



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS

## **Sicha Summary**

Chelek 15 | Breishis | Sichas 4

### **The Context:**

Cain and Abel each brought a sacrifice to G-d. Cain “brought from the fruit of the soil... And Abel... brought from the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest....” (*Bereishis* 1:3-4)

Then the Torah describes G-d’s reaction. “And G-d turned to Abel and to his offering. But to Cain and to his offering He did not turn, and it annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell.” (*Bereishis* 1:4-5)

Tragically, Cain then killed Abel.

### **The Rashi:**

What was Cain’s offering, and why was it lacking?

Rashi comments:

*Of the fruit of the soil* – of the most inferior (*Bereishis Rabbah* 22:5), and there is an Aggadah that states that it was flaxseed. (Another explanation: *of the fruit* – from whatever came to his hand, not the best and not the choicest.)

### **The Question:**

Why is it relevant to the simple understanding of the verse that Cain offered flaxseed? Knowing that the offering was “of the most inferior” is obviously important, for it explains why G-d did not accept the offering. But why does Rashi cite an aggadah that seems to supply a detail not relevant to the simple meaning of the verse?

### **The Explanation:**

Rashi offered a second layer of explanation because his first comment, that Cain offered “of the most inferior,” does not fully explain Cain’s motive. If he was bringing an offering to G-d, intending to honor Him, why would he deliberately bring “of the most inferior?”

Therefore Rashi adds two additional explanations, “it was flaxseed,” and in parentheses, added as a gloss in later editions, “Another explanation: *of the fruit* — from whatever came to his hand, not the best and not the choicest.”

We know from a previous comment of Rashi that flaxseed is a prominent plant. One of the four rivers described in the narrative of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden was Pishon, named after the flax that grew on its banks. (*Rashi to Bereishis 2:11*) Clearly flax is an important enough plant to name a river after.

It appears that Cain thought that what was most important was to bring an offering from a prominent species; the particular representation of that species, whether the flax was inferior or superior, was not as important.

Once Abel brought his offering from “the firstborn of his flocks and of their fattest” and G-d accepted that offering, it became clear that it was important to offer to G-d from the best of whatever species you chose to offer from. When Abel still persisted in his offering, and did not learn from G-d’s response to Abel that he should offer from the best of the species, then G-d “did not turn” to Abel’s unrepentant offering.

There is a slight difficulty with this explanation, however, for why would Cain go to the trouble of offering from a prominent species only to deliberately choose the most inferior of the species? Rashi, therefore, adds a second possibility, that he chose the quality at random. He did not think that the quality mattered, so he chose at random, but he did not deliberately choose an inferior sample. This explanation is still more difficult, however, for why would G-d deny Cain’s offering entirely just

because he chose at random? G-d's response is more understandable if Cain chose an inferior offering on purpose.

### **Legal Resonance:**

The above clarifies a legal ruling of the Rambam. Rambam writes that "one who desires to gain merit for himself... should bring his sacrifice from the most desirable and superior type of the item he is bringing."

He then offers two prooftexts: 1) For it is written, "And Abel brought from his chosen flocks and from the superior ones and G-d turned to Abel and his offering." 2) As it states "All of the superior quality should be given to G-d (*Vayikra* 3:16)

From the second proof, "all of the superior quality should be given to G-d," it seems that a person should select the best individual of the best species. Yet Rambam ruled that a person should bring "the most desirable and superior type of the item he is bringing."

By citing the story of Cain and Abel, Rambam alludes to his reasoning. Cain did not offer from the best species — he offered from his sheep, not his cattle which are superior. But G-d turned to his offering because it was the most desirable of the item that he was bringing.

### **The Deeper Dimension:**

Why is it so critical to offer the best of any given species, and not just from the most superior species itself? The objective of a sacrifice is to achieve the awareness that "the earth and its fullness belong to G-d." If we were to only offer from the best species, that would imply that we acknowledge G-d's ownership only over the more prominent species. By offering the best of every species, we acknowledge G-d's ownership over all that we have.

### **Further Explanation:**

Cain wanted to reveal the undifferentiated oneness of G-d. Therefore, he brought an offering from flaxseed, which is unique in that each seed grows a single stalk, representing Divine oneness. To further demonstrate G-d's

unity he did not bring from the best of that species, because that would imply that there are distinctions between good, neutral, and bad. Cain wanted to reveal the reality of Divine oneness that transcends the particulars of this world. But he was mistaken, for G-d desires His unity to be expressed within the particulars of creation. And so we must offer from the best of each species, to demonstrate that each and every detail of this world is suffused with, and belongs to, G-d.

This underscores the importance of beautifying a mitzvah, of offering the very best of ourselves to the service of G-d.