

"The Perils of Progress"I. Cain and AdamIn the Beginning

A-370

In the vocabulary of contemporary man, the words "progress" and "progressive" hold a distinct place of honor. Progress is regarded as an unimpeachable virtue, a synonym for all that is good and noble in life. Indeed, the progress resulting from the advances of science in our day <sup>is</sup> ~~are~~ a tribute to the creativity of modern man.

It is amazing to note, therefore, that our Torah does not seem to share this popular unconditional adulation of Progress. The Torah, in its hesitation, seems to indicate that there are also pitfalls and perils in Progress. For, as Dr. Israel Eldad in his Hegyonot Ha-Mikra points out, in Genesis it is Cain who represents the man of creativity. Of the two brothers, it is he who is the oved adamah, the farmer who digs and plants and fertilizes and weeds and prunes in order to develop a plant -- a thing of value -- from a mere seed. And Cain, surely, did not have the most desirable character.

And yet there is another aspect to the Torah's estimation of Progress. For if we are to accept this identification of avodah with creativity, "work" as a synonym or at least prerequisite for progress, then we must go back one generation earlier in order to find <sup>its</sup> ~~the~~ true origins ~~of Progress~~. It was Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden who were commanded l'avdah u'le'shamrah, "to work it and keep it." The concept of avodah, or Progress, was already known to Adam. And since this is a divine command, and is the occupation of man in Paradise, it <sup>of what we said above</sup> would seem that the reverse <sup>is</sup> true; that creativity and progress and technical advances are accepted as noble virtues and praiseworthy goals of human activity in the world-view of the Bible.



## "The Perils of Progress"

### II. Controlled Creativity

The correct understanding of the Torah's conception of Progress comes when we realize that in the Garden of Eden, God gave two commandments to Adam and Eve: l'avdah u-le'shamrah. The first was "to work it": avodah, creativity, the forward impulse, the capacity to produce and build. The second commandment was "to keep it": shemirah, the exercise of moral restraint and ethical discipline. When man obeyed both together, he lived in a Paradise. The turning point of <sup>early</sup> human history came when man sinned, and avodah and shemirah were divorced from each other. When man rebelled against God and was driven out of Gan Eden, he lost the capacity for exercising l'avdah u-le'shamrah together, for controlled creativity, for morally guided progress. Instead, the great combination was split amongst the two children of primordial man. One son, Cain, became the oved, the worker and man of Progress. The second son, Abel, became the shomer, the man of moral sensitivity. Cain used tools and artificial machines in order to dig and produce and create food. Abel merely watched over the sheep, that no wolves attack them. But sheep grow of their own accord, grazing by themselves. Abel, with his passive morality, is -- as his name in Hebrew indicates -- only Hevel, a breath of air that comes from the mouth: noble, pure, and clean, but short-lived and soon evaporating into nothingness. Cain (Kayin) comes from the word kinyan: ~~acquisition~~, acquiring, saving, conquering. Cain, the oved adamah, is a symbol of Technological Man -- the creator of tools, the man of ceaseless progress. Cain is the progenitor of Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain, who respectively are the fathers of business and administration (yoshev ohel u-mikneh), of the arts (kol tofess kinor v'ugav), and industry (lotesh kol choresh nehoshet u'varzel).

What we are to learn, therefore, from the biblical account of the first human family is two things: First, that Progress is a must. Without it we are left only with Hevel -- mere moralizing which is ephemeral and transient and of no



II. Controlled Creativity (continued)

lasting value. And second, that Progress without the restraint of morality -- avodah without shemirah -- leads to the evil symbolized by Cain. Like human cells which grow without control, so is the human urge for progress and creativity when permitted to proceed without moral and spiritual control -- both cases result in a cancer, one of the body and the other of the spirit. L'avdah u-le'shamrah -- that is the ideal of Torah, if we are ever to reconstitute our society into a form of Paradise.

Norman Lamm



## "The Perils of Progress"

### III. Alienation

It is this message which we people of religion must constantly press and impress upon our contemporaries. If modern man will continue to be just another Cain, a technologist blindly intent upon mere progress unencumbered by religious scruples, uncontrolled by ethical considerations, then he faces the same tragic consequences as did Cain of old. And they are three in number.

The first of the consequences of avodah without shemirah, is -- alienation from Nature. When Cain, the oved, sinned, he was told by G-d in the famous curse: "Cursed art thou from the ground," you are to remain forever at a distance from your natural environment, and "a fugitive and wanderer shalt thou be in the earth." Your attempt to conquer Nature means that you will be eternally at war with her, never at home in the world. You are to remain a Na ve-Nad, an eternal outsider, a stranger in the world.

