

THE END OF DAYS

by Rabbi Label Lam

Then Jacob called for his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in "The End of Days". Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. (Breishis 49:1)

When they had assembled they thought they would hear a litany of blessings and consolations. Jacob our father answered and said to them, "Abraham my father's father had blemished children that came out from him, Ishmael and all the children of Ketura. From my father Isaac issued, my brother Esau who was disqualified. I am afraid that that there might be amongst you a person whose heart is divided from his brothers and goes to serve other gods". All twelve tribes responded simultaneously and said, "Listen (our father) Israel HASHEM is OUR G-D HASHEM is the ONE and ONLY." At that moment Jacob our father answered, "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity!" (Talmud- Yerushalmi)

Maimonides writes in The Laws of "Shema" that this homiletic is the source of our inserting those whispered words after the first line of "Shema", although it is not part of the verse- "Blessed is the Name of His glorious Kingdom for eternity!" With that as the punctuation to their discussion, it seems that Jacob's worries were quieted by the brother's unanimous pledge. Why was their declaration of faith at that moment taken as a "guarantee" of future loyalty?

It's written in his, "Guide for Grooms" that Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe asked a group of young men preparing to stand under the wedding canopy, "On what will you base your marriage?" All expressed the same tender sentiment- "On love and understanding!" The Rabbi explained to them that however well- meaning their intent they cannot possibly base their new marriages on love and understanding. They neither love nor understand each other quite yet! That is what they need to strive for. With effort they could hope to love more and understand more of each other over time. What they experience now is a desire to understand and to love. It is the goal initially and not the means. Communication is the vehicle that helps deliver that result.

When looking for a life partner an important factor, all can agree on, is "compatibility". It's valid to ask, "Is there enough commonality to create a shared existence?" However, there is an even more pressing question. Compatibility may assist in the area of communication but more importantly one might need to ask, "What is our ultimate goal in being together?"

To illustrate, imagine two people meet in the train station and start a dynamic conversation. They

soon happily discover that they are both going to the airport and the very same airline terminal. When they arrive they are saddened realize one has a ticket to Hawaii and the other to Jerusalem. All the communication skills in the world won't help them at this point.

However, when two people are committed to and hold in their hands tickets to the same final destination a host of difficulties will melt away effortlessly. The ego of both is trumped by the compelling power of a shared vision. Obstacles built by questions of "Who's right?" will yield naturally to the answers to- "What's right?" How important is it to have not just a common history but a common destiny?!

"Shema Yisrael" can be called the "mission statement" of the Jewish Nation. Properly understood from its primal origin, The "Shema" declares not only our point of departure but our final destination, as well, as we say daily: "On that day HASHEM will be ONE and His Name will be ONE!" (Zechariah 14:9) With the end in sight and all his children unified in purpose around him, Jacob sought to and was successful at offering us a glimpse of that which paves our way to "The End of Days".

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