Does he alone bear the sole burden of his guilt or are there other people or forces whose part in the murder also need to be examined? We will use the midrash as a mirror in order to examine these questions. We will see that in addition to accepting the primary responsibility of Cain (although suggesting that he himself did not necessarily accept it), they would raise questions to imply that Abel, the victim, was not exempt from responsibility for his own downfall, and perhaps more fascinating, even that God's part in the murder needs to be examined. We note, as we have see previously, that in asking these questions, the masters of midrash were in fact departing from the peshat itself in order to ask fundamental questions about human (and in this case, divine) behaviour and society. The story serves them as a prism for an important philosophical, moral and theological debate.

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY? CAIN – “who? me?”

AND THE LORD SAID UNTO CAIN: WHERE IS ABEL? This may be compared to a prefect [policeman] who was walking in the middle of the road, and found a man slain and another standing over him. "Who killed him?" he asked? "I'll ask you [that question] instead of you asking me," answered the other man. "You have answered nothing," said [the policeman].

Again, it is like the case of a man who entered a garden, and gathered mulberries and ate them. The owner of the garden went after him, demanding, "What are you holding?" "Nothing." was the reply. "But surely your hands are stained [with the juice]!" Similarly, [God
said to Cain, THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT TO ME FROM THE GROUND.

Again, it is as if a man entered a pasture ground, seized a goat, and threw it behind him. The owner of the pasture pursued him, demanding, "What have you in your hand?" "Nothing!" "But it is bleating behind your back!" said [the owner]. Similarly, [God rebuked Cain]. THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT TO ME FROM THE GROUND.

One of the interesting questions in the text relates to the words with which God turns to Cain after the murder. "Where is your brother?" asks God and appears as such to be entering into a similar game as when he turned to the hiding Adam and Eve in Eden in the previous chapter with the word אַיָּ红外? What is the purpose of this disingenuous ploy on the part of an all knowing God? In both cases the context is the same: a person has sinned and the divine response begins with a question to which the answer is known. The midrash posits a number of similar situations where the guilt of a person is known but the accuser turns to the accused with a question before the accusation is made clear. Now, of course the situation is not identical because of the all-knowing nature of God. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the midrash, we have an interesting insight into the situation. It seems that in all three cases, the accuser gives the accused a chance to confess, before further proof or evidence is suggested. In a sense it can be seen as a chance to examine the general moral make up of the accused, as well as an opportunity to begin to get a sense of the general response that the accused is going to take.

Just as surprising as the question is Cain's answer: "I don’t know" - לא ידעתי says Cain, flying in the face of logic. It should be remembered that this is indeed a repeat performance of the confrontation with Cain's parents in the previous chapter. Cain knows the impossibility of hiding sin from God. His whole life and the life of his family has resulted from the sin and the failure to admit the sin honestly and openly. Here he commits exactly the same mistake as his parents before him. It might be that he simply panic, having been caught red-handed: it might be that he is stupid enough to think that he can escape punishment, and it might be that he is attempting to brazen it out with God. All of these are postulated by the midrash. What is clear is that the three suggestions of the midrash cover all the possible bases and what is even clearer is that they make way for a generally negative assessment of a weak or evil character for Cain. Morally, the message of these midrashim is clear. A person must take responsibility for his own sins and crimes. There is no hiding behind brazenness or stupidity when it comes to an all-seeing God.
EXERCISE: CAIN’S SURPRISING RESPONSES – PLEADING INNOCENT

- The students should read verse nine together and should list any things that they find strange in the sentence. As group, they should turn each strange thing into a question that they would like to ask of the text.

- Explain that you are going to examine two of the major questions that come out of the sentence, namely, the response of the two protagonists, God and Cain to the new situation that occurs when God confronts Cain after the murder.

- Open with God's response. Ask the students to suggest reasons why God asks the question if the answer is already known to God. List any possible answers that they can think of on the board, and now ask the students to reflect briefly and to write down a situation when they asked a question (as if innocently) although they already knew the answer. (e.g. to make a good impression on a teacher, to show off to classmates, to gain attention, to appear to act innocently, to get somebody into trouble etc.). Ask some volunteers to read out or relate their situations and ask additional people to give their reasons even if they did not read out their story. Add all the reasons to God's list. Which of those are possible explanations for God's behaviour? Which sound most reasonable? What does each one suggest about God?

- Now move to Cain's response of “I don’t know” - לא ידעתי. Is this clear lie a surprising response for the students? Why? Why not?

- Discuss which other responses were open to Cain.

- Ask the students to reflect briefly and to write down a situation when they told a lie despite the fact that they knew that the person to whom they were talking knew the answer. Take some of the situations and discuss why we sometimes tend to lie to people despite the fact that we know that they know that we are lying.

- Present the following situation to the students. Recently a man who was once an important figure in the Israeli political system, was suspected of fraud. He complained that his credit card had been stolen and that the thief had taken 20,000 shekels and he demanded the sum back from the credit card company. They suspected him and started an investigation which turned up the fact that one of the major withdrawals while the card was stolen has been made in Hong Kong in a bank which had a close circuit T.V. protection system. They examined the tape for the minute when the withdrawal was made and they saw clearly the picture of the owner of the card taking the money out himself. The credit card company then summoned him for an investigation and confronted him with the tape of himself withdrawing the money in a Hong Kong bank with the date and time of the withdrawal clearly appearing on the film. The following conversation is drawn from the protocol of the conversation between Avital, the investigator and G., the accused, as reported in the daily paper "Yediot Acharonot" (10/9/04).

Avital: These are pictures of the use of your card, at the exact time when the money was ordered and for the exact sum taken out on the card, which you claim was not in your possession at that time. Look at the time and the date, a time when you said the card was not in your possession.

G: That's correct. I didn't have the card... This is ridiculous...Look, that's me [in the picture]. I can't deny that it's me. It is me!
Avital: That's clear.

G: I don't know what to tell you now. But I didn't withdraw money with that card.

Avital: Perhaps you have a double?

G: I have no doubles.

Avital: Perhaps you want to withdraw your claim?

G: I won't withdraw my claim!

Avital: But the...

G: ...It's an unbelievable coincidence! The person who tried to withdraw with my card was there at exactly the same time as I was there. It's strange. It's not logical...

Avital: Ahhh...

G: Tell me. They take photographs in every place [where there are credit card machines]? I had no idea...

Avital: No. Not in every place. Just in the big centres. In Israel, there aren't [cameras] at all. Listen, you don't have a lot of options.

G: (Laughs)

Avital: No really. I'll be honest with you.

G: I understand you 100% and I see I've got a real problem here. But I'm telling you I didn't withdraw that money.

Avital: Do you want a lie detector test?

G: I have no problem with that, but if you've got pictures, what do I do about that?

Avital: The pictures are genuine.

G: I wasn't suggesting they're forged.

Avital: Do you want to withdraw your claim?

G: O.K. I'll withdraw it. What can I do? To go to court and say it was my cousin? In [Hong Kong], it's hard to find someone who looks like me. I don't look Chinese.

"Yediot Acharonot" (10/9/04).

- How do the students understand G's reactions? What do they think he's feeling?
• Now present the students with the first midrash, from Genesis Rabbah. Go through it slowly? How did Chazal appear to understand Cain’s reaction? Do the students agree with the assessment?

We now come to a second midrash from Tanchuma which goes beyond the peshat of the text and tries to penetrate how the Rabbis understand Cain’s next words to God אֲנֹכִי הַשָּׁמֵר עַם אֵנֵי. In the scenario of the Rabbi, Cain stands up to God offering three defences of his own behaviour and refusing to accept the responsibility that God’s question had given him the opportunity to accept. Here we have a case of the criminal mind who uses any and every excuse to keep from admitting responsibility.

*When God asked "WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER, ABEL?" Cain replied: "I don't know, am I my brother's keeper? After all you are the guardian of all creatures, so why seek him from me?"

*It is like the parable of the thief who stole some items one night without being caught, but was arrested by the gate keeper the next morning.

*The gatekeeper challenged him: "Why did you steal the items?" The thief responded, "I am a thief who does not neglect his profession, but your professional duty is to guard. Why did you abandon your duty? Now, how can you blame me?"

Similarly Cain admitted, "I killed him but you created the evil impulse in me: you are the keeper of all. Yet you let me kill him.

*You really killed him as it says I AM (ANOCHI) - MY BROTHER'S KEEPER. If you had accepted my sacrifice just as you did his, then I would never have been jealous of him".

Midrash Tanchuma

Here, as in the previous midrash, we are given three possibilities. Let us examine each of Cain’s defences in turn.

1. In the first case, Cain blames God for not doing his duty in protecting Abel. The idea here is that it is impossible to accuse Cain of not doing his duty when the one who has really fallen down on the job is God. Here, we see of course that Cain has not internalized the moral imperative of the society. There is no sense that he has done something morally wrong. He, like God, has merely slipped up on his job. Each person in society has a job to perform. The thief is only 'doing his job' when he steals, and the murderer is only doing his job when he murders!

2. In the second case, Cain takes an opposite line. Here he takes God to task for not protecting him, Cain from the consequences of God's creation of the יֵצֶר הָרָע, that evil impulse which Cain blames for his own downfall. This is an interesting defence, suggesting that man bears no responsibility for sin since it results from the weakness of character against the evil impulse which is an inbuilt aspect of mankind, and since God created mankind that way, it is God that must bear the responsibility. Man did not ask to be born and therefore he has no responsibility for any actions committed in his life as a human being. The whole ideal of free will or the power of conscience, the ability of a person to withstand temptation and govern her or his own actions is not admitted.24

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24 “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: My son, I created in you a yetzer ha-ra.[evil impulse]. I also created within you Torah as an antidote. As long as you engage in Torah, the yetzer ha-ra will have no control over you, as our verse says, “If you do well, you will rise above [the yetzer ha-ra].” But if you don’t engage in Torah, then you’ll be delivered into its hands, as our verse continues, “But if you don’t do well, sin crouches at the door.” And not only that,
3. In the third case, Cain blames God more directly for failing to accept Cain’s sacrifice and thus causing the whole problem to begin with. This is a reading which is closer to the peshat of the text and is in line with those explanations of the murder that we saw previously which locate motive in the directly preceding events of the story. Here the criminal acts predictably, responding to a given situation and it is thus the creator of that situation that has responsibility for whatever crime or sin resulted from the situation.

All three explanations turn on an interesting play of words which is brought directly for the last one, but which in truth are equally applicable to the first two.">אֶרֶץ is a word of subjective identification reserved for God. By reading the phrase יָדַעְתִּי הַשָּׁמַרְךָ אֵנָּךְ as an explanation rather than as a question as it is normally read, and by understanding אֵנָּךְ as referring to God rather than to Cain, we get the phrase turned into an accusation against God. "God is the guardian of my brother".

So far we have heard three defences of his own behaviour by Cain, posited by the midrash. Let us bring two others, that go in a similar direction. Our fourth example is also from Midrash Tanchuma but we bring it separately because it goes in a different direction from the others.

4. **How could I have known?**

   *Cain said to God: "Master of the Universe, never before have I encountered death, nor have I beheld a dead person. How could I possibly know that if I pummeled [Abel] with a stone, he would die?"

This is a novel and interesting defence of Cain. According to this Cain is not to blame because he had never encountered death. It is like the defence of the child who responds to an accusation of guilt by saying: I never knew, I was never told. Once again the blame is transposed onto the parent – here, God – for not making things clear to the child (Cain) beforehand. This is the frequent basis for the plea of ‘another chance’. It is a defence which many loving parents find convincing and are inclined to accept with an admonishing finger and a scolding of "but now you know and it better not happen again". It is worth noting that in the Tanchuma, this is the claim that is immediately cut short by God and followed by the announcement of the punishment, as if the Ba’al midrash himself finds this almost an affront as opposed by the other claims (1-3) which have been allowed to play themselves out.

   *The Holy One, blessed be He, answered immediately: CURSED ARE YOU FROM THE GROUND etc.*

5. The last of the midrashic ideas, we have already met as a suggested cause of the murder. Here we bring as an attempted defence by the assailant.

   *Cain thought that he had been wronged and a dispute followed between him and Abel. "I believed," he said, "that the world was created through goodness," but I see that good deeds bear no fruit. God rules the world with arbitrary power, else why had He respect unto your offering, and not unto mine too?" Abel opposed him; he maintained that God rewards good deeds, without having respect unto persons. If his sacrifice had been accepted graciously by God, and Cain’s not, it was because his deeds were good and his brother’s wicked."

but there will be internal vacillations, as the next verse says, “its desire will be for you.” But if you want, you can rule over it, as the conclusion says, “You will rule over it.” (Sifre Deuteronomy, *Ekev* 45, cf. Midrash on Psalms, 119:64)
This of course can be taken as a defence of Cain, which connects in with argument number three, just discussed, but which goes far beyond it. He had believed in a world of fairness and morality, of ethical and behavioural norms, but his belief in such a world had been undermined by the rejection of his sacrifice which he sees as evidence of an arbitrary and unjust order. If God acts in such an arbitrary manner without regard for justice, how can he be accused of wrongdoing? His wrong would only be a wrong in a world based on justice.

We have seen five defences of Cain, that the midrash suggests in his favour. Whether or not they see these defences as rationalizations of reality in an attempt by the criminal to defend himself ex post facto, or as genuine explanations for his behaviour, they present us, individually and collectively, with an important moral challenge. Reading Cain through these midrashim, we get a different, more complex picture of him – and by extension (remembering the archetypal character of the story) – of the 'criminal' in society. It brings us to see a less black and white picture of the situation of the criminal. There might be considerations that need to be taken into account when assessing the guilt of the criminal and his responsibility for his actions. While explanation one will be unconvincing to the modern mind, the other four unquestionably have something to make us pause for thought. Ultimately, none of these will affect us perhaps, in seeing the criminal – Cain – as guilty, but taken at face value, rather than as rationalizations or excuses, they have the benefit of forcing us to face the complexities of assessing criminal guilt.
**EXERCISE: CAIN’S DEFENCE ATTORNEY**

- Ask the students, in pairs, to continue Cain's defence. If he wanted to continue not to accept responsibility, how do they think he would continue in his answer to God? Let them suggest arguments that they think he could use. Back together, collect the suggestions and list them.

- Present the students with the midrashim from Tanchuma and the Targum Yerushalmi. Tell them that there are five arguments that Cain uses in the midrashim in order to defend himself. They have to isolate them, list them, and give their opinion on each of them in the following form.

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<tr>
<th>ARGUMENT NUMBER (Name the argument)</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>CAIN'S CLAIM</th>
<th>AM I CONVINCED? MY OPINION</th>
<th>DO I THINK THAT CAIN BELIEVES IT?</th>
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- Go through the arguments with the students and discuss with them the last two columns. What do they think of these arguments and do they think that Cain believes them?

- Do any of the arguments bring them to see Cain in a different, more sympathetic light? Are there any arguments that could be brought (look back at the first list) that could cause them to see Cain in a less harsh light? Are there any arguments that he could use which would get him off the hook completely from the point of view of the students?
SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY: 'TAXI DRIVER'

We suggest the possibility, for the older grades of viewing together the classic film "Taxi Driver". This 1976 Martin Scorsese film, which is seen as one of the great American classics of recent decades, tells the story of Travis (Robert de Niro), a troubled veteran of Vietnam, who returns to New York and takes a job as a taxi driver at night in order to escape his terrible insomnia. Totally cut off from all normal relationships, after attempting and failing to reach out and develop normal human relationships, lonely and alienated, he develops a hatred for the human dirt and filth that he sees around him and vows ultimately to clean the city up from all its dirt. After almost assassinating a U.S. senator, candidate for the presidency, in his confused and psychotic state, he ultimately kills a pair of pimps and Mafioso, and becomes a media hero (although, had he succeeded in killing the senator, he would have been seen in the most negative terms).

The film is extremely disturbing and very challenging, and there are scenes of violence and profanity. However, it raises searching questions about the responsibility of the murderer for his crimes and opens up the question of the weight to be given to extenuating circumstances as a defence of a killer. The relevance to the story of Cain is clear and is easy to bring out.

The major questions that we suggest should be in the focus of discussion are these:

- Do you see Travis as guilty or as a victim?
- If he is a victim, what exactly is he a victim of?
- How do you explain his actions? Is he a bad man?
- Do the terrible things that have happened to him in any way excuse his actions?
- If he had succeeded in assassinating the senator (the 'Great White Hope' for a better America) and the film had ended there, would you have judged him in exactly the same way?
- How was he seen by the media at the end of the film? How do you explain this?
- If he had succeeded in killing the senator, how would he have been seen?
- Is there anything we can learn from that?
- Is there anything that we can learn from the film about the Cain story? Can you read Cain as Travis? Why? Why not?
INDIRECT RESPONSIBILITY: ABEL THE VICTIM?

The fact that Cain is seen obviously as having primary responsibility for his crime (despite his attempts to excuse or to explain his own behaviour) is clear. However, it does not mean that other individuals or forces are not seen as being partially responsible too. The midrash examines the parts of Abel and of God as potentially bearing some responsibility for the crime. Let us now examine these ideas in turn.

It is perhaps strange initially to think of the responsibility of the victim of this kind of a murder, but the midrash and commentators suggest two directions of indirect responsibility regarding Abel. The first midrash, from Genesis Rabbah, we have already encountered in another context.

AND CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL, etc. R. Johanan said: Abel was stronger than Cain, for the expression "ROSE UP" can only imply that he [Cain] lay beneath [Abel].’ He [Cain] said to [Abel], ‘Only the two of us are in the world: what will you go and tell our father [if you kill me]?’ At this [Abel] was filled with pity for him; immediately [Cain] rose against [Abel] and slew him. Out of that incident was born the proverb, 'Do not do good to an evil man, then evil will not befall you.'

Genesis Rabbah

The second piece comes from the Ba'alei Tosefot in the Middle Ages.

AND CAIN SAID TO ABEL HIS BROTHER: he reported to him what God had said and what he had replied. He showed Abel that he was very angry that God had not accepted him as He had Abel. Then Abel was happy. AND CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL AND KILLED HIM - out of jealousy.

Ba'alei Tosefot: Da'at Zkenim

The first source, from Genesis Rabbah, takes the term 'ROSE UP' and uses it to suggest that Cain was actually losing the battle with Abel. However Abel, out of a sense of pity, allowed the advantage to slip and thus paved the way for his own death. Far from praising pity, as an attribute of God to be imitated by man, the text condemns pity as weakness when it gives an evil person the chance to exploit the goodness of heart of his or her opponent and to win an advantage that should not rightly exist. Pity is good against people who can be elevated to reciprocal gestures through gratitude to their opponent who 'gave them a chance'. But pity must not be used in the case of real evil, which will only use it to strengthen its own position. One of the effects of this midrash is to blacken the character of Cain seeing him as one of those irredeemably evil people who – like Amalek- can never be spared and pitied, because that will only have a boomerang effect. This is different from some of the texts that we have seen, which serve to humanize Cain and redeem him from diabolic status. Here, as the exploiter of human weakness he is seen as beyond possible redemption. But the text clearly criticizes Abel, too, for the naivety and gullibility which is the negative side of pity and which cannot be seen as praiseworthy.

Abel should have been prudent and refused Cain’s invitation to go out to the field, just as Jacob was prudent and withdrew when he heard Esau was plotting against him. -- Philo, The Worse Plotting Against the Better Sec. 14, p. 252
By extension, this can be seen as a societal discussion about the nature of democracy and the place of pity and sympathy in world politics. When is humanity and charitable behaviour on the part of a state, praiseworthy and when is it naïve weakness, that offers a helping hand to its worst enemies?

The second source takes a very different line and makes a far harsher suggestion regarding Abel. It takes us back to the purported discussion between the brothers and shows the two brothers in a very different light. According to this, when Cain, feeling rejected and vulnerable, turned to his brother for reassurance and human acceptance, he received exactly the opposite: ושמח הבל – and Abel was happy. Rather than give his brother the human warmth and reassurance that he needs, Abel arrogantly reinforces Cain's feelings of rejections and thus contributes to the frenzy that leads to his own death. This reading of the Biblical text returns us to the more complex picture of a three dimensional person, tortured by circumstances or by deep feelings of human rejection, who lashes out at the world that he sees as persecuting him.

**ACTIVITY: BLAMING ABEL 1**

- Ask the students whether anyone else other than Cain has any responsibility for the murder of Abel? Follow up any discussion by telling them that Chazal apportioned some responsibility to both Abel and God. Explain that now you are going to concentrate on Abel.

- Divide the students into small groups. Each group has to prepare a scene in which Cain explains to Abel (back from the dead for the purposes of the exercise) why exactly he killed him and how he reacts to the death of his brother after the fact.

- Play out some of the scenes. Do any of them blame Abel in any way for playing a part in his own death? If so, what is the claim made?

- Bring the explanation from Ba'alei Tosefot. Does that reflect any of the opinions brought forward from the group? If we were to know that the scene had really happened like this, how – if at all - would it change our perception of Cain as an individual and his responsibility for his brother's death?

- Can the students think of modern cases where victims are blamed for the violence that befalls them? Perhaps bring up the issue of rape victims who are told that their provocative dress or behaviour caused the rape. How do the students relate to that claim? Is the midrashic claim similar or different? In which ways?
ACTIVITY: BLAMING ABEL 2

- Bring the midrash from Genesis Rabbah as another kind of totally different claim against Abel. How do the students see this as a possible scenario within the original story? If the story had happened like this, would it be reasonable to blame Abel for his own death?

- Try and work out what is the message of the midrash. What seems to be on R. Johanan's mind?

- If R. Johanan were an advisor to the president of the U.S. at the time of 9/11, and he was to apply the message of his midrash to the aftermath of that tragedy what sort of memo would he send the president? In pairs, write a brief and pithy one page memo that R. Johanan might have sent to President Bush, which includes reference to the Cain and Abel and his midrashic interpretation.

- Share some of the memos. Do you think that this is the right message for America today? Does following such advice have a price for a modern democracy? What is that price? Is it worth paying? Why? Why not?

- Should an Abel never show mercy?
INDIRECT RESPONSIBILITY: GOD

We now come to a more complex question, the theological question of God's indirect responsibility for the murder. We have already seen a number of sides of this in some of the claims made by Cain in the earlier midrashim which attempted to suggest Cain's genuine or manipulative line of defence. These ideas, perhaps, did not strike us as serious because we were reading them, together with the midrash, as ideas that came through the mouth of the killer who is trying to evade responsibility. Read as such, they are easy to dismiss. But when complaints against God are seen from the standpoint, not of the killer, but rather of the victim, they have a lot more power, and are a lot more troubling and thought provoking. Here we bring two such midrashic sources, one from Genesis Rabbah and the other from a medieval Yemenite midrash, HaMidrash HaGadol.

R. Shimon bar Yohai said: It is difficult to say this thing, and the mouth cannot utter it plainly. Think of two athletes wrestling before the king; had the king wished, he could have separated them. But he did not so desire, and one overcame the other and killed him, he [the victim] crying out before he died, 'Let my cause be pleaded before the king!' In this way, THE VOICE OF THY BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT AGAINST ME.'

Genesis Rabbah

CRYING OUT TO ME: Don't read "to Me" but "about Me." A parable will explain. Two persons quarreled and one killed the other. A third person was standing between them and did not intercede to separate them. Who will everyone be buzzing about? Certainly 'about the third person'.

Midrash HaGadol (Yemen 13th century)

Rashbi opens up the issue which, judging from his introduction, clearly troubles him from a theological point of view. He gives a reading of the story from the point of view of the victim which raises issues similar to the difficult ideas of theodicy raised by the issue of צדיק ורע לו.

His critique can be read on three different levels.

1. Firstly, it is the king (God) who is in charge of the world. As such he has ministerial responsibility for whatever evil is done in his kingdom. He is the one in power and he has full control of all the subordinate forces under his command. He has the power to intervene and he fails to do so. The defence that he has warned the murderer of the need to exercise self-control is hardly convincing in these circumstances. As such, the blood of the victim, Abel, cries out at God.

2. The image of the king watching the contest is deeply disturbing because it suggests that the king, in this case God, enjoys the spectacle of the struggle that leads almost inevitably to the death of one of the contestants. Life becomes a game to be played out for the entertainment of the king. How can this be said about God? Noam Zion suggests that the intention of Rashbi is not to suggest a literal reading of this regarding the critique of God, but a deeper metaphorical reading. According to this suggestion, Rashbi postulates that the two gladiators are in fact the forces of good and evil – יצAIR התבז – that struggle inside each individual. God has created these forces in order that mankind should have free choice and as such God waits hopefully in each situation to see the struggle in the hope that God's hope is confirmed and that the good tendency wins out. The struggle is the price of free choice. As such God watches over things (the king) and does not interfere, because the struggle is essential to God's concept of a Divine world. If this reading is accepted, then it is possible that Rashbi is in fact protesting the idea that humans should have free will. If they are making the right choices then they should be left alone, but if they are about to make the wrong choice, there are
cases in which God should intervene, limiting free choice, but allowing for a better and more moral world, seen especially from the point of view of the victim (here Abel).

3. The third level concerns the fact that any spectator, in the Roman arena, could take the part of the gladiator, down on his knees and about to die, crying out 'Let my cause be pleaded before the king! They could petition the king to spare the man's life. In a case where God was the only spectator, God had to intervene. The second midrash makes essentially the same point. Any individual in their everyday life should understand that he or she has the responsibility to intervene. The person who fails to do this is likely to become the object of gossip and derision almost as much as the person who committed the crime. If anyone has the responsibility according to God's moral law (לא תעמוד על דם רעך, how much more so does God have such responsibility?

It has been suggested that Rashbi was influenced in his criticism by the terrible events of the Bar Kochba revolt to which he was witness. The image of the arena might have been drawn from the public persecution of the Rabbinic martyrs of the time, including Rashbi's teacher, Rabbi Akiva. Such a patent example of injustice in God's world, might have caused people such as Rashbi to go back and explore the complexities of the issue through the prism of the familiar story of Cain and Abel. It is clear from his opening, that this is no mere intellectual speculation but rather a deeply troubling issue from a personal point of view.

These complaints by the first victim of arbitrary violence against the Creator of the world sound very different from similar claims put forward in defence of the first murderer.

EXERCISE: BLAMING GOD

- Ask the class whether God is in any way responsible for the events of Abel’s death, according to the peshat as recorded in the Biblical story. Discuss this with the group.

- Bring the piece from Genesis Rabbah to the group. Analyse it beginning with the second sentence, according to the suggestion made above, talking about the three levels of the story. What are the complaints against God? It is possible to bring in the second midrash from the Midrash HaGadol too.

- Ask the students what is happening in the first sentence of the midrash. Explain that Shimon bar Yochai seems reluctant to say everything that is on his mind. Ask the group why that might be.

- Each individual should go and write a prose piece or a poem or draw a picture that represents what he or she thinks that Rashbi really has on his mind and what he might say if he was not censoring his own thoughts.

- Share some of the answers and then suggest the idea brought above concerning the agony of Rashbi after the death of the martyrs of the Bar Kochba including Rabbi Akiva. Ask why - if this is true – he appears to be channeling his feelings about his present day world through the story of Cain and Abel.

- We suggest finishing with the following poem by Uri Zvi Greenberg, the great Zionist poet who wrote this poem in 1928 despairing of the situation of the Jews of Europe in these years.
WITH MY GOD, THE BLACKSMITH

Like chapters of prophecy, my days burn in all their revelations, and my body, in their midst, is like a melted mass of metal. And over me stands my God, the blacksmith, hammering mightily. Every wound that Time has cut in me, opens its gash and spits forth the pent-up fire in sparks of moments.

This is my fate, my daily lot, until evening falls. And when I return to fling my beaten mass upon the bed, my mouth is a gaping wound. Then, naked, I speak to my God: "You have worked so hard. Now night has come; let us both rest."

Uri Zvi Greenberg

What is the poet experiencing? Are there any parallels with the experience of Rashbi? If there are, why might this be so?
SECTION SIX:

THE POLICY OF PUNISHMENT:
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT. CAIN AND GOD. (Genesis 4: 11-17)

This section will deal with four main questions.
1. What was Cain's punishment? The principle of 'measure for measure'.
2. What was Cain's response to the punishment. The issue of repentance.
3. God's reaction to Cain's response. The mark of Cain.
4. The end of Cain. What can be learned?

What is the point of punishment? What are the possible responses to crime? These questions are fundamental to any society, and we find them, once again in archetypal form, in the story of Cain. Both the midrashim and the medieval commentators discuss the punishment of Cain extensively. What they are really examining is the issue of responsibility for sin and crime. In this section we will examine a number of central issues that were examined by these authorities, relating to the connection between crime and punishment.

Before we go to the story itself, it is worth mentioning that theories of punishment divide down, broadly speaking, into two categories, retributive and utilitarian. In the first, the criminal is punished for what he or she has done and an attempt is made to establish some kind of scale by which punishment and crime are connected. A certain punishment crime merits a certain punishment. The second category, the utilitarian category, focuses less on the past and more on the future. What is the importance to society of a certain punishment? How will society gain most by the punishment meted out to the criminal? And, in addition, which punishment is best calculated to benefit the criminal?

Both of these approaches are to be found already in the Tanach. The first is found in the principle of מידה כנגד מידה or 'measure for measure'. Here the assumption is that God, the truly objective judge, will give each miscreant whatever that person deserves. Good behaviour is rewarded and bad behaviour punished, and the punishment fits the crime. In fact, examination of the Genesis story shows very often a specific adaptation of the punishment to suit the misdemeanor in question. The Jacob and Joseph stories especially are full of examples of this kind.

However, the other approach can also be found. In the case of the 'stubborn and rebellious son', for example, (Deut. 21:18-21) the punishment is death by stoning, not on account of past crimes, but rather both in recognition of potential future damage to the society and the educational value of such an example in the society as a whole. In addition, the prophetic idea of the need for repentance and the possibility of punishment that causes people to examine their own sins and turn away from them, is pronounced in the discussions of Chazal. The possibility of repentance and real change in a criminal was of great importance to the Rabbis.
We will turn now to the example of Cain and examine how these approaches appear both in the peshat of the story and in the Rabbinic discussions of later generations.

Let us outline to start with a number of major questions brought up by the text. We will attempt to address each of these questions.

1. Does the word "ועתה" – "and now", which opens the section imply chronological connection between the crime and the about-to-be-announced punishment or is there an internal logic that links the two in a deeper fashion. Is God an objective judge or does God act as a party in the dispute?

2. Does the punishment 'fit the crime' (measure for measure)? Are the different aspects of the punishment announced by God parts of one punishment or separate punishments? How are they likely to affect Cain and mankind in general? What is the place of the word אדמה in the scheme of punishment?

3. How can we understand Cain's reaction? What do the individual words mean? Is it a question or a statement? Does it imply some kind of repentance or not?

4. What does the playwright Arthur Miller add to our understanding:

Cain's Punishment and Death of a Salesman from an Interview with Arthur Miller, the playwright

"The rabbis who collected the Old Testament set Cain at its beginning not out of some interest in criminology, but because they understood that the sight of his own crimes is the highest agony a man can know." And, perhaps even more tragically, like Willy Loman, not knowing what his crimes are."

