



- Jeremiah: “How does the city sit solitary, that was so full of people!” (Lamentations 1:1 – attributed by the rabbis to the authorship of Jeremiah – which will be read after Shabbat, as the fast and commemoration are deferred to the 10th as it always is when the 9th falls on Shabbat)

Not only are these three verses read each year in the same week, it is also traditional to read the first two in the distinctive trop (style of cantillation) used for reading the Book of Lamentations on Tisha B'Av. So it would seem that the three are connected, that they carry some similar message, right?

But we're still not quite done. Two rabbis each think that "Eichah" (and also "Aiyecah") has a consistent meaning, but they dispute what it is:

Rabbi Nechemiah said the word "eichah" means only lamentation. That's what it means by "And the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9)

Rabbi Yehudah said the word "eichah" means only rebuke. That's what it means by "How can you say, 'We are wise...'" (Jer. 8:8)

The choice of text cited by each rabbi is rather intriguing. Rabbi Nehemiah turns to Gen. 3:9, which he reads, it seems, as God's lament for the entry of sin into human beings and the world. But it's also a bit strange for the rabbi to turn to Adam and to a text that a) is not actually using the word "eichah" but the identically spelled "aiyecah," and b) could as easily be read as a rebuke as a lamentation? Why not cite Lamentations 1:1, for example? Rav Yehudah's text supports his point a bit better, but he too had other choices, Isaiah 1:21 to name an example. These two views and the prooftexts that are meant to support them are each somewhat less stable (I think) than perhaps they were meant to be.

"Eichah" – praise, rebuke, or lament? Let me propose that it depends on answering the Divine call/question "Aiyechah," "where are you?" Are you in community, or alone? Are you in a place where justice is done, or a place where people think and act as if they are above the law? Will you turn to the person next to you and say "It's her fault!," or are you seeking to be a rightful descendant of Abraham and disciple of Moses, trying to be worthy of the blessings and T



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