

From How to Where | Rabbi David Ingber's Kabbalat Shabbat Sermon July 17 2026

Transcribed by [TurboScribe](#). [Go Unlimited](#) to remove this message.

This is the week of Eicha, that word Eicha. We don't hear that word, we don't hear that word chanted in the right way. Like I once saw a YouTube video of an African American preacher talking about the pentatonic scale as a slave scale, and music from the depths of the African musical culture and imagined the song of Amazing Grace, the melody of it, as the song of the slaves in the hull of the ship.

And he went on to sing Amazing Grace with the feeling that you might have felt if you were, there's a lament, there's a dirge, there's like a quality to Eicha. It's from the belly. It's from a place of brokenness and a place of shock, Eicha, how, how? And so this week when we chant Eicha on Wednesday night, we hear that lament, but it's not the first time the word Eicha appears in the tradition.

And Jeremiah, whoever is the author of Lamentations, is drawing certainly from other Eichot, other Eichas. This week alone, there are three Eichas this week. There's the one that I just mentioned, the first verse in Lamentations, Eicha, Yashvav Adan, Dayir Abbasi Am.

Where the author of Lamentations says, Eicha Yashvav Adan, how, in this, this city, is alone, isolated, but before that Eicha, there are two more Eichas that appear tomorrow. There's the Eicha of Moses in the Parsha will say, Eicha Esal Vadi, how can I handle, how can I carry, Levad, how can I, I can't handle this whole people, I can't carry them alone. And the Eicha, the how, the cry of Isaiah in the Haftorah that is the source for the Shabbat's name, the Shabbat Chazon, where Isaiah says, Eicha Eital Zona, Kiryan Emana, how has the faithful city become like a harlot? And every time the word is translated the same way, how, but it's really a howl.

It's not a how, it's a howl. But anybody who's ever sat with somebody who is howling, knows that Eicha as how, how has this happened to me, to us, knows that it's a very short trip from how to why, from how, which is disbelief and shock, to blame, or the search for etiology, the roots of it. It's an innate human need, meaning making that is.

Whenever we say how, we want to know, well, how not, next time. Lament, lament, as howl can very quickly become why, and that is as it should be, because lament asks questions because it has to. A why that never gets asked honestly becomes hardened into a knownness.

If we swallow the whys of our life, it hardens us. And so it's natural to go from how to why, but by itself, lama, why, doesn't ever bring us to what's next. It doesn't move us.

You can spend your whole life asking, Eicha, how did we get here? Why did this happen? And never actually go anywhere else, because the question is always a question that looks in the

rearview mirror. Let's take those four letters of that Eicha, Alef, Yud, Chaf, Hey, and change those vowels around and keep the letters there in place. And instead of Eicha, you get what? Ayeka.

Instead of how, the same letters, and in Hebrew, of course, letters aren't vowels. We have vowels beneath the letters. They're all consonants.

Eicha, which is how, becomes Ayeka with other vowels, which is, where are you? The very first question that God asks humanity, Adam HaRishon, Adam HaRishon, is eaten from the tree, and he's hiding amongst the trees in the garden. And God calls out, Ayeka, where are you? You might think that that was an interesting Ingber wordplay. As some of you know, my neurodiverse brain can't help seeing patterns where there might not be patterns.

It's certainly an accusation that I field comfortably. Numerology, all that. But I'm not the first neurodiverse brain to notice that the four letters that make up the word Eicha can be re-read as Ayeka.

In fact, a very early Midrash, a very, very early Midrash, hears Yirmeyahu Eicha as Eicha as the very same echo of God's Ayeka. Midrash Ravah says they're connected. The Eicha of Yeshvah Badad, how can she be sitting alone, and the very question that God asks humanity, Ayeka, are interwoven.

And when you go to look at that question that God asks in the story of Genesis, in the second chapter of Genesis, when God asks man, human, Ayeka, Rashi there, the great medieval commentary says something really obvious, but it's really profound. He says that God, of course, already knew exactly where Adam was. Adam was hiding, and God knows where Adam was hiding.

The question wasn't about information. Rashi says it was asked so that Adam wouldn't be blindsided, so he'd have a chance to answer before judgment fell. The same gentleness that God will show to Cain later, where he says, Aye, Hevel Eichicha, where is your brother? He knows where his brother is.

Kol d'mei Eichicha tzoakim elayim min adamah. The same gentleness, the same thoughtfulness, the same interrogation that is resting on God's desire not to shoot the human when he asks a question that corners them. God wants to have a difficult conversation and doesn't want to ambush him, and so he tells him, because God wasn't really wanting Adam to say, Here I am.