5. What are the differences between the punishment as formulated by God (verses 11 – 12) and as reformulated by Cain (verse 14)? What do the differences mean? What does the phrase מפקך אסתר mean?

6. Why did God not decide to kill Cain? Why did he decide to protect him? What is the function of the אות קין and what exactly is it? Did God make his punishment easier or harder?

7. What, if anything, can be learned from the end of the story? Is it a happy end? Should it have been?
INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE: PUNISHMENT!

- Ask every student to write down a time when she or he was punished by their parents.

- Ask the students what are the aims of punishments. Make a list of possible aims on the board. Write on the board, above the list, the two terms mentioned in the introduction above, retributive and utilitarian punishment. Ask the students to try and define the two words in respect of punishment. Now see if the other words that have been used can be fit into the two categories or whether there is any kind of a third approach.

- Go to some of the cases that the students wrote down. Let volunteers present their cases and decide which of the two categories they belong too. Note, it might indeed be that some or many of the punishments fit into both categories. Ask if one of the categories was more dominant with respect to the particular punishment. At the end of this stage, sum up. Which, if either, of the two categories was dominant in the class stories?

- Discuss a number of possible cases with the class. Here are some examples:
  - A child steals candy from a shop out of greed.
  - A child steals bread from a shop out of hunger.
  - A child steals medicine from a pharmacist for a sick family member who cannot afford the medicines.
  - A kid in school bullies another kid and scares her.
  - A kid in school attacks a boy unprovoked, pulls a knife on him and stabs him.
  - A kid in school responds to incessant bullying by bringing a knife to school and stabbing the bully.

Which of the two categories of punishments would the class use in each of these cases? If more than one, which category would be dominant?

- Now discuss generally the virtues of the two kinds of punishment. What is each category attempting to achieve? What are the pro's and con's of each approach?

- Without looking at the text again, which of the two categories should God (setting the standards for human behaviour through all time) have used in the case of Cain? If both, which should be dominant?
PICTURING THE CRIME

What did the first murder actually look like? How exactly did it take place? This pivotal history-making event is almost off the screen in the brief Biblical description – “he rose and killed him.” Yet some rabbis and many artists were drawn to its visualization and we bring here a number of graphic opinions on different aspects of the gruesome event. We believe the exercise in reconstructing the scene of the crime is essential for ruling the appropriate punishment if it is to match the crime in some way.

Midrash

Midrash Rabbah describes the scene graphically.

AND CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL, etc.
R. Johanan said: Abel was stronger than Cain, for the expression "rose up" can only imply that he [Cain] lay beneath [Abel, after what might have been an initial attack by Cain that was thwarted by Abel who wrestled the assailant to the ground].
He [Cain] then said to [Abel], 'Only the two of us are in the world: what will you go and tell our father [if you kill me]?'
At this [Abel] was filled with pity for him [and released him]. Immediately [Cain] rose against [Abel] and slew him.
Out of that incident was born the proverb, 'Do not do good to an evil man, then evil will not befall you.'

With what did he kill him?
R. Simeon said: He killed him with a staff... a weapon that inflicts bruises
The Rabbis said: He killed him with a stone ... a weapon which inflicts wounds.
R. Azariah and R. Jonathan in R. Isaac's name said: Cain had closely observed where his father slew the bull as a sacrifice... and there he killed him - by the throat and its organs.

Midrash Rabbah

Cain killed Abel by biting him like a snake until his soul went out and he died. -- Zohar 231

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26 We now introduce art as an additional component in the process of commentary. We suggest that the visualisation of Biblical stories through art is an essential component of the process of commentary. Every picture tells a story and those stories can be just as compelling to the student as the more traditional genres of Midrash and commentary. As we move towards a process of internalisation by the student, we suggest that it is valuable to use this important extra genre, integrating it into the rest of the process.

27 That skull has a tongue in it and could sing once; how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain’s jaw-bone that did the first murder. -- Shakespeare, Hamlet V:1, 83-85

Since 9th cent, English accounts say Cain’s weapon was jaw-bone of an ass. Similarly Samson uses bone of an ass [in a fight.] (Judges 15:14) English tradition that Cain used jaw-bone came about because of linguistic reason. In the Anglo Saxon prose “Solomon and Saturn,” Cain is called the bana, bane, of his brother. [Hence bone].
-- Meyer Schapiro, “Cain’s Jawbone That Did the First Murder,” Art Bulletin XXIV September 1942 p 205, 210-11

28 “Grendel’s mother, living in the murky cold lake assigned her since Cain had killed his only brother, slain his father’s son, with an angry sword.” -- Beowulf, lines1261-1262)
The Tanchuma describes the process of the murder generated by the lack of technical expertise by the first murderer together with a brutal determination to get the job done.

_How did he kill him? He inflicted numerous bruises upon his body with a stone. He smote him over his entire body, from his hands and feet to his throat, for he had no way of knowing from where his soul would depart._

Midrash Tanchuma

Ibn Ezra in his comment has no patience for the details of the death. However in dismissing the question, he actually adds to the plastic description.

_Those born on a dark day ask, how did Cain kill Abel since no swords were yet in existence? This is a foolish question. He could have choked him or killed him with a stone or a piece of wood inasmuch as there were thousands of stones and chunks of wood around._

Ibn Ezra

MeAm Loez, the compendium of Spanish commentaries, brings an interesting idea from the earlier sources to illuminate the immediate aftermath of the act.

_Cain did not know what to do with the body, and he left Abel lying there in the field. This was the first time that he had seen a dead person. He then saw a group of kosher birds and wild animals fighting. When one of them was killed, they dug in, the ground and buried it. Learning from them, Cain buried Abel in the ground._

MeAm Loez
Art as Midrash and Commentary

It is not just the Midrash and the commentators who have contributed to the popular imagination regarding the details of the bloody crime. For many painters the murder is the highpoint of the story. We bring here a number of striking representations of the murder.

PEDAGOGIC GUIDELINES: A Systematic Analysis of Art as Commentary

We bring here a systematic pedagogic suggestion for examining works of art that are based on texts. According to this suggestion, there are five stages of examination that can be made into a work-page or can be asked in the classroom. We suggest, for each stage, a number of questions that can be asked.

1. First reactions.
   - What catches your eye in the picture? What feeling or atmosphere does the picture evoke?
   - At first glance, what do you like or dislike in the picture?
   - Does the picture remind you of anything or make you think of anything specific?

2. Identification of the subject – between the story and the picture.
   - What is shown from the p'shat of the biblical story? (Characters, events, ideas, values).
   - What if anything, did the artist leave out?
   - What did the artist add to the text as he or she came to express his or her version of the text?
   - Give a title to the painting and sum up what is the main emphasis of the picture.

3. Artistic fashioning – describing what the artist has done.
   - What means has the artist used to portray the story? Note the colours (warm, cold, realistic, imaginative etc.), technique (oil, water, brushstrokes etc), the use of light and shade, the lines (broad, delicate, clear, unclear etc.), the organization of the subject (composition, location of figures and objects, size of objects and people, accentuation and emphasis etc.).
   - How do the artistic means focus the main emphasis and the message of the picture?
   - Which of the techniques of the artist had the most effect on you? .
   - Compare the artistic means used to those that appear in other pictures in this series?

4. Examining the meaning.
   - What is the meaning of the choice of figures and subjects that the artist has put in the picture or those that the artist has left out?
   - What human problems was the artist attempting to address in the picture?
- What lies behind the artistic choices that the artist has made in terms of how the scene is portrayed?
- What is the personal meaning of this picture to you when compared to other pictures in the series being viewed?

5. Connecting back with the text.

- Looking back now on the text, what were the gaps or the questions opened up by the text, that the artist attempted to address?
- What contribution did the culture and the period of the artist make to the picture?
- Compare the picture as a midrash of the text with classic Rabbinic midrashim (brought in the booklet) and with other pictures in the series. What are the central questions that both the Rabbis and the artists attempt to answer? How are the answers they give similar or different?
- In your opinion, to what extent did the artist succeed in listening to the messages and the problems of the biblical texts and succeed in creating a novel point of view in understanding the story?
- To what extent does the picture succeed in speaking to you and your generation, in relation to the other pictures in this series?

1. GUSTAVE DORE. Paris, France 1832-1883

We open with Dore, who, as the popular biblical illustrator of the nineteenth century in Europe, served to frame the imagination of generations of readers as to how the biblical scenes and characters actually appeared. Dore has placed Cain in an interesting perspective regarding Abel. He could be moving towards him, lured on by a fascination of what he has actually achieved or he might be moving away, recoiling in horror from the act that he has just performed. Cain is in darkness (evil?) wrapped in snakelike contours and at least one snake makes its way towards Cain, a symbol of cunning and evil, recalling the Garden of Eden. Cain's head seems to bear a crown of thorns, like Judas who betrayed Jesus. In contrast, Abel is bathed in an unspecified light, perhaps a divine halo. He is sprawled on the ground with his arms outstretched like Jesus taken of the cross. Cain’s murder of the Abel the first shepherd (pastor) is a foreshadowing
of the murder of Jesus, the lamb of God. Often in medieval Christian iconography Cain is identified with Judas who is identified with the Jews who killed their innocent brother Jesus.

"When Cain discovered that God had approved his brother’s sacrifice but not his own, he ought surely to have changed his ways and imitated his good brother, instead of showing pride and jealousy. In fact, Cain turned sullen, and his face fell. This is a sin which God particularly rebukes, namely, sulkiness about another’s goodness, and a brother’s goodness at that. . .What was said to Cain about sin, or the perverted desire of the flesh [envy of Abel] is said in this passage about the sinful woman [Eve]...Cain received...instruction from God like a lawbreaker. For the fault of jealousy grew stronger, and he planned and carried out his brother’s murder... He also symbolizes the Jews by whom Christ was slain, the shepherd of the flock of men, who was prefigured in Abel, the shepherd of the flock of sheep.”

-- St. Augustine, City of God, XV:7

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites…You snakes, you vipers…I send you prophets, sages and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you man come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of the righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. ”

-- Matthew 23:29, 33-35

2. TITIAN. Venice, Italy. c1477-1566
Titian's scene presents us with the muscled figures so beloved of the Renaissance. Cain – once again with some kind of a crown of thorns and leaves on his head – wields his massive club above the falling Abel and uses too, his muscled leg to push his brother down a hill/cliff/mountain. Abel's hand is spread in appeal but the evil act is underway. Once again, the picture moves from darkness to light and from Cain to Abel. As if to underline the evil of the deed, a pillar of smoke billows out behind the figure of Cain, perhaps denoting destruction and evil. The source is seen in a small flame behind his right leg which might denote the sacrifice on the altar. Both men are similarly dressed in the skins of animals (Abel's domain) perhaps hinting at some generosity on Abel's part in letting his brother partake of his realm, an act which is clearly violated by the scene in the picture.
We see some similar elements in this picture by Novelli. Smoke, altar, rocks, light and darkness all appear here. Cain has his back to us. He is in the act of escape. No weapon is shown, perhaps drawing more attention to the human dimensions of the tragedy. The new element here, however, is clearly the figure of God or God's spirit which appears to the fleeing Cain out of a cloud, or perhaps the smoke of the sacrifice. God appears to be stopping the flight of Cain by the raising of a divine hand. Cain knows that his deed has not gone unnoticed. Though we do not see his face (the face that dominates the picture is the angelic face of the fallen Abel) we sense his apprehension. He has been caught and he has been caught by God.
Chagall's scene is semi-abstract and naïve. Cain and Abel are here both clothed in light. The whole scene is in fact much lighter than the others that we have seen, perhaps suggesting a different reading of the scene, whereby, in a sense both Cain and Abel are victims in a terrible family tragedy. This is also suggested by the fact that both appear to have the same weapon, which suggests less a pre-meditated unilateral attack by Cain against Abel, and more some kind of mutuality. This Cain might be read in an altogether less threatening way. He looks like a boy, with a boy's innocence, rather than the muscled embodiment of evil that we have seen in other paintings.
Sandra Richardson, a contemporary American artist, has preserved the naïve style of Chagall. Her weapons in the fight between the two brothers are implements of work suggesting that the economic struggle between the farmer and the shepherd lays at the heart of the violence. However, the most interesting element here from our point of view is not the foreground, but rather the background in which all sorts of weapons of war and destruction grow like plants out of a natural landscape of agriculture. Agriculture gives birth, perhaps ironically, to a culture of war. Recall that Cain’s descendant Tubal-Cain is the first blacksmith, an expertise associated in the Bible with weapons of war. Human violence can appear in the middle of nature to spoil and to dominate it and here is the first example.

6. JOSE VERGARA. Valencia, Spain 1726-1799
Vergara's version is clearly unsympathetic to Cain. He is surrounded by darkness and he attacks Abel who appears by the position of his cloak, to have been sleeping on the ground. There is every evidence that Cain's act is premeditated brutality. Interestingly here, the brothers are presented in a most unromanticised fashion. Both of them have the face of participants in a pub brawl. Compare the face of Abel to the one depicted so nobly by Novelli.
Rubens brings us back to the muscled figures with which we opened. Abel's face is beardless and innocent – a classic victim – while Cain has the closed bearded look of the person who might have great cruelty inside him. Cain is clothed while Abel is naked. Cain is dark while Abel is bathed in light. The scene is placed between two altars. One (Abel's) is lit up and burning. The other, on the extreme right of the picture, is cold and dark. What seems to be a snake is nestling (slithering?) up Abel's thigh. The evil of the parents' generation is here revealed again.

8. GERARD HOET. The Hague (Netherlands) 1648-1733 [and his school of illustrators]
In this picture, taken from a 1728 illustrated bible, by a school of Dutch illustrators led by Gerard Hoet, we have a very busy scene, with all sorts of familiar and unfamiliar elements creeping in. We have for example a group of cows that look as though they have wandered in from the nearest Dutch barnyard, and a dog of the kind that appears in so many domestic Dutch pictures of the era. The two figures, once again sport fairly typical faces and all in all there appears to be little emotion either in the figures who star in the story or in the illustrator/s who depicted them. The two altars are present, both lit up, one far more successfully than the other, and we have also the element of a large rock as the murder weapon.
ACTIVITY: WITNESSING MURDER

- Divide the students into pairs. Tell them that they have been commissioned because of their tremendous talent to paint a large work on the subject of the murder of Abel by Cain.

- Ask each pair of students to start planning a sketch of the murder scene as they see it. They are not asked to work on the actual picture but only to do the pre-planning. In order to do this they have to make a list of elements that they would need to put in. Where would they put them? How would they picture Cain and Abel? What would they be wearing? Holding? Would anyone else be involved as a character? Where would the characters be situated? What would be the pose of each of them? Would there be a weapon? What would it be? What would be the use of light and shade? These are the type of things that they need to consider. They should sketch the positions and the essential information on a piece of paper.

- Together with that they are also asked to prepare a paragraph in which they explain to the person who has commissioned them, what stands behind their decision making. What is the position that they are trying to put over regarding the story and the central characters? In other words what is the message of their story?

- Some pairs should volunteer to present their work and their explanatory paragraph to the group. Invite comments and questions, and lead this into a general discussion regarding some of the central questions mentioned in the first part of the exercise.

- Now bring the groups together into small groups and give each group a copy of both the literary texts and the artistic texts. Let them examine each fairly briefly and work out the "take" of the text or the picture to the subject in question.

- Discuss the artistic texts as a group bringing up perhaps some of the points that we have mentioned in regard to each picture. Which pictures are strongest? Most effective? Most thought-provoking?

- Tell them now that the artistic assignment has changed. They are taking part in a competition organised by an institution called "Youth Against Violence" to make an abstract or semi-abstract mural protesting against violence using the general theme of the murder of Abel by Cain. They are asked to do a small version of the final product on a large sheet of paper. They can – and should – use any of the written texts or pictures that they have received, partially or completely, as part of their work (i.e. they can cut or tear the pictures and the texts). They can also use images from newspapers, internet sources etc. They are aiming to make something that can shock and can make people turn their head and think.

- Present the pictures to each other. We suggest that they are put away till the end of the Cain and Abel learning at which time they can be incorporated into an evening for parents which will sum up the learning process. We will talk about this later.
SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY: PUNISHING MURDER.

As we saw in the previous exercise there are many different scenarios that might justify different punishments that go under the headline of the same crime. (The two examples we brought there were stealing and violence between kids). The same holds true for murder. Under the label of murder, many different kinds of crime are committed. There is a world of difference between premeditated murder in vengeance for a real wrong committed, family violence where one partner kills the other because that partner wants to leave or divorce the first partner, family violence where one of the partners kills the other in self-defence, a crime committed under the influence of psychotic drugs, euthanasia performed on an incurably sick person, abortion and many other similarly dissimilar scenarios. Seen from one point of view, each constitutes murder but the attitude of the legal system, and indeed of society, is likely to be different in each case.

We suggest that the students are given a week to go through the newspapers and the internet and bring several very different cases of murder, some of which are after sentence of the perpetrator and others of which have still to be tried or have not had the punishment announced.

Let them bring cases to class and in groups see if they themselves can create a typology of cases, where they themselves believe that the perpetrator is 'more guilty' or 'less guilty'. They should try and put these in some kind of continuum? Let each group present their typology and continuum which should serve as the basis of discussion. The attempt should be made to create a consensus continuum which reflects the general opinion of the class.

The next stage is to discuss with the class where, if at all, the line of capital punishment should be put on the continuum. Do they think that all of the people along the line should be subject to retributive 'measure for measure' capital punishment for the murder that they have committed? Do they think that none of them should be executed? Or would they draw the line somewhere along the continuum?
1. WHAT WAS CAIN'S PUNISHMENT? THE PRINCIPLE OF 'MEASURE FOR MEASURE' (Gen. 4:11-12).

Cain's punishment as announced by God, comprises different elements ארא撤离 תחת תחת אדרמה, לא תוסך את תחת אדרמה. All of these are in one way or another connected with land. The question needs to be asked: why is the punishment so land-centred?

a. Let us bring two answers to this. Moses Alsheikh, the 16th century commentator gave the following answer.

"now", before your repentance, you are cursed from the face of the earth. Or, the present punishment, in this life, will be that the earth will not continue to respond to your efforts as it has done in the past. "From the earth," i.e. you will not produce from the earth. Now, however, even when you toil, God said to Cain, the soil will not yield its potential, כח. The reason is because it opened its mouth to aid in a shameful deed, burying the victim of a foul murder helping to hide the deed. As an appropriate punishment earth will not be able even to open its "mouth" for worthwhile activities. The earth which had been Cain's servant up until now would henceforth become his enemy.

Moses Alsheikh (16th century, Safed)

This answer was extended by the outstanding Ladino 18th century commentary MeAm Loez.

Blood was absorbed so completely that no trace was visible. In one way, the earth had done a good deed, since animals would not be able to lap up any of this blood. But since not even the slightest discoloration was left on the surface, it was a sign that the earth wanted to hide the blood completely, that it not be discovered. This was improper; nothing can be hidden from God. He therefore also included the ground in the curse.

MeAm Loez

The land here is seen as an accomplice to the crime. Abel was killed by two accomplices, Cain and the ground. Both of them must be punished. In addition, it should be mentioned that the cause of the crime was connected to the produce of the land. Cain, so linked by his life to the land, and who committed his crime through his relationship with the land, will get his punishment through his relationship with the land. The natural and organic relationship between man and the land, central in God's world at the time of creation, is already bruised by the exile from Eden. Cain's crime will break the relationship and create an alienation, a non-relationship. Both the land and Cain will suffer from this.

Genesis Rabbah discusses the nature of the curse.

WHEN YOU TILL THE GROUND, IT SHALL NOT HENCEFORTH YIELD UNTO YOU HER STRENGTH (4, 12).

R. Eleazar said: To you it shall not yield [her strength], but to another it shall yield it.
R. Yossi b. R. Hanina maintained: Neither to you nor to another. Similarly you read: You will carry much seed out into the field, and will gather little in (Deut. Ch. 28 v38).
R. Yehudah said: That means that a person will sow a se'ah and gather in a se'ah. Said R. Nehemiah: If so, how will he live? Rather, the field that ought to yield twenty measures will yield ten, and what ought to yield ten will yield five.
Another thing: WHEN YOU TILL THE GROUND, IT SHALL NOT HENCEFORTH GIVE TO YOU HER STRENGTH. Her strength it shall not give unto you; your strength, however, it shall give unto you. It won't give you all of your strength, however, it will give you only a part of your strength.

Genesis Rabbah

The midrash is formed around a couple of different disagreements. In the first R. Eleazer and R. Yossi ben Hanina disagree regarding the scope of the curse. Who, precisely, will be cursed? Will it be Cain alone or is all of mankind included in the curse as occurred in the episode of Eden? If the latter, then mankind is still suffering from the results of this first murder. A question like this of course would be central in a society that was based on agriculture. Should the majority of people see themselves as labouring under a curse as they attempted to wrest a living from a sometimes harsh and unyielding soil?

The second argument between R. Yehudah and R. Nehemiah concerns the return that a person will get from the soil after the curse of Cain. R. Yehudah believes that the land will give no profit to the person who works it. R. Nehemiah, on the other hand, believes that there will be a profit but it will be less than would have been the case before the curse. The last comment in the midrash changes the language from כחיה to כחי and adds to R. Yehudah's pessimism, suggesting that not only will the land not give all of her power back to the worker, but the person will not get back the full reward for the labour invested.

Samson Raphael Hirsch sums up eloquently the result of this alienation between Cain and the land.

When God placed the Earth under Man's sway, it was to be elevated in the service of moral human purposes by the use of its powers. But crime severs the bond between earth and Man. To the criminal, God says: the earth will no longer give its powers unto you. Only when Man is Adam, the footstool of the Shechinah then the Adamah is also the footstool of man. But when Man tears the bond between himself and God asunder, then God tears asunder the bond between Man and the earth. Then Man indeed goes on living on the globe, but it is no longer a footstool to him, no longer "Adamah".

Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th century, Germany)

Hirsch lines up with R. Eleazar, in seeing the punishment of alienation not extending to all mankind but limiting itself to the one who through his or her own actions has broken the relationship with God of which the relationship with the land is a central part. When Adam is no longer Adam, in other words, when a man is no longer behaving as a 'Man', reflecting God's ethos, then Adamah can no longer be Adamah, something which in its very name, reflects the special relationship with man. Hirsch, a nineteenth century rationalist and optimist, naturally shrank from any idea that mankind was labouring under a curse because of the sin of Cain. However, the broken relationship with God and the land would not limit itself to Cain as an individual. It refers to Cain as a type. Those who break with God's way through criminal acts can expect the same retribution.

b. The other part of the punishment is נד ונד, variously translated as 'wavering and wandering' or as a 'restless wanderer'. The two words are in fact basically synonyms but for the darshanim and commentators they were seen to represent different aspects of the punishment.

The commentators were divide as to the connection of this part of the punishment with the motif of earth that characterized the preceding parts of the punishment. Rashi, for example, makes the following comment.
IN THE LAND OF NOD In the land where all exiles wander about...Another explanation of
IN THE LAND OF NOD –[taking Nod in the sense of "movement"] - wherever he went, the
earth quaked beneath him, and people said, "Turn away from him: this is the man who killed
his brother."

Rashi

Rashi does not see an agricultural connection with this part of the punishment. For him, it is a
punishment which touches a completely different part of the crime. In his crime, Cain is seen as
having sundered the connection between people. The natural relationship between people is one of
connection, but Cain broke that connection and thus had no place in the society of normal people.
His punishment is to relinquish his normal organic links with humanity and community and to go to
the place of exiles, for people like him who have broken their natural connection with their fellow
men. Moreover, when he comes into the society of people (or animals) untainted by sin, he will be
instantly recognizable. His whole physical presence – characterized here by the earth shaking – will
make it clear that he is a murderer.

Here are two different opinions of medieval commentators who see that there is a connection
between the different aspects of the punishment and, as such, link the wandering in to the idea of
land, already mentioned.

AND NOW CURSED ARE YOU FROM THE GROUND. Cain, a tiller of the soil, suffered a
loss with regard to the ground. He sowed and planted but the earth no longer yielded fruits or
harvest. Cain was forced to wander far from the dwelling place of his father, Adam, who lived
close to the Garden of Eden. He was never to find rest in one place but was constantly to be on
the move.

Ibn Ezra

YOU WILL BE A RESTLESS WANDERER OVER THE EARTH. This is a different curse,
and it is for him [Cain] alone. It said to him that he would not be able to stand in one place,
but that God will put in his heart the consciousness of the curse of the land. He will say 'I will
go to another place to sow there. Perhaps the land there will give me her strength' and in this
way [he will go] from place to place throughout his life.

David Kimhi ([Radak] 12th century, France)

Both Ibn Ezra and Radak see a more natural connection between the idea of the land and the idea of
wandering. Both of them see that the inhospitability of the land towards Cain would be the essential
factor in turning him to a life of wandering.

An interesting bridging position, which embraces both Rashi and the other thinkers can be found in
Hirsch, whom we have already quoted regarding the first part of the punishment.

That he be a fugitive and a wanderer in the world. This means that his heart will not be at
rest, and he will lack the tranquility to remain in one place on the earth; he will wander
forever for the punishment of murderers is exile.

By the opposite of נוד, to have no place of rest, referring to the earth, to be cut off from
it, to have no spot on it to call "his own". נוד referring to mankind, to be cut off from
all fellow-men. The general underlying meaning of נוד is the separation of that which
is related from that to which it is related, of things which by nature belong together.
To Cain, the husbandman, whose pride it was to cultivate the soil, and to extract its
produce by his strength, the earth will no longer yield its powers, yes, he will have no spot on earth that he can call his own as a home. And whereas, otherwise, even the landless stranger, the גָּר, receives the means of existence in the brotherly love of other people, Cain is denied even this, the murderer becomes נֻּכֶּה, homeless and shunned, forsaken by earth and man.

Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th century, Germany)

For Hirsch, the exile is both from the land and from mankind and they are related in that the criminal (here, Cain) is severed from the natural organic state of humanity and becomes alienated from all natural connections. The break with the land and the break with humanity are two parts of the same thing, the descent into alienation and isolation on the part of the person who has performed the great anti-social act.

**EXERCISE: CAIN'S PUNISHMENT**

- Begin by reading carefully verses 11 and 12 and making a list of any questions that come out of the text for the students.

- Ask them to define the punishment in their own words. How many parts of the punishment are there in these two sentences (two or three depending on the definition: broadly speaking there are two categories, land and exile)? Are they connected?

- Half the class, in pairs, should attempt an explanation of the first (land-based) part of the punishment in terms of it fitting the crime. The other half of the class should do the same for the second part of the punishment (exile). Is the punishment retributive, utilitarian or a mixture of both? They should explain in which ways this is true.

- Bring all the groups in the same category together to compare ideas and then when the ideas have been shared and deepened, bring one member of each group together so that the class is divided into pairs. They should explain the general approach of their group and their own specific 'take' on the issue to their partner.

- Now bring all the above midrashim and parshanuyot on a sheet to each pair and let them read carefully through them. Let them choose one or two that most speak to them.

- Back together as a whole group, go through the midrashim and comments, one by one, getting reactions on each of them, initially by those who chose the specific comment as a favourite, explaining the reasons for their choices.

- Discuss with the group. Does their understanding of the text at this point suggest that God acted in a utilitarian way or a retributive fashion when deciding on Cain's punishment?

- Do they have any extra insights into the text after the process or do they feel that they had most or all of the important points themselves?

2. WHAT WAS CAIN'S RESPONSE TO THE PUNISHMENT?

GOD SPEAKS AND CAIN HEARS – OR DOES HE? (Gen. 4: 13-14)?
In Cain’s response, it is clear that he has taken God's words and added to them. It is as if God has said something specific and defined, but Cain, perhaps anticipating something far worse, hears not only the words of God but the outer projection of his own fears. Thus he believes that as a wanderer he will be condemned to death, and that he will be compelled to hide himself from God. We bring here two comments on this idea of hiding from God, one from the Spanish commentator Bahya ben Asher and one from the medieval midrash, the Great Midrash.

**AND I HAVE TO HIDE FROM YOUR COUNTENANCE.** There is nothing harder in the world than the hiding of the Shechinah. Because the Shechinah is in hiding a person feels vulnerable in the world and all problems find him, and that is why it says (Deut. Ch. 31, v. 17) ‘I [God] will hide my face from them and they shall be devoured’.

HaMidrash HaGadol

**AND I HAVE TO HIDE FROM YOUR COUNTENANCE.** It is possible to understand the meaning of the word **ומפניך** as “from Your presence” i.e. from the place where Your presence is manifest, from Mount Moriah. This would prove that Adam lived near Mount Moriah and that his children lived there also. In that event, we would have to understand the words of our verse as follows: "You have expelled me this day from the holy site on earth in order that I have to hide from Your presence." Anyone who has been expelled from the presence of God is considered as **נסתר** "in hiding," as he is under the domain of other forces...

Another way of explaining the above words by Cain is this: seeing You have decreed upon me that You hide Your face from me when You told me "be a vagrant and a wanderer on earth," this mean that exile of either an individual or a nation is an indication that God has turned His countenance away from such an individual or such a nation. It means that such an individual or nation is no longer under the supervision of the Creator. Cain’s anguished outcry was: "if this is so, what hope is there left for me? I am now at the mercy of every single creature!"

Bahya ben Asher

Both of these comments have the same effect. God is seen as having hidden the divine face from Cain. Cain is now alone and vulnerable in the world, not only cut off from the land and mankind but from God, the source of security and a feeling of safety. Cain is now an outlaw from humanity and God, and the last shreds of confidence which comes from a sense of connection, are torn away from him. His isolation and alienation are now complete. Naked and unprotected he stands in the world. It is no surprise that he now feels that at he is a prey to everyone and everything. In his own mind, he is a man totally alone.

Erich Fromm, who we quoted earlier on in the booklet, takes this idea of Cain's subjective feeling of rejection by God.

_The Biblical report of Cain's crime and punishment offers a classic illustration of the fact that what man is most afraid of is not punishment but rejection. God accepted Abel’s offerings but did not accept Cain's. Without giving any reason, God did to Cain the worst thing that can be done to a man who cannot live without being acceptable to an authority. He refused his offering and thus rejected him. The rejection was unbearable for Cain, so Cain killed the rival who had deprived him of the indispensable. What was Cain's punishment? He was not killed or even harmed; as a matter of fact, God forbade anyone to kill him (the mark of Cain was meant to protect him from being killed). His punishment was to be made an outcast; after God had rejected him, he was then separated from his fellow_
Fromm sees the connection with God - the authority figure – as the most important element in Cain's identity. He suggests that the murder was committed because of the feeling of desolation caused by his abandonment by God, the force whose approval was so central to Cain. Now, the feeling of Divine rejection is the worst thing that could happen to Cain. Perhaps we could add to this that if indeed we accept Fromm's thesis about the utter centrality of God's presence and God's approval for Cain, it might explain why he hears these extra elements that God doesn't actually say. The fear of being rejected by God would then be his biggest fear and would provide fertile ground for his projection of his own worst fears onto the severe but nevertheless more limited message of punishment that God is giving him.

**ACTIVITY: LIFE WITHOUT GOD**

- Read carefully verses 13 and 14. Are there any strange things that are apparent in the text? Focus the group's attention on the fact that Cain's answer to God contains two elements that God did not mention. Why do the group think that this happened? What is there in Cain that might make him hear things that God did not say?

