

<p>speaks in the name of other gods – that prophet shall die. And should you ask yourselves: <u>How can we know that the oracle was not spoken by the Lord?</u> If the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him.</p>	<p>(כא) וכי תֹאמַר בְּלִבְכֶם אֵיכָה נִדְעָ אֶת הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא דִבְרוּ יְקָ: (כב) אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹר הַנְּבִיא בְּשֵׁם יְקָ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה הַדְּבָר וְלֹא יָבוֹא הוּא הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא דִבְרוּ יְקָ וְנִקְבְּלוּ דִבְרוּ הַנְּבִיא לֹא תִגּוֹר מִמֶּנּוּ:</p>
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The usage of the word “how” is unique however (!) in that in almost every instance throughout Tanakh, (and in all four of the above cited sources) not once is there a true direct answer to the question of “how,” rather, they are all used in a rhetorical fashion. Moshe does not receive an answer as to “how” he will bear the burden of the nation, nor was that his intention when asking. The same is true concerning the disenchanting one in the second source who questions how he will be able to inherit the land from those strong ones who dwell there. These were not questions seeking answers, rather just the opposite, they were statements made expressing grief, feeling overwhelmed, a loss of resolve or commitment, or even disbelief. The third source as well seems to be rhetorical, as a reproach of one who seeks after foreign Gods, with the justification of “how can it be that all these nations worship idols?” – the inference meaning, there must be something correct in worshipping their idols since they all do it. And the fourth, referring to a false prophet, is mentioned in the context of “lest one say in their heart,” asking rhetorically, “how should I know what God (did or) did not say?”

Yet the first appearance of the word *Eikhah* is the most revealing.

<p><u>Bereishit 3:8-10</u> And they heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called out to the man and said to him: Where are you? And he replied: I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.</p>	<p>בראשית פרק ג (ח) וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת קוֹל יְקָ אֶל הַיָּם מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּגֶן עֵדֶן הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי יְקָ אֶל הַיָּם בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגָּן: (ט) וַיִּקְרָא יְקָ אֶל הַיָּם אֶל הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֵיכָה: (י) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּגֶן נְאֻיָּךְ כִּי עִירָם אָנֹכִי וַאֲחַבְּא:</p>
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The question many commentators ask is: Didn't God know where Adam was? God had to ask? Rashi presents us with the more well-known answer, and a midrash on the Book of Lamentations gives another perspective.

<p><u>Rashi Gen. 3:9 s.v. <i>ayekah</i></u> [God] knew where he was, rather, [it was] to enter into a conversation with him, so that he not be terrified to answer [being fearful] should he receive a sudden punishment. We find this as well with Kayin, He said to him: Where is your brother Hevel? And also with Bilaam: Who are these men that are with you? – [it was all] to begin a conversation with them...</p>	<p>רש"י בראשית פרק ג ט איכה - יודע היה היכן הוא, אלא ליכנס עמו בדברים, שלא יהא נבהל להשיב אם יענישהו פתאום. וכן בקין אמר לו אי הבל אחיך, וכן בבלעם מי האנשים האלה עמך, ליכנס עמהם בדברים, וכן בחזקיה בשלוחי (אויל) מרודך בלאדן.</p>
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<p><u>Lam. Rabbah Parshah 1</u> Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemiah [disagreed]: R.</p>	<p>איכה רבה (וילנא) פרשה א רבי יהודה ור' נחמיה, ר' יהודה אומר אין לשון איכה</p>
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Yehuda says [the word] *Eikhah* is the language of rebuke, thus scripture writes “How can you say: we are wise and the Torah of God is with us?!” R. Nehemiah says [the word] *Eikhah* denotes lament, thus scripture writes: And the Lord God called to the man and said to him “Where are you?” – “Woe be unto you!” And when was [the book of] Lamentations said? R. Yehuda claimed: in the days of Yehoyakim. R. Nehemiah replied: Does one cry over their dead before they have died?! Rather, when was it said? After the destruction of the temple. Behold its remedy: *“Eikhah yashvah badad.”*