God wanted Adam to notice that he was hiding. So Adam's first response is, Va'ira, I was afraid, Va'ichave, I hid. He didn't say where he was.

He said what he was doing. He didn't say, Over here. I'm so happy you found me.

The human being had to say, I'm hiding. God asks us so that we'll say, You know what, I'm hiding. I wasn't admitting it to myself, but now that you've asked me, now I know I'm hiding.

And that's exactly what every Eichai is probably asking us to do. Why did this happen to me, to us? It's not the question only. The question is also, Where am I now? Where are we now? Are we hiding? Lament looks at the wreckage of the situation and says, How did we get here? And self-scrutiny looks at ourselves standing in the wreckage and asks, Where are we now? Where did I let myself be led astray, adrift? Where am I actually standing in this moment? Not where I'd like to think I am, not where I'd like other people to believe I am, but where am I really? And that's the turn.

That's the Eichai turn. Eichai asks us how. Ayekah says, Where are you? And only after we've answered that, honestly, can we begin to say, Now what? L'ma, now what? And I want to be careful here because this turn somehow can become a spiritual bypass because now what said too quickly becomes its own kind of dishonesty.

If we rush into the now what, especially from someone standing in front of the room, it's tempting to move people past where they're ready to be and to move quickly from lament to a resolution, from how did this happen to us into a five-point strategy on how to fix it. But that's not what I'm doing tonight, and that's not what this week and this Shabbos of Eichai, Eichai, Eichai, Eichai, and Ayekah is saying to us. Ayekah doesn't hand us a plan.

It hands us a mirror. Ayekah doesn't hand us a plan. It hands us a mirror.

And mirrors are only useful if we're ready to look into it. So let's look briefly. It's late, I know.

Real self-scrutiny means answering Ayekah without deciding ahead of time what answer will make us look righteous. So if you already think you know how you'll be righteous and then you go to look in the mirror, no, then you might as well not. The mirror can't be the place where you have your own presuppositions and preaffirmed and prepackaged ideas confirmed for you.

We have to show up in the mirror with a willingness and a readiness to hear things and see things as they really are. And so if we were to look with that kind of honesty at this moment, we might see something that should terrify us and wake us up. And before I say this, I want to just name a fear before I say the next paragraph.

There is a fear, and I know it in my body and I know it in so many other ways, that any self-examination that we offer right now as Jews, as a community that loves Israel and that worries about Israel, can be picked up and used against us by people who were never interested in our repair to begin with. That's a given. It's a given.

And that fear is not paranoid. No matter how many sub-stackers tell you the other way, no matter how many people tell you the Jews are using the oldest canard in the book, there's anti-Semitism and here we go again, and everything that's anti-Zion is always going to be, and they're using it, okay, turn down the volume on that. Let's not be worried about that.

Let's expect that. It's in the room. It's in the space.

It's an earned paranoia that we have, and I refuse to let anybody in the world tell me that my usage of anti-Semitism, my fear of it, is my fault, or refuse to let anybody tell me that my criticism or my fear of publicly being critical of my own people is my own issue. If the world really was a safe place for Jews and Israelis to be publicly critical of one another in public, oh, what a world that would be. It's almost like that could be a prayer.

Make this world a safe place for us to publicly show you our dirty laundry, because we've got plenty. So when people tell us that we don't want to air our dirty laundry in public, we say, you know why? Can you blame us? So let's put that here for a second. But if I look in the mirror today, on this Shabbos of Shabbat Chazon, we have to be honest.

There's a lot more that we can be doing as a people. There's a lot more that we can be doing to make more peace happen. There's a lot more that we can be doing to lift up Jewish life.

It's not this, this, this, but let's be honest, and let's be honest for a moment as if nobody's watching us. We could do more. And saying that doesn't mean that we haven't done.

We have. And saying that doesn't mean that the world is not to get us. It sure seems like that.

And saying that doesn't mean that in any way, shape or form, we are being disloyal to who we are as Jews or who we are as lovers of Israel. We can demand more. We can demand more of ourselves, of the Jewish community.

We can demand more and own our parts without any embarrassment, without any shame. The Ayatollah, where are we? The only honest answer that we should have tonight is the answer that comes a little bit later on in the Torah. The answer that comes later on in the Torah from Moshe, not later tonight, but later from early in the Torah.

The earliest Ayatollah response after the original Ayatollah is when Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses, our teacher, is standing. And God says to Moshe, Moshe, Moshe, Moses, and he answers, Hineni. Here I am, ready to be deployed.

He doesn't say, here's my strategy, God. I know there's a problem. The Jewish people are in dire straits.

It's not good for them. I'm your man, God. He just says, Hineni, here I am.

