

PERPETUAL CARE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Some things get special attention. The land of Israel Yisrael is one of them. The Torah tells us this week, that Eretz Israel is a land "that Hashem constantly watches, from the beginning of the year till the end of the year" (Deuteronomy 11:12). It is an amazing verse, one that declares the eyes of a very Personal G-d to be supervising even a seemingly inanimate object, His most beloved piece of real estate with constant concern. And though the commentaries discuss the special significance of this particular surveillance as opposed to every thing in the world that is under Hashem's ever-present surveillance. But if everything is always under guard, what makes Israel so special?

In the early 1980s my grandfather Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, suffered an angina attack, and his doctor strongly recommended that he undergo an angiogram, a difficult and sometimes dangerous procedure for a man that age. At the time my younger brother, Reb Zvi, was a student at the Ponovez Yeshiva in B'nai Beraq. In addition to his own prayers on behalf of our grandfather, he immediately decided to approach his Rosh Yeshiva HaGaon Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach with a request to pray for Reb Yaakov's welfare.

In Jewish tradition, when you pray for the welfare of an individual, you identify the intended party by mentioning him or her together with his or her mother's name. Thus Moshe our teacher's name would be Moshe ben Yocheved (Moshe the son of Yocheved).

My brother knew he had to present Rav Shach with his grandfather's name, Yaakov, and the name of Reb Yaakov's mother. That was no easy feat, my brother Zvi had no clue of her name. Moreover, at the time of the angina attack, Reb Yaakov was over 90 years old, and in excellent health. Zvi could not recall a time where he had mentioned our grandfather's name in the Mi Shebairach for the sick. He simply was embarrassed to approach Rav Shach without Reb Yaakov's mother's name, so he went on a search expedition through B'nei Beraq attempting to contact people who would know the name of Reb Yaakov's mother.

Visiting at the homes of second-cousins and other relatives, my brother inquired. No one knew. Finally, a nephew of Rav Yaakov who lived in B'nei Beraq told my brother that Rav Yaakov's mother was named Etkah.

Armed with the information and an update on my grandfather's condition, he approached the home of Rav Shach.

The elderly sage invited my brother into his sparsely furnished dining room and asked him to take a

seat. The elderly Rosh Yeshiva sat by a wooden table that stood directly under a large bulb illuminating the tomes that lay opened in front of him. The Rosh Yeshiva looked up from the Talmudic passage he was contemplating and smiled toward my brother. He knew my brother and his lineage and asked him how he was feeling. Then he inquired about his grandfather, Reb Yaakov.

My brother turned white. "That is exactly why I came," he stammered. Immediately Rav Shach's face filled with consternation. My brother continued, "you see, my grandfather was not feeling well and must undergo a procedure. I came to inform the..."

Rav Shach jumped up from his chair and exclaimed: "we must say a special prayer for Reb Yaakov ben Etkah (Yaakov the son of Etkah)!"

My brother stood opened-mouthed and could not contain himself. "Rebbe," he began meekly. "The last 12 hours I have been trying to find out my grandmother's name in order to present it to the Rosh Yeshiva. Now I see that the Rosh Yeshiva knows the name of my great-grandmother. How is that?"

Rav Shach explained. "Years ago your grandfather visited Eretz Yisrael. After meeting him I asked him for his mother's name. I could not imagine a Jewish world without a healthy Reb Yaakov, and there is not a single day that goes by that I do not say a special prayer for his welfare!"

Hashem teaches us a lesson in this parsha. Sometimes we think that the Land of Israel is on auto-pilot. The Torah tells us that it is not. His eyes are on it 365 days a year 24 hours a day. And though we all care for and love Eretz Yisrael, perhaps we too, must mimic that attitude. Because we should not be able to imagine a world without a stable and healthy Israel. And we must have it, like Hashem, in our hearts and minds constantly. Not only when during crisis when the storm clouds are brewing, but even from "the beginning of the year through the end." Even when the sun is shining down on it.

Dedicated in memory of David Atlas by Larry and Marcia Atlas

Good Shabbos
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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