

HAFTORAH OF THE WEEK : ויחי

*This week's Haftorah is taken from the First Book of Kings,
Chapter 2, verses 1 — 12*

1. The connexion between the Sidra and the Haftorah is quite straightforward. In the Sidra, Yaakov feels his end is near and calls for his sons. He bestows upon them his blessings and he tells them his last wishes and instructions before departing this world. The Haftorah, similarly, is the report of the last instructions of King Dovid to his son Shlomo. But although the Sidra and the Haftorah share this common topic, there are some clear contrasts, too.
2. Firstly, Yaakov called for all his sons. They were all present and he spoke to each one. With Dovid, on the other hand, although he had a number of children, he called only Shlomo. Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, teach us that a man has a duty towards his sons to rebuke them and keep them on the correct path. Avrohom, they point out (*Shemos Rabboh, 1*) because he did not rebuke Yishmoel, therefore Yishmoel led a depraved life. Because Yitzchok did not rebuke Aysov, therefore Aysov led a depraved life and likewise, they say, because Dovid did not rebuke his other sons, therefore they led a depraved life. On the other hand, because he did rebuke Shlomo, therefore Shlomo was righteous. And because Yaakov rebuked all his sons, therefore all his sons were righteous.
3. As a result of this mistaken leniency with his sons, Dovid HaMelech suffered great personal tragedy. His son Avshalom led a violent rebellion against his father and eventually was horribly killed and Adoniyohu, another son, also proclaimed himself king in defiance of his father and there was much violent hatred among his other children, too. But Shlomo was endowed with the same noble personal virtues of his great father and was thus worthy of being his successor. As his life drew to an end, Dovid has summoned Shlomo to his bedside to instruct him to carry out punishments against some of those who were guilty of crimes against the king.
4. The Jewish People are bold, they are fiercely independent of mind and do not easily take to being governed: they only grudgingly accept authority. Yet these qualities are just why HaShem has chosen us to be His People as without these qualities we would not be able to withstand all the trials and tribulations as HaShem's steadfast People of the Torah. But it does make the Jewish People a difficult people to govern. When Dovid was anointed to be King after Shaul, he had to be careful not to assert his authority with strict justice as this would have resulted in resentment and even hostility against him. The monarchy of the House of Dovid was new. It had yet to establish itself. In the interests of national unity and safety, which require a united and strong leader-king, Dovid had to personally endure much insult and even invective at the hands of people

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who had their own axes to grind but whom it was not possible to punish. But even if they could not be punished then, they nevertheless had to receive their punishment later — if only because if they did not, that would threaten the authority of the monarchy. But more importantly, the authority of the Jewish King is not really his own as it is really a symbol of the authority of the Divine King of Kings. That is why even the king himself cannot forego his honour, for it is not his to forego, and why even a small offence against the king cannot be overlooked. In his last hours, Dovid, the true servant of the people who was personally so humble and self-effacing, is concerned for his People's safety and security, which depends on a strong monarchy. It would now fall to Shlomo to demonstrate that the Nation was secure and in the hands of firm leadership.

4. The people who were guilty of offences against the king, says Dovid, must not be allowed to end their days peacefully. Dovid tells Shlomo that he must see to it that Yo'av ben Tzeruyoh and Shim'i ben Gayroh in particular, are punished in such a way that the people at large learn deep respect for the king and what he represents.
5. It must seem strange to us that some of the great personages of the time, the generals and commanders-in-chief of the army of Dovid HaMelech, although great Torah scholars, were nevertheless guilty of devious treachery against Dovid himself and were also guilty of even quite brutal killings. And yet this need not surprise us. Our Chachommim point out for us that Torah knowledge itself, even great Torah knowledge, does not make a man good unless together with that Torah knowledge there is genuine fear of Heaven. Indeed, when one is a Torah scholar and utilizes that Torah scholarship for one's own ends, then the Torah of HaShem has been usurped and the desecration of G-d's Name is all the worse.
6. Yo'av, who was a son of Dovid's sister Tzeruyoh (and therefore his nephew) was a fearless military fighter, one of the generals in the armies of Dovid. Avner, who originally was the commander-in-chief of King Shaul, eventually came over to Dovid's side. But Yo'av tried to persuade Dovid that Avner was not to be trusted for he was determined to be rid of someone that he saw as his rival. At the same time, Yo'av was popular with the people. They viewed him as a courageous hero for he was a brave fighter and he struck fear into the hearts of the Philistines. The very threat of him kept the Philistine enemies of the Jewish people in check. For this reason, it was not possible for Dovid to punish him for his unlawfully killing Avner, against his, Dovid's wishes: the people would not understand it. Far worse, though, was the way in which Yo'av had killed Avner for it pointed the finger of suspicion against Dovid, that he was behind this killing and that, if not with Dovid's actual connivance, it was at least carried out with his agreement. Yo'av was also guilty of killing Amosso, who had originally been with Avshalom in his rebellion against his father Dovid. When Amosso came over to join Dovid, Dovid made him a general in his army, to the great chagrin of the jealous Yo'av. Once again, Yo'av used a legal excuse for killing this rival, too, and once again Dovid could not punish Yo'av. But through these killings by Yo'av, an impression was

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created that the House of Dovid was implicated in intrigue and murder. After all, Yo'av was the king's nephew, and there was the real danger that the Davidic monarchy would appear to be as bad as any other monarchy of the day. All this violence and legal wrangling threatened to do great harm to the fledgling House of Dovid. Yo'av could not go unpunished for this would implicate the Royal House of Dovid, that his evil deeds were indeed with Dovid's knowledge and agreement. Therefore, there had to be a reckoning: justice had to be seen to be done, even if it was later.

7. Shim'i ben Gayroh had come out against Dovid when he was fleeing from his son Avshalom. Unfortunately, Shim'i, too, was a great Torah scholar but he too, say our Chachommim, had no fear of Heaven. He had thrown his lot in with Avshalom because he thought that the rebellion of the young prince would be successful and he resented the fact that Dovid had been made king, replacing Shaul, who came from his Tribe, Binyomin. Dovid had heard Shim'i shout his vile curses and humbly resigned himself to HaShem's will that he suffer this humiliation. Later, of course, when the rebellion had failed, Shim'i had come back, deceitfully seeking forgiveness. But he deserved to die, says Dovid and he charged Shlomo with this task.
8. Dovid tells Shlomo to remember the kindnesses that various people had done to him and to welcome the family of Barzilai from Gil'od in particular for they had sheltered and supported Dovid during the time of Avshalom's rebellion.
9. And so Dovid slept the long sleep, confident that the son who succeeded him would maintain and build further the high reputation of the House of Dovid. With his personal example of Torah scholarship but together with the fear of Heaven and sincere Mitzvah observance, Shlomo's reign would build on the work of Dovid and would be the epitome of a just and good society, to the admiration of the whole world.