

The Beth Jacob Beat

The beat goes on...

Parshat Bereisheet

24 Tishrei 5775, October 17-18, 2014

There's no need to take this home on Shabbos... these announcements can be found on our website at www.BethJacobOakland.org.

MAZEL TOVS

- **Birthdays:** Sophie Marinoff (20), Amily Huang, Hannah Elkins (16), Nina Offen, Ray Edelman, Sam Orbach (18), Ali Zak (17), Joshua Zak (17), Leslie Klonoff, Avi Schwartz (23), Ken Schwartz
- **Anniversaries:** Jonathan & Nicole Smith

KIDDUSH

- Kiddush this week is sponsored by Beth Jacob in the hope that all enjoy the festivities!
- Sponsoring Shabbat Kiddush, our weekly community event, is a wonderful way to celebrate a *simcha* or joy, mark a special moment in one's life, honor someone, or commemorate a Yahrzeit. Sponsoring a Kiddush allows the community to share important moments in your life. It is also a way to say thank you to your community. To sponsor Kiddush, please contact the office at office@bethjacoboakland.org. We also encourage co-sponsorships.

MINYAN TIMES

Shacharit: Sun: 8:00 AM; Mon-Fri: 6:45 AM

Maariv: Mon-Thurs: 6:45 PM

SHEMINI ATZERET/SIMCHAT TORAH OCTOBER 15– OCTOBER 18	
Mincha/Maariv Wed, Thurs, Fri	6:10 PM
Shemini Atzeret Candle Lighting Wed, Oct 15	6:13 PM
Simchat Torah Candle Lighting Thurs, Oct 16	After 7:12 PM
Candle Lighting Friday, Oct 17	6:10 PM
Shacharit Thurs, Fri, Sat	9:00 AM
Yizkor Thurs, Oct 16	10:45 AM (approx.)
Maariv followed by Simchat Torah Hakafot & Celebration, Thurs, Oct 16	6:45 PM
Havdalah/Holiday Ends Sat evening, Oct 18	7:09 PM

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Mark your calendars:** The **BJC Annual Dinner** will be Sunday, February 8th, 2015. We've been to Paris. We've been to Rome. We've been to Outer

Space. This year it's time to come home. Join us as we celebrate Oakland and 120 years of Beth Jacob Congregation. Start thinking about what items and events you would like to donate to this year's auction. Details for item and event submission to come in just a few weeks.

- **Morah Kathy Fund:** Kathy Obee, our beloved preschool teacher of over 11 years, recently suffered a serious heart condition and is recovering from open heart surgery. We are all praying for a full and speedy recovery. Kathy will not be able to work for at least several months and we are collecting funds to help her and her family during this time. Donation funds can be made out to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund and sent to BJC. If you would like to pay by credit card please use the donation link on our website. Thank you so much for your support!

HOLIDAY REMINDERS:

- **High Holy Day Parking:** The City of Oakland has granted BJC a permit to park overnight during the upcoming High Holy Days for those who wish to do so. However, the following parameters must be observed. The permit is for the Beth Jacob side of Park Boulevard between Kingsley and 38th Street only. Furthermore all other parking restrictions, i.e. handicapped space, red zone, and the entrance to the church parking lot must be observed. Emerson Street is not involved in the permit so please be mindful of any restrictions there. All other parking restrictions must be respected. Please contact Steve Astrachan if you have any questions.
- **Eruv Tavshilin Reminder:** Please remember to set aside an Eruv Tavshilin on Wednesday evening before the start of the Chag. As part of the Eruv, we make a blessing, and start our Shabbat preparations before Yom Tov, thereby allowing us to continue our Shabbat preparations on Friday leading into Shabbat. Instructions can be found in the Artscroll Siddur on page 654.

EVENTS & CLASSES

- **Shabbat University, the Pursuit of Higher Education:** Every other week. Join our rabbis at "Shabbat University" after Kiddush for classes covering a diverse array of subjects catering to different levels of Jewish Studies backgrounds.

Next class: Nov 1 at approximately 12:20 PM in the main Sanctuary, taught by Rabbi Albert and Rabbi Fox.