- Show the two traditional commentaries (HaMidrash HaGadol and Bahya) and then the Erich Fromm. Bring the group to understand all three suggestions. Talk about the inner fears of a person who believes in God but realises that God might abandon them? How must the world look to them?

- Show the group the picture and ask them to write a monologue or draw a picture that represents the feelings of the person who suddenly feels that they have lost God or that God has forsaken them.

- Share the contributions, and conclude by reading the following poem by Ya'akov Fichman, the early to mid 20th century Hebrew poet. It is not about Cain, but rather about David, who
according to some traditions, was cursed after the sin with Bath Sheva by, among other punishments, losing contact with God. That is the subject of Fichman's great poem.

*Midnight descends on the world.*
*An hour of mystery.*
*Every trace of yesterday*
*Sinks into the blackness like a stone in the depths,*
*And an ancient darkness, like a rolling wave,*
*Fills every scheming rock-crevice, every sunken valley,*
*Every mountain cave.*
*Come, night, and fill up my soul too,*
*With the cold moaning of midnight*
*And pour your shadows into my eyes.*
*Once I loved to rise in the middle of the night,*
*And, like a prowling animal of the dark,*
*To walk unseen, nourished by the springs of God,*
*While the blackness rang and sang.*
*But no more will the night's silence*
*Cause my harp to play:*
*Like a cursed forest*
*My strings stay silent at the touch of wind.*
*Since the clouds of my sin descended upon me,*
*My playing does not grace the dawn;*
*I do not raise the new-born day with song,*
*And the breath of God to which I pray secretly*
*Brings me only terror at its approach...*
*And so, as midnight comes,*
*When night flows like perfume on a garden*
*And depths touch,*
*I'll sink my face despairingly in the lap of the universe*
*And wait for a sign.*
*Sometimes, at night, as sleep falls silently on the house,*
*And darkness wraps the mysteries of the garden,*
*I'll feel a sudden flowing in my heart*
*And I'll believe - deliverance is near.*
*Now the wrong will be righted and I will be replanted*
*In the earth, my roots nourished once again.*
*Only at midnight, the hour of forgiveness,*
*As darkness opens the gates to the heavenly throne*
*My blood cries out for salvation and will not stand silent,*
*And all that is destroyed in me and turned to dust,*
*Longs to cleave to You.*
*My pain screams out for you, Oh God.*

Ya'akov Fichman

We have seen that there were three different punishments or rather three different aspects to the punishment that Cain received. He was cut off from the earth, cut off from his fellow men and cut off from God – at least in his own mind. If we accept that we have a 'measure for measure' response by God to the question of Cain's punishment, each of the three aspects touches a different side of his crime. His alienation from the soil represents his calling as a man of the land for whom the land was
very dear and who felt truly bonded to the land. The crime for which this is the punishment according to the parshanim, is the alliance made with the earth to kill Abel and to hide the body, and perhaps the crime of jealousy over the fruits of the soil which led to the murder. His alienation from people represents his identity as a social being. His crime in this respect is the attack on human solidarity that saw him capable of lifting his hand against another human being, in so doing forfeiting any claim to human community. His alienation from God represents his identity as a man who wanted to serve God and for whom God's acceptance and approval were cardinal. His crime here was to protest God's choice and to question Divine justice and to put his own needs above God's decision, in so doing threatening the whole order that God had built and slaying the image of God in Abel.

Here we see how peshat and derash together can yield some wonderful insights into the text on the one hand and the human condition on the other. The derash here has built its scenarios fairly close to the text itself (unlike the scenarios arising out of the discussion before the death, for example). The reading of the text refracted through this heady mix of peshat and derash is, we suggest, a highly enriched reading, challenging and relevant.
3. WHAT WAS CAIN'S RESPONSE TO THE PUNISHMENT?
THE REPENTANCE ISSUE.

We stated above that there are two concepts of punishment for criminals, the concept of what is called 'retributive' justice – i.e. 'measure for measure' – and the idea of utilitarian justice, namely doing what is best for the individual and the society as a whole. Up to now we have examined Cain's punishment in strictly retributive terms. However, there is also the possibility that there was an element of utilitarian justice involved, and that God chose the punishment with this, at least partly, in mind. The key to examining this, it would seem, is to examine Cain's response, brought in verse 13, where he says to God, עון דוד ונתן לו און נ תוך . This short three word response is in fact very unclear. There are several ambiguities in the language used. עון can connote either sin or punishment and נושא can imply either to bear a burden or to forgive. This uncertainty has allowed commentators and darshanim to suggest various scenarios. It is to these scenarios that we now turn in order to try and illuminate the reaction of Cain to his punishment.

[Another interpretation bases itself on the meaning, "MY SIN IS TOO GREAT TO BE FORGIVEN [IN THE WAY THAT YOU HAVE DONE]": My sin is greater than my father's. My father violated a light precept and was expelled from the Garden of Eden; this is a grave crime, namely murder; how much greater then is my sin!]

Genesis Rabbah

In this interpretation Cain compares his punishment with that which his father had received and concludes that God has lightened the punishment, because compared with his father's minor sin, murder merits a much harsher response. The derivation for this is the sense of "My sin is too great to be forgiven [in the way that You have done]". Thus there is an expression of gratitude at God's lenience. The retributive principle is seen not to have been completely invoked. Cain's gratitude according to this and his recognition that the principle of justice has been tempered by mercy, is the beginning of a true repentance. Cain has seen the error of his ways. With the revelation of God's great mercy in front of his eyes, he truly begins to repent.

This idea of the phrase representing an expression of repentance is found too in Pesikta deRav Kahane which sees the whole episode as an example of God's infinite ability to pardon.

Israel asked the Holy One directly: Master of universes, if we do resolve upon penitence, will you accept us [even though human nature being what it is, our repentance may be imperfect]? He replied: I accepted Cain's repentance, and shall I not receive your repentance? Consider how Cain's repentance relieved the harshness of the decree that had been imposed on him. It was said to him, When you till the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto you her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer shall you be (Gen. 4:12). But as soon as he vowed repentance, half the punishment specified in the decree was canceled for him.

And where is the proof that he vowed repentance? Cain's saying "MY SIN IS GREATER THAN CAN BE FORGIVEN" (Gen. 4:13). And what is the proof that half the punishment specified in the decree was canceled for him? The verse "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land as a wanderer, to the east of Eden" (Gen. 4:16), Scripture here not speaking of him as both "a wanderer and a fugitive," but only as a wanderer, on the east of Eden.

As Cain went out, Adam met him and asked, "What punishment were you given?" Cain replied: "I vowed repentance and was granted mercy." Hearing this, in self-reproach Adam proceeded to strike himself in the face and said: "Such is the power of repentance, and I knew it not!"
Then and there he exclaimed: It is a good thing to confess to the Lord, etc. (Ps. 92:2).

According to R. Levi, the first verse of the Psalm just cited, a verse usually read A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day (Ps. 92:1), is to be read A Psalm, a song for the day of repentance, and the entire Psalm is to be taken as having been composed by Adam [after he was told by Cain that he had been granted clemency. Now we understand why God said to Israel: If I accepted Cain's], shall I not accept your repentance?

Pesikta deRav Kahane

Here too God is seen as a just but merciful God who has not exacted the full penalty for the crime. Cain, in appreciation repents and the power of repentance is such that it can avert the full force of the punishment. God's justice is at least partly aimed at affecting the individual criminal and causing a true internal change of heart (in addition to its positive effect on the community of Israel). A justice system which is purely retributive and has no other horizons besides the "come-uppance" principle is perhaps lacking in vision as well as humanity.

Such an idea is suggested by the words of Moses Alsheikh.

Cain responded by asking: "IS MY SIN REALLY GREATER THAN YOU CAN BEAR?" He had realised that God had given him an opening for repentance when He had said: ﴿ now," i.e. under the existing circumstances. He now wanted to know: "is my sin greater than Your ability to forgive?" He meant: "how could I recognise Your greatness except by Your ability to grant a pardon?"

Moses Alsheikh (16th century, Safed)

Alsheikh reads the phrase of Cain differently ("Is my sin really greater than You can bear?"). He has turned the comment into a question and has understood ﴿ as "to bear". Moreover, he has made God the subject of the word "to bear". However his scenario is once again a scenario of repentance inspired by God's example. God's greatness is revealed by the ability to pardon.

However not all interpretations are so clear as to the issue of Cain's repentance. Many commentators read the phrase very differently and come to different conclusions. Let us see another reading from Genesis Rabbah and add it to a piece from Tanchuma.

AND CAIN SAID UNTO THE LORD: MY SIN [OR PUNISHMENT] IS TOO GREAT TO BEAR. You bear the heavenly and the earthly, yet You can not bear my transgression.

Genesis Rabbah

Thereupon Cain cried out: "O Lord of the universe, do You have informers who denounce men to You? My father and mother are the only living human beings on earth, and they do not know that I slew him; how do You, who live in heaven, know?" The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: "Fool! I bear the entire world as it is said: I have made and I will bear; yes, I will carry and will deliver (Isa. Ch.46:4)." Immediately Cain cried out: "You bear the entire world, yet my sin You are unable to bear. MY SIN IS GREATER THAN I CAN BEAR."

Midrash Tanchuma

Both of these midrashim go in a very different direction to those we have seen till now. Both of them share in common the sense that Cain responded with great indignation to the 'sentence' that he had received. He explodes protesting against the arbitrary nature of God's justice – or as he might have said 'injustice' – which is arbitrary and vindictive in its approach to him personally. This of course continues the theme that we saw at the time of the argument between the brothers which
some have interpreted as an argument over Cain's protest at God's unfairness in the affair of the sacrifices. The idea of God being a vindictive and arbitrary God who singles Cain out for special treatment, at the same time as God is prepared to forgive, accept or bear everyone else's sin, is central here. Once again the two midrashim understand the specifics of the words in different ways (Tanchuma does the interesting switch of assuming that God is the subject of the verb to bear) but arrive at the same conclusion. There is no sign of repentance here. Rather, we get a continuation of the rudeness of the criminal who is indignant at everything that happens to him, from the time that he is caught.

Radak sees a similarly unrepentant Cain.

> And Cain said to God, "MY PUNISHMENT IS TOO GREAT [FOR ME] TO BEAR", and he did not speak as a person who was repentant and who had repented for his sin. [Rather] he was simply like someone who wanted his sentence reduced.

David Kimchi (Radak)

Radak reads Cain as a kind of a wheedler, begging pathetically for a reduction of sentence without any pretence of regret for his past misdeeds. Here there is no suggestion that God has shown any mercy. On the contrary, God has been too harsh and has pushed the punishment to the unjustified lengths which are subjectively unbearable to Cain.

One last interesting reading comes from Hirsch. His Cain is a man consumed by self-pity.

> "MY SIN IS GREATER THAN I CAN BEAR", You [God] have shown me how great it is, "You have driven me away today, have severed the bond that gave the earth to me as the ground for human beings, and from Your Presence too: I am not to be protected and watched over, and so, forsaken by the earth, God and man, I must fear that every creature that meets me might kill me"...

So Cain did not recognise the sin he had committed as being so much against his brother as being against himself. That is why he called it רע, wrong, crooked. That which leads most directly to its goal and to happiness is theישר straight, right. Every רע is not only turning aside from our duty but also from our happiness. Thus God ordered it...

> He comes to the realisation of his guilt, not by the thought of what he had done to his brother, but by what he had done to himself. He is still the same Cain, would still now have said רע ונד! "My sin is too great" says Cain, had I only murdered my brother it would be bearable, but I did not know that I had thereby murdered myself, had made myself אורר and had forfeited every claim to the world or to brother-man.

Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th century, Germany)

Hirsch's deep reading suggests a man who only realizes how bad his sin is by reflecting on the harshness of the punishment that he has received from society (in this case God). But that realization only turns inward into self-pity rather than an more expansive realization of sin which would enable the criminal not only to accept the enormity of the crime but to turn outwards towards the victim. This Cain thinks not and cares not for Abel and the crime. He understands that it is seen as wrong but rises up in protest against the harshness of the sentence. There is no repentance, no consciousness of other. Only an intensified sense of self.
Lastly let us see how Bereishit Rabbah develops the theme of vindictiveness on the part of God with reference to another part of the text.

BEHOLD, YOU HAVE DRIVEN OUT, etc. yesterday you drove out my father and now you drive me out.

Genesis Rabbah

Here we see a return to the connection with his father, Adam, but the midrash takes us in the opposite direction to the pervious one where Adam was mentioned. There it was invoked as an argument in favour of God's mercy. Here it provides extra fuel to the fire of resentment that smolders in Cain. God has a problem with the whole family and the family therefore finds itself picked on by God. What happens to Cain is merely a repetition of that shameful previous episode where God banished Cain's parents. Here Cain's complaint is extended from "Why me?" to "Why us?"

We have seen how divided the commentators are regarding Cain's reactions. Some see him as repenting. Others see him as holding fast to the obstinate position revealed in the previous sentence, concerned only with his own fate as a victim of a cruel and arbitrary world.
EXERCISE: DOES CAIN REPENT?

- It is known that some criminals repent after punishment. Some remain silent but repent inwardly. Others say that they have repented but in fact have not really done so. Briefly discuss how students see this phenomenon. Do they think that many criminals truly repent? What is most likely to influence a person to repent? Can the sentence passed influence this in any way? How?

- Ask the students whether they see in Cain's response in verses 13-14 any signs that Cain has had a change in heart and repented. If there are any students who have, let them explain what if any text they are basing themselves on, and how they came to that conclusion.

- Explain that the authorities are divided and that the disagreement stems from the different ways that it is possible to understand the three-word phrase גdiği עוני מנשאות. Explain the genuine ambiguity of the phrase and how two of the words can each be interpreted in two ways. Write a list of all possible meanings that the class can find in the three-word phrase.

- Now bring as many as you want of the seven different interpretations brought above, each of which bases itself on another understanding of the crucial phrase (leave out the last text from Genesis Rabbah which uses another phrase). Let the group go through them in pairs, trying to understand how each text has understood the phrase differently, and noting whether each specific text sees Cain as repenting or not. Go through them with the class.

- Bring in the last Genesis Rabbah quote and compare it with the first one, also from Genesis Rabbah. Both of them have Cain mentioning his father but they draw radically different conclusions. Use them to sum up the two approaches to Cain's repentance.

- At the end reread the text, pointing out once again that there really is ambiguity in the text and it can equally correctly be read in several different ways. Which of the readings is most consistent with their understanding of Cain? Ask again, did he really repent?
4. GOD'S REACTION TO CAIN'S RESPONSE. THE MARK OF CAIN. (Gen. 4:15)

One cardinal question that needs answering is the obvious one: why did God not decide to kill Cain? We have suggested that if examined carefully, the sentence passed by God (alienation from land, from people and from the Divine presence) can be seen as very fitting and a perfect example of retributive justice. However, it cannot be denied that a more perfect form of retributive justice would be to act according to the 'eye for an eye' principle and demand life for life taken. The story makes it clear that God goes out of the way to stop this from happening. God gives a mark to Cain so that this will not happen and expressly forbids the slaying of Cain. As a result, much of the discussion concerning why God did not kill Cain, becomes focused on the issue of this sign, its nature and its role. But the truth is that the question is wider than this. In the initial punishment it becomes clear that God has decided not to resort to capital punishment, the simplest and clearest form of retributive response that God could have decreed. This suggests more than anything else that we have a more utilitarian approach at work here, and that there are things that God wants to achieve through the punishment that have benefit either for Cain himself, or for humanity as a whole. We will examine this through the discussion engendered by the mark of Cain but the larger aspects of the question should certainly be acknowledged.

Let us open with a piece from Genesis Rabbah.

AND THE LORD SAID TO HIM: THEREFORE (LACHEN) WHOEVER SLAYS CAIN, etc. R. Yehudah said: The cattle, beasts, and birds assembled to demand justice for Abel. Said the Holy One, blessed be He... 'I say to you WHOEVER SLAYS CAIN,' etc.

R. Nehemiah interpreted: Cain's judgment shall not be as the judgment of other murderers. Cain slew, but had none from whom to learn [the enormity of his crime], but henceforth, All who slay shall be slain.

Genesis Rabbah

R. Yehudah pictures the animals and the birds assembling to demand Cain's blood. It is clear to them that in order that justice should prevail, the principle of 'measure for measure' should be employed. Cain must pay with his life. But God stops their demand without an explanation. "I say to you (לכן) that whoever slays Cain will be slain". R. Nehemiah attempts to explain this anomaly – that Cain the murderer will not be killed but the animals – or whoever takes his life - will be. His explanation is that of precedent. Cain had no example from which he could learn. It is like a child who pleads ignorance as a defence after being caught in a misdemeanor. "I didn't know" – לא ידעתי (which opens up a whole fertile field of midrashic possibilities, since these were, it will be recalled, the first words that Cain says to God after the murder, when God begins the accusation). But ignorance only holds once. From now on goes the warning, everybody knows.

Radak extends this idea.

And [God] did not kill him as one would for anyone who killed another deliberately, in order that the world would not remain empty of people, since Cain had not yet had children and Adam would not have more children till he was 130 years old. Therefore God did not kill him but rather sentenced him (in addition to the curse through the land) to exile one of the punishments of the murderer...In Genesis Rabbah it is said ...that Cain's judgement will not be as the judgement of other murderers since Cain had no one from whom to learn but from now on whoever kills Cain will be killed. And it could also be that the murder was not intentional because he did not think that the stone or whatever implement was used had the capacity to
kill, because he had never seen a person killed and did not think that it was capable of killing. Thus he was judged for unintentional killing for which the punishment is exile and he was told: you shall be a restless wanderer.

David Kimche

Thus we see that the Rabbis were bothered by this clear deviation from the principle of retributive justice and explained it by the educational value of the punishment as a warning to others, or as a justified punishment for an unintentional killing.

In Genesis Rabbah we have another discussion regarding the reason for the sign.

_Rav said: He [God] made him an example to murderers. R. Hanin said: He made him an example to penitents. R. Levi said in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish: He suspended his judgment until the Flood came and swept him away, as it is written, And He blotted out every living substance, etc. (Gen. VII, 23)._ 

Genesis Rabbah

There are two possible reasons that Cain was given a sign. The plain meaning of the peshat would be that the reason was to prevent others from killing him. It was a safety measure to show that he was a marked man (in the positive sense of the word). According to this explanation it is interesting to note that God's concession to Cain is to take away the thing that Cain most feared, namely his exile from God. Remember that God had not mentioned this – Cain had talked of this in his understanding of the punishment. Now God takes away his deepest fear and gives him the comfort of knowing that the Divine presence has not been withdrawn from him. On the contrary, God is with him, protecting him.

The second explanation goes back to R. Nehemiah's previous idea of Cain as an educational example. The question that arises is: an example of what to whom. Here the Rabbis differ. Rav has him as an example to murderers. Presumably the idea here is that the total misery of his punishment would be a deterrent for future potential murderers (perhaps accidental murderers since we have already been told that deliberate murder would be punished by death). R. Hanin sees Cain's punishment as an example to would be penitents who would be encouraged by God's mercy to understand that repentance was never impossible and would always be worthwhile.

Resh Lakish attempts to bridge the two attitudes towards punishment that we have spoken about. Cain was allowed a few more generations of life as a sign to future generations (either murderers or Ba'alei Teshuva) – the utilitarian approach - but ultimately his crime would be punished suitably by his death in the generation of the flood (retributive justice).

It is interesting to see the long comment that appears in MeAm Loez, where a whole group of earlier traditions regarding the character of the sign are collected and summed up.

"Therefore, anyone who kills Cain, etc." this is the admonition not to kill Cain. The reason for subjecting people to this oath was that Cain had gained seven generations of grace before he would have to die of natural causes, i.e. שבעתיים יוקם קין. He was to use these seven generations in order to rehabilitate himself. The "visible sign," was a warning for the animals not to kill him.

There are various opinions as to the nature of this sign. Some say that God engraved one of the letters of His name on Cain's forehead. According to another opinion, the sun rose for Cain
before its time. When the animals wanted to attack Cain, it was nighttime, when wild beasts usually prowl, along with other harmful forces. God made the sun rise, so that they would know to keep away from Cain. Just as the demonic forces have no power by day, so they have no power over Cain.

Others dispute this, saying that Cain was wicked, and certainly not deserving of God's performing such a miracle for him. According to this opinion; the sign of Cain was leprosy. Since he was leprous, the animals recognized him, and would not come close to him.

There is another opinion that God gave Cain a dog as a constant companion. Since he was afraid of animals, God gave him an animal as a pet. As they traveled, the dog would lead, and Cain would follow.

Some say that the murder occurred on the eve of the Sabbath at twilight. The merit of the Sabbath then protected Cain, safeguarding him from all evil. [According to this, the "sign" that God gave Cain was the Sabbath, which is often referred to as a "sign."]

Another opinion states that Cain's heart was strengthened and he became fearless. Whatever the sign was, God did this because Cain confessed that he had sinned. He wanted to give sinners a chance, so they would not think that once a person sins, there is no longer any help for him. One must realize that if he repents completely, he is no longer subject to the punishments mentioned in the Torah.

Even though Cain confessed, he did not repent completely. God therefore decreed that vengeance be extracted against him after seven generations... [According to this interpretation, the verse should be translated, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain.... His vengeance shall come (after) seven (generations).""]

MeAm Loez

We see here the idea that Cain is given seven generations to repent for his sins. Once again this is an example of God's extraordinary forbearance to sinners. We are also told at the end that Cain did not use the time allotted to him in order to repent. As such, God decided to exact ultimate justice and to have Cain killed after seven generations.

Finally, let us see the explanation of Hirsch regarding the reason why God did not want to kill Cain.

Because the condition in which Cain has placed himself is so unbearable "listen all of you that would kill Cain to avenge the blood of Abel!" Cain is punished sevenfold heavier by being left alive, the crime is atoned for seven times more strongly, Abel revenged seven times more strongly, than by a death which is over in a minute...

"Therefore" - because Cain's condition is such a depressing one - "let everyone who would kill him hear: thus is revenge taken on him sevenfold." Thereby God decreed a striking condition over Cain so that nobody who met him would kill him, for everybody recognised in his distressed condition a greater deterrent sign than his death would be.

Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th century, Germany)

Hirsch takes Rav's idea that his suffering will be an example to murderers and explains the full implications of the idea. The living death that Cain will be experiencing is a much harsher punishment than a simple death sentence. Nothing can compare with the misery that Cain will
experience. This will be the most fitting punishment from the retributive point of view as well as the most effective deterrent from the utilitarian point of view.

The Mark of Cain, the Yellow Star and Uncle Oscar Schindler

The ambiguity of the mark of Cain is its function both as protective marking and as stigmatizing mark of shame. That same ambivalence is contained in the medieval Christian requirement that Jews from 13th century on wear an identifying mark on their clothing – sometimes a hat, sometimes a color and sometimes a yellow badge. Pope Innocent III who enacted this stigmatizing marker also wrote a commentary on the Cain and Abel story identifying Cain as the eternal Jew who killed his brother, the lamb of God, Abel the shepherd, and was condemned to be exiled, to be treated as fraticide, as murderer, to wander, to be degraded with the mark of Cain, but not to be killed. Yet at the same time he followed the Augustinian tradition that the Jew must be protected as historical witness to those who saw Jesus, rejected him, killed him and therefore they wander degraded and landless as a mark or sign to the pagan that he needs salvation and that one who rejects Christ is punished and outcaste.

Later Hitler revived this medieval demonization and stigmatization of the Jews using the yellow Jewish star (the six pointed star which only became a Jewish symbol in later 18th-early 19th century. Hitler also adopted the Christian millennial vision of the a thousand year Reich, kingdom on earth of Jesus triumphant.

On Holocaust Day in his class in Jerusalem, Ariel Blum, son of the former ambassador of Israel to USA, introduced his class on the mark of Cain by speaking about his family's attitude to the yellow star. His father and brother who were released from Bergen Belsn as part of the Kastner trade deal with the Nazis, burned their yellow stars as soon as they were liberated. Thus they rejected the external identification with a mark of shame. However Ariel's grandfather chose a different path. Ariel knew his grandfather as the wonderful man who would pull out his old wallet out of his inner coat pocket which rested over his heart and distribute Hanukkah gelt to the grandchildren. Twenty three years after his death, Ariel was rummaging in his grandfather's desk and found the same wallet and inside to his shock was nicely folded cloth yellow star that he had always carried on the inside of his coat over his heart, so as never to forget.

Ariel also recalled a frequent and beloved visitor called Uncle Oscar who came from Germany with gifts every year. Later his father told him that "Dod Oscar" was Oscar Schindler who was treated like a Cain in postwar Germany, ostracized, spit at, jeered at as a traitor to his brothers. Ariel speculated that Schindler was kind of Mark of Cain on the German people who proved that they knew or could have known about the Shoah and that they could have done something just as he did, even in totalitarian society.
ACTIVITY: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT – THE DEBATE

- We suggest opening with a formal debate in the class on the question of the justice of capital punishment.

- Divide the class into two groups. One group has to prepare arguments for capital punishment in the case of first degree murder, the other has to prepare arguments against.

- Choose two speakers from each group, for and against, to debate the following motion.

*THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT THE FAIREST PUNISHMENT FOR MURDER IS CAPITAL PUNISHMENT ON THE BASIS OF THE PRINCIPLE OF RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT.*

- Carry out the debate, with students questioning and commenting from the position of the group that they were in previously.

- Before the vote, tell the class that they are now out of character, and conduct a discussion with them on their real opinions regarding the issue.

- Bring Cain as a case study. Should God have punished Cain with death? Would not this have been the fairest thing to do according to the principle of retributive punishment? Now ask why God did not do this? How is it possible to justify the idea that the murderer should get a different punishment but that people who want to take revenge for the death of the victim *will* be punished with death?

- Bring any or all of the five sources brought above (two from Genesis Rabbah, Radak, MeAm Loez (emphasizing the last part) and Hirsch. Look at the various suggestions made in these sources. Which if any are most convincing?

Do these reasons suggest that God acted in a utilitarian way or a retributive fashion when deciding on Cain's punishment?
5. THE END OF CAIN (Gen. 4: 16-17)

The story of Cain draws to a close. The dialogue with God is over. We are told that he "went out of the presence of God", that he dwells in the land of Nod, that he marries and fathers a child and that he is the builder of a city. What can we make of this information: when he left the presence of God, did he do so as a changed man, as a repentant? In addition, what is the relevance of the fact that he built a city?

We open with a piece from Genesis Rabbah.

AND CAIN WENT OUT, etc. From where did he go out?
R. Yudon in the name of R. Aibu said: It means that he threw the words behind him and went out, like one who would deceive the Almighty.
R. Berachiah said in R. Elazar's name: He went forth like one who shows the cloven--hoof, like one who deceives his Creator.
R. Hanina b. Isaac said: He went forth rejoicing, as you read, He goes forth to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart (Ex. Ch. 4: v14). Adam met him and asked him, "How did your case go?" 'I repented and am reconciled,' he replied. Thereupon Adam began beating his face, crying, 'So great is the power of repentance, and I did not know' Immediately he arose and exclaimed, A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day: It is a good thing to make confession unto the Lord (Ps. 92 v1).

Genesis Rabbah

The Rabbis are divided in their assessment of Cain and his state of mind. R. Yudon and R. Berachiah are convinced that there was no change in heart. The criminal remained a criminal and any appearance of repentance was only a devious attempt to try and receive a lighter sentence. R. Hanina, on the other hand, believed that Cain had undergone a genuine change of heart, so inspired was he by the mercy of God. He even posits a situation in which Adam, who had never expressed contrition for his sin, was overcome with regret at the fact that he had never understood the importance of or the power of repentance, is brought to repentance by his meeting with Cain.

The question remains however. Even if he did repent sincerely, should the punishment be commuted altogether? What is the punishment for the person who makes a total repentance for his crime? The Great Midrash suggests the following response.

And God said to him, since you have repented, go into exile from this place. Exile atones for sin and future generations will learn from you that all who murder by accident will be exiled to the cities of refuge and will make atonement.

HaMidrash HaGadol

This returns to a theme that we have met before. Cain goes to a land where all the exiles gather (Rashi), and this is the place where accidental murderers (Radak) are to assemble. The new idea here is that going out from the presence of God and into Galut is the prelude to an act of atonement which represents some kind of physical act of compensation for the acts of the past, over and above the mere subjective and psychological act of repentance. Something is needed in order to try, at least symbolically, to make right the wrong of the past. What this act of atonement is or should be, is not stated but the idea of the importance of כפרה is clear.
It might be that the one physical act that is mentioned in Cain's case, that of building a city, is part of the act of atonement. The text does not say so but it the one constructive act that Cain is recorded as doing. What is the significance of the city? Hirsch brings the following interesting idea.

*It does not say ויבן עיר he built a city, but, he became a builder of a city. With him a new enterprise started - the city. Cain had been cut off from the earth, the soil would no longer respond to his efforts; cut off from God and his fellow-men, what remained unto him? He himself was what remained for him, the stock of mental powers and abilities which was part of his personality, and from that, quite naturally the "city builder" emerged. The city, as contrasted to the land, is quite free from the fields, from agriculture. It is a complex of human beings who make their living purely out of human powers. In cities the products of the land are transformed for human purposes, and are stamped by art and industry with the mark of human intelligence. The fields which the town-dweller has to cultivate are his powers, his mind, and his abilities. Hence these are developed as we are immediately informed in the succeeding verses. On the land the fields are "cultivated", in the city it is the man. In the city all the slumbering capabilities of men are awakened, and men became wide awake.*

Samson Raphael Hirsch

Hirsch's suggestion is fascinating. He sees the city as the key to the future progress of mankind and portrays the transition from agriculturally based life to an urban existence as 'a great leap forward' for mankind. But how was that transition effected? He suggests that only a person like Cain, totally alienated from land (and from God), someone forced to rely completely on his own resources, was capable of making that change. Only the person who has decided, of necessity, that he or she has to lived entirely by their own wits and their own resources is capable of taking the leap to the new form of life that was the city. Cain thus, according to Hirsch's suggestion was the man who paved the future for the rest of mankind. Metaphorically, the same idea can be extended down the generations. It is fitting that the builder of the next stage of human civilization would be the ancestor of those who invent music and the arts (Yuval) and metalwork, the basis of every industrial society (Tuval Cain).

Cain is then the person who ultimately points to the future of mankind and this, it might be said is the ultimate act of כפרה.

Finally, we bring one final midrash, from Tanchuma, which suggests another irony of closing the story.

**AND CAIN WENT OUT FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD** and dwelled in the land of Nod Wherever he wandered, the earth would quake beneath his feet; the animals and the beasts would tremble in fright, and would inquire of each other: "What is this?" And they would whisper: "He is Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel. The Holy One, blessed be He, has decreed concerning him: A fugitive and a wanderer you shall be." Then they would say to each other: "Let us devour him." They would gather together to attack, but as they approached, tears would well up in his eyes and he would cry out: Where shall I go from Thy spirit, or to where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol (the netherworld), behold, You are there. If I take the wings of morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there would Your hand lead me and Your right hand hold me (Ps. 139: vv. 7-10).

