

# LOOKING FOR OUR BROTHERS

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

A few years back I found out something about myself that surprised and amazed me. It was Erev Yom Kippur and colleague of mine, we'll call Zalman, and I was on our way to Williams College, a small liberal arts school in western Massachusetts to meet some college students to talk about Yom Kippur and present an opportunity for some to come to Jerusalem for a winter session. We drove up the New York State Thruway before turning into the back woods of western Mass. It was hours before we found our destination and a warm delegation of thirsty souls. After our presentation and discussions ran their course it was our turn to take the long trek home. It had certainly been worth our while. A number of students had shown interest in coming with us to Israel and as it turned out a few from that night made it "all the way to the Wall!"

Along the way home Zalman and I had tossed our hats and jackets into the back seat of his station wagon and we had ceased to talk about work and prospects and we begun to talk "in pajamas" as the phrase goes. I asked Zalman how he had gotten involved Yiddishkeit and what had spurred him on. He began to tell me how he had a brother that went to camp one summer and drowned. My heart fell into my stomach. He explained how he started to wonder, "What's it all about?" and "Where do we come from and go to? Etc.

When he finished I asked him if he had heard about my story. He acknowledged not. I told him that I had a little brother that went to the dentist to get a load of teeth fixed and they gave him gas and he never woke up. I explained with vivid recollections all the haunting philosophical questions that have followed me since. Here we were two grown men with families at home barreling down the New York State Thruway and we were both crying about matters that happened more than three decades earlier.

Then it occurred to me a verse from this week's Torah Portion. Yosef confronts a man who is really the angel Gabriel while he blunders on his way and the angel asks him, "What are you looking for?" Yosef answers, "I am looking for my brothers!" (Breishis 37:15) I told Zalman, "Look at us two crazy guys! Here we are grown up guys with families and it's Erev Yom Kippur! Under normal circumstances we should have been in bed along time ago but here it is already Two O'clock in the morning and we are hustling down the thruway to get home. If the angel Gabriel would turn on his police lights and pull us over and, instead of giving us a ticket, he would peak into the car and ask us, "What are you guys doing out here at this crazy hour so far from home? What are you looking for?" If he would ask us the same question he asked Yosef, I think we can give him the very same answer

with the fullest of hearts, "We are looking for our brothers!"

I never understood this aspect of my own drive until that drive. Sometimes HASHEM puts a hole in our hearts, we get such a deep hurt that we spend the rest of our lives filling the gap and it may form the basis for our main accomplishments in life.

Each year on Chanukah, at some point shortly after candle lighting, I pile the kids into the car with a handful of candies of course and we take a ride all over our town and even to some uncharted areas. We drive through some of the wealthier and some of the more modest sections of town but our goal is not to scout out real estate at all. Rather what we are looking for in the heart of the night, in the windows of Jewish homes, are flickering Chanukah flames, keeping in mind the words of the wise-Solomon "The candle of G-d is the soul of man." (Mishle') It's always treat and a thrill of endless depth, especially on Chanukah, looking for our brothers. Text Copyright &copy 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.