- **Sunday Morning Breakfasts and Tefilah Talks:** Learn together on Sunday mornings after Shacharit. Once a month, a more formal Tefilah Talk will take place. More details will follow in our upcoming Program Guide. Thank you to Eve Gordon Ramek for underwriting this program in memory of Henry Ramek. If you are able to serve and/or clean up, please contact the office.
- **Women's Monthly Study Group:** Each month, we will study texts from a classic or contemporary Jewish work that relate to different subjects of interest. Let us know what subjects are on your list! All texts will be offered in English with opportunities for building Hebrew textual skills as well. Next date: Wednesday, October 22nd at the home of Leslie Wilkof (743 Longridge Rd); taught by Meira Albert. Please feel free to contact Meira at meira.tirschwell@gmail.com with any questions or suggestions.
- **Lunchtime Talmud:** Join us to study the 9th chapter of Bava Metzia every Thursday at 12 PM at the home of Deborah and Michael Sosebee: 701 Trestle Glen Rd. (corner Brookwood)
- **Meditation Group:** Join a group of Jewish meditators at an ongoing Monday evening meditation session at 7:15 PM in the small sanctuary. Anyone welcome to join (no RSVP required). For information contact Marc Schweitzer at marcschweitzer@comcast.net

BJC YOUTH (TOTS – 12TH GRADE)

- **Shabbat and Holiday Youth Groups:** 10 AM - All ages meet in the downstairs Social Hall. 10:30 AM - Tot Shabbat in the first Gan classroom on the right, Kindergarten through 2nd grade in the second Gan classroom on the right, 3rd through 5th grade girls in the first Gan classroom on the left, and 3rd through 5th grade boys in the downstairs Social Hall. Parents, please pick up your children at the end of services (before Kiddush). The Gan will be locked at the completion of groups. **Please Note:** There are no youth groups on Simchat Torah, Friday, October 17,

as all youth are invited to participate in the Simchat Torah dancing.

- **NCSY:** Join us for the following events:

9th-12th grade:

- ~ October 19th- Laser Tag at the Junipero Serra Forest! Event is from 1:30 – 5:30. Sign up at www.norcal.ncsy.org
- ~ Nov 8th- Save the Date for our BJC Shabbaton! With guest speaker Rabbi Lashak, Fear Factor, Ropes Course, and more!

6th-8th grade:

- ~ November 21st: Save the Date for our BJC Shabbaton! Including the visiting Las Vegas NCSY middle school chapter and Saturday night BUBBLE SPORTS!

COMMUNITY MESSAGE BOARD

- **Friday Night Open Table:** Anyone and everyone is invited to a Shabbat Open Table – Hosted by Ken Maki and Kathy Hollander on Friday, October 17th at 6:00 PM. All dinners are meat with a veggie option. RSVP to Ken Maki at ken@kenmaki.com. 1963 E. 38th St, Oakland.
- **Science Alive!** An event for preschool families on Tuesday, Oct 21st from 2:30 - 3:30pm in the Discovery Room at OHDS. Come and take a peek at OHDS' innovative science program! Bring your preschooler for some hands-on science fun with plenty of fizz, bubble and pop, plus a science magic show performed by our wonderful Middle School Science Teacher, Jessica Boualavong. Please RSVP to Philippa Lichterman, Admissions Director, at plichterman@ohds.org or 510-531-8600 ext. 12.
- **Need a wonderful baby sitter?** Interested in taking beginners' voice lessons? Either way, Tessa Zitter is available for help. Please call 510-542-0996 and leave a voicemail if I don't pick up.

24 Tishrei 5775 / October 18, 2014

By: Joel Ackerman

Bereshit 2014

Ages ago, at another time and place, in a far distant galaxy, I was serving as gabbai in another East Bay congregation that used the Stone Chumash. I announced the page number for this parasha by saying "I would like to tell you that this parasha begins on page 1, but I can't. It begins on page 2."

Our sages have said, many times, that one can learn from all aspects of the Torah, even from empty spaces. So what can one learn from the fact that there is nothing on page 1 of our Chumash? [Yes, I do know that the text of many of our works, including the Talmud, begin on page 2, which is supposedly a printer's convention, but why should that prevent me from trying to learn something from the fact that page 1 of the Chumash is blank?]

