

HAFTORAH OF THE WEEK : ויג'ש

*This week's Haftorah is taken from Sefer Yechezkel,
Chapter 37, verses 15 — 28*

1. Concerning the dramatic confrontation of Yehudah and Yosef in this week's Sidra, the Midrash tells us how the ministering angels exclaimed to each other, "Let us go down and watch how the lion and the ox fight each other!" "The lion" refers to Yehudah, whom Yaakov, in his farewell blessing to his sons, calls "a noble lion" and "the ox" refers to Yosef, whom Yaakov calls "a strong ox." The lion is often spoken of symbolically as the king of the animals of the wild. The ox, on the other hand, is the symbolic strong leader of domesticated animals.

2. Yaakov Ovinu saw prophetically how the noble characteristics of Yehudah, together with his courage and leadership abilities, would be inherited by his descendants. The kings of the Jewish People, said Yaakov, the father of that People, shall come from Yehudah. At the same time, Yaakov saw that in Yosef, too, there is great moral strength and nobility and in Yosef, too, there are qualities of leadership, as in fact was clearly seen when he was Viceroy of Egypt, but there are clear differences in their styles of leadership. Yehudah represents a monarchy that is more symbolic of the Divine Kingship, more evidently regal, perhaps more authoritarian, more strict, more lion-like, whereas Yosef represents a leadership that is gentler, less roaring but more quietly strong like an ox, less aloof, perhaps, more down among the people, more openly compassionate and there is a need for that type of leadership, too. These differing styles of leadership existed right at the beginning when the sons of Yaakov were growing into the founding fathers of the Tribes of Israel and in fact were a contributing factor in what happened with Yosef and his brothers back in Kenaan. Later in the history of the Jewish people, after the death of King Shlomo, these differences re-emerged and manifested themselves in the unfortunate split-up of the Jewish state into the southern Kingdom of Yehudah and the northern Kingdom of Israel, often called Ephrayyim, son of Yosef, because its first king came from that Tribe. For most of that era, there was bitter rivalry between the two kingdoms, giving rise, too, to rampant idolworship in the Jewish People and eventual calamity for the whole Jewish Nation.

3. This week's Haftorah is the prophecy of Yechezkel that this rivalry between the kings of Yehudah and the kings of Yosef will come to an end when the two kingdoms will be united once again under the one king descended from the House of Dovid of the Tribe of Yehudah. HaShem instructs Yechezkel to take two wooden sticks (signifying two sceptres) and write on them the names "Yehudah" and "Yosef." In view of the people, he is then to bring them together, symbolically uniting the two kingdoms under the one monarch, dramatically signalling how the bitterness and disunity in the House of Israel will be brought to an end. Furthermore, he is to prophesy and tell the people that when that time comes, HaShem will gather-in all the scattered people of the Jewish Nation from all their places of dispersion. They will all come under the benign rule of the King of the House of Dovid who will lead the whole Nation back to HaShem and His Torah and Mitzvos. With the Beis HaMikdash again established in the midst of the Jewish People, the Nations of the world will know again that the Jewish People are the People of HaShem through whom the Name of HaShem is sanctified throughout the world.