

Ayeka: 7 Oct at Three

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 7 October 2026

Ayeka, the first question G-d asks a human being, is still waiting for its answer.

By Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren

The question

Today is three years since 7 October 2023. On that Simchat Torah morning, Hamas-led terrorists broke through the Gaza border and murdered some 1,200 people, most of them civilians. More than 350 were killed at a music festival; whole families were killed in their homes. 251 people were carried into Gaza as hostages. It was the deadliest single day in the history of the State of Israel.

Others will write today about the names. This essay is about a question.

This Shabbat we read Parashat Bereishit. After the first sin, the Torah records the first question G-d ever asks a human being: “The L-rd G-d called to the man and said to him: Ayeka — where are you?” (Bereishit 3:9).

A question G-d does not need answered

G-d is not asking for information. Rashi explains that He knew where Adam was, and asked only to open a conversation, so that Adam would not be too frightened to reply. Ayeka is not an interrogation. It is a door held open.

The Midrash hears another word in it. Bereishit Rabbah (19:9) reads the same four letters, aleph-yud-kaf-heh, as Eicha — “How?” — the opening cry of Lamentations. I brought him into the garden, says G-d; I commanded him; he transgressed; I sent him out, and I lamented over him: Eicha. Before it is a demand, Ayeka is a grief.

Take the two readings together and you have the posture this anniversary asks for. The question of responsibility is not opposed to mourning; it grows out of it. It is precisely because the loss is so great that the question cannot be allowed to fade.

Four verses of evasion

Adam’s reply comes in stages. “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid” (3:10). Fear first, then hiding. When G-d asks directly, “Did you eat from the tree?” (3:11), Adam answers: “The woman whom You gave to be with me — she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (3:12).

The sentence carries two deflections: the woman did it, and You gave her to me. Rashi’s comment is three words: here he denied the good. The gift of a companion becomes his excuse. Chava follows the pattern: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (3:13). The blame travels downhill until it reaches the one creature with no one left to pass it to.

Then notice what G-d does with the serpent. He asks it nothing. Rashi (3:14) explains that the inciter is not asked for its side, because it had an answer ready: when the words of the Master and the words of the student conflict, whose words does one obey? The enemy is held to account; it is not invited to explain itself. The questions go to those who were charged with keeping the garden.

That is the first lesson for an anniversary like this. Hamas is the serpent of 7 October, and nothing here softens its guilt. But the serpent never exempted Adam from Ayeka. The enemy's guilt and the guardian's answer are kept in two separate ledgers.

What a guardian owes

The Torah shows us what keeping faith sounds like. Yaakov, accounting to Lavan after twenty years as his shepherd, says: "What was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss myself... By day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night" (Bereishit 31:39-40). The shepherd does not offer the wolf as his alibi.

Yehuda, standing surety for Binyamin, says: "Anochi e'ervenu — I will be his guarantor; from my hand you may demand him" (43:9). It is the same word the Sages use when they say kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh, all Israel are guarantors for one another. Responsibility here is not first a matter of rules. It is covenantal: I bound myself to you, so I answer for you.

The Torah expects leaders to fail. In the laws of offerings it says: "asher nasi yecheta — when a ruler sins" (Vayikra 4:22). Not if; when. Rashi, following the Talmud (Horayot 10b), reads asher as ashrei: happy is the generation whose leader sets his heart to bring an atonement for his unintended sin. The blessed generation is not the one whose leaders never err. It is the one whose leaders say so, publicly, with an offering in their hands.

And the Torah reaches beyond intent. When a body is found in the open field and the killer is unknown, the elders of the nearest town wash their hands and declare, "Our hands did not shed this blood" (Devarim 21:7). The Mishnah (Sotah 9:6) asks: would anyone suspect the elders of murder? Rather, they declare that he did not come to us and leave without food, and we did not send him off without escort. The leaders of a town answer not only for what they did, but for the protection they owed.

Two kings

The Navi sets two kings side by side. Confronted by Shmuel, Shaul explains: the people took the spoil (Shmuel I 15:15, 21); "I feared the people and listened to their voice" (15:24). Confronted by Natan, David says two words in Hebrew: "Chatati laShem — I have sinned against the L-rd" (Shmuel II 12:13). Shaul is told the kingdom has been torn from him (Shmuel I 15:28). David's kingdom endures. The one who confessed kept the throne; the one who explained lost it.

Three years

Israel's own history has known the difference. In April 1974, after the Yom Kippur War, Golda Meir resigned, even though an inquiry had not faulted her personally, telling the Knesset there was public unrest "which cannot be avoided, whether it is justified or not." Before that, a reserve officer, Motti Ashkenazi, had sat outside the Prime Minister's Office demanding that the country's leaders accept responsibility.

After 7 October, some answered. Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva, head of Military Intelligence, resigned in April 2024: “The intelligence division under my command did not live up to the task we were entrusted with.” Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi announced his resignation as Chief of Staff in January 2025: “On the morning of October 7, under my command, the IDF failed in its mission to protect Israel’s citizens.” Shortly afterwards, Maj. Gen. Yaron Finkelman of Southern Command announced that he too would step down, saying he had failed in his duty to protect the Western Negev.

Those letters returned no one. But they were answers to Ayeka.

At the political level, the question remains open. As The Times of Israel noted this week, the prime minister has never accepted direct responsibility for 7 October. One need not belong to any camp to see that the sentence the commanders wrote, “it happened under my command,” has not yet been written by those who held the higher command.

The pattern returns

Last week the question came back in a new form. On 30 September, the co-pilot of flydubai flight FZ1073 from Dubai to Tel Aviv attacked the captain with the cockpit crash axe; the UAE’s Attorney-General calls it an attempted terrorist act. The wounded captain, the passengers and a second crew on board stopped him, and the plane landed safely in Saudi Arabia. Within days, the transportation minister said vetting crews was the intelligence agencies’ job, opposition leaders demanded her removal, and the US president said he personally believes Iran was behind it, while his vice president said he had seen nothing conclusive.

How foreign crews are checked deserves its own essay, and has one. The point here is the shape of the reply: it was someone else’s job. If Iran is found behind the attack, that will be the serpent again. It will not answer Ayeka for anyone.

What an answer is not

An answer is not a scapegoat, a slogan or a campaign line. In an election season, accountability is easy to wield against the other side and hard to apply to one’s own. The families of the fallen and of the hostages, the people of the south and the north, have not asked for revenge on anyone’s rivals. They have asked for what G-d asked in the garden: that someone step out from among the trees.

Nor is Ayeka asked only of ministers and generals. Each of us is asked where we stood and what we will do now: for the bereaved, for the wounded, for the reservists and their families, for the displaced. But in Bereishit the question is put first to the one who received the command. Those who asked for the nation’s trust are asked first, and loudest.

Hineni

The Torah gives us the answer Adam did not give. When G-d calls Avraham, he replies with one word: “Hineni — here I am” (Bereishit 22:1). No explanation, no third party, no serpent. Three years after 7 October, the people of Israel are still waiting to hear that word from everyone who held the watch.

May G-d comfort the families, strengthen all who guard us, and grant those who lead us the courage to answer.

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