I suggest that the blank page 1 of the Chumash could teach us that before or during the creation of our world, G-d could have been carrying out some other works of creation, the nature of which is not described in the Torah. I suggest that He could have created other worlds, with other intelligent beings. After all, the Torah, being directed to us humans, is necessarily Terra-centric. This parasha describes the creation of our world – the planet we live on and other items in our world such as the sun, moon and stars. It was given to our ancestors, in times when it was not known that other planets existed. The stars were simply fixtures in our heavens. We should not really expect it to speak of other worlds, other intelligent beings.

We certainly cannot believe that G-d is incapable of doing this. Remember what He said to the prophet Jeremiah: "Hineh, ani Adonai Eloheh col-basar, hamimeni yifaleh col-davar?" ("Behold, I am the Lord, the G-d of all flesh; is there anything too hard for Me?") And there is nothing that I could find in the Torah that negates the above idea. Indeed, why should we humans be the only intelligent beings that He created? (Note that a number of books appeared in the 1980s asserting that in fact our planet had been visited and contacted numerous times by other intelligent beings ("aliens"), citing, among others, the Merhava vision of the prophet Ezekiel as an attempt to describe a visit by such beings in terms that a human of those days might be able to express.)

All right, you say, perhaps G-d did create other worlds with other intelligent beings. After all, our scientists have discovered that many stars have planets and that some of these planets appear to have conditions somewhat similar to our own, so that conditions for the development of intelligent life as we know it seem to exist elsewhere than on Earth. And there is no reason to believe that the conditions on our planet are the only ones that could support intelligent life. Why couldn't other intelligent beings be able to breathe different atmospheres than we, live under different pressures than we, be primarily water-dwellers rather than land-dwellers, etc?

All well and good, you say, but this is a mini-drash, not some miscellaneous opinion piece based on nothing but pure imagination! As they say, where's the beef? In other words, where's the proof-text?

Well, I have to admit that I don't know of any text that definitely supports this concept. Some years ago, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan wrote a short piece on this question. He cited several possible sources for the concept, but none of them clearly or definitively support it. So I don't have an authoritative proof-text.

However, I do have some text that reinforces this concept. It's from the Rosh Hashanah machzor, a part that deals with the nature of the kingship of G-d:

“Elohenu v'eloheh avotenu, m'loch al col ha-olam culo bichvodecha v'hinaseh al col ha'aretz biyarkecha, v'hofa bachadar ge'on uzecha, al col yoshvei artzecha.”

“Our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, reign over the entire universe in Your glory, be exalted over all the world, in Your splendor, reveal Yourself in the majestic grandeur of Your strength over all the dwellers of Your inhabited world.”

The text distinguishes between G-d as ruler of the entire universe (ha'olam) and ruler of our world (ha'aretz). The machzor states several times that here on earth, all of His creations (man and animal, at least) are to acknowledge His kingship. And what about elsewhere in the universe? The same. “Reign over all the universe in Your glory”.

We humans have been seeking for some years now, through powerful telescopes and the SETI (Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence) project, sending space vehicles and messages to other parts of the universe, hoping to contact other intelligent life. So far, we have not been successful (although see the books written in the 1980s on visits by other beings). Our sages have not really addressed the question of whether the universe contains intelligent life and, if it does, what it would be like. Of course many of our other wise men, such as James Blish, James White, Isaac Asimov, Avram Davidson, and Poul Anderson (among many others) have considered this question and many of its implications, and you may wish to read some of their writings.

And, of course, it's interesting to speculate what such intelligent beings would be like. Would they also believe that the universe was created by a Supreme Unique Being? Would they have holy scriptures? If so, would they resemble our Torah? Would G-d have delivered to them the same messages as He gave us? Did they receive something resembling the Ten Commandments? Is there a group among them that corresponds to us Jews, with our mission? Or, alternatively, will it be our mission to eventually venture into space, to carry the word of G-d to other sentient beings elsewhere in the universe?

Enjoy your speculations. Shabbat shalom.