Midrash Tanchuma
The suggestion here is clear. Despite the fear that God would desert him and that he would live his life without the presence of God, and despite his 'going out of the presence of God', ultimately Cain had to recognize not only the presence of God in his life and the glory of the Divine Presence, but the sheer impossibility of living one's life without God and the inescapability of God as a function in the human condition.

Ultimately, the suggestion that comes from a close examination of the episode of the punishment in its entirety is the following. The policy of punishment is never automatic. On the one hand it must include elements of retributive justice, of 'measure for measure' so that justice is done and is seen to be done. On the other hand, the wise and insightful judge should take other elements into account and should temper his judgment with utilitarian considerations. What is best for the individual criminal and what is best for the society? What example can the sentence have for others? What implications can it have for the individual? Can it lead towards soul searching and repentance? Is an appearance of contrition to be taken at face value? Are there constructive sides of the punishment that can contribute towards the welfare of society? All these questions, it seems, have been related to, it seems, from our examination of the story of Cain, both on the level of the peshat and the derash. There is a lot that can be learned from this kind of examination. Both for us and for our students.

**ACTIVITY: REWRITING CAIN'S ENDING**
- How did Cain's story finish? The group should look together at the text of verses 16 and 17. In small groups they should prepare dramatic scenes with their own ending to the story within the contours of the scenario brought in verses 16 and 17. As they prepare their ending, they should refer to the following four questions, which must be worked into their scenes.
  - Did their Cain repent genuinely?
  - Did their Cain make his peace with God?
  - Did their Cain manage to create a happier family situation than he himself had experienced?
  - Why did their Cain build a city?
- Present the scenes, and then sit and examine some or all of the above four sources, (Genesis Rabbah, HaMidrash HaGadol, Tanchuma and Hirsch). Discuss them and get the participant's assessment regarding the scenarios of the different texts.
- Finally discuss with the group: Do they think that the story has a happy ending or not? Why? Is that the sort of ending that they would have chosen for the Torah's story, given that this was going to serve as the archetypal story of crime and punishment for millions of people in the future? Why? Why not?
SECTION SEVEN: THE CAIN STORY IN LITERATURE

Throughout this booklet we have repeatedly stressed the need for developing personal midrashic readings of the Biblical text. We have examined several different kinds of such readings and among them, where relevant, we have included several literary readings. However, here, in the first part of this section, we want to take ten literary readings of different kinds, both Jewish and general, and examine them as a whole. They serve as a series of modern midrashim on different aspects of the story. The examples that we bring here are almost all poetic, largely because of the brevity of the genre that makes it more suitable for educational use, due to the pliability and the terseness of the medium. One brief prose piece is added. In the second part of the section, we will examine John Steinbeck's long extended literary work, "East of Eden", which gives us a series of different viewpoints on our story. It is our belief that each of these readings opens up different paths of thinking that can stimulate both the understanding and the creativity of the students.

We divide this first part into three brief subsections. The first part brings us three poems by Dan Pagis, the Israeli poet, each of which uses the Cain and Abel motif in a central way. The second part brings us four very different "takes" on the story from Jewish writers. The first three are poems by, respectively, a noted Israeli poet, Amir Gilboa, the great German Jewish poet Else Lasker Schueler and the highly regarded Yiddish poet and playwright H. Leivick. The fourth piece is a brief prose observation by Yigal Tumarkin, Israeli artist and sculptor. The third part brings two poems by modern American poets, Betty Sellers and Scott Summers, and a final poet by the great French poet, Charles Baudelaire. Each piece takes us in a different direction. The poems can be used individually or collectively. We introduce each of the three sections individually and each of the pieces within each section, separately.

A. Three poems by Dan Pagis.

Dan Pagis was born in Bukovina in 1930. He spent several years in camps during the war and subsequently arrived in Israel, settling on kibbutz. He became an expert in medieval Hebrew literature, ultimately becoming a professor of the subject at the Hebrew university. He was also an accomplished and much praised poet. He died in 1986.

1. Autobiography

I died with the first blow and was buried
in the stony field,
The raven showed my parents
what to do with me.
If my family is famous, not a little of the credit
goes to me.
My brother invented murder,
my parents - crying,
I invented silence.

Afterwards, those well-known events took place.
Our inventions were perfected.
One thing led to another.
And there were those who
killed in their own way,  
cried in their own way.

I am not naming names  
out of consideration for the reader,  
since at first the details horrify,  
though in the end they bore.

You can die once, twice, even seven times,  
but you cannot die a thousand times.  
I can.  
My underground cells reach everywhere.

When Cain started to multiply on the face of the earth,  
I started to multiply in the belly of the earth.  
For a long time now, my strength has been greater than his.  
His legions desert him and go over to me.  
And even this is only half a revenge.

Dan Pagis

In this powerful poem, Pagis emphasises the archetypal nature of the story. “My brother invented murder, my parents - crying, I invented silence”. The story for Pagis is the story of the first - but not the last - murder, the first – but not the last – grieving, and the first- but not the last – victim. These themes have continued to mark the world's story ever since this first story was told. Ever since the murderers started to multiply in the world, so naturally did the silent victims. However, Pagis seems confident, that ultimately the power of the silent victims shall overwhelm the power of the murderers and their evil. This poem seems almost like an apocalyptic or Messianic vision of the end of time, when evil shall be vanquished and justice shall rule the world.

2. Scrawled in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car

here in this transport i eve  
and abel my son  
if you should see my older son cain son of man  
tell him that i

Dan Pagis

This poignant poem situates the drama in the middle of a holocaust scene. Eve the mother and Abel the helpless victim are being transported to their deaths. Adam, the protective father figure is nowhere to be found and in the language of archetype it is clear that Cain, the other son has switched sides and will soon murder the innocent, including half of his family. The mother, protective and empathetic, is with Abel; she, in this version will suffer death together with him, rather than abandoning him as in the vacuum of the Tanachic tale.

Cain is described as קין בן אדם – perhaps a mocking look at the human race, since Ben Adam, means not just the son of Adam or the son of man, but is also the familiar Hebrew usage to describe a 'mentsch', a moral or a good man. This is what the human race has become, and the mother seems here to be totally aware of the irony. She gave birth to two good sons. One has turned into ultimate evil. What message would she like to give her son? That we shall never know, because the message
is simply undeliverable, scrawled as it is in its unfinished way, in pencil (a temporary and insubstantial medium), doomed to go unnoticed and unlamented, like the lives of the victims themselves.

3. Brothers

Abel was pure and woolly
and somewhat modest
like the smallest kid
and full of ringlets like the smoke of the offering
inhaled by his Master.
Cain was straight. Like a knife.

Cain is amazed. His big hand gropes
inside the butchered throat before him:
from where does the silence burst?

Abel stayed in the field. Cain stayed Cain. And since it's decreed
that he be a wanderer, he wanders diligently. Each morning
changing one horizon for another. One day he discovers the earth tricked him
over the years. It moved, while he, Cain, marked time in one place.
Marked time, marched, ran only on a single scrap of dust, exactly as big as the soles of
his sandals.

One evening of grace he stumbles
on a fine haystack.
He dives in, is swallowed by it, rests. Hush, Cain sleeps.
He's happy. He dreams that he is Abel.

Don't worry. Don't worry.
It's already decreed for the one who might kill you
that your vengeance shall be taken sevenfold.
Your brother Abel guards you from all evil.

Dan Pagis

In this poem, the first part of which we quote elsewhere in the booklet, once again Cain and Abel are pictured as opposites. Cain is the murderer and Abel is the silent victim. However, this reading is more generous to Cain because it is clear from the poem that here, Pagis's Cain is an inadvertent killer. "Cain is amazes". He does not understand what has happened. He seems to have woken up from a daze and to have found the deed done. Another theme here is Cain's wish to be Abel. Even after the murder, it is the thought or the dream that he has become Abel that gives him a little peace and rest. He is a man who is condemned to wander but whose wandering brings him no respite. He does not get anywhere: he always stays in the same place. Abel stays with him. Ultimately, it is Abel's presence (the presence of good?) that serves to protect him. He is not his brother's keeper perhaps but his brother Abel has become his keeper.

B. Four Jewish poets and writers: Amir Gilboa, Else Lasker Schueler, H. Leivick, Yigal Tumarkin

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4. Amir Gilboa was born in 1917 in Volhynia, Poland and came on Aliyah in 1937. He started off as a labourer and started to write poetry only when he was serving in the Jewish brigade in World War 2. He was recognized as an original poet who was not afraid to experiment. He successfully fused large themes and personal subjects in his poetry and wrote much very personal Biblical poetry. He died in 1984.

My Brother Was Silent

My brother came back from the field
In gray clothing.
And I was afraid my dream would be false
And began at once to count his wounds.
And my brother was silent.

Then I burrowed into the pockets of his tunic
And found a dressing with a dried stain,
And on a crumpled postcard his girl’s name
Beneath a picture of some poppies.
And my brother was silent.

And I undid his bundle
And took out his things, memory after memory.
Hurray, my brother, my heroic brother,
Look, I’ve found your symbols!
Hurray, my brother, my heroic brother,
I’ll shout your praises!
And my brother was silent.
And my brother was silent.
And his blood cried out of the ground.

Amir Gilboa

Gilboa sets his poem of the brothers in the aftermath of the war. Here the fight is not between brother and brother but between the innocent and the murderous act of war. Against the hopes and prayers of the brother who stayed behind, the soldier comes back silent, wounded, dead. We get some kind of a fragmented picture of the dead brother’s life from the memories contained in his bundle, in his pockets. A whole man has been taken by the war, "and his blood cried out of the ground", presumably in accusation, not against his live brother, but against the machinery of war and the people who sent him there to his death.

5. Else Lasker Schueler (1869-1945) was one of the major German expressionist poets. She included many Jewish themes in her work and after several visits to Palestine, she settled there in the late 1930's, where she lived her last years sadly and eccentrically in Jerusalem.

Abel

Cain’s eyes are not gracious to God,
Abel's face is a golden garden,
Abel's eyes are nightingales.
His singing is always so clear
For the strings of his soul,
But the ditches of town go through Cain's body.

And he will slay his brother-
Abel, Abel, your blood colors heaven deep.

Where is Cain, for I wish to storm him:
Have you slain the sweet birds
In your brother's face?

Else Lasker Schuler

Lasker Schuler emphasises the dichotomy that many of the commentators see between the two brothers and what they represent. Abel is all light and goodness while "the ditches of town go through Cain's body". This is a tale of good against evil in which evil will triumph. The task of evil is to destroy all that is good and Cain, unable to accept the sweetness of his brother's face and clearly unable to live up to such standards, naturally attempts to remove the reminder of his own inadequacies, by the inevitable act of violence through which evil will always meet good.

6. H. Leivick (the pseudonym of Leivick Halpern (1886-1962)) was one of the great lyric poets of the 20th century who wrote in the Yiddish language. Much loved as the great conscience of East European Jewry, he was a man of immense principle who suffered jail and exile in Siberia for his strong humanitarian socialist principles. Escaping to the U.S. in 1913, he continued to express his strong identification with the suffering of man.

Cain and Abel

Abel lies in the field,
killed. Cain eats
with his snout in the pot,
a bear after sweets.

Noon, the sun is afire. A dry waste field-
only a patch is tilled,
and no sower.

Face up, the killer lies gorged.
His steely body swells
as he snores.

His fingers are tangles
of thorns.
Red hairs on his temples
whorl like horns.

Beasts come.
Weak and numb
they turn and creep
from that fearful sleep.


They crawl to the other,  
who never stirs  
face down in the furrow  
on all fours.

Abel lies still, earth  
in his mouth:  
over him at evening  
the lion's mane dangling.

Over Abel's head the lion roars  
for marrow and meat.  
Sweating Cain snores  
and grinds his teeth.

The lion bides his time  
till Cain's grunts wane  
and stars gleam  
on the pot's rim.

He sinks into Abel's limbs,  
his hatred foams.  
Abel with his mouth down  
keeps kissing the ground.

Cain rouses and yawns –  
the lion runs. Cain  
wants his brother's love again:  
sparse are his remains.

Cain howls into his pot.  
The head in the evening light  
smiles – face up.

H. Leivick

Leivick shows the bestiality of mankind, capable of the basest emotions and the basest acts. His Cain is a man-beast who operates on the lowest level of life, trying to satisfy his urges and needs in the most rudimentary fashion. He is hungry, he eats. He is tired, he sleeps. He is angry, he kills, so that nothing ultimately separates this beast-man from the animals around him. Leivick's Cain lives on the level of the animals, some of whom in fact appear to have risen above the limits of the Cain-man: appalled or frightened by the power that is Cain, "Weak and numb they turn and creep from that fearful sleep". Cain's company is the great beasts, such as the lion, who is wary of Cain and his violence, even while he schemes to finish of Cain's work. Waking, sated from sleep, Cain's next need comes to the fore. He wants his brother's love again, but Leivick suggests, this need will be replaced by others and Cain will pad on through his amoral universe, until his urges are satisfied once again. This is a powerful and frightening picture of what man is or what he can become.

7. Yigal Tumarkin is famous as a sculptor but equally famous for his outspoken and extremely
controversial views on subjects that have gained him the reputation of the "enfant terrible" of the
Israeli art world. He has received many prizes inside Israel including the Israel prize (the top
national award) in 2004, but each prize has been greeted by indignation by those who disagree with
his blunt and opinionated statements.

Cain was born screwd up

The real hero is Cain. The loser. In a world of five (God, Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel)
four did not like him. I have no time for Rashi's explanations or Cassuto's. Cain was
born screwed. The farmer as opposed to the shepherd. But God always loved shepherds.
God knows how strong is the emotion of jealousy, and how destructive. It is the first
feeling he put in nature. So what's the big deal here? God drove Cain crazy. And never
gave him a chance since he was born. I understand him. Jealousy, strong, barren, the
most destructive of emotions. What did the poet Alterman say?

"If you ever laugh
Without me at a party of your friends,
My silent jealousy
Will burn your house down upon you".

I'm Cain. And how! So are you.

Yigal Tumarkin

Tumarkin puts the emphasis on the terrible power of jealousy which exists in every one of us with its
potential for destruction. He is not interested in the philosophizing of Rashi or (Moshe David)
Cassuto (1883-1951) the great academic commentator on the Bible. What can their commentaries of
condemnation say to him? He understands Cain and sees the situation from Cain's perspective, the
perspective of the "loser" who has spent his whole life unloved and "screwed over". He quotes
Natan Alterman, the celebrated poet of the early state years to show how natural and destructive is
jealousy for any of us. All of us are jealous. All of us are Cain.

C. Three non-Jewish poets: two Americans - Betty Sellers and Scott Summers –
and a great Frenchman - Charles Baudelaire

8. Betty Sellers lives in Georgia, where she taught English as an English professor in a local college.
Retired now, she was named Poet Laureate of Georgia in 1997, by the governor of Georgia and she
held the position for three years.

Sarah's Quilts

She stands, barefoot, in the creek, homespun dress,
rich brown with walnut dye, tucked up almost
to knees that feel the rush, the chilling press
of Corn Creek's water even in the heat
of August. Now her sons are far away:
one running over hills his footsteps beat
on forest trails she never saw. Laurel
thickets tear his clothes, snatch hands
that picked up stones to end the quarrel
once too often, left his brother dead,
buried beneath the oak that tops the rise
just steps behind the cabin. She sees his head
rest on patchwork squares she sewed; a quilt
she made to warm his bed serves as a shroud
to line his grave. His brother's fear, his guilt
have made him run without a warp to warm
him in the cold of mountain nights, no bright-
patched "Star of Bethlehem" to ward off harm
lurking behind great pines. She prays for brothers
as she picks up stones, piles them along the bank.

One stone, now clean of blood, joins others
she will use to lay around a space,
an outline like the rope-strung attic bed
where he can sleep, her quilt across his face.

Betty Sellers

Many of Seller's poems are set in the Appalachian mountain area and reflect biblical subjects. Sellers situates her tale in a timeless rural America and presents us with an enormously tender picture of the mother, a pioneer woman, who has to come to terms with the fact that one of her sons has murdered the other son with a stone "now clean of blood". The quarrel that killed her son was clearly one of many, and happened "once too often". She does not seem to bear remorse to her fugitive murderer son, but reacts by "praying for brothers", seemingly accepting her fate as a tragic result of the reality of motherhood. She is concerned for the comfort of her murdering child who has flown in flight, and hopes that he will manage without the warmth of the quilt that she had made. It will stay with her, lining the grave of the dead son. This is the story through the eyes of the mother, who seemingly, was powerless to stop the violence that filled the air between the two brothers and came to its inevitable conclusion. Life goes on. There's work to be done.

9. Scott Summers lives in New Jersey where he teaches high school English.

Cain trembled…
Cain trembled like a hunted rabbit
behind a fallen palm tree
in the forest east of Eden,
his fingers still tight around the white stone
he found that afternoon
picking weeds between his prized
squash and eggplant.

Brain garnished shards
of Abel's skull flecked
Cain's chest and face
like bits of minced raspberries.
Moonlight splashed treetops,
trickled over the edges of sycamore leaves
staining black the blood that slicked
the rock he could not let fall.

A brisk night tightened
his skin about his bones.
as wind coiled through the darkness
like a hungry cobra whispering
the voice of God.

Cain. Where is your brother? I need him.
My father's voiced echoed
through the hallway
that led to my bedroom.

My toddler brother wailed in the yard,
under my window,
his arms stiff like a lawn jockey's,
still stunned by the exploding water balloon
I expertly dropped on his fragile head.

Under my bed, I cowered
with the dust, a lost Matchbox Corvette,
and a forgotten Batman doll.
I noticed his cape was ripped
as father reached under the bed,
grabbed my ankle, and pulled
me into the light.

Scott Summers

Summers gives us two parallel situations of sibling violence. The Cain story is used as a backdrop to the contemporary domestic tale, but this time it is the earthly father who will give retribution for the act of violence perpetrated on the younger brother. There will be no hiding in the darkness for the contemporary Cain. He finishes up "pulled into the light" where no doubt he will receive his just deserts. The original Cain we meet as a fugitive, with the wind representing the voice of God, whispering to him, suggesting God's presence and the fact that he, too, will not escape his punishment.

10. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) was one of the greatest and most controversial of French poets in the 19th century. He lived a life of scandal and wrote poetry which reflected his disgust with the comfortable French middle-class bourgeoisie, and in search of a more honest way of life. As such he embraced decadence and eroticism in his disgust (a la Lenny Bruce in a later generation) and thoroughly scandalized his listeners.

Cain and Abel

I.

Race of Abel, sleep, drink and eat;
God smiles complacently on you.
Race of Cain, crawl and die
Impoverished in the mud.

Race of Abel, your sacrifice
Pleases the nose of the Seraph!

Race of Cain, will your
Torment ever end?

Race of Abel, watch your fields
And your cattle flourish;

Race of Cain, your entrails
Scream with hunger like an old dog.

Race of Abel, warm your belly
At the patriarchal hearth;

Race of Cain, tremble with cold
In your den, poor jackal!

Race of Abel, love and multiply!
Even your gold bears children.

Race of Cain, heart that burns,
Beware of these great appetites.

Race of Abel, you grow and graze
Like insects in the forest!

Race of Cain, drag your desperate
Family along the roadsides.

II.

Oh! Race of Abel, your carcass
Will fertilize the smoking soil!

Race of Cain, your task
Has not been sufficiently completed;

Race of Abel, here is your shame:
The sword is vanquished by the spear!

Race of Cain, mount to the sky,
And throw God to earth!
In this extraordinary poem, Baudelaire sees Cain and Abel as representing two sides of the human condition and true to his unconventional assessment of the conventional world, sides with Cain rather than Abel. Abel represents the bourgeois morality that Baudelaire abhorred while Cain represented the dark side of the human psyche that he embraced and with which he identified. In the first part of the poem, it would seem that Abel has the upper hand and represents the good life, but the second part makes it clear that in fact, Cain is fated to gain ascendance. It is Abel whose "carcass will fertilize the smoking soil". But Cain's task is not done. He has yet to dethrone God, presumably the hypocritical God of the conventional worshippers of Baudelaire's generation. Cain's task is to dethrone conventional morality – and he will win!
There are many possible ways of using literature as midrash. One possibility that we have already included is to take different poems that illustrate different moments in the story and analyse them together with the relevant piece of text. Here we suggest something slightly different.

- We suggest a simple Talmud page type of activity where the whole text that we have been studying is placed at the centre of a large page with some or all of the poems ranged about it on the page in a fixed pattern. Outside each poem there should be a space which should be used for interpretations or comments that the students should add to the page.

- One possible step is to link each poem to a particular part of the text by stretching a balloon in colour from the specific poem to the relevant part of the text. Some poems will encircle all the text. Others will circle specific parts.

- A discussion can then take place in which different students present different poems or parts of poems and explain why those poems speak to them.

- Finally, each student should attempt to write their poem on the story, representing their own particular take, centering on the story as a whole or any detail on which they would like to expand.

- Finally, share the results and discuss, not the quality of the poems, but the choices the students made and the "takes" that they had on the story and the characters.
SECTION EIGHT: SUMMING UP THE STORY

ACTIVITY: CAIN ON TRIAL

The following report appeared in the Jerusalem Post in 1988.

CAIN WAS NOT GUILTY. It took a few thousand years to get it straight, but humanity's first (alleged) capital crime – Cain murdering his brother Abel – was finally retried. The acquittal came in a simulated trial held in Venice recently by lawyers, moral theologians, historians and anthropologists. The trial saw the defence successfully extricate the accused from the moral dictum in the Bible "Thou shalt not kill", with arguments about the psychological and sociological circumstances in which Cain slew Abel, of whom he was jealous.

Cain's defenders conceded that he did kill his brother but that it was unpremeditated and in the context of an economic power struggle between pastoralists and the first agriculturalists, Abel representing the former and Cain the latter. From this point of view, Cain's crime should be seen as "rightful" in terms of the "law" of the time, his lawyers maintained.

Defense and prosecution each called rabbis as witnesses. After an hour's deliberation, the jury pronounced Cain "not guilty" by a majority of five votes to four.

Jerusalem Post

Cain had been put on trial and his innocence had finally been affirmed thousands of years after his guilt was first assumed and proclaimed to the world. We propose a similar exercise as our first large scale concluding exercise.

We have worked our way systematically through the whole of the Cain and story. We have examined the peshat of the task and have also examined a great deal of the central midrashic texts and a good number of commentaries, traditional and modern, theological, literary and artistic. We have emphasized time and again that rather than just learning the material, our object is to promote internalization of the issues on the part of the students, to bring them to a point where they themselves are struggling with the issues that come out of the text.

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29 We now bring three closing exercises that can be chosen to bring the unit to a sense of closure. We feel it is imperative to bring closing or summary exercises as they can aid greatly in the essential task of integrating the material learnt and helping the students to process the material that they have examined and learnt. The essential characteristics of such exercises is their ability to relate to the story as a whole and to allow the students to go back and revisit some or all of the pieces that have already been learnt. They are not intended to introduce new material as such but are aimed at helping the students reflect on all that they have learnt.
In this, our opening summary activity, we suggest integrating a lot of the issues that have come up over the study, by getting them to examine the story once again, from the beginning, in the form of a trial. The suggestion is to use the text to put Cain on trial for the murder of his brother. Tradition has always seen him as guilty, but is he really as guilty as he has always been made out to be? Maybe yes and maybe no: in this activity that will be up to the students to decide.

- There are many ways to conduct a trial like this. One thing however must be clear. If the trial is going to involve a serious examination of the issues, enough time has to be given to the students to examine carefully the various aspects which need to be assessed. We suggest the students work in small groups and each group takes on a slightly different role.

The roles we suggest are as follows.

THE POLICE INVESTIGATOR. The task of this group is to investigate as closely as possible the details of the murder and to bring a recommendation regarding the precise charge that should be brought against Cain.

THE SOCIAL WORKER. The task of this group is to investigate the family background and to try and assess to what extent the family (i.e. the parents) bear responsibility for creating the situation which develops into murder.

THE PSYCHOLOGIST. The task of this group is to try and assess the state of mind of Cain at the time of his murderous act and to see whether or not he was totally responsible for his actions or whether there are other factors that need to be taken into account in recommending a particular verdict. Are there mitigating circumstances that should be taken into account when assessing Cain’s guilt?

THE SOCIOLOGIST/ANTHROPOLOGIST/HISTORIAN. The task of this group is to examine the background behind the quarrel and to see whether it needs to be situated in a wider context of conflict between shepherds and farmers for example. Additionally they can consider the question whether or not Cain can be considered to have broken a law if no societal norms yet existed, and mankind lived in a natural lawless state.

THE PHILOSOPHER. The task of this group is to examine the issue whether there are other forces or people whose role needs to be examined in order to assess the guilt of Cain. Does Abel as victim play any role in the chain of events that led to his murder? And what of the role of God? Does God in any way, bear indirect responsibility for what happened?

The different tasks overlap to an extent. For instance, the role of the social worker and the psychologist overlap. It is inconceivable that the role of the parents should not be taken into account when examining the psychological health of Cain. Nevertheless, the centre of the examination by each group is different and despite overlap around the margins, our feeling is that each group is looking at the events and at the personality and experiences of Cain from a sufficiently different point of view to justify the division in this way. Each group will bring different points of view to the table, when the separate investigations have reached their conclusions.

- Each group should go back and examine the relevant parts of the text. They should use every hint in the text (and in some cases, where relevant, earlier chapters of the text of Genesis for things like family background, parental expectations etc.) Ultimately, they will need to supplement their readings of the text with their own intuition/imagination/creativity and in so
doing they will be following in the footsteps of the early midrashists and the modern literary writers both of whom have used their understanding of the text, supplementing it with their own thoughts in order to complete the incomplete scenario that the text offers us. Just like these different commentators, the students must attempt to get behind the text to get to the story that they imagine is written there. Having studied the midrashic accounts extensively throughout this programme, they should be encouraged to view their task now as participation in the midrashic tradition so deeply rooted in the Jewish culture.

- The groups should arrive at their own conclusions regarding the questions that lie within their realm, and should prepare a report which will subsequently be presented within the framework of the trial itself. At that trial, it might be desirable to have students playing the principle parts of Cain and the other family members, or alternatively it might be advisable to keep things clinical, limited to the different officials with their reports. The trial can be conducted formally with a judge and jury and with prosecutors and defending counsels or in the form of a series of discussions between the members of the different teams. It might or might not include some small group work where each of the positions is represented within each of the small groups or it might be that it should be conducted as a group of delegations sitting round a "table" in a United Nations type arrangement.

- There are many possible variations here and the specific technique should be left up to each educator and teaching framework. What is important is to make sure that the group of students understands its task to be one of milking the text for all that it can provide and that the whole text is completely covered in this fashion. If the participants want to use some of the insights of the midrashim and literary explorations that they have studied, so be it. This will once again help them to internalize the ideas that they have covered, but it is important to emphasise that they should not see any midrash or literary exploration as in any way authoritative. They themselves, backed by the text of the Tanakhic account are the authorities.

- In the course of discussion, the group as a whole, or the judge and jury, should arrive at a verdict regarding the guilt of Cain. If Cain is found not guilty, then the process should stop there. If Cain is found guilty, either fully or partly, then the next stage is to recommend and finally to adopt, a punishment for him. This once again can be done in a number of ways and we will not enter into the possible techniques here. It might or might not include an analysis and an assessment of the punishment appearing in the Biblical account.

- Finally, when the decisions are made and the trial itself is over, it might be suitable to conclude the process with the release of some final report or a press release prepared by the group, announcing the news to the outside world. Alternatively, it is possible to prepare a wall newspaper full of articles which include reports of the trial, interviews with the witnesses and the experts, analysis by special correspondents and the like.

- This could be the basis of a parents' evening in which the articles are interspersed with dramatic and artistic renderings of the story, with midrashic and literary sources read out or acted by the students themselves, and with discussion involving the parents in which some of the issues are examined and where the students get the opportunity to show the parents what they have learned and gained from the learning process.

**ACTIVITY: CREATING A MURAL**
Archie Rand is an innovative Jewish artist, world famous for his giant murals, many of which are on Jewish themes and include Biblical motifs, often in contemporary form. He is also famous for his monumental paintings and murals which cover the 13,000 square foot interior of B’nai Yosef synagogue in Brooklyn, the only such muraled synagogue in the world. If you are interested in seeing pictures of Rand’s work in the synagogue, you can look at the essay by art critic Richard McBee at

http://www.richardmcbee.com/paintedshul.html

A number of years ago, Rand painted a series of biblical scenes in what might be called generally a 'pop-art' style, inspired by the comic books of his childhood. Each picture was different but they were all shocking in their application of comic book style to Biblical stories. What they did succeed in doing, is to wrench the stories away from their traditional biblical context and to place them squarely in the contemporary world, thus removing any safe distance between our world and the world of the Bible.

The above picture was Rand's take of the Cain and Abel story, or at least, part of it. The Hebrew text that Rand has chosen above his murder scene is the voice of God confronting Cain with the statement that Abel's blood is crying out from the ground.
The students are asked to look at this picture carefully and to try and understand what the artist has done and to suggest why he might have decided to present this (and other) Biblical themes in such a way, shocking to our modern sensibilities. What, if any, are the advantages of seeing the scene in such modern terms? Is such a treatment acceptable? Why? Why not? Does Rand's version of the scene achieve what they think he is trying to achieve?

Following this, they should create their version of the story using any artistic medium which appeals to them (prose, poetry, drawing, painting, dancing, sculpting, drama, mime and movement or any medium that they wish) Their story must be a modern version of the story taking it in whichever direction they wish as long as it placed in a modern setting.

**ACTIVITY: CAIN AND ABEL IN PARADISE WITH Ghiberti in Florence**

In 1452, the great artist Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) finally installed his wonderful bronze and gold gates at the entrance to the baptistery of the Cathedral of Florence. He had been working on these gates for twenty seven years and they immediately became the wonder of Florence. It is said that the young Michelangelo, greatly impressed by the doors, described them as worthy to be the Gates of Paradise. This, at any rate, became the popular name used about the gates. They illustrated in wonderful detail some of the stories of the Bible. One of the scenes described was our story, the story of Cain and Abel. The story was portrayed through a number of scenes from the Biblical story. For this reason it is a good medium to use in order to sum up the story. We bring here the Cain and Abel panel of the Gates of Paradise.

Look at the picture below which show one of the greatest art sculptures of the Italian Renaissance, the "Golden Gates of Paradise" created by the Italian artist, sculptor and goldsmith Lorenzo Ghiberti and installed in the Cathedral of Florence in 1452.

To read more about the gates themselves, the artist and the techniques that he used, you are asked to visit the following sites which belongs to the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

http://www.gracecathedral.org/ghiberti/
http://www.gracecathedral.org/enrichment/crypt/cry_19960703.shtml

On these web pages you can learn more about the artist, the gates and the techniques that were used. What are the three most interesting piece of information that you learnt there?

Now look carefully at the Cain and Abel panel. Write a "guided tour" to the panel as if you are showing a visitor the doors and reconstructing the relevant parts of the story through the scenes shown in the panel. Which detail represents which scene? Where do you start in your tour of the panel? Where do you go from there?

