

IS MY FATHER STILL THINKING ABOUT ME

by Rabbi Label Lam

A Rebbe in Israel asked his class a question from this week's Torah portion and received a surprising answer from an unlikely source. Why was Yosef compelled to ask his brothers, "Is my father still alive?" Yehuda was pleading "mercy" for Binyamin on the basis of their father's health risk, if anything happened to the boy. Yosef could not have been told more directly about his father's status.

The class was perplexedly silent. Nobody could conjure a reasonable explanation. Then Shimon in the back of the class raised his hand. He was usually quiet and despondent. He never participated. His grandparents had deposited him there. His father had abandoned home and his mother was unable to care for him. No wonder little Shimon was usually mentally absent while others were actively participating. This time was different though. To the amazement of all, Shimon was waving his hand enthusiastically. The Rebbe called on him and he answered, "Maybe what Yosef meant to ask was not if Yaakov was alive but rather is *my* father still alive? Does my father still think about *me*?" Those who knew his situation were touched. He had a novel and valid approach to the meaning of a verse in Torah based on the peculiarity of his experience.

When I heard this story the first time I too was very moved and when I began to think about more and more I realized that his insight was not unique to his circumstance. For many years I have been involved with seminars demonstrating with lockdown logic the veracity of Torah. Many people have walked away with a conviction that the Torah is true and there really is a G-d! They may have adopted Shabbos and Kashrus based on their new understanding of things. However, I know that deep inside there lurks a gnawing question, "Sure I know there's a G-d, but does He think about me?" We all certainly feel it to a greater and lesser degree!

Almost 30 years ago I heard something stunning directly from the mouth of the Tzadik of Monsey, Rabbi Mordechai Schwab ztl. Quoting Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, it is written in Adon Olam, "Master of the Universe before any creature was created ... He was, He is, and He will be in glory. He is One and there is no second to compare to Him to associate (with Him). Without beginning, without end, Power and dominion are His. He is *my* G-d and *my* living Redeemer!" Rabbi Schwab emphasized that last line and etched into my psyche! "He is *My* G-d" he said touching his own chest. That is how one relates to HASHEM, not as a distant entity but as a great and personal G-d who is deeply interested in the details of your life. So how do we know?

9 years ago we went to my mother's house for Shabbos, honoring my step father's Sheloshim. After Shabbos we all sat down to watch our wedding video from, at that time, 22 years earlier. As we

watched the parade of people comments flowed on how young or different this one looked and how many are not in this world. By the Chupah one after another of our Rabbis could be seen with much darker beards making those seven blessings.

One person my mother did not recognize. She asked, "Who is that?" I told her that that was Reb Getzel my Rebbe at that time. My wife asked, "Whatever happened to him? I haven't heard anything from him or about him since then." I think he went to Cleveland and I also have not heard from him or about him for 22 years."

Later that night, back home in Monsey, my cell phone rings. "Hello Reb Label, Getzelhere!" I was in shock. It was that Rebbe. He told me in his usually excited tone that he was on his way back to Cleveland after an inspiring Shabbos in Philadelphia. After one of his lectures a young man approached him to ask a pointed question and a follow up question. He asked the fellow what his name was. He said, "Eli Lam." He asked where he came from. The young man told him, "Monsey". He said, "I taught a Lam in Monsey 22 years ago- a Label Lam!" "That's my father!" he said. He was so impressed by and so excited to meet my son that he asked him for my number and amazingly he actually made the call that very night.

It was a huge dose of Hashgacha Pratis-Divine Providence! It felt like a confirmation of something, a kiss from heaven, a reminder that the Master of the Universe, in His supernal glory and endlessness **is my father still thinking about me.**