

Hashem Elokim called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” (3:9)

Interestingly, in the first dialogue that ensued between Hashem and man, the question was one word: *Ayeca*? “Where are you?” Clearly, this was more of a statement than a question, which is obvious from the word *va’yomer*, “And (He) said to him.” Hashem did not ask – He said. Hashem wanted to begin a conversation with Adam *HaRishon* concerning his sin. Rather than immediately assert: “You are guilty!” or “Why did you do it?” Hashem began, “Where are you?” Hashem used this as a conversation opener to soothe Adam and allow him to open up with what he had to say. Sadly, Adam immediately blamed his wife. In a well-known exposition on the meaning of the word *ayeca*, the *Baal HaTanya* explains that this is the perpetual question of Hashem to all of us: “Where are you in the world! What have you achieved with your life?” We have each been allotted a specific amount of time to spend on this world, during which we are to carry out Hashem’s individual mission for us. I underscore “individual,” since some of us are more concerned with our fellow’s mission than with our own. Others would rather stand around complaining bitterly about their lot in life than doing something about it. We declare that we are in the wrong place for achieving success, the wrong job, the wrong city. We remonstrate, “Who cares?” Hashem cares. Otherwise, we would not be here. Every life has a purpose; every life matters. Each person is exactly where Hashem wants him to be. A Jew is never lost. He is where he belongs.

Our lives matter not only to Hashem, Who sent us here on a Divine mission. They matter also to those around us, who we affect/influence knowingly and unknowingly. We do not know what our mission is, but wherever we find ourselves, we must believe that this is by Hashem’s choice. Thus, we are to make the most of it and to succeed at whatever life throws at us. No one knows when he will be called “home.” When that time comes, will we be able to respond affirmatively to the question, “Mission accomplished”?

The following story is not new, but well-worth repeating. Shmuel Tamir was Minister of Justice under Menachem Begin. Fiercely independent, he had strong opinions on Israeli nationalism, patriotism and prosecution of Holocaust criminals. During his tenure as minister, *Eretz Yisrael* was suffering through a period of grave economic difficulty. Tamir felt that if people would limit the size of their families it would be greatly beneficial. He, of course, was directing his grievance toward the *frum*, observant, community, to whom a violation of the *mitzvah* of *P’ru u’revu*, “Be fruitful and multiply,” was anathema. Despite his personal lack of observance, Tamir felt that he required the support of one of the Holy Land’s preeminent sages, *Horav Aryeh Levine, zl*, who was widely respected by members of both sides of the religious spectrum. If he could elicit his support, it would be a crucial positive step in the right direction.

Minister Tamir’s basic position was: Is there any way to “dispense” with *Halachic* stringency, especially for those families that had absolutely no way of providing another child with the necessary material and emotional support vital to his/her growth and development?

Rav Aryeh Levine was as wise as he was erudite, as thoughtful and caring as he was kind. He listened intently and then replied the following: “Years ago, I was confronted with a similar issue, when a young couple, who already had a little girl, was faced with the prospect of bringing another child into the world. They contended that they hardly had enough food in their home for the three of them. How could they undertake the responsibility of adding to their present obligation? They were financially desperate.

“I explained to them that while I understand with all my heart that the road ahead would be far from easy, they needed to see the pregnancy through to fruition and welcome their child into the world. We believe with complete conviction that Hashem Who gives life can be relied upon to sustain it. He supports all His children, their future child included. They would just have to maintain faith in Him. The second reason for rendering my disapproval of your request is your spiritual responsibility. The *mitzvah* of *P’ru u’revu* requires one to have a boy and a girl. Thus far, you have only a girl. The *mitzvah* has not been optimally fulfilled.

“Last, is probably the most critical of reasons for my refusing to grant you a dispensation. You are presently carrying within you a holy Jewish soul entrusted with a Divine mission. Like all of us, a soul has a purpose which the world needs fulfilled, or else Hashem would not have granted life. [He does not just send down souls because He has an excess in Heaven.] Do not prevent the fulfillment of your child’s mission – neither for its sake nor for the sake of all mankind.”

Tamir was visibly disappointed. He thought Rav Aryeh would be more “understanding”, more “reasonable.” As he was leaving, he asked the Rav, “By the way, did the young couple acquiesce to your request? Did they have the child?”

“Yes, yes, they were blessed with a boy,” was the Rav’s reply.

“And,” Tamir countered sarcastically, “did the boy fulfill his mission in life?”

Rav Levine looked Tamir in the eye and said, “You will have to answer that question. It was your parents who stood before me years ago, and you are standing before me today only because they chose to heed my ruling. So, indeed, let me ask you now – did you fulfill your mission?”