



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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What's the Backstory?

The Haftorah opens with a striking and almost unexpected call: רְנֵי וְשִׂמְחֵי בַת צִיּוֹן, Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion. But to fully appreciate these words, it is important to know the backstory. The penultimate pasuk preceding the Haftorah contains Hashem's warning to the nations who persecuted the Jewish people during exile: כִּי הִנֵּגְעַ בְּכֶם נִגְעַ: כִּי הִנֵּגְעַ עֵינֵי הַבַּיִת, Whoever touches you touches the pupil of His eye. Only after this declaration does the Navi turn to Zion and say: "Now sing."

The Malbim explains that the joy of this opening emerges specifically after the reassurance that Hashem never stopped watching over His people. The nations may have believed that exile meant abandonment. Jewish suffering may have appeared to be evidence of Divine distance. But Zechariah insists otherwise. Every wound was seen, every humiliation registered, every tear mattered. And therefore: רְנֵי וְשִׂמְחֵי, Sing and rejoice.

The imagery of כִּי הִנֵּגְעַ עֵינֵי הַבַּיִת is itself deeply powerful. The pupil of the eye is among the most delicate and protected parts of the human body. Instinctively, a person shields it from harm. The Navi teaches that this is how Hashem relates to His people. Harm done to Israel is not distant to Him; it is personal.

And at the same time, joy does not emerge in a vacuum. It emerges from the realization that even in periods of concealment, there is always Divine attentiveness beneath the surface.

The Navi then continues with an even greater promise: כִּי הִנְנִי בָא וְשִׁכְנֵתִי בְתוֹכְךָ, For behold, I am coming, and I will dwell among you. The Malbim explains that this refers to the future redemption, when the Shechinah will once again rest openly among the Jewish people. During exile, Hashem's presence may feel hidden, fragmented, difficult to perceive. In the future, that relationship will no longer require interpretation. It will be clear.

Perhaps this is one of the deepest forms of consolation. Redemption is not simply the promise that pain will end. It is the realization that even during the pain, we were never alone. So often people carry burdens quietly. Struggles are hidden beneath routine, smiles, and responsibility. There are moments when individuals wonder whether anyone truly sees what they are carrying. Zechariah reminds us that the Jewish people are never unseen. Even in exile, even in concealment, Hashem watches over His people with the protectiveness one has for the "pupil of His eye."

Perhaps that is why the Haftorah begins not with rebuke, but with song. Because sometimes the ability to sing again begins with knowing that all along, Hashem was listening. ■

רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה
Peleg Shabtai ben Chaviva Leah