

Devarim 5772

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

In our Parasha, Moshe Rabbeinu uses the word “Eicha” [1:12], meaning “How can I?”.

This gives it a clear connection to the Book of Lamentations which we are scheduled to read this Motza’ei Shabbat

Yirmiyahu HaNavi begins Megillat Eicha lamenting about Yerushalayim with the word “Eicha”, how is it possible? How could such a tragedy have happened? In Bereishit [3:8], after Adam HaRishon ate from the Eitz HaDa’at, G-d calls to him and questions him with the word “A’Yeka”- “Where are you?” The Midrash sees a parallel between Yirmiyahu’s use of the word “Eicha” and HaShem’s questioning with the word “A’yeka”, both words being spelled with the same four letters, ALEF, YUD, CHOF, HEY, only vowelized differently. But what possible connection can there be between these two episodes?

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the “A’Yeka” question of G-d is responding to Yirmiyahu’s question of “Eicha”. Why did HaShem introduce the conversation with Adam HaRishon with such an inane question? Why did He not ask, “What did you do?” or “Why did you transgress My command?” However, Adam HaRishon did not perceive the question to be inane. His answer to G-d is, “I heard the sound of Your Presence in the garden and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid”. Adam understood that HaShem was saying, Do you think you can do something without being seen by Me? The only way you could have committed this sin was by mentally blocking out the reality of standing in My Presence. By hiding from My Presence you have blocked me, out and thus, created a distance between us that has until now, not existed. That’s what sinning and transgressing against G-d accomplishes, it creates a distance between us and our Creator.

That is what the Midrash is saying. Yirmiyahu asks, Eicha, how can it be? And HaShem answers- A’Yeka, because Bnei Yisrael have sinned, they have separated from Me, and instead of closeness, there is distance between us. Yirmiyahu understands this message and expresses his distress by using the word “Eicha” thirty-six times in the Book of Lamentations, corresponding to the thirty-six instances in which the word “Kareit” –“to be cut off” is used in the Torah [Kritut 2a].

That is, according to the Rav THE great tragedy of the Churban HaBayit. More than the loss of Jewish lives at the time of the Churban, and more than the loss of the magnificent Beit HaMikdash, it was the loss of our intimate closeness and relationship with HaShem. Only on Tisha B’Av do we find a day of mourning that reflects a loss of relationship, and not a punishment. Gemara Berachot [3a] teaches us that three times a day HaShem laments, “Woe to the father who had to banish his child from the table”. HaShem is pained by the chasm between us, as much, or perhaps even more, than we are.

Our consolation is, we have the knowledge that this is not an irreparable breach. May we all merit seeing the restoration of this intimate relationship by our doing Teshuva, which means returning to G-d, and witnessing the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, speedily, IN OUR TIME.