Modern man experiences that result more keenly than ever before in history. Never before has man felt so lonely, so solitary and so forlorn, so alienated from nature, from world, from society -- even from himself. Psychologists take it into account. Philosophers have come to recognize it. It has become part of modern living. We live in skyscrapers and do not know the natural feel of the earth under our feet. Our children grow up in a jungle of concrete <sup>and steel</sup> and they and we are never introduced to the natural loveliness which G-d gave us in our world. And in this <sup>artificial</sup> world of <sup>iron</sup> steel and cement in which we are imprisoned, we are alienated from our neighbors too, for the more people in a city, the less each knows the other. Our occasional vacation is not a return to Nature, to the experience of oneness. It is usually no more than the same dilemma in a new geographical setting. And how this dark loneliness leads so many of us to mental illness! Na ve-Nad, fugitives and wanderers on the face of the earth! Like Cain, the first oved or Man of Progress who did not have the capacity for shemirah or moral experience, we too do not feel at home anywhere. It is the curse of Cain from which we suffer.

Norman Lamm



## "The Perils of Progress"

### IV. Purposelessness

The second consequence of amoral Progress is: purposelessness. After a while, the drive for progress and creativity and technical advancement is self-motivating. If the moral element (shemirah) is lacking, this drive becomes <sup>involved</sup> ~~introverted~~, an end in itself; it becomes self-justifying without any higher meaning or purpose. When that happens individual men become like cogs in a giant wheel, existing merely for the purpose of the wheel without any other, loftier ideal or goal.

Of Cain, the great oved, the Bible tells us: "And he was building a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch." The famed author of Kele Yakab wisely asks: Why does the Torah use the language, va-yehi boneh ir, "and he was building a city," when it should say va-yiven ir, "and he built a city." His answer is even more relevant for the mid-twentieth century than it was for the days in which he lived: Cain is always building, he is never finished with his creating, he is always involved in new construction; blindly and neurotically he builds on and on. <sup>The man</sup> Cain is still building, even to this very day, and he will not ever finish. His creative urge has run wild. He merely builds for the sake of building, and works for the sake of working. Of course, Cain justifies his <sup>sick</sup> obsession with progress: "and he called the name of the city after his son Enoch" ("I am doing it for the sake of my children!") But then why do his children build? -- for the sake of their children! When you examine the life of Enoch, you find that he attained no distinction that should make him worthy of all the effort of his father Cain. Nothing! All Enoch accomplished was -- to beget another son. And his son beget another son, and that son another son ... The answer of Cain is only a lame excuse for a meaningless dedication to a purposeless progress.



## "The Perils of Progress"

### V. "Homo Faber"

This is indeed the curse of modern man. We too are in the grips of an <sup>obsessive</sup> ~~urge~~ ~~obsession~~ to progress and advance, to build for the sake of building (the "edifice complex"), to beget bigger and better businesses and more and more kinyan. And we too offer that very same excuse: we are doing it for our children. How wise was the great Hassidic master, the Yud ha-Kadosh, when he said: "All about me I see men working like slaves, and each telling himself that he is doing it for his son, and his son for his son. O Ribbonei Shel Olam, when will I have the privilege of meeting that man for whom all the generations have labored ..."

Indeed, all of modern life is colored by this blind, self-defeating, and purposeless drive for Progress. Without shemirah, moral restraint and spiritual direction, our avodah or Progress is bereft of significance and devoid of meaning. We use all our technological talents in order to look at the other side of the moon -- and most of us have not yet learned the names of our next-door neighbors. Like Cain, we are no happier for all the progress we have made. Joseph Wood Krutch is right when he complains that whereas man was once known as homo sapiens, man the Thinker, he now must be called homo faber, man the Maker. We have learned how to progress without the grace of inner guidance. And so the meaningless Man the Maker, the oved, becomes a mere statistic -- building and building for no reason, <sup>becoming</sup> instead of the human being endowed with a dignity of purpose that he should be.

