



**Parsha Vayigash**  
**Ezekiel 37:15-28**  
**December 6, 2013 / 3 Tevet 5774**

The Haftarah assigned to this week's Torah portion, Vayigash, is Ezekiel's vision of a future reconciliation and reunification of the Northern and Southern tribes of Israel. The Northern tribes had been dispersed and exiled from their land by the end of the eighth century B.C.E. With the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., the Southern kingdom of Judah met its end. Ezekiel preaches from exile in Babylonia in the years following that destruction, and his vision of a time when the tribes will be united and a single monarchy will lead the nation in its land must have been a comforting and hopeful buoy for a community on the verge of total extinction. Ezekiel holds two sticks, one inscribed with the name of Judah (representing the southern tribes) and the other with the name of Joseph (representing the northern tribes). God instructs Ezekiel to bring them together so that they will become one stick. The symbolism of the sticks serves to tell the world that the Israelites will again be one nation, with one king, in their land, serving the one God and sanctified by God.

Finding ourselves in the midst of the holiday season, family dynamics tend to take on greater prominence than during the rest of the year. Tension grows as excitement grows. Anticipation of family reunions, and the revisiting of longstanding (and sometimes strained) relationships raises the level of anxiety for many people. Sometimes the emotional and social exiles we experience from one another are the result of an act of God (as Ezekiel sees it-some event for which no one can claim responsibility), and sometimes they are the result of an act of a person (as in the case of Joseph and his brothers-some careless or intentional act that leaves us hurt, angry and resentful). Sometimes, we can't even remember what started the whole uncomfortable dynamic, but we can't imagine freeing ourselves of it!

It would be wonderful if we could write our names on stick, hold them together, and cure all that separates us. But that's not the way it works. Ezekiel's vision, however, does offer us some guidance. With one God, with one mission, with one sense of direction, we are made whole despite our differences. We don't need to agree on all things to be one people. In fact, according to our sages, when two sides argue over an issue, and each side is truly dedicated to serving God in their position, the argument is worthy of being preserved! Such disagreements, however, are not meant to divide us. They are meant to bring us closer because of the passion and dedication we see in each other. Imagine how different our political or religious discourse would look, both in Israel and here in the United States, if members of every party or movement trusted that their opponents' sole interest was the serving of the greater good. Perhaps compromise would more easily be reached if we didn't have such a terrible track record of self-

interest; perhaps more common ground would be explored. Within our own family structures, imagine how much better we would get along if we forgave insult, if we believed that we all want to be loved and accepted, if we opened the door to reconciliation and allowed two to dwell as one for a while.

I can't promise that God is going to bring about reconciliation and unification to the north and the south, the secular and the religious, the Republican and the Democrat. But I know that I can open the door, just in case.

From the editors: Add your answer to the questions below raised in this week's Unraveller. Join the discussion of these questions and the commentary in Mentschen, the FJMC's online forum.

1. Have you had a family issue which divided members of the family, which was resolved? How was it resolved?
2. Have you ever tried to look at the issue from another's point of view? Did that change your view of a situation?
3. Have you been able to forgive an insult, perceived or actual, made to you, and how did you do it?

*This week's Unraveller was written by Rabbi Craig Scheff of the Orangetown Jewish Center in Orangeburg, New York. After practicing law for 3 years, Rabbi Scheff decided to enter the rabbinate. In the fall of 1995, he arrived at the Orangetown Jewish Center. Just having commenced his third year of Rabbinical School at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbi Scheff took the position of Cantor at the OJC, and was determined to make the OJC his home. After serving the OJC for 2 years as Student Rabbi, he was ordained in 1998.*