

# Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler**

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**VAYIGASH - 14 p'sukim - Yechezkeil 37:15-28**

## Two that Merge into One

The primary theme of our parasha, that of the reunification of Yosef and his brothers, was effected by Yehuda's plea to Yosef, a moving soliloquy that opens our Torah reading. In a similar vein, the navi Yechezkel prophesies of the eventual rapprochement of the two kingdoms of Yosef, (referred to as Efrayim) and Yehuda, through Hashem's miracle of uniting the two branches into one. And, just as the peaceful reunion of the brothers allowed for the eventual redemption from Egyptian oppression, so would the reunification of the divided kingdoms bring to the redemption from the oppression of the exile.

Beneath it all, however, remains the underlying question: Why was there such a division between Yehuda and Yosef - both that of the brothers and that of the kingdoms? Why did this rupture, one that began as a simple familial divide, eventually become a national fracture that continued for centuries (even until today)?

A day before I started to write this essay, I began to consider various thoughts about this week's haftara that I would share with the readers - some fresh approaches to the text that might be seen as illuminating or, perhaps, even, innovative, so that it would interest the public. I set aside my efforts for a time to relax and read a (relatively) new book written by Rabbi Doron Perez, the Executive Chairman of the Mizrachi World Movement, and well-known public speaker. As fate(?) would have it, I opened to the chapter that addressed this very question. In it, Rabbi Perez shares the approach of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook HaKohen zt"l, the first Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, an approach that presents an impactful and essential lesson for us today.

The monarchy of ancient Israel survived only over the reigns of but three monarchs before it divided into two separate states, Yehuda and Yosef [Efrayim]. Rav Kook explained that the Northern Kingdom of Yosef was more idolatrous in nature and synonymous with the mores of the pagan world, while the Southern Kingdom of Yehuda was more religious and spiritual-centered, as it was centered around the Beit HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. Hashem regarded the need for reconciliation and reunification, as portrayed in the haftara. Rav Kook saw the two states as body and soul, political state and

spiritual society, and, therefore, the message of Yechezkel was that these contrasting forces had to become complementary ones, working together.

In the Chief Rabbi's eulogy of Theodore Herzl of July, 1904 (he was then the Chief Rabbi of Haifa), he concedes that, ultimately, the divine forces must take the lead, because our devout mission is the *raison d'etre* of the Jewish nation. Nonetheless, his essential message to the masses who gathered on that day, was that a future Jewish State must include the national and cosmopolitan goals that involve scientific expertise and political experience, but, with that, it must also embrace the spiritual aspect, requiring religious educators, Torah study and Rabbinic guidance. In short, Rav Kook was calling for both the supporters of Yosef and the followers Yehuda to act in consonance, with a realization that each can contribute to the other.

Upon completing the remarkable essay of Rabbi Perez, I was struck by how essential Rav Kook's message is for our own generation. The words he shared over a century ago must echo in our ears even today for it is of extreme importance to our very survival as a strong, independent nation. The endless attacks between the different segments of our society do no more than exacerbate and

intensify our divisions and, even worse, discourage discourse, understanding and, of course, unity.

The simple truth is that the two branches cannot survive without the other. Hashem had Yechezkel take two branches to teach that which should be obvious: that the two must merge into the one. ✨