I'm ready to be deployed in the way that you need me to be deployed. He doesn't blame anybody. He doesn't sit and tear his garment.

It's simple. This is where I actually am. I'm not going to pretend otherwise.

The Jewish people are where they are, and I'm showing up, and I want to look in the mirror, and I'm not afraid of what I might see. So that's the whole thing. Now what? At least the version that we're allowed on a Friday night that isn't yet Tisha B'Av to say that there is not a now what yet.

There is just, let's look in the mirror. I was talking with somebody in the Jewish world this past week. I have absolutely nothing in common with him about seeing this moment in the same way.

He is so much further to the left than I will ever be on any of these issues. There isn't one thing that comes out of his mouth, usually, that isn't criticism of Israel. It's the first reflex.

It's always Israel's fault. I know it's hard to say this, but I have friends who don't like that I would say this, but I still love this person. I have a thing for heretics.

I was once one myself. I said to him, what do we have to do to go forward from where we are right now in the Jewish world? With people like J.D. Vance, who are not so subtly stirring the populist sentiments against the Jewish people, preparing. What do we have to do now, I said, with what's going on on the left with the DSA? What do we have to do now with what's going on in Israel? And he said one thing, and I sort of agree with it, but I'm not sure, but I think it's kind of what I'm saying here tonight.

He said we have to do tshuva. Now, what he meant, I think, was we should stand up and repent for all of our sins. That's certainly not what I think.

But I liked the return back to ayeka. I like the turn back to watching things unfolding with our brothers and sisters in the land of Israel and saying, we're with you. Where are we together? Where are we with all of the exhaustion that you're experiencing? Where are we with the PTSD that you're experiencing? Where are we together with growing global isolation? Where are we together? Not it's your fault and their fault.

There's time for that, too. But now on this Shabbos, ayeka ayeka, ayeka ayeka, where are we? Can we get together as a community here in the United States and in Israel as one am and counter the ayeka yashvah badad, because we're not badad, because we're together. We're together.

We're together. Can we come together and look in the collective mirror? Hold ourselves in the deep lament of look at what has become. Recognize that Rome had its part and Babylonia had its part and Assyria had its part and the Germans had their part and the anti-Semites in the world had their part to play, without a doubt.

I was thinking when I was reading the book of ayeka this week in preparation for next week, reading it a couple of times, I kept wondering if there are other traditions that have an equal mandate at self-criticism and self-reflection as we do. That after the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet came along and said to us, the city was destroyed, what's your part? Do we have

prophets like that in other parts of the world? They say to them, look what happened to your territory, it was destroyed, what's your part? We have our part and others have their part, but our part, our power has always been the power of ayeka. They tell the story, I'll finish with this just so you know, coming in for a landing.

There's a story of the Kotzka Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotzk, and a student once came to me with a famous story. He traveled from, I think it was from Warsaw, I don't know what the story exactly is, he traveled some faraway place and he came to the Kotzka and he said to the Kotzka, it wasn't easy to see the Kotzka, the Kotzka Rebbe was a very harsh Hasidic Rebbe, like we have a vision of Hasidic Rebbes that they were very soft and cuddly and beautiful and sweet, but the Kotzka Rebbe was vinegar. And it was scary to stand in front of the Kotzka Rebbe because according to people who stood in his presence, he saw right through you.

And if you weren't ready to have an x-ray done in real time, it was not a good idea to go see him. And so this student went to travel to the Kotzka Rebbe and he stood in front of the Kotzka Rebbe, he thought, you know, I traveled so far and he finally got an audience with the Rebbe, he sat down with the Rebbe and the Rebbe looked at him and just like right at him and he said, and he was a little bit harsh too, he said, why are you here? And the student said, I'm here because I heard that I can find God here. This is the place to find God.

And the Rebbe leaned in and grabbed him by the lapel, according to the story I read. And he said to him, he said, my friend, if you came here to find God, you came to the wrong place. So you can find God wherever you are.

If you came here to find yourself, pull up a seat. Ayeka, Eicha, where are we? It's the question that will never go away. No matter how old we become, we will always look in the mirror and have the mirror say back to us, we should actually have a mirror that says, Ayeka, where are you? Where are you? Where are we? From the how to where are we? That is the journey this week.

And just a blessing. This is the blessing. May God bless each and every one of us with the courage to look in the mirror and to look in the mirror honestly, without shame, to resist the urge to point outside of ourselves as often as we do and to turn that gaze back on ourselves with love and compassion and honesty, all that we can bear for the sake of building a better world soon.

May it be soon. And let us say amen.

Transcribed by [TurboScribe](#). [Go Unlimited](#) to remove this message.