Finally, write an assessment of the panel as an expression of the whole Cain and Abel story. Relate both to the aesthetic visual side of the panel and to the decision made by the artist in his depiction of the story.
SECTION NINE: THE FILM OF "EAST OF EDEN"

Advice to the Educator for Analyzing a Movie as a Midrash

BACKGROUND of the MOVIE

THE INTRODUCTION BEFORE THE FILM:

ACT ONE: Introducing all the main characters and issues:
From the opening of the movie until Cal is thrown out of his mother's brothel.

ACT TWO: New aspects of the characters revealed as they are tested by events.
From the scene with the sheriff and Cal in the jailhouse to the dialogue of Cal and Kate borrowing money from his mother.

ACT THREE: The outcomes - happy endings?
From Cal's entry to the bean business to the end of the movie.
(To shorten the film you may skip the beginning of ACT THREE which describes the excitement over World War I and then the pain of the fallen soldiers and disillusionment. Begin with the amusement park scene of Cal and Abra and continue to the end).

SUMMING UP
Advice to the Educator for Analyzing a Movie as a Midrash

A Generative Topic

Teaching a movie is a large commitment of time and its proper introduction takes even longer and for the movie to be seen as a midrash the Biblical text must have been analyzed in depth with an eye to its gaps. However this is a powerful exercise that achieves many goals: close text analysis; philosophic – psychological-theological exploration of major issues of sibling rivalry, free will and Divine justice; creative contemporary reverberations of the Biblical story that might otherwise be seen as merely Jewish and merely ancient and merely verbal; an alternative medium – a movie that models the principles of midrash and invites students to continue creating in that tradition; modeling close reading of movie etc. In short this major unit constitutes what Understanding by Design educational theorists call a "generative topic" that is worthy of indepth study because it achieves so many goals of teaching method, big ideas and a seminal classic narrative.

Presenting Midrash in its Modern Form

The exercise presupposes that a film on biblical themes and stories functions as a form of midrash. If we define midrash as both:
1. An imaginative rewriting of a classical text by members of a later generation who seek to close the gaps in time between their own consciousness and the original text,
2. A text exploring an existential question via a return to the classical Biblical paradigm for this problem then indeed some films can be identified as a form of midrash. "East of Eden" is to be seen both as a piece of art which stands in its own right but also as an interpretative midrash on the Cain and Abel story. It should be pointed out immediately that the film is intended to function on both levels.

In this analysis and pedagogic suggestion we relate to the film rather than the book. The film, which weighs in at about two hours, is, though long for any one class, a far more workable medium for an educational context than the book (six or seven hundred pages).

Suggesting a Structure for the Exercise

Only as a summary activity does the film emerge as a close reading of the Biblical text and a surprising echo of - as well as departure from - classic commentaries and midrash. Without the knowledge of the story and its many gaps a great deal of nuance will be lost. The student must be invited to see the movie not only as a viewer but as a potential colleague of the writer and director considering ways to midrashically fill gaps.

In a class viewing of the film, the movie may be seen as a whole and then analyzed – perhaps after students have seen it at home – or divided up into a number of sections shown over three or four class periods with discussion after each. This preserves the maximum dramatic continuity.

Movie Presentation

1. A substantial introduction about author, playwright, main actor and the challenges of making a movie out of this story with its gaps.

2. The film itself divided into three parts with discussion and analysis after each part.

We will here organize our comments in the following pages according to the schema that we have outlined above, an introduction and three parts of the film. We will suggest some of the comments and ideas that you might want to make to your class at the different non-viewing moments. Obviously, these comments are guidelines and suggestions. They go into detail which you might decide to avoid, both because too much detail can clutter the main ideas and because of time considerations. In addition, having viewed the film carefully before (an absolute must!), and reviewed the suggestions that we make here, you might disagree with some of the interpretations brought here and come up with some other insights or interpretations of your own, or you might wish to put your emphasis on other aspects of the story and the film.
BACKGROUND: The novelist, the director and the actor

In midrash the interpreter seeks to connect his own world of experience and values to that of the Torah understood as an existentially meaningful text meant by God to speak to each and everyone of us in our present and as an open text that grows by additions and gapfilling. Therefore it is essential to know the worldview and biography pf the interpreter – here – the novelist, the director and main actor. While the viewer sees only the actor and hears only the text much culled from the novel, the director clearly has much input in the presentation.

"East of Eden" was made in 1953-1954 and issued in 1955 just a few months before James Dean was killed in car accident. It was directed by Elia Kazan, his first color film, on the basis of the monumental novel of the same name by John Steinbeck that had been published in 1952. It is the first of the three films in which James Dean made his name and his myth. He would die in a car accident in 1955. The screenplay was written by the playwright Paul Osborn and the director, Elia Kazan, was also the producer, giving him full control over every decision.

As the Biblical story comes to us it is mediated through 3000 and more years of commentary and midrashic expansion. Arriving in 1950 in America the Cain and Abel narrative – some 16 lines – was received and recreated successively through the eyes, experience and approaches of a great novelist, great director and great novice actor. Having their background will help us understand them as Biblical interpreters in a novel and then a movie medium.

It was one of three versions of the film which lovers of the book will have a chance to see. A mini series was made for T.V. at the beginning of the 1980's but more significantly, a new version of the film is presently being planned, directed by Ron Howard (Cocoon, A Beautiful Mind etc.) and is scheduled for release in 2006. It is always interesting to see and compare remakes of great films, but in this instance it will be even more interesting than usual given the allegorical nature of the film and the ability of any director to give a different reading of the allegorical story.

JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) saw his novel (written in 1951 and published in 1952) as a reworking of the Cain and Abel story. The very name of the book refers us back to the beginning of Genesis and the names of the central figures in this family saga, the father (Adam) and the two sons Cal (standing for Cain) and Aaron (standing for Abel) announces the allegorical character of the book. In addition there are pages of discussion of the story of Cain and Abel including a long textual analysis in a conversation between some of the characters in the book itself.

In Steinbeck’s novel, one of the central characters, the Chinese servant Lee, (who is absent in the film), says the following regarding the Cain and Abel story. It is especially significant because it
is widely understood that Lee is the character that acts as a mouthpiece for many of Steinbeck's own ideas. He regards the Biblical story as a basic paradigm for human life, hence in our terms a prime candidate for a midrashic retelling with existential meaning

No story has power, nor will it last, unless we feel in ourselves that it is true and true of us…. I think this is the best known story in the world because it is everybody's story. I think it is the symbol story of the human soul... The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved and rejection is the hell he fears. ... And with rejection - comes anger, and with anger - some kind of crime in revenge, and with the crime – guilt. And there is the story of mankind. ... The human is the only guilty animal...Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul – the secret, rejected, guilty soul.... What a great burden of guilt men have!

Yet behind the universal message that Steinbeck uncovers is also his personal biography that helps shape his midrashic reading:

a. Steinbeck when he wrote the novel was already a world famous novelist for his book *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) about the Nebraska and Oklahoma farmers driven off their land by debt who wandered from the Dust Bowl to California where they became migrant workers and there Steinbeck met them. He also wrote *Of Mice and Men* (1937) about the same migrant people. The Depression deeply shaped Steinbeck's world as the previous generation of writers – Hemingway and Fitzgerald - had been shaped by World War One. Steinbeck belonged loosely to the school of American naturalists who described realistically people from the lower classes. In his novels nature plays a key role in shaping life and character. But he feels outrage at how life and other people treat these poor people. He believes in their free will to master their situation.

b. During World War Two Steinbeck was a war correspondent. His concern for facts was also reflected in his novel writing which is based on extensive historical research. In *East of Eden* Steinbeck continues to see himself representing the American experience and he does much exploration into the background of World War One and America's loss of innocence. In America's self-image, migrant to America leaving Europe for the new promised land and Americans leaving the East to go West were seeking pristine purity and anew garden of Eden and leaving corrupt and hypocritical establishment with no room for them. Yet eating the tree of knowledge and disappointment was inevitable for them and World War One symbolized that loss of innocence for the generation of writers just before Steinbeck.

c. But this novel is not just about American history or social causes. Steinbeck began the book intending it to be his own family's saga built around Sam Hamilton who was one of his relatives who lived in Salinas, California. His initial title was *Salinas Valley* where himself grew up. Salinas is a land of wealthy farmers, like his own grandparents on both sides of the family, whom Steinbeck resented. The citizens of Salinas reciprocated this antipathy toward their famous native son and twice publicly burned his novels which reflected so badly on them. Steinbeck was attracted – as was Cal his main character to Monterey where the Chinese like his philosophic character, Lee, lived and where poor fishermen eked out a minimal subsistence. Like Adam in the book who lost his land and his fortune, Steinbeck's father lost his job and poverty was well-known to the family.

d. Like Adam in the book, Steinbeck's own grandparents took the Bible very seriously. Both were born in Israel, the Protestant holy land. John Adolph Steinbeck was born there to German Lutheran missionaries and his grandmother Almira was descended from new England Calvinists. Later they married and moved to California near Salinas and near the other grandparents, Sam and Lisa Hamilton. Steinbeck took not only the Bible seriously but all classic books. He wrote of his favorite books like Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and
Doestoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, "I remember them not at all as books but as things that happened to me!... I guess there are never enough books. Books are one of the few authentic magics our species has created."

e. When Steinbeck was writing the novel in 1951 he was in the midst of a very painful and ugly divorce in New York City. His wife was a monster as far as he was concerned and she took away his two young sons to whom the book was dedicated originally. It sought to give them their California heritage which the mother threatened to cut off. Kate, Adam's serpent-like malicious wife who walked out on him, is supposed by many to be his literary picture of his wife. The writing of novel may have been therapeutic for Steinbeck.

f. Only later does Steinbeck broaden the perspective to make this a universal novel. Then re-names it first *The Cain Sign* and finally *East of Eden*. Cal is “the Everyman, the battleground between good and evil, the most human of all, the sorry man.” It became a book not about the return to Eden but the attempt to live East of Eden in the post-expulsion world of Cain who was exiled eastward of Eden. Steinbeck considered it his ultimate novel (“I think perhaps it is the only book I have written. I think that there is only one book to a man.”)

g. Despite all the differences between the novel and the movie, Steinbeck comments, perhaps tongue in cheek and perhaps not: "It is a real good picture. I didn't have anything to do with it. Maybe that is why. It might be one of the best films I ever saw."

**ELIA KAZAN**

When Elia Kazan (a friend of Steinbeck’s) made the film in 1954, he took Steinbeck's central plot (one part of a much longer and complex story) and reworked it in his own way to change some of the emphases but he retained the Biblical subtext as its allegorical character. Kazan, born in Turkey, the son of Greek Orthodox Christian, then immigrated to the USA where together with leftwing Lee Strasberg he founded the Actor’s Guild in New York City in the 1930s that was influenced by avant garde Russian film and especially by Stanislavsky’s acting school. Here the actor is expected to reach into his/her own personal experience to find echoes of the emotional world of the character played. Then one can let one’s inner empathy flow in acting the part. Hence Kazan sought to choose actors whose life could contribute to the life of the characters as in the case of James Dean playing Cal. Actors should not be treated as puppets enslaved to the script but encouraged to improvise. He believed that each character sees him/herself as from an inner logic – “everyone has his reasons” – even the villain. So it was not the director’s job to identify the villains and heroes. “A work of art should not teach but be. Different people should see it differently. Don’t answer questions but ask them.”

Kazan was deeply influenced by Freudianism which is reflected in the Oedipal relationships within the script. Adam is the uptight superego and Cain struggles to control his libido. He was also affected by German Expressionism in movies using the sharp unrealistic camera angles and dark shadows.  

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30 For example, in the scene where Adam confronts Cal on throwing down the ice, they are both sitting at the same level on a table. However the camera shows the father at a steep angle looking down at Cal like an authoritarian God. Then when Cal counters by accusing his father of lying about his mother, Adam’s face falls and the camera angle shows Cal looking down on his father. For example, when Cal ventures into the whore house marked with the hanging sign “K” for Kate’s a place but also for forbidden knowledge, he proceeds down a dark corridor with heavy shadows until opening the door on his mother now basked in light as angel. The doorway to knowledge may recall the Biblical metaphor – “sin is like a crouching demon at your doorway” (Gen 4:7).
Thematically Kazan liked to explore human nature as a jungle of powerful emotions in which human loyalty is being tested and we often betray others and ourselves in order to survive. Psychic stress, near madness, cathartic violence are typical motifs and his interest in Freud is obvious. Kazan’s own loyalty was tested when he was asked by Senator Joe McCarthy’s House UnAmerican Activities Committee of the Congress (1952-1953) to betray his former communist and socialist fellow travelers (Kazan belonged to Communist Party for 14 months back in 19340. He collaborated with McCarthy in the 1950s saving his own career at the expense of many of his former friends. When Kazan won the 1996 Oscar for a lifetime of work, several actors protested for honoring one who betrayed his colleagues to McCarthy.

His movies deal with social issues but even more so with the inner psyche of the characters: Gentleman's Agreement (1948) on social anti-Semitism, A Streetcar named Desire (1952), On the Waterfront (1954) – starring Marlon Brando.  

31 No other contemporary director has contributed so much to the concept of cinema as a means of artistic expression, rather than merely a means of mass entertainment. Cinema is a tool through which one can convey violence - and few of his films do not sport at least one violent scene. There is always some power struggle, some character whose forcefulness leads to violent action. He first started out in Broadway, in the "Actors' Studio" he founded with Lee Strasberg. His theatrical work had an immense influence on his cinematic creations - in the careful adherence to the written word, in the script's importance, in the way he presented the scenes in front of the camera, culminating in the work methods he developed with Strasberg, in which he urged his actors to enter the soul of the characters they portrayed, to understand their motives, to become part of them.

His actors raked in a total of 21 Academy Awards nominations - and nine Academy Awards. Kazan was almost solely responsible for the star status of actors such as Marlon Brando, James Dean, Warren Beatty, Julie Harris and others. James Dean was nominated for Best Actor in East of Eden and Jo Van Fleet – Kate – won the best supporting actress Oscar for her role.

Elia Kazan was one of the first filmmakers to believe American cinema should deal with reality and make a serious effort to confront issues rather than produce sweet saccharine Hollywood productions providing an escape from daily problems.
**JAMES DEAN**

James Dean first acting role in a movie was *East of Eden*. He was chosen over Paul Newman because of his personal identification with the role which was an important criterion for Elia Kazan. Like Cal, James Dean lost his mother (at age 9). He wrote in his diary: “My mother died on me when I was nine years old. What does she expect? For me to do it all alone?” Then he moved from California to Indiana growing up on a farm with his pro-prohibition Bible-belt grandparents. His first play was a Temperance Union production. His teenage years were an embodiment of the second movie role he earned – *Rebel without a Cause* - where his character says: “If only I had one day when I didn’t have to be confused, when I didn’t have to feel ashamed, when I felt I belonged somewhere.” Dean wrote about himself: “I’m trying to find the courage to be tender. I know violent people are weak. Only the gentle are really strong.” “I don’t want to be alone. I don’t want to be different. But I push people away. I have so much love to give.” Elia Kazan said of Dean: “he belongs to a private club with only a few members.” A clipping in his actor's studio said: "The complete man has three needs: love and security, creative expression and recognition and self-esteem.” His relationship with his father was deeply unsatisfying to both – his father opposed his acting career regarding it as an effeminate and unpredictable profession.

Dean studied acting at UCLA and then moved to New York in 1951 to study off and on at the Actors’ Studio where he also met Elia Kazan. His best friends were the actor Martin Landau and musician Leonard Rosenman who wrote the musical score for *East of Eden*. In a play in 1951 which was quite successful he kept changing his lines and drove mad the director who, unlike Kazan, did not like improvisation on stage. In 1954 he moved to Hollywood and won the part of Cal, not because he was good actor but because he was playing himself.

Elia Kazan recalls: "Jimmy was Cal. Jimmy was it. He was it. He was vengeful, he had a sense of aloneness and he was suspicious.” But he was also mischievous. Julie Harris recalled: "Jimmy was like Tom Sawyer. Life is always an adventure. I really loved him."

Dean's room-mate from New York, claimed that watching Cal Trask in *East of Eden* was the closest any movie-goer ever got to seeing 'the real James Dean.' Dean's old teacher, remarked: 'Many of the movements of "Cal Trask" were characteristic movements of James Dean. His funny little laugh which ripples with the slightest provocation, his quick, jerky, springy walks and actions, his sudden change from frivolity to gloom - all were just like Jim used to do.”

Graham McCann in Rebel males writes: “Dean does not often show off or act out. Rather, he beckons us into his recessive self, with a discreet flourish as sly as it is compelling. His face corresponds to a dominant physiognomic type: blond hair, regular features. Further, the fluid mobility of his expressions reflects the ambivalent nature of the adolescent face, still hesitating between childhood's melancholy and the mask of the -adult ---a smooth-cheeked subversive. John Dos Passos wrote of 'the resentful hair ... the deep eyes floating in lonesomeness, the bitter look, the scorn on the lip'. The photogenic quality of this face is rich with all the ambiguity of an ageless age, mixing scowls with surprise, delinquent glamour with rustic innocence, disarmed
candor with sudden coldness, resolution with collapse. As Edgar Morin put it, 'The face of James Dean is an ever-changing landscape in which can be discerned the contradictions, uncertainties, and enthusiasms of the adolescent soul.'

Graham McCann writes:
"Dean's directors were forced into taking highly unconventional or aggressive action when he lost his hold on a role. For example, during the shooting of a scene of *East of Eden*, Dean found it impossible to respond to any direction. Kazan decided the only way to get a performance from Dean was to get him drunk on Chianti and then commence filming. Kazan also noted how Dean seemed to rely upon genuine, off-screen feelings for his characterization.

He thus encouraged the animosity that was evident between Dean and Raymond Massey who played the father Adam, so that by the time the movie was shot, the two men really detested each other. (Massey was a religious, Oxford educated conservative Canadian whose brother became Director General of Canada). For example, in the Bible reading scene in *East of Eden*, Cal whispered curses under his breath enraging the religious Raymond Massey. Later Kazan admitted to putting Dean up to that to make the anger genuine. Kazan and Dean had a common cause in confrontation with "the father," the father as repressive society and society as an oppressive patriarchy. "He had a grudge against all fathers," said Kazan, "and he exploited this feeling."

Kazan also worked on the tensions between Dean and his 'brother', Richard Davalos, in order to enrich the movie's sibling rivalry with a sexual ambivalence between the brothers. Thus he insisted that the two actors live together while the movie was made. The tensions on the screen were charged with real emotions.
(During the movie Dean felt love and then jealousy. He fell in love with actress Pier Angeli who then left him to marry actor Vic Damone. Dean showed up at the wedding on his motorcycle and gunned the motor to disturb them).

Dean used every means possible to generate the appropriate mental and physical state for his performance. For one scene, Hopper recalls, 'he really wanted to look up tight. So to get himself really uncomfortable, he didn't pee all day until they did the shot. For example, when about to do the final scene of *East of Eden* saying farewell to his dying father, Dean spent the whole day in his room crying to get in order to get into the right mood. His close friends all seemed to have stories of how Dean had tested their affection for him. It was, as he said himself, as though he had Montgomery Clift saying, 'Forgive me,' at the same time as Marlon Brando was saying, 'Fuck you!'

Dennis Hopper recalls a very enlightening conversation with Dean:
"I told Jimmy I had to know what he was doing because acting was my whole life ... I asked him why he became an actor and he said, 'Because I hate my mother and father. I wanted to get up on stage ... and I wanted to show them. I'll tell you what made me want to become an actor, what gave me that drive to be the best. My mother died when I was almost nine. I used to sneak out of my uncle's house at night and go to her grave, and I used to cry and cry on her grave - Mother, why did you leave me? Why did you leave me? I need you ... I want you.' OK, well that eventually turned into Jimmy pounding on the grave saying, show you for leaving me ... fuck you, I'm gonna be so fuckin' great without you!"

Dean was also so nervous about proving himself that he did outrageous things to imply he did not care what people thought even though he cared too much. For example, before playing his first scene as a novice actor with the great Elizabeth Taylor in *Giant*, he suddenly walked off in front of 4,000 people on the set and peed in front of all of them. Dean explained: I figured if I could do that, then I could play with Liz. For example, when Kazan was going to introduce Dean to the rest of the actors in *East of Eden* — mainly much more experienced than himself, he warned them: "You're going to see a strange young man, but on screen he's pure gold." Then Dean entered and he worked out his fear of what
Julie Harris who played Abra remembers going to say goodbye to Dean after the last day's shooting of *East of Eden*. She heard what sounded like a little boy sobbing and then she saw it was Dean, with his head in his hands, tears streaming down his face. 'It's all over,' he said. 'I never wanted it to end!'

**Dean’s Death**

In 1955 James Dean filmed a 30 second safety advertisement. At the end he turns to the camera and says, "The road is no place to race your car. It's real murder." He was supposed to sign off with the safety committee's slogan: "Drive safely, because the life you save may be your own." Instead, he chose to say, "And remember, drive safely ... because the life you save may be mine!" The self-obsession showed up in everything he did.

In one of his last interviews, when asked what he respected, Dean replied: 'That's easy. Death. It's the only thing left to respect. It's the one inevitable, undeniable truth. Everything else can be questioned. But death is truth. In it lies the only mobility for man, and beyond it, only hope.’

After his final scene in *Giant*, Dean and a friend departed for a weekend race at Salinas. By 6:00 that evening (30 September 1955), Dean was dead. Dean loved auto racing but he died in a simple traffic accident on September 30, 1955 near Salinas the location of his first movie. Then his death just added to his myth. After his death 3.8 million fans paid to join his fan club.

**1950s Movies and Rebel Males**

Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift were James Dean’s idol. He imitated them, dressed like them. He told a friend: “I’ve got Marlon Brando in one ear screaming, ‘Screw you! Screw you!’ and Montgomery Clift in the other saying, ‘Help me! Help me!’” Together they changed the way American males saw themselves. James Dean is perfect to transform the movie image of the teenager from a singing and dancing Andy Hardy (Mickey Rooney) to a misunderstood, pained, vulnerable but cool and crazy juvenile delinquent. When Bob Dylan saw *Rebel without a Cause* he adopted James Dean’s blue jeans and boots, his slouch and smirk and added a black leather jacket worn by Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. They became central topics in the generation gap conversations. Many parents considered them immoral and indecent. J.Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, declared “juvenile delinquency” along with communism the greatest threats to American freedom. (Some people noticed that J.D. stands not only for “juvenile delinquency” but for the hero of *Rebel without a Cause* – James Dean.) These actors fought the conformism reinforced by the McCarthy era investigations. Their movies broke the Production Code that from 1934 to 1954 discouraged movie makers from displaying drugs, sex, alcohol, interracial relationships, crime etc. In 1952 the Supreme Court ruled that First Amendment protections of free speech applied to movies as well.

These rebel males found ways to express their rebellion against conformity. Graham McCann writes in *Rebel Males*: “When society demands greater uniformity, consensus crowding out the claims of consent, then the strategy of individuality and distinctiveness is to become identifiable within the uniform - not by it, adopting its identity, but despite it, accepting no privilege or privation accruing from it.

they would think of him by telling them all “fuck you” three times and walking out. Raymond Massey, mature, conservative and religious was deeply offended and replied: “So what is the price of gold?”

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Method acting facilitated this stance of the rebel male. In Method acting the most important element is the inner subtext which emerges, often in silences between the lines, from the character's struggle with the group and with the character's own fissile nature. Clift, Brando and Dean are at their best in schismatic parts based on the unresolved tension between an outer, social mask and an inner, private reality of frustration and confusion which usually has a sexual basis (p.29). ... East of Eden is such a crucial youth movie because it indulges the young person's unprincipled and shameless yearning to be the centre of attention and affection.

As François Truffaut commented:
“In James Dean, today's youth discovers itself. Less for the reasons usually advanced: violence, sadism, hysteria, pessimism, cruelty and filth, than for others infinitely more simple and commonplace: modesty of feeling, continual fantasy life, moral purity without relation to everyday morality but all the more rigorous, eternal adolescent love of tests and trials, intoxication, pride, and regret at feeling oneself 'outside' society, refusal and desire to become integrated and, finally, acceptance - or refusal - of the world as it is...East of Eden is the first film to give us a Baudelairean hero, fascinated by vice and contrast, loving the family and hating the family at one and the same time.” (p.139).

Baudelaire’s dandy is a forerunner of these rebel males:
The burning need to create for oneself a personal originality, bounded only by the limits of the proprieties. It is a kind of cult of the self which can nevertheless survive the pursuit of a happiness to be found in someone else - in woman, for example, which can even survive all that goes by the name of illusions. It is the joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished."

Albert Camus observed:
“The dandy is... always compelled to astonish. Singularity is his vocation, excess his way to perfection. Perpetually incomplete, always on the margin of things, he compels others to create him, while denying their values. He plays at life because he is unable to live it. He plays at it until he dies, except for the moment when he is alone and without a mirror. For the dandy, to be alone is not to exist.”

These rebel males became anti-heroes, virile but vulnerable males disenchanted with the traditional notions of masculinity.” (p.124).
Biblical echoes of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve abound in this novel. For example, when Adam Trask discusses with Samuel Hamilton (Steinbeck’s maternal grandfather, one aspect of the autobiographical aspect of this saga) his intention to build a new Eden on his property in California and raise his family on it:

'Look, -Samuel, I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember my name is Adam. So far I've had no Eden, let alone been driven out.'

'It's the best reason I ever heard for making a garden,' Samuel exclaimed. He chuckled.

'Where will the orchard be?'

Adam said, 'I won't plant apples. That would be looking for accidents.' 'What does Eve say to that? She has a say, you remember. And Eves delight in apples.'

At several points within East of Eden Steinbeck makes it clear that father figures often stand as symbols of God himself... as 'the cool, dependable figure of godhead'... [Eve on the other hand is portrayed as a serpent, a monster, purely maliciously, an evil one who has burned her parents alive by setting their house on fire. She bears the scar of Cain as a terrible scar on her forehead given her by her whoremaster’s beating.]

Perhaps the clearest example of the jealous rivalry of brothers, reminiscent of the struggle between Cain and Abel, is that between Charles and Adam Trask which occupies centre stage of the first part of the novel (chapters 1-11). The two brothers are in fact half-brothers, having the same father, Cyrus, but different mothers. Even here we see the roots of a rivalry developed within the story line, for Adam's mother commits suicide very early in the novel (3:1) and his father quickly remarries and sires a second son (Charles) by his new wife Alice (the two boys are thus a year apart in age). Despite the fact that Adam's real mother died before he was old enough to remember her, and Alice became for all practical purposes his mother, there remains in the relationship between the two boys and their parents a tension, a mutual suspicion of favoritism. Charles suspects that his father does not love him, or at least loves Adam more, and he harbors jealousy against his brother for it - a clear echo of the sibling rivalry recorded in the Genesis story.

The tension between the two brothers reaches a climax over the gifts that the two boys present to their father on his birthday. The story is strikingly reminiscent of the gifts of sacrifice that Cain and Abel offer to God in Gen. 4.3-5, only to find that God (inexplicably) accepts Abel's offer of a lamb while rejecting Cain's offer of grain. Steinbeck creatively reworks the story, altering the gifts, of course, but keeping their symbolic nature intact (Adam offers an animal as did Abel, while Charles offers a knife, a mechanical instrument of harvest in keeping with the gift of Cain). Thus in 3:4 we have Charles confront Adam about the gifts in the midst of a violent rage:

`Look at his birthday!' Charles shouted. `I took six bits and I bought him a knife made in Germany - three blades and a corkscrew, pearl-handled. Where's that knife? Do you ever see
him use it? Did he give it to you? I never even saw him hone it. Have you got that knife in your pocket? What did he do with it?

"Thanks," he said, like that. And that's the last I heard of a pearl-handled German knife that cost six bits......

What did you do on his birthday? You think I didn't see? Did you spend six bits or even four bits? You brought him a mongrel pup you had picked up in a woodlot. He laughed like a fool and said it would make a good bird dog. That dog sleeps in his room. He plays with it while he's reading. He's got it all trained.

And where's the knife? "Thanks," he said, just "Thanks".'

Charles is filled with such anger and jealousy that he proceeds to beat Adam so severely that he almost kills him (not quite emulating his predecessor Cain). Their father finds out about the beating from Adam and goes looking for the wayward Charles with a shotgun; fortunately for Charles his father does not find him before his anger cools. After some weeks an uneasy truce is arrived at and life takes on some degree of normality again. The beating over the knife remains a key event in the relationship between Charles and Adam and is mentioned in several subsequent passages (including 4:2; 7:2; 7:3). In a subsequent conversation between the two brothers (7:3) the episode is explicitly described by Adam as Charles's attempt to win the love of his father. 'I didn't know then, but I know now-you were fighting for your love.'

The Cain-Abel motif is also contained in the second half of the novel (chapters 22-55) where the twin sons of Adam, Cal and Aron, extend the motif of brotherly conflict into the next generation. As was the case with Adam and Charles, there is some irregularity concerning the familial connection between the two. Some doubts are raised about the paternity of the two brothers, given Cathy Trask's adulterous affair with her brother-in-law Charles on her wedding night (11:6). Much is made of the fact that the twins are born with separate amniotic sacs (suggesting that Adam is the father of Aron and Charles the father of Cal). The two (half-)brothers are locked in the struggle from infancy; as Samuel Hamilton is made to remark (in 17:2) their entry into the world was 'much more like a bitter, deadly combat than a birth'.

Continuing to illustrate the point of brotherly conflict, Steinbeck gives several other glimpses of their rivalry as they grow up together. Later, one of the focal points of the conflict is the struggle between the two young men for the love of the beautiful young Abra Bacon. In the end the clash between the two is interwoven with their attempts to please their father Adam. It concludes tragically with Cal 'killing' his brother (in true Cain-like fashion) by revealing news about their prostitute mother. This revelation is too much for the sensitive Aron and he escapes by enlisting in the army. He is sent to France with the American forces and is killed in battle. Cathy then commits suicide and Adam has a cerebral hemorrhage.
The Film itself: Narrative, Themes and Characters

The film has five major characters:

Adam, the father (Raymond Massey),
Kate (or as she is usually called in the novel, Cathy),
the mother (Jo van Fleet),
Cal[eb], the younger son (James Dean)
his older brother Aaron (Richard Davalos)
Aaron's girlfriend Abra (Julie Harris).

The story is about sibling rivalry, family relationships and father-son tensions. It is about a father who rejects one of his sons even as he accepts the other.

The rejected son, Cal, labeled (and initially self-labeled) as evil, spends large parts of his young life trying to win his father's approval, especially through the bringing of gifts, but he spends other parts in acts of both self-loathing and self-discovery as a young man coming of age. He is a totally different sort of person both to Adam, his father, and to his brother Aaron.

Adam has created an artificial, limited world of righteousness and morality as he understands it. For him the world is divided into good and evil. It is a moral world of black and white, of evil and good, of absolute categories. In his own way he is a good man, but it becomes increasingly clear that the narrowness of his vision and his inability to accept weakness in himself or others, leads him into a morass of self-righteousness, that suffocates his family.

