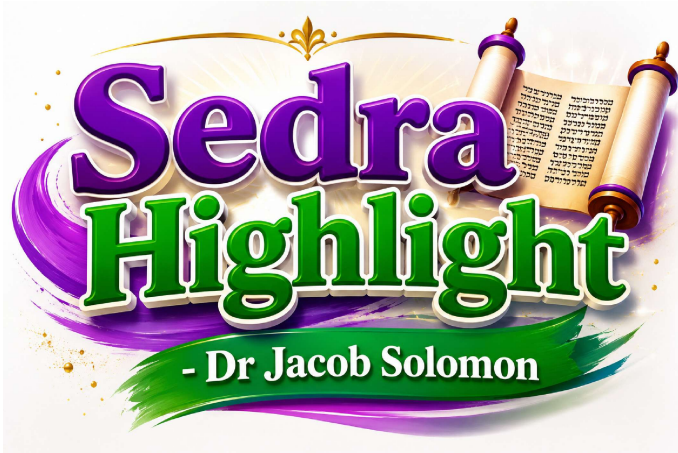




B'REISHIT

Six generations after Kayin killed Hevel, the world included:

Yaval... he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and herd livestock.

Yuval... he was the ancestor of those who play the lyre and the pipe.

Tuval-Kayin... who forged tools made of copper and iron (4:20-22).

All those individuals gave the world the benefits of their remarkable achievements. Music, meat and dairy products, metals for tools and structures... Elementary, but highly effective innovation and technology producing food and cultural entertainment for many, many people. Their values continue long after the inventors and innovators have passed on.

Yet though the Torah mentions these stages along the march to progress and technology, it seems rather unimpressed by them. It does not talk about them again.

What does seem to occupy the Torah

is G-d's reaction to something that happened with an earlier-mentioned farming practice: settled farming. We learn that Kayin chose to be a farmer who worked on the land. He brought to G-d an offering from the products that he grew, but G-d rejected it. Kayin was deeply discontented. G-d turned to him in his disappointment. He told him that if he did the right thing there was no reason to feel let down, and if he did the wrong thing he was perfectly capable of self-correction if he would choose to exert the self-discipline needed.

There, the emphasis is not on the merits of settled agriculture. It is on something moral, only incidentally connected with settled agriculture. It is on the choices we make in managing personal disappointments. DERECH ERETZ KODMA LA-TORAH (Vayikra Rabba 9:3), the Torah is built on the foundations of common decency between people. However disenchanted and frustrated you feel, you do not put things to rights by destroying people and property. Indeed, Sefer B'reishit with its events long before Matan Torah focuses on failings in derech erez, in civilized and decent behaviour: the conduct of the Dor HaMabul, the abduction of Sara by the rulers of Egypt and the Philistines, the chicanery and manipulation by Lavan, the sale of Yosef by his brothers - to mention just a few.

We hear little more about technology. We hear plenty more about greed, jealousy, human failings, and the suffering they cause. Technology by itself does not solve problems. Common decency does.

And we see similar things today. The march to progress and technology accelerates. Quality food cheaper and more abundant through intensive farming and global economies of scale. Your choice of goods and services coming pronto to your front door with a few clicks and a piece of plastic. Information on any conceivable issue: health, legal, psychological, and practical, is yours to take without troubling to find the nearest library.

Yet something is wrong. Basic human needs continue to be unmet. The world produces massive quantities of food, yet out of 8 billion people on the planet, more than half a billion experience hunger, and 2.3 billion suffer food insecurity. The world employs robotic surgery and performs organ transplants, yet more than half its population are not fully covered by essential health services, with glaring deficiencies in vaccination, primary care, trained medical staff, and reliable supply chains. More than a billion people live in slums and informal squatter settlements, and many more lack safe drinking water and sanitation.

Putting all these things to rights in pure financial terms should easily be achieved without creating much of dent in the well-being of the wealthier nations and classes. Yet with all our wonderful resources, this has not yet happened. Technology and innovation have not yet reached all those whose very survival need it most.

It has much to do with the lack of *derech eretz*, now as well as then. Corrupt officials steal public money, elites sometimes capture resources designed for those further down the social pyramid, firms exploit monopoly and cartel power, wealthy interests influence political systems to protect the advantage of the privileged few, and governments prioritize politically powerful groups over poor people who lack a voice.

So Sefer B'reishit implicitly shows that what lies at the core of the Creation is not technology, but qualities of decent and self-disciplined behaviour that take into account the needs of individuals, families, societies, and thereon humanity as a whole. Technology is a means to that end, but it is not an end in itself. Avraham Avinu doesn't actually invent anything, at least physically. But he shows hospitality to unknown strangers. He intercedes personally to save the people of Sodom from destruction. He negoti-

ates respectfully with the Hittites for a place to bury Sara. And the Avot whose lives, trials, and tribulations form the bulk of Sefer B'reishit were not only people who strove to live that way in harmony with the Creator, but who were to give rise to an entire nation whose purpose was taken to a yet higher level through Matan Torah and its role of MAMLECHET KOHANIM V'GOI KADOSH to itself and to the world. 🌿📖