

Rabbi Ethan Linden's Prayer
at Interfaith Service on the BP oil spill,
July 6, 2010

In the Hebrew Bible, there is word that signals lament, a word that cries out in sadness at the folly and loss and destruction of the world, and that word is *aicha*. It means literally how, but its poignant use often gives it a meaning more like alas. The very first word of 3 of the 5 chapter of the Biblical Book of Lamentations is *aicha*. As the author of that book surveys the destruction of the once great city of Jerusalem, he opens his plaintive cry with the words, *aicha, yashva bedad eer rabati am*. Alas, how lonely sits the city, once great with people. And now we too, once again, in this city, we cry out: *Aicha*. We echo Lamentations, but we also cry out with the prophet Jeremiah as he declares, *aicha tomru chachamim anachnu*. Alas: How can we say that we are wise? And we cry out with the people of the tribe Benjamin, in the book of Judges, when they ask, with fear and trembling: *aicha nitah haraah hazot?* Alas: how did this evil thing come to pass? And as we call out our word of lament: *aicha*, we remember that with a simple switch of vowels, that word of sorrow, *aicha* become *ayecha*, a word of investigation: where are you? This is what God asks of Adam in the Garden of Eden when the man and his wife hide from the Lord in an attempt to flee their sin. The question goes beyond location: *ayecha* means: Where are you, where do you stand? And so as we cry out our lament in this city and in this region, *aicha* for livelihoods lost, *aicha* for animal life destroyed, *aicha* for beaches marred and ecosystems threatened. But even as we cry out *aicha* we know we will not stop with that, we will not stop with alas, but we will also say *ayecha*, because we want to know from BP *ayecha*, where are you? And to the Government, from those tasked to help us, we ask

ayecha, where are you? And, perhaps most crucially to each other and to ourselves as well, we ask *ayecha*: where are you?