



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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When We Stop Looking

YIRMIYAHU 2:4–28; 3:4

There is a heartbreaking moment that sometimes happens in a game of hide-and-seek. A child finds the perfect hiding place and waits excitedly, listening for footsteps and laughter, anticipating the joy of finally being discovered. But the minutes pass. There is only silence. Eventually, the child realizes the game is over. Everyone has gone home. No one is looking anymore.

The sadness is not in the hiding. The sadness is in no longer being sought.

This week's Haftorah opens with Hashem's painful rebuke of the Jewish people. Through the prophet Yirmiyahu, He recounts how the nation gradually drifted away from Him. Yet among all the accusations, one phrase stands out:

וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֵיךָ ה'

"They did not say, 'Where is Hashem?'"
(Yirmiyahu 2:6)

At first glance, the criticism seems surprising. Yirmiyahu does not say that the people denied Hashem or openly rejected Him. Instead, he laments that they stopped asking, "Where is Hashem?"

The Malbim explains that this question should have been on the nation's lips. Hashem had taken them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and brought them

safely into a land of abundance. Their history was filled with unmistakable encounters with the Divine. Their failure was not simply that they forgot the miracles of the past. They stopped looking for Hashem in the present. They no longer sought His presence, recognized His hand, or searched for His guidance in their daily lives.

Perhaps this is one of Yirmiyahu's deepest insights into the nature of exile. Exile does not begin only when the Beit HaMikdash is destroyed. It begins much earlier, when we stop asking 'איך ה'? The first step away from Hashem is often not rebellion but indifference — not deciding that He is absent, but no longer wondering where He is. Relationships cannot flourish without seeking one another. The moment we stop looking is the moment distance quietly takes root.

As we enter the Three Weeks, we mourn the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, but Yirmiyahu reminds us that every physical destruction is preceded by a spiritual one. Before the walls of Jerusalem fell, the relationship had already begun to crumble. The people no longer asked, "Where is Hashem?"

The Three Weeks therefore invite us to reverse that process. Before we rebuild walls of stone, we rebuild a relationship. We train ourselves once again to notice Hashem's presence in our lives, to recognize His hand in history, and to ask, every day, 'איך ה'? ■