

KNOW AND TAKE HEED

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Jacob called to his sons and he said, "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will happen to you in "the end of days". Gather yourselves and listen, sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. Reuven you are my first-born..." (Breishis 49:1-3)

...and I will tell you: Jacob attempted to reveal "the end". The Divine Presence was removed from him and he started to speak about other things. (Rashi)

I keep reading these verses over again hoping the missing pieces will suddenly appear and a window will open to the final act of the drama of human history. This was no senior moment and neither was it a bait and switch technique to merely pique our interest. We need to know the benefit of introducing the subject of "the end of days" even if the conversation is abbreviated.

The theatre is filled with the buzz of excitement. The curtain is about to rise on a wonderful night. We are ready to be taken for a long and drama-filled ride to "who knows where?" The play begins. The acting is superb. The characters are rich. The plot is appropriately complex.

We are far enough along to begin to figure out the shape and the direction of the play when odd things begin to happen. Parts of the curtain and lighting begin to fall. Actors break ranks with their roles and fight as if they were off stage. Scenes lose their symmetry and sense. The audience begins to rumble. It's too hard to figure out what's planned and what's spontaneous, what is intended and what is mishap?

Meanwhile the plot thickens like a cholent and is ready to boil over. "Could all this ever be strung together cohesively?" is the question pounding in the minds of many. After a while some look at their watches and calculate, "Soon another hour of parking will have to be paid for and the baby sitter too." One after the other begins to file out.

The play is assumed to be in the genre of "the absurd -theatrical dadaism." Make your own sense from the chaos and be happy that you're still sane enough to still seek some meaning.

Only a few remain. Why? Why do they remain? They bothered to peak into the Playbill- the program and noticed the name of the author of the play. Though his imagination is wild and deep, he has a habit of cleverly concluding his works in a genius fashion. The end is the part not to be missed. That's when the all the loose ends are reconciled in an amazing and satisfying way.

Those who remain, observe with a heightened intensity even as events seem to spin faster and

more out of control. No matter how long it takes, they understand that this play will not end in a fizzle and a pop.

In the unfolding of the story of Joseph and his brothers, all crystallized in an instant when Joseph revealed his true identity. "The Author" gained enormous credibility. So too on a bigger stage, the drama of human history can be made to make perfect sense when some hidden quotient is manifested.

If one assumes that all of what is happening around is no more than sound and fury signifying nothing, then he is more likely to join the millions who have abandoned the theatre in deep despair.

If, however, Jacob's tease, if you please, is taken to heart, then every moment is pregnant with hope. There is that burgeoning sense that the best is yet to come, which contributes to the resolve to continue to continue.

The words of Rabbi Israel Friedman of Rizhyn, from 150 years ago echo eerily this very real and personal drama: "At the end of days, before the coming of the Mashiach, G-d shall take a string, a "string of faith", and stretch around the world. Many a man will attempt to grab that string and to hang on to it. However, G-d will appoint two angels to hold the string at both ends, instructing them to shake violently as the days of Mashiach near.

It will become increasingly difficult to maintain a grasp on the string. As the years go by many, many will slip and fall. I am telling you this, my brothers, so those living in those times will know and take heed."

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