

The first and central *kinah* for *Tisha b'Av* is *Megillat Eicha*. The Talmud (*Baba Batra* 14a) even refers to *Eicah* as the book of *Kinot* (Lamentations). The word *Eicha* represents the critical ingredient necessary to transform this day of sadness and mourning to a day of solace and jubilation. To solve the tragedy of *Eicha*, “How could this happen?,” we must scrutinize how the realities of this Diaspora came to be. While the first Temple was destroyed due to the lack of embrace of the *sh'mittah* year, acts of idol worship and sexual promiscuity, the second Temple was destroyed for a singular issue, *sin'at chinam* – baseless hatred, the lack of respect for one another.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was fond of saying that the best way to understand a word is to analyze the first time it appears in the Torah. The word *איכה*, *eicha*, first appears in the Torah as *איכה*, *ayekah*, (*Bereshiet* 3:9) when Hashem asks Adam and Chava “where are you?” If we are to solve the national calamity of *גולה* *golah*, exile and Diaspora, and move to a state of *גאולה* *geulah*, redemption, then we must recognize that the phonetic difference between these two words is one letter, *aleph*, representing the role of *אני*, the individual. In responding to the question *eicha*, how did this happen we must ask ourselves *ayekah*, where are we?

Rav Naphtali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin explains in his introduction to *Sefer Bereshiet* that the calamity of the Diaspora occurred when those involved with Torah study were not willing to recognize that there are multiple gateways of service to God. “The pious, the righteous and those steeped in Torah study were not virtuous in their interactions with others. They had baseless hatred of others in their hearts. They looked askance at those who served Hashem differently ... thinking that they were *zadukim* and *apikorsim*, apostates and heretics. It is for this reason that death and civil unrest [came to our people], and all the evils that happened in the world culminating with the destruction of the [second] Temple occurred.”

It is not coincidental that the *troph*, cantillations, for *Megillat Eicha* and *Megillat Esther* are similar. What separates these two *megillot* is not the masoretic musical notes, but rather the tone in which they are expressed. It is a keen reminder that the Moshiach is born on this day of *Tisha b'Av* and his ability to act is dependent on each one of us. When we answer the question of *ayekah*, where are we, in the way we treat other Jews and other human beings, we solve the problem of *Eicha*, how could this have happened and how do we change the status quo. Our personal commitment to engage in the solution instead of being part of the problem changes *golah* to *geulah*.

Hopefully the learning we share from our Roshei Yeshiva, faculty, and communal leaders, will empower and enable us to become more focused change agents enabling *geulah* to happen.

Wishing you all a meaningful three weeks and fast.

Sincerely,

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