

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

Bringing Dry Bones to Life

VAYIGASH - 14 p'sukim (short)

- Yechezkeil 37:15-28

A strange title, I know. After all, this week's haftara does not even mention Yechezkel's well-known prophecy of "the dry bones"! It is, however the "sequel" to the prophet's nevu'a, an "extension", if you will, of the better-known divine message. This selection is taken from the latter part of thirty-seventh perek of Sefer Yechezkel, a continuation of Yechezkel's vision of the valley of the dry bones. The opening prophecy focuses upon Hashem's promise to bring the "dry bones" - the despondent recently-exiled Jews - back to "life", infusing them with hope for the future, by guaranteeing their eventual return back to their land. On the other hand, the latter message, that of our haftara, describes the glorious future that awaits the people after their homecoming to their beloved land - and it is this second prophecy that links us to Parashat HaShavu'a.

In this later vision, G-d commands the navi to take two sticks/branches and write the name of Yehuda, representing the Southern Kingdom, on one stick, and the name of Yosef, synonymous with the Northern Kingdom (Efrayim), on the other stick. Yechezkel is then told to bring these two sticks together as one in his hand upon which Hashem will miraculously fuse them into one stick. The powerful message to be taught to the nation is precisely a message we learn from the parasha itself. Recall how the rapprochement of the brothers that we read of in the outset of the parasha came about through the entreaties of Yehuda to Yosef. This reunion of the two "leaders" in the house of Jacob, of he who suggested the sale of his brother with him who was sold, led to the mending of the twenty-two-year breach in the family.

Similarly, G-d teaches the exiled nation that their return to the land, essential as that would be, will not be the final stage of their redemption. After the "dry bones" are brought back to life, after they returned to their land, they would still have to mend the tear that had divided the nation. And, more importantly, they had to realize that it would not be Hashem who would repair the rift! G-d demanded that Yechezkel take the sticks and place them in his own hand and put them together. Only

after the navi's efforts to draw the sticks to each other would G-d perform the miracle and combine the two. Without the efforts of the navi - of one who was part of klal Yisra'el - no miracle would have taken place.

The message of both the parasha and the haftara speaks loudly to us today. Our return to our land was but a first step - essential, but only a beginning. It is now our challenge to take the different "sticks" from all over the world and place them in our hand. Only when we make the effort to bring the disparate parts of our nation together, whether they be in Israel or in the Diaspora, will Hashem perform the miracle to make us truly one.

The House of Jacob could not become the Nation of Israel until Yehuda and Yosef agreed that they were part of one whole.

And the same is true of us today. 