Norman Lamm



## "The Perils of Progress"

### VI. The Murder of Abel

Fratriade

The third and most devastating of the consequences of uncontrolled creativity and unguided Progress is: perversion, pillage, plunder. Cain, as an uncontrolled oved, becomes: a murderer! He kills his brother Abel. The shomer, the moral challenge represented by Abel, is a constant thorn in the side of his conscience. And so he rises up and destroys him, as if he can thereby destroy the need for a spiritual dimension to life. When G-d challenges Cain, saying: "Where is thy brother Abel?", he significantly answers: "Am I my brother's keeper (shomer)?" The ultimate depravity of Technological Man! What do you expect of me, ~~G-d?~~ How can you expect me, an oved, to be bothered by shemirah? Science is ethically neutral. Technology is amoral. You cannot keep progress down with your religious superstitions.

This indeed is what avodah without shemirah has done for modern man. It had made of him a murderer -- one who callously neglects the life, the feelings, and the heart of his own brother, as did Cain. And even worse than giving us the tools whereby to destroy our neighbors and brothers, modern technology unencumbered by moral guidance has threatened man with the probability of universal suicide. Our danger is that we shall become our own victims. Like today's scientists who are themselves most exposed to the deadly radiation ~~with~~ <sup>which</sup> ~~which they~~ <sup>Part 7 their</sup> work, it was Cain who was killed by his own great grandson, Lamech! The Agadah teaches that in one day Lamech, father of the three technological geniuses, killed his grandfather Cain and his son Tubal-cain. That is the threat that faces us today: utter cataclysmic destruction and mass suicide touched off by some Lamech, some man of technological brilliance and moral idiocy, who will press the button that will bring crashing down over our heads the creations of our own amoral avodah. For whereas we have the capacity for



VI. The Murder of Abel (continued)

avodah, the "know how," we have failed <sup>to attain</sup> ~~the~~ shemirah, we do not have the "know whether" -- or "when" -- or "why" -- or "if." Like Cain, we have gotten rid of Abel, the shomer. We have silenced the voice of conscience and have disclaimed responsibility for moral rectitude. The pure oved always answers "Am I my brother's keeper (shomer)?"

Norman Lamm



## "The Perils of Progress"

### VII. The Sabbath

What is the answer that Judaism has to offer in this, its analysis of "Progressive Man?" How can we learn to reestablish the harmony of avodah with shemirah? The answer is: the Sabbath. For the Shabbat teaches us every week to join together the oved and the shomer. G-d commands man: "Six days shalt thou labor (ta'avod)," six days are you permitted to give expression to avodah, to your progressive urge, and continue on the creative technological and scientific exploitation of Nature. But then, ~~on the seventh day,~~ comes the Shabbat as a reminder that if man is to be true to the human dignity with which he was endowed when G-d created him in His own image, then on the seventh day he must cease and desist from any avodah, from any kind of creative labor. Instead, ve-shamru benei Yisrael et ha-Shabbat -- the children of Israel shall "keep" the Sabbath; and Shamor et yom ha-Shabbat le-kadsho -- "keep" the Sabbath day in order to sanctify it. If you wish to sanctify life and society and man himself -- you must practice shemirah, moral restraint and ethical discipline, <sup>you of</sup> ~~and an attempt at elevating~~ the spirit of man. Sabbath day reminds Israel, and Israel must remind the world, that in the course of our lives we must have at least one part of shemirah to six parts of avodah. Our brethren both in Israel and in America who complain that the Orthodox want to hold back progress, ought to understand that when we demand that the wheels of industry grind to a halt on the Sabbath, it is because we want, through shemirat Shabbat (the "keeping" of the Sabbath), to enhance and not to stop Progress; to make the Progress (avodah) of the rest of the week meaningful and serve the purposes of man, rather than have man become the slave of Progress, serving the purpose of avodah all his life, untouched by the graciousness of the spirit and unblessed by the holiness of spiritual shemirah. The "keeper" of the Sabbath is the "keeper" of his brother.



VII. The Sabbath (continued)

This, then, is the command of Torah: to resurrect the spirit of Abel and reunite him with the spirit of Cain, so as to reestablish the primordial harmony of avodah with shemirah. For shemirah without avodah, mere moralizing without the progressive urge, an ivory tower commitment to religiousness, leaves the world static. Like the Hebrew name of Abel, Hevel, it evaporates all too quickly, leaving no trace behind it. But more important: avodah without shemirah makes of the world a living hell. Only when we shall have united avodah with shemirah, Progress with Spirit, technical creativity with Torah conscience, can we achieve l'avdah u-le'shamrah -- "to work it and to keep it," the ideal of Gan Eden. Only then can we constitute our world as a Paradise once again.

Norman Lamm