PARSHA BEREISHIS

“THE CHOICEST CHOICE”

Barry Waldman

(based on the writings and shiurim of Rav Matis Weinberg, www.thelivingtree.org)

In this week’s parsha, both Kayin and Hevel present offerings to G-d. Hevel’s is accepted and Kayin’s is rejected. This confuses and annoys Kayin exceedingly:

“He thought to himself: ‘I sacrificed first, and my offering should have been accepted first.’” (Tzror HaMor)

Chazal, however, were sensitive to the subtle differences in the descriptions of the sacrifices offered:

Kayin: “brought an offering to Hashem of the fruit of the ground.”

Hevel: “he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest.”

Whereas Hevel brought the best of what he had, and no such mention is attached to Kayin’s offering, Rashi follows the midrash and deduces that Kayin’s was rejected because he brought inferior produce:

“of the fruit of the ground” – from the poorest

But Rashi offers an alternative explanation that does not appear in most editions (though a similar explanation can be found in the Rome ed. 1470):

“of the fruit” – *From whatever came to his hand*, not the best and not the choicest.”

The difference between these two Rashis is subtle. Yet, understanding this difference – and, indeed, the nature of subtlety itself – yields deep insights into the essence of man’s *avodah*, his life’s work and purpose on earth.

Our exploration begins with the observation that many words and phrases from the story of Kayin and Hevel are echoed in one other parsha – Korach:

I

Kayin was the first whose “face fell” in response to sin:

Bereishis 4:6 - וַלְמָה נָפְלוּ פָנָיו - וַיִּשְׁמַע מְנַשָּׁה, וַיִּפֹּל עַל-פָּנָיו - Bamidbar 16:4

Moshe and Aaron “fall on their faces” numerous times in response to the sin of Korach and company – for example:

Bamidbar 16:4 - וַיִּשְׁמַע מְנַשָּׁה, וַיִּפֹּל עַל-פָּנָיו - Bamidbar 16:4

II

Kayin “rose up” against his brother: וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל

Just as Korach and company “rose up” against Moshe: וַיִּקְמוּ לַפְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה

III

Kayin is told that sin crouches at the “door”:

Bereishis 4:7 - לִפְתַּח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ

In Korach, the sinners Datan and Aviram stand at the “door”:

Bamidbar 16:27 - וַדָּתוּן וְאַבְיָרִים יֵצְאוּ נֹצְבִים, פֶּתַח אֶהְלִיָּהֶם

IV

Kayin was very annoyed: וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד

And so was Moshe: וַיַּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד

V

Moshe tells Hashem to turn away from Korach’s “offering”:

Bamidbar 16:15 - אֶל-תִּפְּוֹן אֶל-מִנְחָתָם

It seems odd that Moshe refers to Korach’s *ketoret* offering as a “*mincha*” – but could this be an illusion to Kayin’s *mincha* to which G-d did also not turn?

וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ, לֹא שָׁעָה

VI

The earth opens its mouth to receive Hevel’s blood:

וַעֲתָה, אֲרוּר אֲתָה, מִן-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת-פִּיהָ, לִקְחַת אֶת-דַּמִּי אֲחִידָךְ מִיָּדְךָ

And the earth opens its mouth to swallow Korach and company:

וְאִם-בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא יְהוָה, וּפָצְתָה הָאֲדָמָה אֶת-פִּיהָ וּבִלְעָה אֹתָם

VII

Hevel brought the “first” and “best” of his flocks as an offering to Hashem:

וְהִבֵּל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכוֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ, וּמִחֲלֵבָה

The gifts given to the Kohen, as described at the end of parsha Korach, are the “best” of the oil and the wine, and the “first” of the fruits:

כָּל חֲלֵב יִצְהָר, וְכָל-חֲלֵב תִּירוֹשׁ

בְּכוֹרֵי כָּל-אֲשֶׁר בְּאֲרָצָם

The second of R. Yishmael's 13 rules by which the Torah is elucidated reads: "similar words in different contexts are meant to clarify one another." Rabbi David Fohrman uses the analogy of binocular vision to describe how two separate sections of Torah can provide a "depth perception" that would be lacking if each were viewed independently (shiur on Unataneh Tokef www.alephbeta.org). Thus, the many linguistic parallels between the story of Kayin and Hevel and parsha Korach are an indication that they are meant to be studied together in order to focus on deeper insights that would be missed otherwise.