Aaron, his first son, is in many ways a carbon copy of his father, preserving the same idealized categories through which to view and experience the world around him. We might, in our day, call him a "prig" of some sort but the truth is that his innocence and essential naivety saves him from such a characterization. He is a monk-like or priest-like figure (Aaron-the-priest?), pure and saintly, who has neither encountered evil nor is equipped to deal with it, which will have major repercussions at the end of the film. He is his father's child.

Cal on the other hand is a totally different figure. He is complex, three dimensional, drawn towards the moral complexity of life. Unlike his naïve and innocent brother, Cal seeks knowledge of himself through knowledge of his family secrets. His complexity – his humanity – prevents him from being accepted by his father's rigid moral rule. As such he is rejected and categorized as the 'bad son'. Steinbeck himself described him as "the Everyman, the battleground between good and evil, the most human of all, the sorry man". For the book's narrator, "humans are caught...in a net of good and evil". That is the human condition and that is why, for Steinbeck, Cal was Everyman.

Despite the fact that he initially sees himself as bad, accepting his father's categorization of him, he senses that his father's world is narrow. He seeks the roots of his own 'evil' and complex moral personality and looks to find it in the figure of his long departed mother, whom he has always understood (from his father) to be dead. Both Aaron and Cal have drawn strong pictures of the mother they never knew, although the two pictures are very different. For Aaron, the

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Abra's name originates in a poem by the Puritan Matthew Pryor called "Solomon on the Vanities of the World" – a Puritan Ecclesiastes. Abra is described there as a beautiful concubine: 'The cakes she kneaded were savory meat, apples she had gathered smelled most sweet.' So the poem's Abra like the book's offers sexuality and knowledge in the form of an apple, but those are vanities not to be valued.
mother is seen as a saintly figure, a perfect complement to the father he knows and loves. For Cal, the picture is different. Since he is so different, he fantasizes that the difference derives from what he has inherited from his mother. If that is so, she cannot be the plaster saint that Aaron has built up for himself.

Cal wants to believe that his mother is good, but at the same time he believes that his not fitting into the familial framework must in some way reflect a certain complexity in her personality. When he discovers that she is alive and that she had fled the family home because of a feeling of being stifled in the atmosphere of moral probity and set limits of the family ranch, he feels vindicated. He discovers her after a chance conversation in a bar (he is drawn to the world of the bar in a way that his brother Aaron could never be). Tracking her down, he discovers that she not only lives in a neighbouring town but that she is the town Madame, the possessor of the biggest brothel in town. He looks to her hopefully as the source of approval that has been denied him by his father, and ultimately as the source of money that he needs, in order – he believes – to win his father's love, the thing in life that he desires more than anything else.

In addition, Kate will become for him the indirect agent of his brother's death, because Cal will engineer a meeting with her, knowing that the inability to accept his mother's true nature, and the contradiction between her reality and the idealized image that he has built up will cause Aaron to explode emotionally. When that happens, Aaron will go through some kind of breakdown, and despite his moral pacifism, will enlist in the U.S. army going over to Europe in the First World War, in what is transparently portrayed as the planned fulfillment of some kind of a death wish in the trenches of war. (In the book, he dies in the trenches of France).

This is the main plot of the film and the family relationships, complex and dysfunctional, become the fuel that feeds the plot. The only figure who is central to the story outside of the core family group is Aaron's girlfriend and would-be bride, Abra, who functions as an interesting mediator and philosopher in the script. She appears at the beginning in virginal glory as behooves Aaron's twin soul. She seems good and pure, a female counterpart to Adam. However, from the beginning it seems that she is fascinated with Cal and as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that she herself is a more complex figure who has tried to emasculate parts of her personality and character in order to fit Aaron's dream of a model future wife. That figure, it becomes clear, is related to Aaron's ideal projection of his own mother, and the model of platonic relationship that Aaron develops, (calling it love), is clearly some kind of a search for a replacement for the mother that he has never known. Abra confesses to Cal all the things that she cannot say to Aaron about who she really is. She is clearly a sexual being attracted to those sides in Cal. Her own self-image is largely negative since she has internalized the moral vision and terminology of Aaron and his father, but in essence, what becomes clear is that she is a parallel figure to Cal in many ways.

She too has known paternal rejection and has suffered from violent emotions as a result, expressing herself in rash and destructive actions. She too represents a character of moral complexity, who, despite appearances, does not really fit into the clear black and white universe of her (new) family. The only way that she can do so is to suppress parts of herself which she tries to do, although she acknowledges to Cal that she is really someone else (and thus 'bad').

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34 This is in the film version, where the part of Cathy/Kate has been softened and changed, as we shall see. In the book, it is Lee, the Chinese servant who loans the money to Cal.
The denouement of the film comes after Aaron's departure to war (and presumed death). Adam collapses as his world collapses around him and, a stroke victim, finishes as a bedridden invalid. However, he is just able to perform one final act of redemption, in which, on the prompting of Abra, he is able to suggest a small request that Cal happily fulfils, enabling some kind of a reconciliation and acceptance between father and son.

Parallels – Film and Biblical Text

The general parallels to the biblical story will immediately be seen. Adam is the Godlike father who expects perfection from his sons as he expects perfection from his universe. The sons compete to offer God/Adam offerings of both material good and a good life. Abel’s offering and Abel himself find favor in Adam/God’s eyes and Cain is rejected. Adam/God insists on Cal/Cain’s power of free will to improve and earn favor. However Cal/Cain do not – at least initially - believe in that freedom. Adam as well as Cal and Aaron live in the shadow of the failed experiment of the Ranch / Garden of Eden. God/Adam imposes moral categories that leave little room for human complexity and human passion. God/Adam punishes, through rejection, those who do not meet his standards. Adam and the sheriff want Cal to leave, to go into exile after the death of Aron. Yet God/Adam holds out the possibility for repentance which is realized only in the last scene in the movie and perhaps in the Biblical story as well.

Aaron-Abel is modeled in his father's image. He will please his father and the things that he can offer will always be accepted. The price that he will pay is his alienation from the harsh three-dimensional (and oh so human) aspects of real human life. He lives in a universe that he (and his father) has constructed and he is happy to dwell there, accepted by his father. He will be able to dwell there in his self-constructed Paradise but he will be unable to function in the real world. Once he leaves Paradise, he will indeed be lost. Cal/Cain, on the other hand embraces the real world with its moral ambiguity but pays the price of the loss of his father's love and ability and willingness to accept whatever Cal-Cain might want to offer him. The father Adam does not want them to know the real world that so disappointed him; he wants to leave his sons in blissful ignorance. Knowledge is pain (for with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge the more grief). (Kohelet 1:18).

One son is obedient to his father's way and follows him. The other son rejects the father's way, not out of lack of love and not because he is evil, but because he is curious about the world and

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35Near the end of the movie the connection to the Biblical story becomes more explicit:

Adam: Where's Aron?
Cal: I don't know. I am not my brother's keeper.

Adam: Where did you go?
Cal: For a ride.

Adam: What did you quarrel about?
Cal: You!

Just to make it clear that there is a deliberate equation between Cal and Cain, the sheriff of Salinas, quotes the critical verse from Genesis at Cal (this takes place following the departure of Aron to the military and the collapse of Adam from his stroke). The sheriff rounds off the quotation with a harsh word of advice to Cal:

'Cain rose up against his brother Abel and slew him. And Cain went away and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.' Now why don't you go away someplace?
incapable of accepting his father's limited blinkered existence. He wants to partake of the world and not just dwell in a failed Paradise. He will have to leave that world, eating "the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil". He cannot live in that stifling perfection. Being imperfect (human) he needs to leave his Garden of Eden, and to follow his mother, who has made the trip before him, into the real world, the world of messy human moral ambiguity. When he tries to take his brother with him, to view reality, he will kill his brother and almost kill his father ("I have killed a man for wounding me and a young man for injuring me") (Genesis 4:23).

It seems that what we have here is a bringing together of a number of biblical themes. The expulsion from Eden is brought here into direct connection with the Cain and Abel story. The family background – and specifically the responsibility of a conflated God-Adam father-figure, is seen as the necessary background to the act of murder, in a way that the biblical text does not spell out (although as we have seen, some of the midrashim, as well as some modern thinkers, have indeed gone in that suggestive direction). In that way, the film can be seen to provide an extremely strong and suggestive midrash on the biblical text.

In allegorical terms, we are left to ponder some unclear threads such as the role of women. Is Kate, the mother, not a kind of Eve-Lilith figure, unable to take the limited role that both God and Adam have consigned her to? Could Abra be a kind of substitute figure for the snake, depicted in the Bible as a knowledgeable and evil tempter, rebelling against God in order to introduce chaos into the order of Paradise? Here in the film, she is shown differently as a knowledgeable and understanding person, aware of the complexity of real human needs and caught between the garden and the outside world, ultimately explaining or interpreting that complexity to herself and to one of the human family.

As we have said, the allegorical reading leaves aspects unclear. Almost always in literary allegory, there are details that seem not to fit in comfortably with the overall interpretation. It is so here. But it is a fascinating "take" on the Cain and Abel story, a perspective that brings enormous complexity to the brief biblical narrative and suggests great depths of ambiguity that we are asked to experience and then to ponder.
The Existential Questions in the Film

1. **PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS.** The first issue that both the book and the film raise so powerfully is the relation between the world of the parent and the world of the child. The book, which is a multi-generational novel, of repeating patterns (in a type of Genesis imitation), raises the question a number of times. If we restrict ourselves merely to the Adam-Aaron-Cal story that is the centre of the film, we see a world in which parents and children do not necessarily inhabit the same moral universe or share the same way of looking at the world. By trying to model the children in their own image, the parents run the risk of both stifling and alienating the child (Cal) or succeeding in creating carbon copies who themselves suffer alienation and ignorance of part of their full humanity (Aaron). The child who leaves the parents’ world, can only do so with a certain amount of anger, if the parents have not willingly accorded freedom to that child. That act of rebellion against the parents can be accepted with love or with rejection. Rejection, suggests Steinbeck, will exact a price of death and destruction on the family. Yet parents have a role to hold up moral standards. Cal’s behavior is hurtful – stealing the coal chute from poor coal miners, making money off war supplies, staying out all night and going to brothels and bars.

2. **FREE WILL.** The second philosophical question that Steinbeck deals with very centrally in the novel is the issue of free will and personal responsibility that human beings have for the determination of their own lives. Adam says: “You have a choice, that is the difference between a man and animal.” We are all conditioned by our parents and our background, but do we have the ability to move beyond this and to transcend the limitations of the lives that our parents have made for us, consciously or not? Cal announces: “You have a certain amount of good and bad you get from your parents and I got the bad.”

The novel works this out and comes down firmly on the side of free will and personal choice. It does so in two major ways. Steinbeck has Cal believe that he has inherited the evil inherent in his mother (in the novel, she is truly wicked and even her facial features look like a serpent; she has no redeeming kindness or human conscience). Yet finally he understands that this is not the case.

Cal said, "I was afraid I had you in me."
"You have," said Kate.
"No I haven't. I'm my own. I don't have to be you."
"How do you know that?" she asked.
"I just know. It comes to me whole. If I'm mean, it's my own mean."

In addition to this however, there is a whole philosophical discussion which winds through the last half of the book, in the form of a discussion of the Cain and Abel story that is conducted among several of the characters. A large part of this discussion revolves around the meaning of the word תמשל – wrongly spelled 'timshel' in the book.

What does *timshel* mean? Should it be understood as a divine command to control the temptation to sin and to master it (as was traditionally understood by Christian commentators especially Augustine and Luther who deny human free will to do good). How should it be translated wondered Steinbeck:
“Thou shalt - ought - to rule over it!” (King James)

Or is there another possibility of reading the text as a form of "educational encouragement", as we have seen above that some of the Jewish parshanim understand it:

“You can or may rule over it”

(E.A.Speiser: “yet you can be his master” or Umberto Cassuto’s “you are not delivered into sin’s power and if you only have the desire, you can oppose it and overcome it and free yourself from its influence.”)

“Sin will be lying in wait for you, and are you sure, you will be bale to master it?”

(G.R.Castellino)

Steinbeck explores this tension through an interesting device. He pits the traditional Christian understanding as reflected in the King James version against the other meaning in a new translation which Lee (remember: Steinbeck's philosophical alter ego) offers him based on discussions between Chinese sages and rabbis over the meaning of the word. This struggle between the different meanings of the word becomes part of the philosophical core of the novel. 'May', or 'can', implies free will, and this understanding of the word becomes a key subject in the last part of the book. In the book Adam whispers the word 'timshel' to Cal just before he dies. The ability to take control of your own life and to master sin thus becomes his legacy.

In the film, the subject is played down but not altogether absent. There is no mention of the word 'timshel' but in a couple of different places (the Bible reading, the end of the film), Adam tells Cal that he can make something of his own life.

note this exchange between Adam and Cal early in the film, following the son's fit of anger in throwing blocks of ice down the chute and Adam's rebuke of Cal by forcing him to read from Psalm 32 at the dinner table as a forced confession of guilt and promise of forgiveness. Cal insists on reading the verse numbers, to the intense annoyance of his father.

Adam: **You have no repentance! You're bad! Through and through, bad!**
Cal: You're right, I am bad. I knew that for a long time.
Adam: (apologetically) I didn't mean that Cal. I spoke in anger.
Cal: Well, it's true. Aron's the good one. I guess there's just a certain amount of good and bad you get from your parents, and I just got the bad.
Adam: That's not true! Cal, listen to me! You can make of yourself anything you want, it's up to you. A man has a choice, that's where he's different from an animal.

Ultimately, at the very end of the film, Cal affirms that the lesson has not been lost when he finally responds to his father's comment in the Bible reading scene that he wouldn't remember the lesson, remarking, in tears, that he has indeed not forgotten.  

“I tried to believe it was born in me and that I couldn’t help it. But that is not so. A man has a choice! It’s the choice that makes him a man”

36 The scene in which Cal rejects his own mother's influence on him, (which we quoted from the novel), does not have to appear here as the figure of the mother is softened sufficiently for Cal to be able to accept her as a partial “role model”. Here, in the film, he can indeed take her rebellion against his father as a model that he so desperately needs. Had she been so evil, he would have had to reject her.
In the first edition of the book there is a photograph of John Steinbeck’s desk with a carved mahogany box crafted by Steinbeck himself containing the book’s manuscript and engraved in it is the Hebrew *timshel*. Steinbeck corresponded with such great bible scholars as Louis Ginsberg at the Jewish Theological Seminary seeking verification of his new translation of the word as “you can” not “you ought to rule over it.” In the novel Steinbeck writes the following dialogue after Lee tells Adam that he has been researching the meaning of *timshel* for two years:

*Adam says to Lee:* Two years? One word? Don’t you think that is just a bit of ecclesiastical hairsplitting?

*Lee:* No, no, no, no! Don’t you see it may be the most important word in the history of the world because it gives man the right to choose between good and evil between right and wrong. The gift of free will in a single word.37

3. GOOD AND EVIL.

A third philosophical question relates to a theme that is woven throughout the novel and the film: what is essence of a good life? Adam constantly relates to this and in Adam's perspective it is a

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37 In Harvey Hart's TV Mini-series (1981) written by Richard Shapiro there is much more of the original book’s concern with 'Timshel!'

Lee whispers the word ‘Timshel!’ over the coffin of the dead Samuel Hamilton. At the graveside Lee is questioned about the incident by Adam:

Adam: What was it you said to Samuel back there in the church? Lee: ’Timshel!’

Adam: What?

Lee: ’Thou mayest!’ You remember back that day when we were naming the twins we read the story of Cain and Abel and none of us really understood it?

Adam: What has that got to do with?

Lee: In the King James version we read Jehovah says; ‘And thou shalt rule over him’; it was a promise that Cain would conquer sin.

Adam: And you weren’t satisfied with that translation.

Lee: I conferred with some Chinese scholars of my acquaintance in San Francisco. Together these four old men and I approached a learned rabbi. I used to go up there every couple of weeks on my days off and study Hebrew, comparing translations.

Adam: That’s where you were, the days I needed you?

Lee: Until, after two years, we finally felt, all six of us, that we had a proper translation of the Hebrew word ‘timshel’. Not ‘Thou shalt’ or ‘Thou must’; but ‘Thou mayest.’ ‘Thou mayest rule over sin!’

Adam: Two years! One word? Don’t you think that’s just a bit of ecclesiastical hair-splitting?

Lee: No! No, no, no! Don’t you see? It may be the single most important word in the history of the world, because it gives man the right to choose between good and evil, between right and wrong.

Adam: ’Timshel’, is it? ’Thou mayest!’

Lee: Gift of free will in a single word.

The second scene is the conclusion of the film as a whole, where Lee, Cal and Abra are gathered at the bedside of the dying Adam.

Lee: [kneeling by the bedside and whispering to Adam] Here is your son Caleb. Your only son. Look at him, Adam. I don't know how long you are going to live. Maybe a long time, maybe an hour. But your son will live! He will marry and his children will be the only remnant left of you. He did a thing in anger, Adam, because he thought you had rejected him. And the result of the anger is that his brother is dead. Your son is marked with guilt, almost more than he can bear. Don't leave him with his guilt. Adam, can you hear me? Give him your blessing. Help him, Adam! Give him your chance. Give him your blessing.

[With great effort Adam extends his hand toward Cal, who makes a move to the bedside as Lee begins to cry.]

Lee: Thank you, Adam! Thank you, my friend! [Cal and Lee exchange positions at the bedside.] Lee: Can you move your lips, Adam? Make your lips form his name!

Adam: ’Timshel!’
highly moral and sheltered existence aimed at being of value to mankind and giving service to the community. It includes avoiding hurting others and sheltering them from the harshness of real life. It must not be tainted by sordid things like money and sexuality. It is in a sense, life in the garden, life back "on the ranch" away from the corruption of the city and the moral entanglements that real life imposes. War is city people’s job as is anything complex and messy. You cannot engage in the real things that the world offers without being corrupted. To do so is to be dragged down. One must not leave the garden. Adam in the book says: "I mean to make a garden of my land. Remember, my name is Adam. But I won’t plant apples, that would be looking for accidents.”

Yet to be grown up, to be mature— a central concern of teenage characters like Cal and Abra—is to eat of the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil. The movie offers a more realistic perspective through the character of Kate, Abra and Cal. The film adds Kate as a character offering an alternative to Bible-reading Adam. She, the Madame, knows what people really want, what it takes to survive and to succeed and to make a buck. She is proud and honest about these truths making her a survivor and good business woman who parades her freedom from hypocritical social norms. Life must be lived in the real world. Cal portrayals what is generally characteristic of being grown—he goes to bars and brothels—emblematic of the “adult only” pleasures of those fallen from the Garden of Eden. Yet more deeply, he and Abra earn their claim to maturity by facing the harsh truth about their origins in parental failures and their own potential for evil. Life must embrace all the messiness and contradictions that are human existence. You live life first of all by facing whatever life offers in the world of human beings. Then you can start making choices about how to navigate in that wider world. But life is not to be lived by shunning the world.

These three ideas then, the potentially poisonous or liberating relations between generations, the ability to create your own destiny and to triumph over sin through free-will and the examination of the good life as a life of retreat and contemplation (Eden) or a life of engagement with the fullness of the world, are, we suggest, the philosophical heart of East of Eden.

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38Cal says: ‘I gotta know who I am. I gotta know!’ He is the young male demanding, confirmation of himself from his parents. He pleads with his cool, conventional father (‘Talk to me’) and, when he learns of her existence, he pleads with his whorehouse madam mother (‘Let me talk to you!’). Then Cal goes to seek knowledge in his mother’s brothel. The whore house is marked with the hanging sign “K” for Kate’s a place but also for forbidden knowledge. Then he proceeds down a dark corridor with heavy shadows until opening the door on his mother now basked in light as angel. The doorway to knowledge may recall the Biblical metaphor—“sin is like a crouching demon at your doorway” (Gen 4:7). Sexual knowledge and knowledge about his parents dark secrets and knowledge of self are all intertwined.
OUTLINE for THE FILM VIEWING AND DISCUSSION
Let us now move to the actual pedagogy of the program, dividing extra comments into suggested appropriate places in accordance with the scheme that we have suggested (an introduction and three scenes with analysis).

We will begin by giving the subjects and the questions that we suggest are appropriate for each part. We repeat that these are possible directions that can be used to trigger your own ideas and thoughts. Having noted the subjects and central questions, we will go on, below, to amplify them wherever necessary.

THE INTRODUCTION BEFORE THE FILM:

Defining midrash.
Film as midrash.
This film as midrash.
The theme of the film.
The task of the director and the screenwriter.
Materials that went into the final version of this film.
Directorial decisions: Casting etc.
About the film.

Some plot details to make it easier for them to understand the film as they view it and to start thinking in terms of interpretation.

ACT ONE: Introducing all the main characters and issues:
From the opening of the movie until Cal is thrown out of his mother’s brothel

"A" characters and "C" characters. Identifying and decoding.
Does anything remind you of the Biblical story?
Are there any repeated motifs or key text words?
Analysis of key characters:
"A" characters: Aaron, Adam, Abra  "C/K" characters: Kate, Cal.
Analysis of scenes: the ice house, the Bible reading scene, the visit to the brothel.

ACT TWO: New aspects of the characters revealed as they are tested by events.
From the scene with the sheriff with Cal in the jailhouse to dialogue of Cal and Kate borrowing money from his mother

Has anything changed in our perception of any of the main characters?
Analysis of the coal chute/field scene.
Analysis of the conversation between Abra and Cal in the field.
Analysis of the conversation between Kate and Cal.

ACT THREE: The outcomes - happy endings?
From Cal meeting with Sam to join in the bean business to the end of the movie. (To shorten the film you may skip the beginning of ACT THREE which describes the excitement over World War I and then the pain of the fallen soldiers and disillusionment. Begin with the amusement park scene of Cal and Abra until the end).

Has anything changed in our perception of any of the main characters?
Analysis of ferris wheel conversation between Abra and Cal.
Why does Aaron enlist if he is a pacifist?
What is Abra’s role in the movie?
What is the role of the nurse in the last scene?
Specific interpretative questions:
  a. What is the murder weapon?
  b. What did he say to his brother?
  c. What is the sign of Cain in the film?
What is the film saying? What is the midrashic "take" of the film?
Were the casting decisions successful? Were the directorial decisions successful?

SUMMING UP
Let us now go back to these issues and questions. Some of them have already been dealt with above, and in those instances, we simply refer you via a few key words to the relevant ideas. In other cases, where we have not suggested answers, we do so here.
THE INTRODUCTION BEFORE THE FILM

Defining midrash.

Imaginative rewriting by later generations.
Dealing with relevant existential questions.

Film as midrash.

If it answers to above criteria.

This film as midrash.

Deliberate and conscious rewriting in order to answer certain key issues.

The theme of the film.

Family relationships. Examination of what is a good life.
Possibility of freewill and change.

The task of the director and the screenwriter.

Making choices:

a. Who is hero and who is the villain? How good is the hero and how really bad is the villain?
   [On one hand, Cain is the villain because he murders his brother, he denies responsibility, he lies to cover up, he
   is concerned about himself not others, he displaces his anger at God onto to his innocent brother. On the other
   hand, God is the villain because God rejects one brother and accepts the other, God rejects the brother - not only
   the offering, God is insensitive to Cain's feelings rather than loving and sympathetic, God's preference seems
   arbitrary, God creates competition between the brothers, in short, God seems very poor at basic emotional
   parenting. Yet perhaps the villain should be the system of family dynamics where there is miscommunication
   between brothers and with God. In the movie Cal = Cain will scream over and over: Talk to me!! In the Biblical
   story communication patterns are very troubled.]

b. If the students read the novel, then ask: How do we turn prize winning novel of 650 pages
   over two generations into a two hour tight popular movie? Do any of the characters have to
   be changed, nuanced, shaded? Should some characters be cut? Why was that done? [For
   example, Kate's character has been substantially 'sweetened', which makes her more balanced and constitutes
   an improvement in realism on the original novel's caricature of this woman as a serpent as in the Garden of Evil.
   Some biographers claim she represents Steinbeck's wife who was divorcing him at the time. The screenwriter
   also drops Lee the Chinese servant who is the philosopher of the movie and transfers her wisdom to Abra who
   is not a central character in the novel. This provides what every American movie needs – a strong romantic
   interest, but also provides a very positive and nuanced female figure opposite Kate].

c. If the students have not read the novel, ask them how they would translate the Biblical tale
   directly into a modern movie set in America: How will the murder weapon and the murder
   scene be portrayed? Will it be portrayed as accidental or premeditated? What mood and
   weather conditions?
   What dialogue must be written between the brothers just before the murder? How can the
   God figure be portrayed on screen? (Recall the solution in Prince of Egypt). What modern version
   of the Cain and Abel rivalry captures the jealousy? (perhaps competing movie leads, lawyers, two
   brothers competing for their father's love in the cattle business as cowboys etc)
d. Will this movie have a happy ending, even though it involves fratricide? Can this lead anywhere positive? Is this a tragic movie or an ultimate triumph of teshuvah and learning from tragedy?

Materials that went into the final version of this film.

Explain that there are a number of layers that lie behind the film's finished product: The original biblical story. Generations of parshanut, both Jewish and Christian, including both literary commentators and visual (artistic) commentators. Steinbeck's book. The screenplay based on the book. The director's work on the script to transform it into the medium of film. (This includes camera work, lighting, scenery selection and creation, costume, music etc). Finally there is the interpretation of the actors. (In this film for example, James Dean gave an extraordinarily nuanced performance which includes some spontaneous extemporizing not written into the script. All of these layers come together to create the film that we see).

Directorial decisions: Casting etc.

Ask the students to suggest contemporary actors for a modernized version of Cain and Abel. Remember the Tanakah gives us no visual clues of age, hair color, body build etc. Who would they choose and why? (For example, do you choose Al Pacino for Cain, then who would Abel be? Woody Allen? Pairs of actors must fit together. If Nicholas Cage is Cain, then is the movie going to be about Cain as villain as hero or victim? What woman can play Abra in contrast to Kate?)

Ask them to watch the actors very carefully and to see whether the choices made by Elia Kazan worked well together.

Would the students have played any key scenes differently or put them in different settings? These are questions to be set up now and asked again at the end.

About the film. Basic information.

When made? Director/Producer etc. Length of film (1 hour 54 minutes)

Some background plot details to make it easier for them to understand the film as they view it and to start thinking in terms of interpretation.

Mention that the characters have come in the late 19th/early 20th century from the civilized but corrupted east coast to the pristine frontier west, seeking the good life in the new world of the “New World” of the New World. The family at the centre of the film, the Trask family, has left the city life and bought a ranch. But the mother (Kate) left the ranch after the birth of the twins, Aaron and Cal, to return to the corrupt city and become a prostitute and work her way up to be the prosperous owner of a brothel in the city of Monterey over the mountains (a madam). Before she left, she shot her husband in the shoulder to escape his grasp. The father, Adam, was a broken man for many years after his wife's desertion, he lay “fallow out there on the ranch” and has only re-emerged in the last few years to a more active life, “to do something for progress, something for humanity before I die.” He told his children that their mother had died and he blames the scar on his shoulder on an old wound. He himself knows that this is not correct, but he has no idea where she is or what she does. He believes that she has moved back east.

The action starts after Cal has discovered from a chance conversation in a bar, where his mother is and what she does for a living. He hops a train to cross the mountains from his farming village of Salinas to seek knowledge about his mother. He is determined to talk with her.
ACT ONE: Introducing all the main characters and issues

From the opening of the movie until Cal is thrown out of his mother’s brothel (28 minutes)

"A" characters and "C" characters. Identifying and decoding.

Ask whether they have noticed anything about the names of the characters. Note the A and C motif based on the Torah. What is the author/director trying to say? Suggest the idea of "good" or innocent (Abel-like A) characters and "bad" (Cain-like C) characters. You might observe that the moment that you are introduced to an A character, there is a supposition of innocence. For example, Ann, the girl who works in the brothel, is an A character despite the fact that she is not central to the story. Abra is the pure and sweet girlfriend of Aaron. (In the novel Adam’s father is Cyrus and his half-brother who tries to kill him out of jealousy is Charles and Charles’s mother is Alice).

Does anything remind you of the Biblical story?

Are there any direct biblical hints?
Possibilities include: apple eaten by Abra, hiding in the trees, offerings from the land (beans), stern father, concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, dialogue of Cal saying “I don't know” to Adam/God asking him why he is upset and Adam emphasizing that a man has a choice…

Are there any repeated motifs or key text words?

Like biblical narrative the movie builds on leitmotif words (brother and face in Genesis 4) and repeating patterns (two brothers competing for parental favor in Genesis). In the course of the movie you may or may not notice the following.

Talk
Know/Understand
Hate and love.
Help
Good and bad. Conscience and kindness.
Roam (na v’nad) and take hold.
Offerings to the father for approval.
Throwing (stones at Kate’s house, sticks at Abra, ice down the chute, drunks out of the brothel)
Peeking (Kate through the white curtains of the house at Cal, Cal through the white blocks of ice at Abra and Aaron, Cal at his mother in her bedroom)

First Impressions: Analysis of key characters:
"A" characters: Aaron, Abra and Adam at the ice house scene

Aaron. Aaron is bright, optimistic and soon to go to college. He seems a paragon of all the virtues and his father's favorite; a “goody two shoes” wearing a tie, polite and very obedient of his father. He never swears but says “darn”. Innocent, pure and naïve - a priestly figure (Aaron the priest recalls the novel’s Aaron who is studying to be minister). Aaron talks of love for Abra but has a very pure, idealized and platonic idea of love and his “hot” love scene occurs in the icehouse. Abra is all over him but the kisses are only on the forehead and she holds him like a baby on her breast while humming a lullaby. Aaron fantasizes about her being a "perfect mother" – not a perfect lover – and Abra realizes that he has never known his mother and projects his idealized “memory” on his girlfriend. Aaron claims to love his brother and to understand him but he understands nothing.
Abra. Cute but not sexually seductive Abra is more virginal than the women who we will see hanging around with Cal. She is a polar contrast to Kate. She seems very virtuous; almost like a carbon copy of Aaron at this stage. She has internalized the same value system. However, she is not lacking in knowledge. She has insight into people and into the human condition as shown by her comment that Cal is not happy with his isolation, as opposed to Aaron who believes that Cal is happy being alone. Abra believes that nobody likes to be alone. Here she seems unconsciously to quote God who said about Adam – “It is not good for man to be alone.” In fact Abra’s red hair and her constant conversation about Cal shows her interest in his “scary” animal-like masculinity. She says the girls in class calls him the “prowler” (Caleb was a spy in Numbers 12) and he reminds her of “an animal.”

Adam. His character is righteous, moral, emotionally restrained, strong religious belief especially in terms of right and wrong. He belongs to the old school of parenting expecting Cal to apologize for staying out all night and condemning his rebellious teenage city-ways – smoking at the ice house and almost causing an explosion, dressed in slovenly way. Cal represents the opposite of the ideal movie image of the teenager – Mickey Rooney. Hence Adam rejects Cal as his son and prefers Aaron – just as God preferred Abel to Cain. Adam claims that he has always understood Aaron but never understood Cal. (Later we see that ironically Cal understands his father who experienced failure, as did Cal, in a way Aaron could never understand him).

