

SHHHHHH... THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY

by Rabbi Label Lam

A lion cub is Judah... He crouches, lies down like a lion, and like an awesome lion, who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah till Shiloh (Moshiach) arrives... (Breishis 49:9-10)

Judah, from amongst all the tribes, was forecasted to make it till the end of times. What quality did he and does he yet possess, that has granted him that kind of longevity? Perhaps in the very blessing of Jacob we have a clue. Why is Judah both a mature lion and a whelp, a baby cub?

Mark Twain wrote an article in 1899 for Harper Magazine entitled, "Concerning the Jews". Here is an excerpt I'm sure many are already familiar with: "If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of; has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people...He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it...The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to the dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but burned it out, and they sit in twilight now or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, be at them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

An archeologist in Israel came upon something rather surprising while digging one day. He was certain that he had just unearthed the next Dead Sea Scrolls. No doubt fame and fortune awaited him. There were a number of tiny scrolls tucked ever so carefully into small compartments and he couldn't wait to return to the lab to analyze and publicize what he had found. He carefully placed the delicate parts into a plastic bag to preserve them and then into a paper bag to disguise their value. He sat on a bus now cradling his find with a parent's devotion. Sitting next to him was a man with a black hat and a beard who was also clutching a bag.

The archeologist could not contain his excitement. He asked his neighbor if he wished to peak at his discovery. The fellow looked into the bag and shook his head affirmatively. The archeologist was a little disturbed by the lack of shared enthusiasm and so he told him that that these items might be thousands of years old. Still unimpressed, the man opened for the archeologist the bag he had been holding and showed him the same thing, Tefillin, black boxes with parchments. "We wear them

every day." He told him exactly what was written on those scrolls and so it was and has been for 3319 years. They may have been very old but it was nothing new.

A psychologist friend who became observant was being chided by colleagues and friends in a public forum as to how he could have become involved with such medieval practices. He cleverly retorted, "It's not medieval! It's ancient!"

Judah, the source of the title "Jew", is like a valuable coin in that he is both extremely old and still in mint condition. He is ancient but not a relic ready for the British Museum. He's also current- on the cutting edge and yet connected to his ancient roots. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter ztl. compared the young generation to an energetic train and the elders to tracks. It's only together that either has any practical function.

Like a lion- cub that is simultaneously old and vibrant, the Jewish People who find in the ancient the very new and the new in the most ancient hold the key to what could be shhhhhh... the secret of immortality. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.