



Devarim

The Whole Jewish World Will Be Asking: How?

Over the coming week, the whole Jewish world will be asking the same question again and again:

“איך?”
“How?”

How could we have reached this awful moment? Moshe asked this question in Parshat Devarim - how is it possible that the people could have rebelled against me in the awful way that they did?

That question will be also mentioned in the writings of the prophet Isaiah in the Haftarah this week. And this will be the opening question, the opening word of the book of Lamentations, of איכה, named after that same word.

How could it happen that Jerusalem was lost and our temple destroyed? This is a question asked by Jeremiah, as well as King Solomon.

“איך” is repeated 18 times throughout Tanakh. Fascinatingly, there is a 19th time in which the word appears, right at the beginning of the Torah, in the Garden of Eden, after Adam had sinned, using the same letters:

א, י, כ, ה,
- but it's not pronounced “איכה”. It's pronounced “איִכה”. God's question to him was:

“איִכה”

“Where are you?”

Where are you holding? Where is your responsibility? What is your response going to be in this dreadful situation?

It is with this in mind that throughout the ages, our people have always valiantly asked both questions: “איִכה” and “איך”.

We've wanted to know: “איִכה” - how could this happen? What are the lessons that we can learn for the future to prevent it from transpiring again? And we have also asked, “איך” - where are we? What is our responsibility now? How are we going to respond?

The Hebrew word for “responsibility”, “אֲחֵרִיּוֹת”, comes from the root “אָחַר”, which means “afterwards”. Throughout our history, we have responded to adversity with fortitude and resilience.

During these exceptionally trying times, so many of us are asking “איִכה”, but in addition, we're standing tall to ask “איך”.

We are giving a marvellous Jewish response: being proud of our tradition, and determined to ensure that the future will be one of hope, promise, and a great destiny for us all.

Shabbat Shalom.