A key linkage between the two parshas can be found in a midrash that depicts the primal argument between Kayin and Hevel as a struggle for the *kehuna*, over who would serve in the Beit HaMikdash:

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." (Bereishis Rabbah 22:7)

Korach, too, tried to wrest the priesthood from Aharon. He did so by asserting:

"For the entire assembly – all of them – are holy and Hashem is among them. Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?"

Ironically, in this bid for the *kehuna*, Korach exposes himself as the "anti-kohen." He presents holiness as generic – the exact opposite of *kedusha*. By definition, *kedusha* requires distinguishing one entity from another, separating it for a dedicated purpose. Thus, holiness is an exercise in *havdalah*, just as we do at the conclusion of Shabbat:

Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who separates (*hamavdil*) between holy and secular, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh and six days of labor...

Moreover, the holiness of the Kohen is derived from this fundamental *havdalah* intrinsic within Ma'aseh Bereishis:

"And he spoke unto Korach...in the morning." What reason had he for saying, "in the morning?" Moses said to them: the Holy One, Blessed be He, has assigned certain boundaries in His world. Can you, for example, fuse day and night? Scripture, in reference to this, says at the very beginning, "And there was evening and there was morning," "And God *divided* the light from the darkness" in order that it might be of service to this world. And just as He divided the light from the darkness in order that it might be of service to the world, so He separated Israel from the nations...In the same manner also He set Aaron apart; as it says, "And Aaron was separated, that he should be sanctified as most holy." [Divrei Hayamim I 23:13] (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:7)

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the main function of the Kohen is:

"to differentiate (*lehavdil*) between the sacred and the profane, between the pure and impure, and to rule [in Torah]..." (Vayikra 10:10)

Returning to Kayin, we can now perhaps better understand why his offering was rejected, and hence his claim to the *kehuna*. The fruit he brought was taken “from whatever came to his hand.” According to this version of Rashi, he did not choose to bring inferior produce – but rather, he chose nothing at all:

“Kayin brings to G-d *m’pri ha’adamah*, some of the produce of the earth – *any, without choice.*” (Rav S. R. Hirsch)

And if we hear in Kayin’s thoughts the echoes of Korach’s ideas about holiness, why *should* he have selected anything special?: “Is not my entire crop holy – all of it? Why should one piece of fruit be exalted over any other?” And so, he took from “*whatever* came to his hand.” This is what happens to holiness when it is made generic – all of the preciousness and uniqueness that it is intended to represent quickly degrades to the least choice word in a generic age...“whatever.”

In his failure to make any *havdalah*, Kayin proved that he was not worthy of the *kehunah* and “to have the Temple built in his area.” But why is *havdalah* so central to Creation and man’s purpose within it? I’ll paraphrase the thoughts of Rav Matis Weinberg on this subject, as he describes the contrast between liberty and freedom. Liberty is the ability to do what you want to do. Freedom is the ability to become what you want to be. Achieving a state of being necessarily involves making choices. And in order to make a choice, there must be a *meaningful difference* between one thing and another.

The more one is able to identify subtle distinctions in the options that life presents to him, the more powerful is the exercise of his freedom, and the more refined is the self-portrait that he actualizes. As Rashi has noted regarding the laws of kashrut: distinguishing between a cow and a donkey is easy, but determining whether <50% of a trachea (not kosher) or >50% of a trachea (kosher) was severed during a ritual slaughter requires the ability to discriminate down to a hairsbreadth!

The *Beit HaMikdash* is also called the *Beit HaBechira* (the House of Choice). We are a chosen people, because we are a choosing people. This, then, is our *avodah* in Creation – to live not lives of default, but of choices, increasingly subtle choices that lead to greater self-discovery. It is this

“singular and mutual chosenness that must emerge from the shared space within which perceptions, wishes, visions, responses, and sustainability contend, the very space and struggle that make it possible for a living creation to work itself out.” (Rav Matis Weinberg – Frameworks, Re’eh)

As we begin today to read the Chumash anew, consider that the “*beis*” of “*B’reishis*” can be translated not only as “in”, but also “for the sake of.” Thus the first pasuk of the Torah could be read, “For the sake of beginnings, G-d created the heaven and the earth.” And the “choicest” choice of all – the foundation of freedom, the basis of all our creative potential, and the essence of *teshuvah* – is to choose a new beginning.