

SHOSHANA JUDELMAN
Chassidus Teacher and Holocaust Educator

Ayeka?

On 19 Kislev, 1798, the Alter Rebbe was freed from Tsarist prison. About 200 years later, his teachings changed my life.

His opponents had accused him of fomenting rebellion against the Tsar, who had him arrested and brought to Petersburg. The Rebbe was held and questioned for 53 days.



The Tanya

One day, a government minister questioned the Rebbe. He asked why Hashem had said "Ayeka?" ("Where are you?") to Adam after he and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Didn't Hashem know where Adam was?

The Alter Rebbe offered Rashi's explanation: that it was a conversation-starter. But the minister, familiar with Rashi, pressed him for something deeper.

So, the Rebbe explained. Hashem wasn't speaking only to Adam. "Ayeka?" is a call to each one of us, every day and in every generation. It is Hashem asking: "You have been here for ___ years. Where are you on your journey? How much of your mission have you tried to fulfill? And, perhaps most importantly, where are you headed?"

As far back as I can remember, I have been introspective, for better or for worse. As a teenager, I used to sit on my dresser, gaze out the window, and contemplate the meaning of my life. Back then, however, I wasn't very connected to Torah and didn't think to look there for answers. Instead, I searched within myself for ways to grow and become a better person.

But I was hard on myself. Those moments of reflection often ended the same way: I would find plenty to criticize, berate myself for what I hadn't done or who I hadn't yet become, and resolve to try harder. I wanted so much to grow, but I didn't know how to do it without making myself feel that I wasn't enough.

The Alter Rebbe's explanation of "Ayeka" holds a key I wish I could have understood as that lonely, downhearted teenager. What if the question wasn't meant to make me feel how far I had fallen short? What if it was an invitation, a reminder that my life has purpose, that Hashem sees the person I can become, and that He wants to help me get there?

The question itself is an expression of connection. Hashem isn't simply waiting at the finish line, measuring how long it takes us to arrive. He is with us throughout the journey, giving us the strength to find our way, encouraging us to keep going, and believing in the potential He placed within us.

Hashem's "Ayeka" is not a judgment. He isn't asking us to measure ourselves against anyone else or hold ourselves to unmanageable standards. We don't have to have

it all figured out. We just have to be willing to keep moving.

At the same time, "Ayeka" invites deep soul-searching. It asks us to pause periodically and consider: Is this habit building my strength or paralyzing me? Is it moving me closer to where I want to be or pulling me further away? And perhaps most importantly: Do I even know where I want to go? These questions aren't meant to leave us feeling inadequate. They are meant to help us become more intentional about the lives we are building.

When he was released on the 19th of Kislev, the Alter Rebbe was emboldened to share his teachings more broadly and deeply. This opened the way for the Tanya to find its way into countless hearts and transform lives across generations.

The energy of this day is one of redemption and possibility. It reminds us that we are never stuck where we are, that new pathways can open, and that there is always room to grow closer to the vision Hashem has for us.

May we all be blessed to find the places, people, teachings, and songs that inspire us to keep moving forward with hope and encouragement. May we recognize the unique potential Hashem has placed within us and feel His presence as we take the steps to bring it to life. And may we have the courage to hear Hashem's "Ayeka?" not as a demand, but as an invitation to discover where we can go from here. ■

Shoshana Judelman teaches regular shiurim in Chassidus for women across Israel and in Midreshet Rachel V'Chaya in Jerusalem. Her shiurim can be found on Spotify and SoundCloud (Shiurim with Shoshana Judelman). Shoshana is also a guide at Yad Vashem and leads journeys to Poland and other countries for JRoots.

