

Hineni: Thanksgiving's Answer to Ayeka

In the Jewish tradition, gratitude is not only a feeling. It is a response to a sacred question. That question is "Ayeka?" "Where are you?"

It is the first question God poses to humanity in the Garden of Eden, spoken into a moment when everything has already gone wrong. Adam is hiding. The relationship is fractured. And still God comes seeking him: "Where are you?"

God is not asking for Adam's location. He is asking: Where are you in this moment? What do you stand for when the world feels uncertain or unfair? Who are you choosing to be? It is not an accusation. It is an invitation to be found.

And the answer our tradition gives us is the answer of our forefather Abraham: "Hineni." "Here I am."

Hineni is a commitment—the courage to step forward when the path ahead is unclear, to answer God's call not because life is easy, but because we trust that He walks with us. It is the language of faith as action, answering God's presence with our own even when we cannot see the way forward.

Since October 7th, I have heard words I did not think the human heart could speak.

I have sat with families of hostages who, through tears, told me, "Others have it worse—we still have hope."

I have met parents who buried their children and whispered, "Thank God we could lay them to rest. Thank God we were able

to say goodbye.”

I have listened to women managing their households alone while their husbands served for months in the reserves—women exhausted and brave, who still said, “He is coming home. Other families lost everything.”

This is Hineni lived out. This is spiritual resilience—the kind that has carried the Jewish people through every chapter of our history.

Our tradition teaches this through the story of the Red Sea. The first song in the Bible is sung not after the Israelites reached safety, but while walls of water rose on either side and danger pressed in. They sang because they recognized the miracle of being carried forward. They sang because gratitude does not wait for certainty.

This is Thanksgiving: not the absence of fear, not the comfort of easy answers, but gratitude inside the unknown—because we trust that God walks with us.

Seen through the lens of Hineni, Thanksgiving is not just a holiday on the calendar. It is a daily practice—a way of standing before God with presence, purpose, and an open heart. And it is often when gratitude feels hardest to find that we need it most.

This year, the question of Ayeka comes to each of us: “Where are you?” Where are you in a culture that tells us we never have enough?

Where are you when God calls you to show up with compassion, faith, and clarity? Thanksgiving invites us to answer with a full heart: Hineni. Here I am.

Here I am, choosing gratitude even in hardship.

Here I am, finding the blessings I would otherwise overlook.

Here I am—not because I have everything I want, but because I have been found by the One who asks where I am.

This Thanksgiving, may we each have the courage to answer God's quiet question with the strength of Hineni. May we recognize the blessings that endure even when everything else is shaking. And may we remember that gratitude is not the result of a perfect life, but the practice that fills every life with meaning, purpose, and hope.

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