

## And G-d called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” (3:9)

Adam *HaRishon* was hiding from Hashem. Having committed the first sin, the very first deviation from a Heavenly command, primordial man was cringing with fear, filled with guilt and shame. Hashem turns to him and asks: *Ayeca?* “Where are you?” Clearly, this is a strange question coming from the omniscient Creator. If Hashem was trying to engage Adam in conversation, then this question is nothing more than an innocuous opportunity for Adam to explain himself. Otherwise, it does not seem to be insightful – especially knowing the Source.

At first blush, the question was really focused on Adam’s hiding from Hashem. “Where are you?” could mean: “Why are you hiding?” Why would a creation of Mine, whom I have endowed with so much, want to hide from Me? Is this right? There is room for discussion concerning this question. What was Adam really trying to prove by hiding? Perhaps he was ashamed of his actions, and he thought concealing himself would delay the inevitable. After all, it is not as if Adam had much experience with sin and repentance.

In his treatise on Biblical questions, Rabbi Emanuel Feldman explains that *Ayeca?* has many parts to it. The most significant aspect is: “Where are you now that you have sinned? Do you realize how exalted you were prior to your debacle with the forbidden fruit? Now – look where you are; and do you have any idea where you will be tomorrow?” We take the effects of sin for granted, not realizing that a sin places us in circumstances of a downward spiral such that each day that goes by in which we do not correct the error of our ways, we descend further into moral decay and spiritual oblivion. *Ayeca?* Do you know where you are today? Do you know where you will be tomorrow? – These are questions we must ask ourselves – constantly!

Rabbi Feldman observes that this question did not receive an answer – but, then, there is no such thing as an unanswered question from Hashem. If He asks – we must respond. The letters of *Ayeca* did not disappear. Instead, they hovered in the cosmos until they formed another word, indeed, a word of lament, the saddest word in *Tanach*: *Eichah?* “How?” *Eichah* and *Ayeca* are spelled with the same letters, but the question is different. Instead of, “Where are you?”, it becomes “How did this happen?” “How could it happen?” “How could it be?” Hidden in the crevices of the question, “Where are you?” is the bitter answer – the result of hiding from Hashem, a lament. Yes, the one who does not reflect on “*Ayeca?*”, will have to deal with “*Eichah.*”

“Where are you?” is not a spatial, geographic question. It is not about location, but about existence. It is an existential question, inquiring: Where are you spiritually – intellectually, morally, ethically, now that you have distanced yourself from Me? Who are you really hiding from? Is it from Me, or are you hiding from yourself? The path that begins with *Ayeca?*, ends with *Eichah?* How important this is for us to understand. How many people could have been saved had they stopped at the very beginning of their journey away from observance and asked themselves, “Am I really

better off today than I was yesterday? And where will I be tomorrow?" Stop and think. It will make a world of difference at the end of the journey.