אלא לשון תוכחה הדא מה דאת אמר (שם/ירמיהו/ח') איכה תאמרו חכמים אנחנו ותורת ה' אתנו וגו', ור' נחמיה אומר אין לשון איכה אלא קינה הדא מה דאת אמר (בראשית ג') ויקרא ה' אלהים אל האדם ויאמר לו איכה, אוי לכה, ואימתי נאמרה מגילות קינות, רבי יהודה אומר בימי יהויקים נאמרה, אמר לו ר' נחמיה וכי בוכין על המת עד שלא ימות, אלא אימתי נאמרה אחר חורבן הבית, הרי פתרונו איכה ישבה בדד.

Both the midrash above as well as Rashi's commentary point to a powerful use by God and man concerning seemingly rhetorical questions. Rebuke, it seems, can come from simply asking the questions, not necessarily wanting, or even needing, to hear the answers. In essence, the answers are irrelevant for it's the weight of the question that has the most resounding force. And the answer is not for the one asking the question, rather, the answer, which is already known, is for the one who is being asked the question – to reflect on its incredibility or disbelief. For instance, when Jeremiah asks “How can you say: we are wise and the Torah is with us...” he is not looking for an answer like: “Well actually, here's how we do it...” He's not asking to receive an answer, he's asking out of his own frustration at those who could claim such a thing, yet also so that those individuals can ponder and internalize the *question*.

If one were to read the Book of Lamentations as a cry of despair by Jeremiah, of questions which may resound within our ears but which we truly cannot answer, or rather, that we can answer but know that the answer will not satisfy the question, where the cry of “*Eikhah?*” is not an “Alas!” but a horrific “How?!” How is it possible?! How could such a thing have happened?! How is it that we LET it happen? *Eikhah Eikhah Eikhah...* How is it that she sits alone? This great and powerful city? How is it that she has become like a widower?! *Tzion* has been sacked, her children and nation sent into exile... HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED? Think of how differently the story might sound.

In silent reflection, one may find regret, or even despair. Yet what exactly are we mourning for essentially on Tisha B'Av?

“Rabbi, I just don't get it. How am I supposed to mourn a building that existed over 2000 years ago? I never saw it; don't even know much about it. How am I supposed to feel sad today or connect with the readings? All of it is so foreign to me...”

Part II: Mourning the... Physical Loss?

Shulhan Arukh Orah Haim 1:3

It is appropriate for every God-fearing person to be pained and distressed over the destruction of the holy Temple.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן א

סעיף ג
ראוי לכל ירא שמים שיהא מיצר ודואג על חורבן בית המקדש.

An obvious question by one who may not feel this pain is “how”? How does one become pained over this destruction? What if we cannot relate to it? Is it supposed to come naturally? Some answer: “you just have to connect with it.” But how does one build connection? Is one capable of building a connection with something that they have never seen or experienced before? Take a look at the following gemara and consider what implications (if any) it may have on our question.

Talmud Bavli *Sukkah* 51a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה דף נא.

The Rabbis learned: Anyone who did not see the rejoicing [during the ceremony] of the *Beit HaSho'evah* has never [truly] seen rejoicing in their lifetime; One who did not see Jerusalem in its splendor has never [truly] seen a pleasing city; **Anyone who did not see the Beit Ha-Mikdash while it was still standing has [truly] never seen a magnificent structure.**

תנו רבנן: מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו. מי שלא ראה ירושלים בתפארתה לא ראה כרך נחמד מעולם. מי שלא ראה בית המקדש בבנינו לא ראה בנין מפואר מעולם.

Though one may say that the gemara here may be speaking figuratively and is not necessarily rendering decisive positions regarding what is and what is not considered beautiful, consider for a moment that the gemara here clearly limits our ability to appreciate what it was we *had* when the Beit Ha-Mikdash was still standing, let alone what we lost when it was destroyed, since we were not among those who witnessed it.

But if we can't fathom merely the physical beauty of the structure, can we be expected to fathom the *spiritual* beauty of the structure? Does the Beit Ha-Mikdash need to be the central focal point for our feelings on Tisha B'Av?

