

## Rabbi's Article II

### Cain's Offering

On the words (-Genesis 4:3), "*Cain brought of the fruit of the soil an offering to G-d,*" Rashi (-Link) comments, "*of the most inferior, and there is an aggadah (homiletic teaching) that states that it was flaxseed.*" In some manuscripts of Rashi there is additionally, "*another interpretation, 'of the fruit,' whichever came to hand, not from the good or the choicest.*" Let us understand why Rashi has two interpretations, and in some manuscripts, three.

Rashi struggles with the, "*of the most inferior,*" because then, just like in a few verses, concerning Abel's offering the verse explicitly states, "*of the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest,*" then so too, here the verse should have explicitly stated, "*of the most inferior.*" Hence, Rashi brings the interpretation of, "*of the fruit,*" to mean simply, "*whichever came to hand.*" However, on the other hand, Rashi struggles with the interpretation of, "*whichever came to hand,*" because we then don't understand why, "*But to Cain and to his offering He (G-d) did not turn.*" Hence, Rashi quotes the interpretation of, "*of the most inferior.*"

The meaning behind all of this is, it isn't logical to say that Cain brought, "*of the most inferior,*" because it was Cain who was the one who wanted to, "*an offering to G-d,*" and therefore, definitely would not have brought it, "*of the most inferior.*" More so, the fact that G-d's not accepting Cain's offering caused, "*annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell,*" proves that Cain was expecting G-d to accept the offering, hence, it couldn't have been, "*of the most inferior!*" So, on the one hand, G-d didn't accept the offering, while on the other hand, Cain's expectation was that G-d would. Therefore, we must say that on the one hand, it wasn't of the good enough to be accepted by G-d, but was good enough for Cain's expecting G-d to accept it. Therefore, Rashi introduces the *aggadah*, --which even though it is a homiletic, and not the *simple* interpretation, nevertheless, Rashi's rule is that he quotes (-Genesis 3:8), "*such aggadah that clarifies the words of the verses*"-- that Cain's offering was of *flaxseed*. And with this Rashi is teaching the young student that, since he already knows (-ibid 2:11), "*The name of one (first river that flows from the Garden of Eden) is Pishon,*" that (-Rashi on the verse), "[It is called] *Pishon because it causes flax (pishton) to grow,*" that *flaxseed* is a worthy and choicest *species*. However, within bringing of the *worthy species*, Cain brought, "*of the most inferior.*" Therefore, Cain expected G-d to accept his offering, being of the *worthy species*. However, after seeing that G-d accepted Abel's offering of, "*of the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest,*" Cain was now, "*annoyed exceedingly, and his countenance fell,*" that his own offering of a *worthy species* was not accepted. And with G-d's telling Cain that, "*at the entrance, sin is lying, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it,*" we understand that (i) Cain's *Evil Inclination* (-Link) caused Cain to only bring of, "*of the most inferior,*" however, (ii) Cain's *Evil Inclination* was only, "*at the entrance, sin is lying,*" and didn't stop Cain from (a) bringing an offering, and (b) from a *worthy species*.

And from this explanation of Rashi we derive a *halachic* (Jewish Law) understanding concerning bringing offerings: Maimonides (-Link) states (Laws of Issurei Mizbeach, Chapter 7, Law 14), "*one who desires to gain merit for himself, subjugate his evil inclination, and amplify his generosity should bring his sacrifice from the most desirable and superior type of the item he is bringing. For it is written in the Torah: 'And Abel brought from his chosen flocks and from the superior ones and G-d turned to Abel and his offering.'* ...And so (-Leviticus 3:16) states: '*All of the superior quality should be given to G-d.*" Hence, we see that Maimonides is defining, "*All of the superior quality should be given to G-d,*" not to mean, "*of the superior species,*" but rather, in which ever species one is bringing, it should be, "*most desirable and superior type of the item he is bringing.*" And this we learn from Abel, who did so, unlike Cain who did the opposite.

However, this in itself we must understand: Why is it not as important that the offering be of a superior *species*, as much as it be of the, "*most desirable and superior type of the item he is bringing*"? The reason is that the soul of, "*All of the superior quality should be given to G-d,*" is that man recognize (-Psalms 24:1), "*To G-d is the land and the fullness thereof.*" Therefore, if, "*All of the superior quality should be given to G-d,*" is to mean only the *superior species*, one may think that *To G-d* is only the *superior species*, while the rest belongs solely to mankind. Hence, the law specifically is that, "*All of the superior quality should be given to G-d,*" is speaking of *all* species, and that within all species, one is to bring the *superior quality* as an offering to G-d.

On a mystical level, we can now understand Cain's intention. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that Cain's bringing an offering of *flaxseed* was in likeness to the High Priest, on *Yom Kippur*, serving in white garments made of *flaxseed*, which eludes to the *World of Unity* --being that the flax produces only one stalk per seed. And the unity of the flax is not in the unity being of the differences, uniting as one, but rather, the unity is in ascent of any details and differences. --Unlike the unity of the *Four Kinds* (-Link) of *Sukkot*, in which each of the *Four Kinds* represent how there are differences, and nevertheless, there is unity among the differences!

Cain, wanting specifically to draw down a unity which transcends *details* and *differences*, brought his offering specifically from the (worthy) *species* of unity, without focusing on the *details* within the species he was offering to G-d to be of superior quality. However, G-d was teaching Cain that this was not the intention of creation. Rather, the intention is specifically that there be *differences*, and that within differences there be the unity and recognition of, "*To G-d is the land and the fullness thereof.*"

The lesson for us in our service to G-d is we each be careful not only in the performance of a mitzvah, but also in the *hiddur -beautification of--* the mitzvah.