

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

Avodat Yisrael

KOZHNITZ · BERESHIT, AVODAT YISRAEL

Kayin's curse of endless wandering is understood not as a loss of physical choice but as a confusion of thought—an inability to attach his mind to the Creator, which alone sweetens all dinim (harsh judgments) and dispels fear, as in "In all your ways know Him." The three midrashic explanations of the "sign" given to him—Shabbat, the shining horn, or the dog—each describe a different degree or source of protection restored to him: full attachment to Hashem on Shabbat Kodesh (the Holy Sabbath), a residual glow of that holiness during the week, or, at the lowest level, protection drawn even from the sitra achra (the other side), since the Omnipresent has many agents through which salvation can come. AI SUMMARY

And God placed a sign for Kayin (Cain). In the Midrash Rabbah: a sign—He locked the Shabbat before him. Another interpretation: He made a horn for him on his forehead. Another interpretation: He gave him a dog to guard him, etc.—see there. The explanation of the matter: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Kayin, "You shall be a wanderer and a vagrant upon the earth." One must understand the nature of this curse—for is not free choice (bechirah) in the hand of man, to choose for himself a place to dwell and not wander from his place? Rather, one must say that He infused within him a spirit of error and some kind of fear and madness, through which he could not choose for himself a place to dwell, but was rather to be a wanderer and vagrant upon the earth.

Now certainly, had Kayin been able to attach his thought to the Creator, may He be blessed, as is proper, then certainly all fears would have departed from him and all the dinim (harsh judgments) would have been sweetened, as it is written, "In all your ways know Him" etc. Rather, this itself was the essence of the curse—that his thought became confused from attachment to Him, and he became a wanderer and vagrant in his thought, until this caused him the fears and the wandering upon the earth.

Therefore they said in the Midrash Rabbah that the sign was that He locked the Shabbat before him—meaning that at least on the day of Shabbat Kodesh (the Holy Sabbath) he was attached to the Creator, may He be blessed, and he had rest, for on it all dinim are subdued and all those condemned to Gehinnom have respite.

Another interpretation: He made a horn for him. The meaning is that "horn" is a term of brightness, for according to the second view, some of the splendor of Shabbat remained upon him even on the weekday, which protected him somewhat from fears and from wild beasts.

Another interpretation: He gave him a dog to guard him. The meaning, according to the third view, is that they did not guard him from the side of holiness, but rather he was given a means of protection from the sitra achra (the other side, i.e., the forces of impurity)—for sometimes miracles are performed through them as well, as we find in the Gemara and in the Midrash, Parashat Toldot, that through Argaginton miracles were performed for Rabbeinu HaKadosh (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi) and his colleagues, and there are many agents for the Omnipresent.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)