Rambam *Hilchot Ta'aniyot* 5:3

רמבם הלכות תעניות פרק ה

And on Tisha B'Av there were five events that occurred: It was decreed on the Israelites in the desert that they will not enter into the Land of Israel; both the first and second Temple were destroyed [on this date]; the massive city called Beitar was besieged where hundreds upon thousands of Jews lived, and they had a great king who all believed to be the messiah yet fell into the hands of the nations and all of them were killed – like the destruction of the Temple; and [lastly] on this day, which was set aside for evil fortunes, Tornos-rufus the evil king of Edom plowed under the temple mount and its surrounding area, thus fulfilling [what was prophesied in] Jeremiah...

הלכה ג
ותשעה באב וחמשה דברים אירעו בו: נגזר על ישראל במדבר שלא יכנסו לארץ, וחרב הבית בראשונה ובשנייה, ונלכדה עיר גדולה וביתר שמה והיו בה אלפים ורבבות מישראל והיה להם מלך גדול ודימו כל ישראל וגדולי החכמים שהוא המלך המשיח, ונפל ביד גוים ונהרגו כולם והיתה צרה גדולה כמו חורבן המקדש, ובו ביום המוכן לפורענות חרש טורנוסרופוס הרשע ממלכי אדום את ההיכל ואת סביביו לקיים +ירמיהו כ"ו+ ציון שדה תחרש.

Though it may be to emphasize the extent of the destruction, Rambam certainly gives much attention to the destruction of the city of Beitar that also happened on Tisha B'Av, even comparing it to the destruction of the '*urban*' itself. Yet in his *Hilchot Ta'aniyot* there is not extensive focus on the destruction of the temple itself per se. In fact, notice the reference to the day as being set aside for '*puraniyot*'. Nor is there extensive mention in, of all places, the Book of Lamentations itself as to the destruction of the Temple. Instead, the Nation of Israel and Jerusalem (Tzion) are the focal points of *Eikhah*.

Rhetorical Question: Is it possible one may not be able to connect to at least one of these other two central themes of Tisha B'Av?

"How can I be expected to cry on Tisha B'Av?"

Part III: The Power of Our Tears: Is it important to cry on Tisha B'Av?

Talmud Bavli *Ta'anis* 29a

"And the entire congregation lifted up their voices with wailing. And the nation cried on that [fateful] night. Rabbah said in the name of Rabbi Johanan: That [fateful] night was the eve of Tisha B'Av. And the Holy One Blessed be He said to [the Children of Israel]: [Tonight] you have cried over meaningless sorrow, but I will set for you [this night] sorrows [to be cried over] for all generations.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כט.

ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו העם בלילה ההוא. אמר רבה אמר רבי יוחנן: אותה לילה ליל תשעה באב היה. אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא: אתם בכיתם בכיה של חנם - ואני קובע לכם בכיה לדורות.

Pesikta Rabbati 26

[Jeremiah] went and saw the trail drenched from blood, and the earth was pummeled with the blood of its martyred from from here and to there. He set his face towards the ground and saw the foot[prints] of babes and children that had gone into captivity and he stooped to kiss them. When he caught up with the exiles, he held them and kissed them. He cried in front of them and they in front of him. He spoke to them saying: My Brothers! My People! With all that has happened to you, had you only listened to the words of my prophecy! When they arrived at the Euphrates River, Nebuzaradan spoke up saying: If appropriate in your eyes, would you not accompany me to Babylonia? Jeremiah thought to himself: If I go with them to Babylonia, there will be no consolation to the remaining exiles. He [thus] departed from them. The captives raised their eyes and saw that Jeremiah was leaving them. They all began weeping and sobbing, crying bitterly, "Our Father! Yirmiyahu! How can you leave us?!" Jeremiah spoke up and said to them: I call Heaven and Earth to testify for me, **had you cried only once while still in [Jerusalem] you would never have been exiled.** Jeremiah went on his way crying, lamenting: Woe unto you, most precious among nations...

