

We tend to focus on particular firsts in Parashat Bereshit: the first day, the first people, the first sin, the first exile, the first murder. I'd like to focus on a less-noticed, yet consequential first: the first musician. Chapter 4, verses 20 - 22 tell us about three sons and one daughter born by two wives to Lemech, a descendent of Kain:

**20** Now Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle.

וַיִּלְדֵּד עָדָה אֶת יָבֶל הוּא  
הָיָה אָבִי יוֹשְׁבֵי אֹהֶל  
וּמִקְנָה:

**21** And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who grasp a lyre and pipe.

וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוֹבֵל הוּא הָיָה  
אָבִי כָּל תֹּפֵשׁ כְּנֹר וְעוּגָב:

**22** And Zillah she too bore Tubal-cain, who sharpened all tools that cut copper and iron, and Tubal-cain's sister was Na'amah.

וַצִּלָּה גַם הוּא יִלְדֶה אֶת  
תּוּבַל קַיִן לְטֹשׁ כָּל חַרְשׁ  
נְחֹשֶׁת וּבְרָזָל וְאָחוֹת  
תּוּבַל קַיִן נְעֻמָּה:

The first thing that struck me about these verses is how early music is mentioned in the Torah. Additionally, it's striking that the adjacent placement of these three verses appears to impart equal worthiness to the professions they mention. I would even argue, in the theoretical-spiritual sense, for music's possible placement *above* agriculture and industry.

Listen to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or Bach's Chaconne for solo violin, or the slow movement of Schubert's String Quintet. They can transport you like prayer, or move the inner recesses of your soul like a perfect walk in autumn woods. The same can be said of other aesthetic encounters, such as attending a Shakespeare play or gazing into Rembrandt's eyes in one of his mature self-portraits.

Yet sadly, as a musician, I'm too often reminded that many in our society would view music as *less* important than the farm or the factory. In focusing on the purely practical, we recognize agriculture and industry as essential for our survival, but tragically conclude that music is a luxury. Furthermore it's easier, and frankly more socially acceptable, to steal music through pirating, than to steal food or a car. So when we think of how we prioritize our values, how we educate our children, what we ask of our schools, let's remember scripture's adjacent placement of Yaval the shepherd, Yuval the musician, and Tuval-Kain the metalsmith.

Having made a plea for the importance, indeed the *equal station*, of fine arts, in our lives, I should now pause to reflect on some less fortunate aspects of Yaval, Yuval, and Tuval Kain. Rashi tells us that while his flock roamed the fields, Yaval used his free time to build houses for idol worship;

similarly Yuval played his instruments in honor of pagan deities. As for Tuval-Kain, he shaped metals into weapons for murderers. Not such nice boys. Indeed, several sources, such as the medieval Rabbis David Kimchi (RaDaK) and Chizkiyahu ben Mano'a (Chizkuni), state that they and all of Cain's descendants deservedly perished in the flood; it was through the descendants of Adam's third son, Seth, that we get to Noah and the survival of mankind.

And yet. Judaism nonetheless gives a higher place to human creators than the other ancient religions to which it stood in opposition. In addition to the human progenitors of farming, music, and industry, it is a human, Cain, who builds the first city, a human, Chanoch, who originates God worship, a human, Noah, who creates viticulture. In the pagan religions to which Judaism stood in opposition, all these achievements were bestowed by the gods on mankind.

Judaism was the first faith that said, no, God allowed *man* to create these amazing things. Now, our scripture, our religion, is primarily interested not with our creations, but with *how* we utilize them--whether we employ them in the service of good or evil. Yaval, Yuval, and Tuval-Kain may have served idols and murderers. But that doesn't make agriculture,

music and industry automatically evil. Animals, musical instruments, and metal implements were all essential to the construction of, and/or service in, the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Temple in Jerusalem.

Or, to refocus on music for a moment, consider these verses:

Praise Him with a shofar blast, praise Him with psaltery and lyre.

הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ

בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר:

Praise Him with timbres and dance, praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.

הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִרְץ וּמְחֹל הַלְלוּהוּ

בְּמִנִּים וְעֶגְב:

Notice in those verses from *Tehillim Kuf-Nun*, Psalm 150, the use of both *kinor* and *ugav*, the lyre and pipe, the exact same instruments mentioned in connection with Yuval--but now used to praise God, not pagan deities.

Other great musical moments in *Tanach* include *Shirat HaYam*, *Ha'azinu*, and Chana's song of thanksgiving after giving birth to Shmuel. And of course lively singing often gives a special *ruach* to services here at Darchei Noam.

A few final musings (on music and morality). Yaval and Yuval both have names that recall Kain's murdered brother, Hevel. Just as Hevel's life was fleeting, the word Hevel denotes something fleeting, such as a breath or vapor. Consider the closely-related word *yovel*, the divinely-decreed Jubilee, which only occurred once every fifty years. That fleeting moment in time gave a taste of the ideal world-to-come when, for instance, slaves would be freed and debts forgiven. The *yovel* was officially kicked off on Yom Kippur by sounding a shofar with a *hevel*, a human breath. We await the shofar blast that will signal a *permanent* jubilee! Or think of the Book of Ecclesiastes that was just read last Shabbat. Chapter One, Verse Two:

Vanity of vanities, said Koheleth; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

הֵבֵל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הֵבֵל

הֵבֵלִים הַכֹּל הֵבֵל:

All is in vain, all is like vapor, all is like a fleeting breath. Mankind has achieved much that is to be celebrated. But our temporal achievements are fleeting. 25 years ago we were celebrating the end of the Cold War, and soon thereafter the Oslo Agreement. Yet currently the future looks grim. Germany was once the land of the musicians Bach and Beethoven and the

writer-philosophers Kant and Goethe and the painters Duerer and Holbein and the scientists Planck and Einstein. But then the German nation's talents were turned to waging World War Two and the attempted annihilation of the Jews. Things turn on a dime. It's all fleeting, like one's breath. The Torah allows mankind great credit when it comes to music and the other arts, agriculture, industry, science, and other fantastic achievements. The Torah also reminds us that they can all be very fleeting. *Having* those gifts is wondrous; *how* we use them, though, is more important. That is our personal responsibility. And so is how we educate the next generation to use these gifts. Shabbat shalom.