The Bible never fully rationalizes God’s rejection of Cain and his offering, but the movie does. Adam rejects condemns Cal’s ideas of making money with beans based on going to war, for that is immoral and selfish. Adam is non-materialistic, he wants to contribute to the community/mankind after lying fallow for so many years after he was shot by Kate and after he himself died inside. Aware of his mortality he wants to do something for progress, to feed fresh vegetables to people in New York City. He has an idea to keep something good – fresh lettuce - by keeping it cold. Sam the business man prefers Cal’s ideas and pleads for understanding for Cal, but to no avail.

"C/K" characters: Kate, Cal.

Cal and Kate (or Cathy as she is called in most of the book but not the film, which only shows her as an older woman who now calls herself Kate) are the two C characters.

Cal is sometimes withdrawn and moody but he also high spirited, flirtatious and adventurous. He has “nerve” and he is often called “crazy” - a kind of vitality like the yetzer hara of libido, a leavening agent, that the Rabbis in their midrash on Genesis 4 say keeps the world going – keeps competition alive, builds houses, hatches eggs and promotes marriage. But there is a darker side to him: Cal prowls, peeking at the loving couple in the ice house and grows hot with anger and picks up an ice pick to throw down the ice in frustration at his father but also in jealousy of his brother’s love and companionship with Abra.

Kate, shown from the beginning of the film dressed in black, is a forbidding figure, who arouses little sympathy, certainly in this opening piece. She is concerned only with money and even at the bank she is extremely unpleasant to the tellers. She seems to embody only the negative and her role as the madam of the brothel, certainly taints her with associations of corruption and evil. She is the target of gossip by “decent” citizens as is shown clearly here, but she also commands
respect as the scene in the bank makes clear, and perhaps a little envy, as her interaction with the
Cal goes in search of something good in his mother which will also be the source of good in
himself, since as Cal says: "There is only a certain amount and good and bad you get from your
parents and I got the bad." So when Cal goes to the bar to interrogate Ann the barmaid about
Kate, he searches for something good. Ann has nothing good to say because Kate is harsh and
the people she works with fear her. Ann says: "Kate will throw me out on my ear." Even Cal's
hope to see the beautiful maternal hands his father told him of is disappointed when he sees she
has inherited arthritis from Kate's mother. When Cal kneels at her feet like the Madonna (she is
now dressed in white), he begs her: Talk to me! But she throws him out – in effect exiles him
again - and scowls at him from the door, as the bouncer tears his clothes and bruises his forehead
(perhaps reminiscent of the mark of Cain). Afterwards Cal interrogates the sheriff to see if there
is any good in Kate. The Sheriff (like Adam) concludes that there is hate not goodness or
kindness or conscience in Kate – unlike Adam who is the paragon of virtue for the sheriff. Nor,
says the sheriff, did Adam ever give Kate cause to abandon the children and to shoot him. Kate
is malevolent without any reason. Kate is first presented in the movie as she is in the novel: "I
believe there are monsters born in this world to human parents … psychic as well as physical
monsters… Cathy would have been called 'possessed by the devil' and she would have been
burned as a witch for the good of the community in a different age." (East of Eden, p. 72)

Analysis of scene: the Bible reading scene.

The Bible reading scene is perhaps the strongest emotional and philosophical scene of the first
part of the film. The centre of the scene is a confrontation between Adam and Cal. This single
scene has two sub-scenes which are differentiated from each other by a different tilt of the
camera. In the first part of the confrontation Adam accuses Cal. The father has the upper hand
and therefore the camera looks up at Adam the God-like accuser from below while it looks down
on Cal whose face is fallen from slightly above. In this part of the scene, Adam attempts to get
Cal to confess his guilt and atone for that guilt.

Initially Adam echoes God’s words in a gentle understanding – perhaps overly psychological -
way: "Why did you throw that ice down? Were you angry? (Genesis 4: 6) Were you afraid I
would punish you for not coming home? But Cal put his father off with a sarcastic echo of Cain’s
words: I don’t know (Genesis 4.9). I wanted to see it go down the chute.

In lieu of a direct confession, Adam tries a rather underhand indirect tactic by getting Cal to read
out the text of a confession of guilt and repentance in Psalm 32. In that way Adam hopes to hear
the words of repentance come from the mouth of Cal.

Cal foils this ploy by refusing to play along, beautifully symbolized by his insistence at saying
the verse numbers along with the words, thus distancing himself from the text reading as an act
of confession and turning it into an act of rebellion subverting the reading of the Bible.
Characteristically, Aaron is willing to read the text instead of Cal, but his father refuses. That
will not achieve the desired effect.

It is now that we get an outburst from Adam accusing his son of being bad, and although he takes
it back, the words are out and Cal has reframed it, affirming that he is indeed bad and that is his
nature and his inheritance from his mother. Adam tries to retract this idea, by affirming the idea
of free will – “A man’s got a choice. A choice is the difference between a man and animal” – and
the personal ability to make of one's life whatever one wants, but it does not bridge the gap
between father and son. Infuriated, Adam finishes his speech on responsibility by throwing at Cal the fact that the words are lost on him – “You’ll never remember!” There is no possibility of repentance (the Augustinian and Lutheran denial of human free will to do good after the Fall).

The second part of the scene is the direct continuation of the conversation but this time it is Cal on the offensive, accusing his father of hiding the truth about the boys' mother. He has caught his rigid moralizing father in a lie and he does not intend to give up his advantage easily. The camera angles place Cal above Adam whose head has now fallen as his son’s was previously. “Why didn’t you tell us that she’s alive?” says Cal. Adam's answer, “I thought that it would cause you pain” brings a cry of anger and derision from Cal who obviously believes that the knowledge of his mother's existence would have taken away a great deal of the pain and guilt that he has suffered from his father. His pain comes from his father's rigid value system, which works in favour of the innocent Aaron rather than the complex and tortured Cal. It is this scene that first sets up the direct confrontation between the two opposing characters and value systems. Whereas Adam opts for an "ignorance is bliss" approach, Cal opts for knowledge of the world. Adam stands for protection – especially of the beloved Aaron - while Cal stands for exposure.

Adam’s concern to avoid pain – knowledge, as Ecclesiastes teaches, is the source of pain – is in a sense a midrashic interpretation of why God prevents Adam and Eve from eating for the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil. Knowledge is painful and a loving parent wishes to protect the children from pain. (The Hebrew word for pain in Genesis 3 is itzavon which refers both to the labor pains in childbirth and pain in agricultural labor on an accursed land).

Finally Adam and Cal have begun to communicate honestly but when Cal probes: How did you get that scar on your arm? Adam does not admit the truth – that Kate shot him in her escape – but promotes the lie that he was injured in the Indian campaigns in the war. So Cal walks out even as Adam tragically and ironically echoes his son’s previous quest – “If you leave this room now, we may never be able to talk again.”

Analyzing the Scene in the Bar. Failing to develop an honest conversation with father, Cal exits the Bible reading scene, passes Abra chewing on her apple and hops a train (wandering and roaming) to eat from the Tree of Knowledge at the bar whose wooden sign says “K” for Kate’s Place and learn about his mother, his true origins. “I got to know who I am, I got to know what I’m like, I got to know.” In his first encounter he had thrown stones at Kate’s house and told Joe to tell her he hates her. But now Cal seeks to talk to her. He hopes that his connection to her will make up for his inability to please his father.

Cal slips into the bar as Joe bounces some drunk, out of money, just as the angels are God’s bouncers at the gates of the Garden of Eden. Cal shows he is grownup by his courage to enter the den of adult evils. He interrogates Ann the much exploited servant girl working for Kate – Is there anything good about her at all? No, Kate is mean, she will throw Ann out on her ear and even her beautiful hands that Adam recalled, are now covered by gloves for she has inherited from her own mother the dreaded arthritis.

When Cal sneaks into Kate’s bedroom to talk to her, we see a different picture – an angelic creature napping on her chair. She is dressed in light clothes, without the ever-present hat and gloves as part of her armour against the world. We see her lying in an intimate and yet vulnerable position as Cal falls to her feet like a Christian worshipping an angelic Madonna
instead of a Madam. But Kate wakes and calls Joe to throw him out violently. Cal gets a cut on his forehead (a mark of Cain?) and ends up in jail with the sheriff.
ACT TWO:
New aspects of the characters revealed as they are tested by events.

From the scene with the sheriff and Cal in the jailhouse to the dialogue of Kate and Cal who is borrowing money from his mother. (33 minutes)

Has anything changed in our perception of any of the main characters?

We suggest that the major characters begin to reveal extra dimensions that undermine the stereotypes created in the first part.

Analysis of coal chute/field scene.

This scene shows us that Cal is trying to change his ways and to work extremely hard to promote the success of Adam's lettuce scheme. The sheriff had told Cal that his father was a good man – filled with conscience and kindness that his evil mother lacked. Cal now sees his father as a vulnerable human being in his bathrobe singing a lullaby to the frozen lettuce that will be his contribution - before death - to progress. We are told specifically that Cal is working very hard, and we see him investing himself in order to be accepted by his father. This is the first offering as a man of the land (like Cain) and his initiative is symbolized by his appropriation of the coal chute to help the great enterprise. However, it all goes wrong when Aaron is the inadvertent agent of truth, who exposes to Adam, the source of the new chute. In a sense Cal can be seen to be attempting to perform an act of teshuvah with the coal chute for his misbehavior with the ice chute in the first part of the film. In any case, Aaron has delivered him to the self-righteous fury of his father who upbraids him publicly for his crime, orders him to replace the coal chute where he found it, and turns to Aaron to make him a new wooden chute in its place. His offering has been rejected. That of his brother has been accepted. This is second time that this will occurred (recall the ice house suggestion to plant beans).

Analysis of conversation in the field between Abra and Cal.

Abra has horizons and perspectives that go beyond the fixed universe of Adam and Aaron. She develops the initial empathy and sympathy for Cal that we saw in the ice house scene where she identified Cal’s loneliness and also her initial fascination with Cal’s animal vitality and sexuality. What is new is her history of conflict with her father. She reveals to Cal that she too, far from the image of the "good girl", has performed a very bad act (the throwing of her stepmother’s ring into the river out of jealousy for her father’s love) and that it came out of a deep misery caused by her feeling that her father had ceased to love her. Cal is fascinated by this new glimpse of his brother's girlfriend which adds perspective to his own situation. When Abra tells him that "Girls love their fathers terribly" he replies by asking "Do they?" - recognizing presumably that it is not just girls. He too is in the same position. Abra reveals to him the close connection between love and hate which occurs when love is rejected and emphasizes that she believes she should have been thanked rather than punished for the act that appeared to be destructive and an act of hatred, but was really an expression of the deepest love. Cal begins to feel that perhaps he has an ally, one who comes exactly from that most unexpected of places, the camp of the enemy, the camp of purity. Cal begins to eat out of her hand (the leitmotif of a woman feeding and enlightening a man under a tree in the field) and to accept her flirtatious playing with his hair and face with a flower. Abra has revealed herself to Cal, both of them become allies against their fathers' lack of love (Abra's in the past, Cal's in the present)
But Cal turns cold and angry and sullen: *I don’t have to explain anything to anybody* when Abra offers her solution to the problem of parents. Abra maintains that she "*still understands kids better than grown ups.*" This perhaps hints at a systemic problem in society: the twofold sin of the parents in the children's eyes is a their emotional preference for others (for Abra’s step mother or for Cal’s brother Aaron) as well as their inability to understand their angry children’s point of view. Rebellion and acts of hatred are the proper response to the parents' failings, according to Abra who is assuming the role in this film of a wise social commentator, explaining the needs of the younger generation to the older one. Abra said she solved her relationship with her father by *forgiving him for not understanding her.* She proves herself to be mature, grownup, by understanding the endemic obtuseness of parents. But Cal will not forgive.

Abra has revealed not only mature wisdom but also a desire for sexual knowledge. She cannot ask Aaron about it but she can – and does – begin to hint to Cal about her curiosity for "the other girls" like Lilly (Lillith?) Cal’s Mexican girl. Lilly burns with jealousy as she eats and then throws away her apple as she sits under another tree in the field watching Abra and Cal flirt. Abra in the field has shown that she is far from the Abra identified with Aaron that was shown in the first scene.

**Adam** also shows a softer side as he sends off the train with the lettuce to the East and jokes at the expense of the mechanic teaching him to drive. But he is revealed most when the train is stopped by snowslide, the lettuce rots and he jokes bitterly at his own expense that *I guess I bit off more lettuce than I could chew. It was presumptuous of me to think it would be I.* Naïve Aaron misunderstands his father completely when he says: *I thought he would be upset?* But Cal knows him to be a failure like Cal has been all his life. *Oh, you don’t understand him.* Cal’s newfound empathy for his vulnerable father reflects Abra’s insights. Ironically Cal has reversed Adam’s statement at the icehouse: *I have never understood that boy – Cal - but Aaron I have understood all his life.* Cal is really closer to Abra and to Adam than Aaron will ever be.

So Cal goes off to find a way to save his father all he has lost in the lettuce business. That takes him to the businessman Sam and back to the beans idea that was rejected at the ice house. The “fruit of the soil” will be his next offering to his father but first he must first solicit his mother’s help to redeem his father.

**Kate** now undergoes a profoundly positive development in the eyes of the viewer. It is worth pointing out here that this transformation is foreign to the book, where Steinbeck has portrayed her very clearly as the human embodiment of absolute evil – murder, violence and deep, deep cruelty – a woman with no redeeming characteristics.

**Analysis of the Conversation between Kate and Cal.**

**How has Kate been humanized?**

1- Kate is now happy to talk with her son and Kate cares for her son enough to help him with a loan. Kate really loves Cal but she only speak guardedly about his being a likeable young man. She sees Cal as her son in his character.

2- Kate is a good business woman who can survive in a harsh world. Unlike her husband the idealist failure, she knows reality and trumpets it honestly without the hypocrisy of the people at city hall who creep to the brothel in the darkness of night. Her sense of humor is her ability to see the hypocritical irony in borrowing her “dirty” money to save her husband his purity.
3- Kate is herself a victim, a victim of the rigidity of Adam's value system and the supposition that he could 'imprison' her in his Eden-like ranch. Cal had asked the sheriff what Adam had done to her and now we know. He wanted to dominate her and she has fought for her freedom. Nobody holds me.

4- Kate is a liberated woman, not a fallen woman. She has rejected mothering for a career. She is a brave and defiant woman. If God in the Garden condemned woman to be ruled by men (yimshol) because of female desire for men (Genesis 3: 16), she has shown that men’s desire for women’s body that allow women to rule them. She is a powerful woman in a man's world. She has inverted the usual power relationships and is now a power of her own, holding the key to men's desires.

5- She stands for a freedom that both Adam and the society would deny her, But she is tragic in the choice she has made. She has achieved her independence at the price of experiencing love. When Cal comes back towards her after receiving the check to embrace her, she chases him away crying out in self-defense – Get out. I have a business to run and spinning the tumblers of her safe that keeps her feeling locked up so that love will never enslave her.

Read a piece of the brilliant dialogue created for this scene:

Kate: Your father still thinks he's living in the Bible...
Cal: I don't like the ranch...
Kate: You take after me...It makes me mad just to think about the ranch...
Cal: Why did you shoot him and why did you leave us? He loved you didn’t he?
Kate: Love?? …I shot him because he tried to stop me…He tried to hold me. Nobody holds me. He wanted to own me... Nobody tells me what to do...Always so right himself. Maybe you are more like me. You know what I'm talking about. You don't fall for that slop. Maybe you know what people are really like, what they really want...

This is a terrible condemnation of the life that we normally think of as virtuous and desirable. This is a bankrupt and rigid Eden that must be fought by all those who search for freedom. It reveals Adam as a jailor and Kate as the brave heroine of a fight for freedom against male and societal repression.

The development in Kate's character helps us view both Cal and Adam in deeper ways. Adam is seen as less of a paragon of virtue than we have been led to believe up to now. As opposed to the glowing report that Cal received of his father's character from the sheriff in an earlier scene, he now realizes that there are cracks in the image of his father, or at least that there is a different way of looking at his father. He recognizes that he too is a victim of his father in exactly the same way as his mother before him. The father's righteousness can be read as a strangling self-righteousness. It cannot be stressed to strongly how much this presentation changes the angle of vision of the novel. It provides a broadening of the picture that we received in second half of the Bible reading scene, where Adam found himself on the defensive against the attack that Cal made on him for his value system. Here we have a stronger condemnation of the results of that value system.

By this point in the film, most of us will feel that our sympathies are firmly with Cal. He might be a rebel against the system but he is clearly presented as a rebel with a cause, and a rightful
cause at that. It is as if our vision is being tilted against Adam the same way that it was physically tilted against him in the Bible reading scene.
ACT THREE: The outcomes - happy endings?

From Cal’s entry to the bean business to the end of the movie. (53 minutes)
(To shorten the film you may skip the beginning of ACT THREE which describes the excitement over World War I and then the pain of the fallen soldiers and disillusionment. Begin with the amusement park scene of Cal and Abra until the end).

American Historical Background

Why is the movie set on the background of the frontier in California and World War I?

The answer is that Americans in general and John Steinbeck in particular understand American history as a recapitulation of Biblical themes of the Promised Land, the Garden of Eden.

Herman Melville, author of Moby Dick, 1849, wrote: We Americans are the peculiar chosen people – the Israel of our time. We are driven to a rejection of the maxims of the Past... escaped from the house of bondage. Israel of old did not follow after the ways of Egypt.

Ronald Reagan in his TV debate with Jimmy Carter said: This land was placed here by some divine plan. It was placed here to be found by a special kind of people, a new breed of humans called “American”... destined to begin the world over again and to build a land that will be for all mankind a shining “city on a hill.”

John Steinbeck, whose grandparents were religious Protestants, saw East of Eden as a paradigmatic myth of America. America is the search for new Promised land leaving behind the corruption of Europe. Then the westward frontier movement to California was an attempt to regain that innocence after the corruption of the East Coast city culture. However as Steinbeck makes explicit in his diary written during the writing of the book, America brought the serpent and Tree of Knowledge within it to its new garden. Human evil in the Protestant tradition is inescapable because of original sin. The farmers of the West led by William Jennings Bryan sought to liberate America from the its cross of gold instituted by the bankers of the East. Later Prohibition in the 1920s grew out of this same impulse. President Woodrow Wilson inspired Americans to fight a war for democracy to save Europe in 1917. However Americans felt as the war took its terrible toll in casualties that they had lost their innocence, that they had been entangled with the Old Europe they wanted to escape and that at home American munitions dealers out for a quick profit – money for blood – had foisted the war on naive Americans.

Thus the movie contrasts farmers and city folk, peace and the corruption of war, America and Germany. Adam represents that naive moralism when he attributes war to city folk, and saying that the war in Europe is responsible for the lawless theft of the coal chute. Adam, though a harsh father, has an important moral point to make war profiteers like Sam and his partner Cal. Sam’s capitalism is exploitive. Cal’s gift of beans is not rejected on the whim of a tyrannical father. But what will remain of morality after we come face to face with the evil impulses within us? Cal’s journey to self-knowledge is not only his maturation project but all of America’s. Cal continues Cain’s journey from a farmer to a wanderer (“Does your father know you roam around here at night?” asks the sheriff to Cal) to a war profiteer (Tubal-Cain) who makes metal instruments like weapons.
Analysis of the scene of the Ferris wheel conversation between Abra and Cal.

Cal is out at the amusement park, another Garden of Eden, like the German immigrant Gus’ rose garden and like Adam’s ranch. Each garden has its own snake – Kate that destroys the ranch and its idyllic family, German atrocities and American prejudice that destroy the rose garden, and sexual jealousy between brothers that undermines the amusement park pleasures. Abra has never been “out here in an amusement park before.” But Cal will show her around – he will be her snake, her path to enlightenment (just as he offered her a stolen black licorice under the tree at the war parade.

The centre of this extraordinary conversation is Abra's revealing of herself as a much more complex character than we have previously seen (although we have had intimations of that in the first conversation with Cal). Abra, by trying to fit herself into the worldview of Aaron and Adam, has betrayed much of her true nature. She reveals herself as a girl who is tortured by her understanding of the distance between the idealized image that Aaron demands that she lives up to, and her real self. It is revealed most clearly in the parts of the dialogue in which she talks about her concept of good and of love. We quote from her dialogue with Cal.

Abra: [referring to Cal’s coquettishly dressed Mexican girlfriend] What are girls like that like?...Why do you go out with them? Is it because you are bad? Are you bad?

Cal: Do you think I'm bad?

Abra: I don't know what's good and what's bad. Aaron's so good and I'm not – not good enough for Aaron anyway...I know love is good the way that Aaron says, but it's more than that. It's got to be...Sometimes I think I'm really bad…That's what he's in love with. It's not me at all 'cause I'm not a bit like that...

Cal is the only one she can talk to since he is the only one in her circle who also has connections to that great tempting and real world outside. She is curious about sexuality (and ashamed of her curiosity) and unsatisfied by the platonic nature of her relationship with Aaron, who she realizes, sees her as a kind of substitute mother, fashioned out of his image of his mother as an eternally young angel. The scene sees her caught between the two worlds to both of which she wants in some deep part of her, to belong. She kisses Cal but protests unconvincingly that she loves Aaron. Abra has blossomed into a full three dimensional personality of great depth, once again a far cry from the virtuous and seemingly rather superficial girl of the first scenes.

However Abra has also emerged as the bone of contention between the brothers. Like the Midrash on Cain and Abel’s dispute about access to their mother or their twin sister the story becomes a classic romantic triangle. But in the background it is still a struggle for parental love – both of mother and of father. Abra is the stand-in for the mother. Yet Abra is also the mediator helping to bring Cal back to his father.

Analysis of scene of the Birthday Offering to Adam/ God – Round Three - What is the moral dilemma?

Cal throws a surprise birthday party for his father in which he plans together with Abra to upstage Aaron by replacing the lost lettuce money with the bean money and prove “who Adam’s real son is.” However as in the offerings in the Bible Abel/Aaron upstages his brother when “he
too brought” from the best of the flocks. Aaron offers a “good life” – marriage with Abra. Adam rejects both Cal and his gift.

**James Dean’s Unpleasant Surprises.** In the movie James Dean improvises from time to time without the knowledge or consent of the other actors – especially Raymond Massey, the conservative Canadian playing Adam. In the Bible reading scene Dean curses under his breath adding personal anger to Massey’s role as the stern father. In the birthday scene after Massey rejects the money and Dean turns to go out the door, Dean comes back again to forcibly embrace Massey who is stone cold with this unexpected show of intimacy.

Adam's self-righteous rejection of his son's third offering of the produce of the land (the birthday gift of money from the beans), shows us very clearly the ideological inhumanity of the man. His principles are lofty and we can understand and maybe agree with his motives for refusing the money, but the sheer insensitivity of the action, of the way in which he ignores and then rejects his son, the cold correctness of his explanation (remember – cold is good!), now put him in a negative light. His morality seems pompous, a far cry from our response to the good man we encountered in the first part of the film. His moral advice – “give me a good life like your brother” – recalls God advice to Cain – “if you do better, there will be uplift.” The father’s openness to repentance does not take into account the pain of the rejection.

Yet we also come fully to understand the rejection of the offering which makes logical and moral sense to Adam. The callous immorality of the war profiteers, the desire of Cal for love combined with his disregard for how he affects others (for example, stealing the coal chute) makes Cal an exploiter, not just an innocent victim. The background of the war and America’s loss of innocence as it returns to Europe is the mythic national backdrop of the family story.

Now Aaron joins the father in berating Cal and in forbidding Abra from ever talking to him again. Here Cal decides to reveal the truth of his mother to Aaron.

**Analysis of the scene of the swing near the house**

**Cal tries to follow in his mother’s footsteps.** He swings back and forth as it says *na v’nad* – wandering and roaming. (Coincidentally, the modern Hebrew word for a swing comes from this verse). Cal is the ultimate victim of his father's personality and actions. He has paid a terrible price for the varied ways in which he does not fit into his father's world. He reminds his father of his mother, the mother whom Adam is determined to cast out of his mind, the one Adam never forgave himself for loving. Cal now decides to take the money and leave Salinas, his father’s home, the garden of Eden, so he will act like his mother, with her sense of independence and need for freedom, and he sees the world in more complex ways than the moralizing Adam, with his biblical view of the world, permits. But like his mother he must write off love for freedom. “I tried to buy your love. Now I don’t want it... I don’t want any kind of love [referring to Abra’s love]. It doesn’t pay.” Adam says 'let him go' just as the sheriff reads him Genesis 4 about Cain’s exile East of Eden. But Abra won’t let Cal go, she will mediate, she will not let him give up on love and nurse his sense of rejection forever for “Cal will never be whole and strong,” never be free until he works through his relation with his father.
THREE CONCLUDING QUESTIONS at the End of the Film

a. Why does Aaron enlist if he is a pacifist?

Aaron enlists because he had seen that his entire world has broken down and there is no point in going forward with his world of shattered ideas. He had believed in his perfect dead mother but now she is revealed as a whore. Note that Aaron’s features are ironically those of his mother as Cal comments. To be pushed on top of his mother by Cal is like a Freudian act of Oedipal sexuality (Freud was popular in early 1950s America). The purity of Aaron the priest is irremediably sullied for he has her original sin in him. The only option for him is to court death and he does it in a way that makes it clear that his world has collapsed around him: by dying for a cause in which he does not believe and which he formerly would have fought against with all his power, given his pacifist ideals. The enlistment provides an external confirmation of his inner collapse. As the sheriff says, Aaron has gone crazy, gotten drunk, gotten into some fights and seems bound to get himself killed. From a Biblical point of view Aaron has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge and it has brought him death through a woman for he cannot accept the mixture of good and evil implicit in the tree and in human life after the Fall.

b. What is Abra’s role in the movie and in particular in the last scene?

Abra is:
(1) the bone of contention between brothers;
(2) the plot focal point for the viewer who follows her as she moves from Aaron to Cal;
(3) the philosopher who explains to Adam that people who are not loved feel hate, just as she explained to Aaron that Cal does not want to be alone;
(4) the psychologist trying to model for Cal how to rebel but then forgive one’s parent’s obtuseness and become truly grown up;
(5) the mediator seeking Adam’s reconciliation with Cal by asking him to “do for you” – to give Cal a mitzvah of teshuvah, so he can prove his love and earn his father’s respect, not his father’s paternalist moralizing forgiveness;
(6) the prize of a happy ending – a loving relationship with a supportive and wise woman unlike Kate or the nurse

c. What is the role of the nurse in the last scene?

From the functional point of view it could be said, correctly, that the nurse provides almost a comic relief against which the stark emotionalism of the final scenes becomes even sharper. The few moments that she is on screen, enable us to collect ourselves before we re-enter the drama.

However, there is another reason that comes from the internal logic of the film rather than the needs of the rhythm of the script. It is only the realization of how much he dislikes the nurse that gives Adam the idea of asking for something genuinely useful – something that he really wanted – that he could ask from Cal. He has accepted Abra's idea of the need to ask something of his son, to ask for help. But Cal is world-wise and has had some major disappointments in the past whenever he has tried to bring something to his father in the form of some kind of an offering. Twice he has been badly rejected by his father and the rejections have come close to breaking his
spirit. He still wants to make an offer that could buy or at least be the vehicle for his father's love for him. But it must be genuine: it must be something that Adam really needs. Only that will prove to Cal that he has really been accepted. The nurse's presence (and imminent departure) fills that role perfectly.

Adam’s sarcastic attitude to the nurse brings him closer to his son. They both hate the nurse, they both make jokes at her expense as they did at the expense of the mechanic in the only scene where Cal says his usually moralistic father has made a joke – a joke another annoying person’s expense. Adam is human, he is not pure “conscience and kindness” – he is like his son Cal.
Back to the Biblical Text:
The Art of the Screenwriter - specific interpretative questions:

Up to now we have started all of our analysis with the film and have moved, where appropriate from the film back to the Bible. But let us illustrate the opposite way of looking at this by taking the biblical text as our retrospective departure point and seeing how the text functions directly as a midrash to suggest answers to particular issues and questions. If we take three important questions that come out of the text, what strategies has the book/film devised to deal with these questions?

**a. What is the murder weapon?**

Here the film offers a fascinating and novel perspective. What kills Aaron, according to the film, is knowledge. It is the failure to bridge the gap between his mother's real existence and the ideal picture that he has built up his head and which has served to underpin and sustain his entire life, which kills him. The world that he had inherited from his protective father was an insular world of ideals that created a basis for his own way of life, but which could not support an interaction with the harsh truths of real life. Cal forces that door open, knowing in his jealousy, that the consequences would be in some way, very difficult for Aaron to cope with. The confrontation with the world outside (East of Eden) is what kills Aaron. He can live in Eden, but he is not equipped to deal with the real world outside. His father, protecting him from all unpleasantness as much as he can, has created a psychic illusory state which can only be sustained by a retreat from the real world. When the real world enters in too harshly, the dissonance can kill. Cal might have been suspecting that this would cause a breakdown of some kind or other. He presumably was not expecting quite the dire results that occurred and which would lead to Aaron's death. We can suggest that this murder was not premeditated.

**b. What did Cain say to his brother Abel before the murder?**

Note that the scene takes place in a field under the tree!

The dialogue is as follows:

*Cal:* You want to go someplace with me Aaron? I’ve got something to show you. You’ll find it very interesting.

*Aaron:* I’m not afraid to look at anything that you can show me.

*Cal:* Can you look at the truth? Just once? You can look at the truth just once, can’t you?

This is a brilliant dialogue. It fits beautifully into the film's moral structure. The conversation is about knowledge, but note that at the back of the conversation stand two women. In the foreground, a witness to the exchange between the brothers, and in a sense a prize in the battle between the brothers, stands Abra. In the background, unbeknownst to Aaron, but in the centre of Cal's concerns, stands Kate. It forms an interesting parallel, from that point of view to the suggestion from the multi-layered text in Genesis Rabbah that the two boys argued over their sister or their mother.
Conveniently the answer to the question – what is the murder weapon and what did Cain say to Abel - is identical. He told him the truth and that killed him rather than liberating him and helping him mature as it ultimately did for Cal thanks to Abra.

c. What is the sign (mark) of Cain in the film?

The motif of the scar – the mark – plays a large role in Steinbeck’s book (several of the characters, including Kate, are facially marked in one way or other) but no real part in the film. True, Adam carries the mark of the wound that he received from Kate, but that functions in the main to drive home the fact that he is enmeshed in a lie to his sons. It is perhaps more meaningful to see the mark or the sign of Cain in another context. In the climax to the film, in the sick Adam's bedroom, Abra, in tears, begs the old man to repent of his harshness and to show a “sign” that he needs his son. The mark of his reconciliation and repentance will be this: "a sign."

"You never gave him your love. You never asked him for his. You never asked him for one thing. You have to give him some sign that you care for him. If you could ask him for something or let him help you so that he knows that you love him or let him do for you."

The sign (which Adam ultimately gives) is both the agent of his repentance and the vehicle of Cal's redemption. This, the film is saying, is the real mark of Cain which in the Bible is not actually a stigma but a protective mark that signals that God still cares for Cain even after the murder.

What is the film saying? What is the midrashic "take" of the film?