פסיקתא רבתי (איש שלום) פסקא כ"ו

היה (לך עמהם) הולך ורואה את השביל מלא דם, והארץ מרובצת בדם הרוגיה מכאן ומכאן, קבע פניו לארץ וראה פרסות רגלים יונקים ועוללים שהיה מהלכים בשבי, היה גוחן לארץ ומנשקן, כשהגיע לגלות גיפפן ונשקן, היה בוכה לנגדם והם לנגדו, ענה ואמר להם אחי ועמי כל כך אירע לכם (עד) [על] שלא הייתם שומעים לדברי נבואתי, כיון שהגיע לנהר פרת ענה נבוזראדן אמר לו אם טוב בעיניך לבוא אתי בכל (שם/ירמיהו/מ'ד), חשב ירמיה בלבו ואמר, [אם] אני הולך עמהם לבבל אין מנחם לגלות הנשאר מהם, יצא לו מהם, נטלו הגלויות עיניהם וראו ירמיהו שפירש מהם, (הגיעו) [געו] כולם בבכיה בקול רם וצווחו ואמרו אבינו ירמיה (הריני) [הרי אתה] מניחנו, [שם] בכו שכן כתב על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו (תהלים קל"ז א'), וענה ירמיה ואמר להם, אני מעיד שמים וארץ אלו בכיתם בכיה אחת עד שאתם בציון לא גליתם, היה ירמיה הולך ובוכה וכך אמר חבל עליך יקרת המדינות.

Talmud Bavli *Berakhot* 32b

Rabbi Eliezer said: From the day the Temple was destroyed the Gates of Prayer were sealed... yet even though the Gates of Prayer were sealed, the Gates of Tears [however] were never sealed...

תלמוד בבלי ברכות לב:

אמר רבי אלעזר: מיום שחרב בית המקדש ננעלו שערי תפלה, שנאמר: (איכה ג') גם כי אזעק ואשוע שתרם תפלתי. ואף על פי ששערי תפלה ננעלו ושערי דמעה לא ננעלו, שנאמר (תהלים ל"ט) שמעה תפלתי ה' ושועתי האזינה אל דמעתי אל תחרש.

Excerpt from "*Consolation*," by Rabbi Maurice Lamm (pg. 7-8)

Weeping

Crying is a blessing. Feel for those who cannot bring themselves to weep after a tragedy. Crying opens a vent in the heart to release the pressure building up inside us, so crying is a perfectly suitable response. Most tragedies are inexplicable. The common lament on learning of a death is, "Why him? Why now? Why this way?" Our loss is complicated by an apparent senselessness. Crying is a burst of raw emotion, inarticulate, beyond reason, offering no logic, no solution. We respond to the impenetrable with unintelligible lament... The difference between numbness and weeping is that in numbness we inhale grief; in weeping we exhale it...

Weeping, far from being thought of as weakness, is considered a manifestation of deep love. When King Solomon built the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, he built two gates—one entry for wedding parties and one for mourners. Outside the mourners' gate, people would gather to say, "May the One who dwells in this House console you." This custom is replicated today in many synagogues. On Friday evening, mourners formally enter the synagogue in the middle of the service—after the joyous Sabbath psalms are recited and before the night service begins—and congregants greet them with the prayer that God should console them. It is quite touching to hear an entire community consoling its mourners. "The holiest attribute of a temple," the Basque poetic metaphysician Miguel de Unamuno noted, "is that it is a place where men weep in common."

Crying is more than respect, it is a godsend. That is how I understand the phrase of Alfred de Musset that I have carried with me since college French: "*Le seul bien qui me reste au monde est d'avoir quelques fois pleuré*" (The only good left me in this world is having at times wept)...

Though tears, which display the overwhelming emotions when met with profound connection, are a rarity at times in connection with our own spirituality, we have been given the gift of one day a year to unabashedly show our truly deep, spiritual and emotional connections with our nation and all of the trials and tribulations we have seen throughout history. And on that day, we are bidden "*Shifkhi ka-mayim libeikh...*" to pour out our hearts towards God. Does that make one required to cry on Tisha B'Av? It would be hard to say for sure. What might be a more "rhetorical" question though is, how much time does one spend truly trying to do so?