

# A NATION OF THAT NOTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

*Then Yaakov 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 Yaakov, and listen to Israel your father. (Breishis 49:1)*

When they had assembled they thought they would hear a litany of blessings and consolations. Yaakov our father answered and said to them, "Avraham my father's father had blemished children that came out from him, Yishmael and all the children of Ketura. From my father Yitzchok issued, my brother Eisav 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)

What was Yaakov's big fear in the waning moments of his life here in this world? How had his children consoled him? Every normal and decent parent wants to be surrounded by his beloved family and to see them together in the end. How was Yaakov any different? He was not content to have everyone rally around and make overtures of allegiance. He wanted something more, a specified commitment! What exactly did Yaakov want that they were able to successfully satisfy his dying wish?

Years ago I was blindsided by a statement. A presenter was telling a group of "minority" students we were guiding through a museum, "To know where you are going in life, you have to know where you come from!" Referring to me he emphatically declared, "He's a son of Abraham", looking at me, "right!?"

After a few awkward moments and after realizing that nothing pejorative had been implied I simply said, "That's right!" Having agreed publicly to such a thing the words owned me. I rushed home and took hold of the old dusty Bible I had received from the sisterhood on the occasion of my bar-mitzvah.

I started to read about Abraham. Amazed to find a portrait of my ancient relative I felt like someone who had dusted off a box in the attic uncovering an amazing family tree dense with pictures and rich with history.

For weeks I obsessed with the idea that I know who my great-great-great- grandfather is going back 3700 years. I researched whether anyone else had any credible information about relatives going that far back down the highway of history. I felt uniquely proud as a Jew and saw myself in a much larger context. Next my mind shifted from the perspective of the present looking backward to a view from the past projecting forward. I wondered what Abraham had done that now his children's children 3700 hundred years hence would not only know of him but hold him in such high esteem. I wondered what I would have to do or be that my children should care or know who I was and what I lived for?

Attempting to mine out and discover an answer, I recorded some thoughts in a personal diary. I imagined a small stone entering a still glass-like surface of a lake, sending out ever widening co-centric circles till the stone settles and the water becomes quiet and smooth again. I penned, *"Pebbles in ponds are our ponderings, but boulders in oceans were our fathers' notions whose waves still rock the sea, whose waves still rock the sea!"*

Now I imagined a giant stone hitting the earth thousands of years ago and settling to the bottom of the ocean. We don't know the velocity with which it hit or the mass of the object but we can only begin to estimate the awesome size by the fact that the ocean is still ebbing and flowing strongly thousands of years later from its impact.

What became clear to me was that Avraham's longevity was not due to his military might or political connections but rather it was because of his clarity about a certain profound idea. I wanted to know what that idea was and that launched me on a journey that has not and shall never cease. Yaakov, I believe wanted to be certain his children would be **a nation of that notion**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).