Perhaps the easiest way to précis this is to look at the title of the book (chosen very carefully by Steinbeck, as his diaries reveal). The original intention was to call the book Salinas Valley, but as the book grew in scope and in ambition, it was seen that to call it by the name of one place would be too limiting. A larger title was needed and Steinbeck found it in the biblical story. The title East of Eden has a certain dynamic quality to it. Implicit in the name is a tension between Eden (Salinas Valley) and the area outside. It is not called "Eden". It is not about Eden. It is about the tension between those who would live, sheltered in the moral certainties of Eden and those who would live outside, embracing the real world, with all its complexities, ambiguities
and moral compromises. The title, it seems, suggests that there will always be tension between Eden and out-of-Eden, between ideal and reality, but that humanity ultimately has to learn to live in the world, East of Eden, embracing the ambiguity of life. To do so is to reject "the earth and the fullness thereof".

The idea of rejecting predestination and of accepting responsibility for life choices is ultimately emphasized at the end of the film, when Cal refers back to the earlier conversation over the Bible and shows his father that the lesson was not lost on him. "You see. I do remember."

Theologically the book and the film reject original sin which is inherited from one’s parents’ sins. They assert along with God in Genesis 4:7 that humans are defined by free will – choice – even the ability to control the emotions of shame, rejection, jealousy. But that freedom first presupposes knowledge – knowledge about where we came from. Knowledge of good and evil as intertwined. Human beings therefore need not unconditional forgiveness or grace in the Christian sense but an opportunity for reconciliation based on mitzvah, based on a mark of love, help they can offer one another as Abra dos to Cal and Cal to his father. We all wish for that love earned through our offerings of our self.

John Steinbeck presents us a Cain, the primal murderer, who is neither an anti-social animal nor a malevolent devil nor a romantic rebel nor a pathetic abused victim. In his diary written about the novel he muses:

In uncertainty I am certain that underneath their topmost layers of frailty, men want to be good and want to be loved. In deed most if their vices are attempted shortcuts to love.

Appendix:
Quotes from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* that comment on Genesis 4:

*How is Cain an archetypal story for us all?*

".....one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest story of all - the story of good and evil, of strength and weakness, of love and hate, of beauty and ugliness. I shall try to demonstrate to them how the doubles are inseparable- how neither can exist without the other and out of their groupings creativeness is born." (from Steinbeck's *Journal of a Novel*)

*Why is your face fallen?*

"Once a boy has suffered rejection, he will find rejection even where it does not exist - or worse, draw it forth from people simply by expecting it." (Narrator from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*)

*Why did God reject Cain's gift and accept Abel's?*

ed "No, I don't want it ever. I would have been so happy if you could have given me - well, what your brother had- pride in the thing he's doing, gladness in progress. Money, even clean money, doesn't stack up with that .... If you want to give me a present -give me a good life. That would be something I could value." (Adam refusing Cal's offer of $15,000)

*Am I my brother's keeper?*
"Do you know where your brother is?" "No, I don't."
"He hasn't been home for two nights. Where is he?"
"How do I know? Am I supposed to look after him?"
(Adam asking Cal about Aron from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*)

*If Abel was killed, from whom do human beings today descend? From Cain?*

"Maybe it's true that we are all descended from the restless, the nervous, the criminals, the arguers, the brawlers, but also the brave and independent and generous. If our ancestors had not been that, they would have stayed in their home plots in the other world and starved over the squeezed out soil. We all have that heritage, no matter what land our fathers left. All colors and blends of American s have somewhat the same tendencies. And so we're overbrave and overfearful - we're kind and cruel as children. We're overfriendly and at the same time frightened of anger. We boast and are impressed. We're oversentimental and realistic. We are mundane and materialistic."
(Lee talking to Cal about the heritage of all Americans from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*)

*Does sin remove free will as Augustine and Luther say? Can we still rule over our instincts?*

"That makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win." (from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*)

*What is the mark of Cain? A curse or sign of forgiveness and protection?*

"Your son is marked with guilt out of himself - out of himself - almost more than he can bear. Free him! Don't crush him with rejection .... Let him be free. That's all a man has over the beasts. Bless him!" (Lee to Adam, from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, p. 602).

"The punishment of Cain is a perplexing one. Out of Eve's sin came love and death. Cain invented murder, and he is punished by life and protection. The mark put on him is not placed to punish him but to protect him." (from Steinbeck's *Journal of a Novel*)
SUMMING UP from the Director’s Point of View

Were the casting decisions successful? Were the directorial decisions successful?

This is something that the students should talk about. We suggest here that all members of the central cast do an excellent job. It is not easy to coax a series of performances from a group of actors each of whom (apart from Richard Davalos as Aaron) is given a character that grows and breaks initial stereotypes by the end of the film. The script sets up stereotypes in the first part of the film and breaks them by the end. The actors have to be able to convey that growth and complexity and it seems to us at least that they do, on the whole an excellent job.

The film is most famous as being the first of the three James Dean films and the only one actually screened before his death. This was the film that started his star rising to mythical heights as he was seen to stand for a disaffected generation that felt misunderstood and unappreciated by an older generation with whose values they did not necessarily conform. Dean's performance here is astonishing. The subtleties of his character depiction – at once wounded and vulnerable, brash and defiant, lonely and alienated and so, so needy of love – become increasingly clear with extra viewings of the film. The power of some of the moments is undeniable and perhaps all the more so in that they were extemporized on the set rather than being written into the script. The prime example of this is his throwing himself on his father after the latter's rejection of his offer of money. This was not planned and the surprised and appalled Raymond Massey (Adam) just manages to shout out his son's name twice, very, very stiffly. This is unquestionably one of the emotional highpoints of the film.

However Massey himself is also excellent as is Julie Harris (Abra) who makes the very convincing transition in her character that makes the whole story so interesting. The other major actor and actress, Richard Davalos as Aaron and Jo van Fleet as Kate are also very good indeed. They set a high standard indeed for the actors of the new film announced for 2006 to have to achieve.

In terms of the directorial decision, we will limit ourselves to one observation. The main decision concerns the creation of the script. Kazan and Paul Osborn, the scriptwriter, made the decision to cut the great sprawling novel wide open, to deal only with the stories of the last part of the current generation and to severely limit, in that generation, the number of central characters, so as to focus more specifically on the family. This caused all sorts of changes. We have mentioned the fact that in the book it was a Chinese servant-sage, Lee (of 'timshel' fame), who lends the money to Cal. Here it is Kate. In addition, Kate was changed into a far more three dimensional character, undoing the demonisation of her that Steinbeck had created. These are big decisions, which had to be initiated by Kazan. They are by no means inevitable but they unquestionably tidy up the vast sprawling character of the book and thus focus attention more clearly on the ideas and their solution. In that way, they might be said to have improved the book. They certainly provide a rich parshanut on the novel.
STUDY TEXTS: The Crisis of the Biblical First Family

By Noam Zion, Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem
Author of A Different Night: Family Participation Haggadah;
A Different Light: Hanukkah Seder;
A Day Apart: Shabbat at Home
A Night to Remember: Haggadah of Contemporary Voices zionsacs@netvision.net.il

Violence by David Suter, NY Times editorial
The Retrial of Cain – What is your Verdict?
The following report appeared in the Jerusalem Post in 1988.

**CAIN WAS NOT GUILTY.** It took a few thousand years to get it straight, but humanity's first (alleged) capital crime – Cain murdering his brother Abel – was finally retried. The acquittal came in a simulated trial held in Venice recently by lawyers, moral theologians, historians and anthropologists. The trial saw the defense successfully extricate the accused from the moral dictum in the Bible "Thou shalt not kill", with arguments about the psychological and sociological circumstances in which Cain slew Abel, of whom he was jealous.

Cain's defenders conceded that he did kill his brother but that it was unpremeditated and in the context of an economic power struggle between pastoralists and the first agriculturalists, Abel representing the former and Cain the latter. From this point of view, Cain's crime should be seen as "rightful" in terms of the "law" of the time, his lawyers maintained.

Defense and prosecution each called rabbis as witnesses. After an hour's deliberation, the jury pronounced Cain "not guilty" by a majority of five votes to four.

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The Power of a Story

*No story has power, nor will it last, unless we feel in ourselves that it is true and true of us…. I think this is the best known story in the world because it is everybody's story. I think it is the symbol story of the human soul…The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved and rejection is the hell he fears. … And with rejection - comes anger, and with anger - some kind of crime in revenge, and with the crime – guilt. And there is the story of mankind. … The human is the only guilty animal…Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul – the secret, rejected, guilty soul…. What a great burden of guilt men have!*

by John Steinbeck, author of the novel, "East of Eden" which was made into a movie made in 1953-1954. It was directed by Elia Kazan on the basis of the monumental novel of the same name by John Steinbeck that had been published in 1951. It is the first of the three films in which James Dean made his name and his myth. He would die in a car accident in 1955

**Genesis 4 – The First Siblings**
Adapted from Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*

The human knew Havva his wife,
She became pregnant and bore Kayin.
She said:  
*Kaniti/I-have-gotten a man, as has YHWH!*
[for God/ from God/ with God]
2 She continued bearing – his brother, Hevel.
Now Hevel became a shepherd of flocks, 
and Kayin became a worker of the soil.
3 It was after the passing of days 
that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to YHWH, 
4 and as for Hevel, he too brought 
– from the firstborn of his flock, from their fat-parts.
YHWH had regard for Hevel and his gift, 
5 for Kayin and his gift he had no regard.
Kayin became exceedingly upset and his face fell.
6 YHWH said to Kayin:
Why are you so upset? Why has your face fallen?
7 Is it not thus:
If you intend good, bear-it-aloft,
[If you do better, then there is uplift/forgiveness]
But if you do not intend good,
At the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon,
Toward you his lust –
But you can rule over him.
8 Kayin said to his brother Hevel …
But then it was, when they were out in the field
That Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother
And he killed him.
9 YHWH said to Kayin: Where is Hevel your brother?
He said: I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?
[Am I my brother’s keeper?]
10 Now he said: What have you done! A sound – your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil.
11 And now, damned be you from the soil which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.
12 When you wish to work the soil it will not henceforth give its strength to you; wavering and wandering must you be on earth!
13 Kayin said to YHWH:
My iniquity is too great to be borne! [Is my sin too great to be forgiven?]
## Genesis 4: Translators as Commentators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King James Version</th>
<th>New Jewish Publication Society, TANAKH</th>
<th>Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.</td>
<td>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.”</td>
<td>The human knew Havva his wife, She became pregnant and bore Kayin. She said: Kaniti/‘have-gotten A man, as has YHWH!</td>
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<td>2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.</td>
<td>2 She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.</td>
<td>2 She continued bearing – his brother, Hevel. Now Hevel became a shepherd of flocks, and Kayin became a worker of the soil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.</td>
<td>3 In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil;</td>
<td>3 It was after the passing of days that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to YHWH, from their fat-parts. YHWH had regard for Hevel and his gift,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering;</td>
<td>4 and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering,</td>
<td>5 for Kayin and his gift he had no regard. Kayin became exceedingly upset and his face fell.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.</td>
<td>5 but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell.</td>
<td>6 YWHW said to Kayin: Why are you so upset? Why has your face fallen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?</td>
<td>6 And the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you so distressed, And why is your face fallen?</td>
<td>7 Is it not thus: If you intend good, bear-it-aloft, But if you do not intend good, At the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon, Toward you his lust – But you can rule over him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.</td>
<td>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.”</td>
<td>8 Kayin said to his brother Hevel … But then it was, when they were out in the field That Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother And he killed him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.</td>
<td>8 Cain said to his brother Abel … and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him.</td>
<td>9 YHWH said to Kayin: Where is Hevel your brother? He said: I do not know. Am I the watcher of my brother?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I</td>
<td>9 The LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”</td>
<td>9 YHWH said to Kayin: Where is Hevel your brother? He said: I do not know. Am I the watcher of my brother?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?
10 And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth to me from the ground.
11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand;
12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield to thee its strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.
13 And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

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!”

10 Now he said: What have you done! A sound – your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil.
11 And now, damned be you from the soil which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.
12 When you wish to work the soil it will not henceforth give its strength to you; waivering and wandering must you be on earth!
13 Kayin said to YHWH: My iniquity is too great to be borne!
On the Birth and Parental Background of Cain.

Adam's Standpoint

Genesis 4:1 – Adam knew his wife – Eve –.

HA-ADAM YADA ET HAVA ISHTO

He knew how he had been robbed of his tranquility; he knew what Eve had done to him.

R. Aha observed: 'The serpent was your serpent and you were Adam's serpent.'

Bereishit Rabbah Ch. 22

ADAM RAISED A CAIN by Bruce Springsteen

In the summer that I was baptized,
My father held me to his side,
As they put me to the water,
He said how on that day I cried.

We were prisoners of love, a love in chains,
He was standin' in the door, I was standin' in the rain,
With the same hot blood burning in our veins,
Adam raised a Cain.

All of the old faces,
Ask you why you're back, they fit you with position,
And the keys to your daddy's Cadillac,
In the darkness of your room,
Your mother calls you by your true name,
You remember the faces, the places, the names,
You know it's never over, it's relentless
As the rain,
Adam raised a Cain.

In the Bible Cain slew Abel
And East of Eden he was cast,
You're born into this life paying,
For the sins of somebody else's past,
Daddy worked his whole life,
For nothing but the pain,
Now he walks these empty rooms,
Looking for something to blame,
You inherit the sins, you inherit the flames,
Adam raised a Cain.

Lost but not forgotten, from the dark heart
Of a dream,
Adam raised a Cain.
Eve's standpoint

AND SHE SAID: I HAVE ACQUIRED A MAN, etc.

R. Isaac said: "When a woman sees that she has sons, she says, 'Behold my husband is acquired in my hand." Bereishit Rabbah ch. 22

“I have acquired a man – ish - and God” (Genesis 4:1).

No place in the Bible is a one day old child called a “man”. Therefore I say that the “man” (ish) means “my man” (my husband), Adam. For after all that had befallen Adam on account of Eve, the events of the Tree of Life incident stood between them like a Satan. So Adam’s heart was not open to his wife as it once was “yesterday and the day before” (Gen. 31:2) due to the evil that she brought on him.

However when a male first born was born to Eve, she declared: “I have acquired my (husband’s) heart (again) for from now on he will relate to me as before. Typically the new mother is dear to her husband (as Leah the less loved wife of Jacob prayed after the birth of her firstborn son Reu-ben: atta yeh-havani ishi – “now my man will love me.” ”Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, meaning 'look it is a son,' for she declared, 'It means: the Lord has seen my affliction for now my husband (ish) will love me.” (Genesis 29:32).

And Eve added: “I have acquired God (again)” – for her birth (fulfilling God’s prescribed punishment of pain in childbirth) was a sign that her sin had now been forgiven.

Mikra Kifshuto, Arnold Ehrlich (1848-1918)

Erich Fromm, one of the great humanistic psychologists of the 20th century:

| The guilt feelings of the child who has not pleased his father or mother are very complex and hidden. Sometimes the guilt relates to the child's inability to love the parents sufficiently, especially if the parents expect to be the center of the child's emotional life. Sometimes the child feels that he has disappointed his parents' expectations. This is particularly true of the authoritarian family where demands are a central parental role. Nevertheless, despite the vast difference between the patriarchal Roman family head where the child is literally his property and the modern "patriarchs," there is still the persistent sense that children were brought into this world to give parents satisfaction and to compensate for their own disappointments in life. |
| Erich Fromm, "Man for Himself" |

Scrawled in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car by Dan Pagis, Israeli poet

here in this transport i eve
and abel my son
if you should see my older son cain son of man
tell him that i

Peter Pitzele, Our Fathers' Wells - Bibliodrama

In the Midrashic enactments I have guided, the build-up to the encounter of the brothers begins as Cain and Abel are moved in their manhood to bring offerings to the Lord. Cain, "in the course of time" comes first.

Who will be Cain? I ask. And almost always there is a long pause, for we have heard the story, and it takes a certain courage and energy for a person to dive deep enough to find and feel that part of himself. I wait.

After a while, several members of the group stand up - not all men - and step forward, often with a shrug or a sigh, an anxious glance. And who will be Abel? Again a pause; again there are volunteers. I need someone, too, to play God.

Why, I ask Cain when we have cleared a space in the center for our drama, why do you make an offering? Where does this idea come from?
The first Cain speaks. "So often I heard my parents speak of the garden. I could feel their longing. When it came time for me to contribute to the family, I became a tiller of the soil: I have tried to make a garden for them. It took time, but now I have plants and trees that yield good things to eat, and fruit. Yes, even fruit."

"In my heart," says another Cain, "I compete with God. This garden is my way to make a substitute paradise for my parents. I shall show God that we can bring forth abundance even out of the ground He cursed."

"I bring my offering to show God what I have done. I myself. It is a display of my power to understand the processes of nature, how to sow and plant and harvest."

"No, no, this is not true at all. This offering is not egotism; It is made in a gesture of peace and reconciliation. My father has not spoken to the Lord since he left Eden, but he has told me stories, and I hope that by my offering God will return to communicate with my parents!

And there is Abel, listening, eyeing his older brother from a distance.

Why, I ask, are you here?

"I too, must make some showing before the Lord. But what do I have? Nothing I have made with my hands, only what the Lord has given into my keeping. But among what I have I shall select the best."

And another Abel speaks: "There is a part of me that does not want to be left out of this. I am often alone on the hills with the flocks while Cain is close to home. Often I feel left out. But not now. What if the Lord appears and I am not there to see Him? Cain will get some reward, and I shall get nothing."

A third Abel speaks: "Out there alone on the hills I feel close to God. Especially at night under the stars. I hear things in the wind and see things glint and dart in the heavens, and my soul has been drawn out of me into that warm darkness. Many times I have felt a rapture. But never until I saw my brother bring his offering did I think to give something back to the infinite Mystery from which all life comes."

Silence. -The brothers, stand, at first attempting to ignore one another. We wait to see what will happen.

Spontaneously Cain turns. "Copycat," he says. "take your bleating sheep off somewhere else. This is my spot; it was my idea:"

"I can stand wherever I please. It's a free country." "Not here!"

"What a sorry-looking bunch of vegetables. That's sheep food."

"You let your sheep wander one more time into my garden, and I'll kill them."

"What do you know about butchering, garden man? I slaughter the sheep for our feasts, not you:"

"What else do you do with your sheep, boy, out there all by yourself?"

On the other side of this last insult are oaths, menace, and the threat of a premature enactment of what the myth delays until God has stepped in to tilt the balance. I hold the brothers apart and motion to the actor playing God. He enters and puts an arm around Abel and slowly draws him aside, and then both turn their backs on Cain. Abel, looking somewhat apprehensively over his shoulder, laughs. Nothing is said. The silence weighs on us as Cain, seeing God and Abel move aside, watches them for a moment, then looks down. His eyes are hooded, and he seems to be looking deep inside himself.

Turning to the group-as-audience I ask, "What do you imagine is going on inside Cain?"

"I hear the silent roar of his anger."

"I see him trying to figure out what he did wrong!"

"He's examining his whole life, searching for an answer."

"I feel him hating God."

"I see the wheels of revenge beginning to turn."

"He wants to punish God."

- "He feels he has lost his brother. He is alone."

And the text tells us that "Cain's countenance fell, and he was enraged."
Bruno Bettelheim

The Bible tells of God's demands on man. As the story of Cain and Abel shows, there is no sympathy in the Bible for the agonies of sibling rivalry - only a warning that acting upon it has devastating consequences.

But what a child needs most, when beset by jealousy of his sibling, is the permission to feel that what he experiences is justified by the situation he is in. To bear up under the pangs of his envy, the child needs to be encouraged to engage in fantasies of getting even someday; then he will be able to manage at the moment, because of the conviction that the future will set things aright. Most of all, the child wants support for his still very tenuous belief that through growing up, working hard, and maturing he will one day be the victorious one. If his present sufferings will be rewarded in the future, he need not act on his jealousy of the moment, the way Cain did.

Developing a Message: Taking a Tip from the Chassidim

The idea that each comment or midrashic statement or scenario is capable of providing a message is rarely shown better than in the specific layer of Hassidic midrash or story. The Chassidim were among the greatest of darshanim and parshanim and their use of the Biblical text to squeeze out contemporary messages for their times is almost unparalleled. As such it is useful to bring an example of the kind of way that they developed their insights from the texts. Let us take two small examples from the text that we are currently examining.

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger (1799-1866) was asked: What is the meaning of God asking Cain why his face has fallen? How could his face not fall since God had not accepted his gift? The Rabbi replied: God asked Cain, “Why has your face fallen? Because I did not accept your sacrifice or because I accepted your brother’s?”

Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim II, p. 308;

God did not ask Cain about his sins that had prevented his sacrifice from being accepted. Rather, he asked why Cain was drowning in grief. Excessive grieving over a transgression is worse than the transgression itself since it drags one into even more transgressions.

Rav Y. Y. Trunk of Kutno, 1820-1893

Cain was born screwed up

The real hero is Cain. The loser. In a world of five (God, Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel) four did not like him. I have no time for Rashi’s explanations or Cassuto’s. Cain was born screwed. The farmer as opposed to the shepherd. But God always loved shepherds. God knows how strong is the emotion of jealousy, and how destructive. It is the first feeling he put in nature. So what’s the big deal here? God drove Cain crazy. And never gave him a chance since he was born. I understand him. Jealousy, strong, barren, the most destructive of emotions. What did the poet Alterman say?

"If you ever laugh
Without me at a party of your friends,
My silent jealousy
Will burn your house down upon you".

I’m Cain. And how! So are you.

Yigal Tumarkin, Israeli artist

Why Did God Reject Cain and his Gift?

Cain’s offering was brought with impudence; Abel’s with humility.

(Zohar, Midrash HaNe’elam, late-13th c., Spain)
Or did God wish to make the point – even then – that injustice is inherent in the human condition?  

(Elie Wiesel, Messengers of God, p. 44)

Abel’s Indirect Responsibility for the Murder

7. Cain spoke to his brother, Abel. What did he say? We don’t know. Perhaps he simply repeated to him the words he had just heard. It hardly seems to matter. Cain, grief-stricken, wanted to, had to unburden himself. All he wanted was someone to talk to, to commune with. To feel a presence. And break his solitude. To have a brother, an ally when confronting God.

And Abel? Abel remained aloof. He did nothing to console his brother, to cheer him up or appease him. He who was responsible for Cain’s sorrow did nothing to help him. He regretted nothing, said nothing.

(Elie Wiesel, Messengers of God, p. 56f.)

8. The text is showing us that there was a breakdown in communication between the brothers. This breakdown led directly to Abel’s death.

(MeSHI – MeiShiloach, Rebbe Mordechai Lainer of Izbitz)
THE MISSING DIALOGUE BEFORE THE MURDER:
“CAIN SAID TO ABEL…” (Genesis 4: 8)

1. Why did Cain kill Abel? What do the missing words indicate about the reasons for the killing? Was the conversation that is hinted at by the text connected with the narrative of the story as it appears in the text?

2. Does the conversation that is hinted at here have wider implications for the human condition or does it only have meaning and ramifications for our understanding of the specific story that we are encountering here?

18th century Ladino commentary "MeAm Loez"

According to [one] opinion, the conversation was as follows: Cain suggested that they take a stroll in the fields, and when they were alone, he said, "It seems that God shows favoritism. That's why your offering was accepted and mine wasn't."
"Heaven forbid," answered Abel. "That's not true at all. I am better than you, and my offering was of higher quality. That's why it was accepted."
"There is no judgment! There is no Future World! Good people don't receive any reward, and the wicked receive no punishment," exclaimed Cain.
Abel replied, "You don't know what you're talking about! Of course God will give good reward in the World to Come. He will, also punish the wicked for their misdeeds."

This began a debate. But before long, tempers flared, and ....

MeAm Loez

CAIN SAID means that he told his brother about God's reprimand and he blamed him: "It's your fault etc," and got angrier and more upset. However, Cain did not attack Abel in his father's presence out of respect for [fear of?] his father. He kept his grudge until they were both together in the field – one grazing and one farming. Then Cain argued with Abel as a result of the anger and jealousy that he already harbored and killed him.

R. David Kimche

AND CAIN SPOKE TO ABEL He began an argument, striving and contending with him, to seek a pretext to kill him. There are midrashic explanations of these words but this is the plain meaning of the text.

Rashi

...In my opinion it is connected with the following words of the Torah:
" and it came to pass, when they were in the field," meaning that Cain said to Abel, "Let us go forth into the field" and there he secretly killed him.

Ramban
Midrash Rabbah:

AND CAIN SPOKE UNTO ABEL HIS BROTHER, etc. (Genesis 4:8).
About what did they quarrel? 'Come,' said they, 'let us divide the world.'
One took the real state and the other the movables [the sheep with their wool].
The former said, 'The land you stand on is mine,' while the latter retorted, 'What you are wearing is mine.' One said: 'Strip'; the other retorted: 'Fly [off the ground].' [Buzz off!] Out of this quarrel, CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL, etc.

R. Joshua of Siknin said in R. Levi's name: [No, there is another explanation based on the competition over their sacrifices to God]. Both took land and both took movables, but about what did they quarrel? One said, 'The Temple must be built in my area,' while the other claimed, 'It must be built in mine.' ...Out of this argument, CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL, etc.

Judah b. Rabbi said: Their quarrel was about the first Eve. Said R. Aibu [No! that is not possible], The first Eve had returned to dust. Then about what was their quarrel? Said R. Huna: An additional twin was born with Abel, and each claimed her. The one claimed: 'I will have her, because I am the firstborn'; while the other maintained: 'I must have her, because she was born with me.'

Cain spoke to his brother Abel. What did he say? We don't know. Perhaps he simply repeated to him the words he had just heard. It hardly seems to matter. Cain, grief-stricken, wanted to – had to – unburden himself. All he wanted was someone to talk to, to commune with. To feel a presence. And break his solitude. To have a brother, an ally when confronting God.

And Abel? Abel remained aloof. He did nothing to console his brother, to cheer him up or to appease him. He who was responsible for Cain's sorrow did nothing to help him. He regretted nothing, said nothing.

Elie Wiesel

Cain tried to speak to Abel, but the words wouldn't come.

Sandy Eisenberg Casso

Cain and Abel, a misunderstanding of love.
Cain just wanted to hug him hard
And strangled him. Neither of them understood.

Yehuda Amichai
ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY? CAIN – “who? me?”

AND THE LORD SAID UNTO CAIN: WHERE IS ABEL? This may be compared to a prefect [policeman] who was walking in the middle of the road, and found a man slain and another standing over him. "Who killed him?" he asked? "I'll ask you [that question] instead of you asking me," answered the other man. "You have answered nothing," said [the policeman].

Again, it is like the case of a man who entered a garden, and gathered mulberries and ate them. The owner of the garden went after him, demanding, "What are you holding?" "Nothing." was the reply. "But surely your hands are stained [with the juice]!" Similarly, [God said to Cain], THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT TO ME FROM THE GROUND.

Again, it is as if a man entered a pasture ground, seized a goat, and threw it behind him. The owner of the pasture pursued him, demanding, "What have you in your hand?" "Nothing!" "But it is bleating behind your back!" said [the owner]. Similarly, [God rebuked Cain]. THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT TO ME FROM THE GROUND.

When God asked "WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER, ABEL?" Cain replied: "I don't know, am I my brother's keeper? After all you are the guardian of all creatures, so why seek him from me?"

It is like the parable of the thief who stole some items one night without being caught, but was arrested by the gate keeper the next morning.
The gatekeeper challenged him: "Why did you steal the items?"
The thief responded, "I am a thief who does not neglect his profession, but your professional duty is to guard. Why did you abandon your duty? Now, how can you blame me?"

Similarly Cain admitted, "I killed him but you created the evil impulse in me: you are the keeper of all. Yet you let me kill him.

You really killed him as it says: I AM (ANOCHI) - MY BROTHER'S KEEPER. If you had accepted my sacrifice just as you did his, then I would never have been jealous of him".

Midrash Tanchuma

Cain thought that he had been wronged and a dispute followed between him and Abel. "I believed," he said, "that the world was created through goodness," but I see that good deeds bear no fruit. God rules the world with arbitrary power, else why had He respect unto your offering, and not unto mine too?"

Abel opposed him; he maintained that God rewards good deeds, without having respect unto persons. If his sacrifice had been accepted graciously by God, and Cain's not, it was because his deeds were good and his brother's wicked."

Targum Yerushalmi

R. Shimon bar Yohai said: It is difficult to say this thing, and the mouth cannot utter it plainly. Think of two athletes wrestling before the king: had the king wished, he could have separated them. But he did not so desire, and one overcame the other and killed him, he [the victim] crying out before he died, 'Let my cause be pleaded before the king!' In this way, THE VOICE OF THY BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES OUT AGAINST ME.'

Beraishit Rabbah

CRYING OUT TO ME: Don't read "to Me" but "about Me" A parable will explain. Two persons quarreled and one killed the other. A third person was standing between them and did not intercede to separate them. Who will everyone be buzzing about? Certainly 'about the third person'.

Midrash HaGadol (Yemen 13th century)
Poems by Dan Pagis.

Dan Pagis was born in Bukovina in 1930. He spent several years in camps during the war and subsequently arrived in Israel, settling on kibbutz. He became an expert in medieval Hebrew literature, ultimately becoming a professor of the subject at the Hebrew university. He was also an accomplished and much praised poet. He died in 1986.

1. Autobiography

I died with the first blow and was buried
in the stony field.
The raven showed my parents
what to do with me.
If my family is famous, not a little of the credit
goes to me.
My brother invented murder,
my parents - crying,
I invented silence.

Afterwards, those well-known events took place.
Our inventions were perfected.
One thing led to another.
And there were those who
killed in their own way,
cried in their own way.

I am not naming names
out of consideration for the reader,
since at first the details horrify,
though in the end they bore.

You can die once, twice, even seven times,
but you cannot die a thousand times.
I can.
My underground cells reach everywhere.

When Cain started to multiply on the face of the earth,
I started to multiply in the belly of the earth.
For a long time now, my strength has been greater than his.
His legions desert him and go over to me.
And even this is only half a revenge.

Dan Pagis

2. Scrawled in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car

here in this transport i eve
and abel my son
if you should see my older son cain son of man
tell him that i

Dan Pagis
3. Brothers

Abel was pure and woolly
and somewhat modest
like the smallest kid
and full of ringlets like the smoke of the offering
inhaled by his Master.
Cain was straight. Like a knife.

Cain is amazed. His big hand gropes
inside the butchered throat before him:
from where does the silence burst?

Abel stayed in the field. Cain stayed Cain. And since it's decreed
that he be a wanderer, he wanders diligently. Each morning
changing one horizon for another. One day he discovers the earth tricked him
over the years. It moved, while he, Cain, marked time in one place.
Marked time, marched, ran only on a single scrap of dust, exactly as big as the soles of
his sandals.

One evening of grace he stumbles
on a fine haystack.
He dives in, is swallowed by it, rests. Hush, Cain sleeps.
He’s happy. He dreams that he is Abel.

Don't worry. Don't worry.
It's already decreed for the one who might kill you
that your vengeance shall be taken sevenfold.
Your brother Abel guards you from all evil.

Dan Pagis

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iii Nahum Sarna, ed., The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, JPS 1989
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v Lieber et al, Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary, Rabbinical Assembly 2001
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