



For being a Jew and wanting to live like one, Reb Asher Sossonkin was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in a Siberian labor camp. There, he and other "political" prisoners lived, cut off from the outside world, in the harshest conditions, together with prisoners who were fearsome criminals.

One day, Reb Asher was approached by another prisoner who asked him about his observance of Shabbat, which had become somewhat of a legend in the camp. This Jew also wanted to observe Shabbat. Reb Asher encouraged him, but with fear and trepidation, for disobedience to camp regulations was punished severely. The Jew, however, would not be discouraged. He began to staunchly observe the Shabbat using ruses which were sometimes successful, and often not.

Once, another Jew said to him, "You can't copy Sossonkin! Why, he doesn't even eat non-kosher food, but you eat anything!"

When he heard this unfamiliar idea, the Jew came to Reb Asher to find out what was this "kosher" food. Reb Asher explained to him that Jews eat only animals which are designated in the Torah as "kosher," and then, only when they are slaughtered in a prescribed manner. From then on, the Jew resolved to eat only kosher, too. To think that this scenario was being played out in the grim setting of a Communist labor camp, where a scrap of meat was a coveted delicacy, is almost unbelievable, and yet it happened.

How did this Jew find the strength of character to maintain his beliefs? He had served in the army and attained a high rank, but nevertheless, he was sentenced to fifteen years at hard labor. Now, in the camp, he resolved to return to Judaism. After a day of ceaseless labor, he would come to Reb Asher to discuss Torah and to learn how to perform mitzvot. He longed to learn how to pray from a real prayer book, but alas there were none in the camp. Reb Asher transcribed the Hebrew prayers phonetically into Russian for the man and his joy was boundless. Thereafter, he recited the prayers with great happiness and devotion every day.

The friendship between the two men was a true blessing, giving them someone with whom to share their pain and even find a bit of joy in observing Torah together. When Chanuka approached, Reb Asher taught his friend the story of the festival. Reb Asher suggested that they find some discarded sardine cans in the kitchen, and try to construct some kind of menorah from them, but his friend wouldn't hear of it.

"How can we celebrate such a great festival using old cans? I have a friend who is a tinsmith and for a few rubles, I'm sure he'll make us a Chanuka menorah!"

Reb Asher was uneasy lest their plan become known, but seeing his friend's enthusiasm, he didn't have the heart to discourage him.

When Chanuka arrived, the shining tin menorah was completed. They set it up in a small room adjacent to their barracks and lit it each night, reciting the blessings in front of Jews and gentiles alike. All seemed to bask in its light and take courage from the Chanuka story which Reb Asher would tell every night.

But, unfortunately, every group has a troublemaker, and the peace of the Chanuka lights wasn't to last. On the fifth night, as they were about to light the menorah, a warden walked into the room to take roll. This was a departure from the usual schedule, for ordinarily, after ten at night, the prisoners were free to do as they wished. For some reason, on this night, they had to line up and be counted.

As the names were being called out, one of the prisoners whispered to Reb Asher that he had been informed on, and the roll call was just a pretense to arrest him. The rule against practicing religion in the camp was matched by an equally severe prohibition against lighting a fire anywhere in the camp buildings. All the buildings were constructed of wood, and it was feared that they could easily go up in flames.

"While he's reading the roll, run in and throw the candles in the snow. Then you can say you don't know anything about it," suggested the man to Reb Asher. But Reb Asher

could not bear to do that to the holy lights which he had worked so hard to obtain and had lit with such sacrifice these five nights!

The roll call seemed to go on interminably. When the warden came to Reb Asher's name, he counted the lights in the menorah and cried out, "Five?"

"Five!" Reb Asher replied in a loud voice. Then he continued calling out the rest of the names as if nothing unusual had happened. The prisoners were shocked. Not only had Reb Asher lit a prohibited fire, but to compound the crime, it was a "religious" fire. No one could conceive how two obviously Jewish men had lit a menorah for five nights of Chanuka, and now, when they were discovered, nothing happened! This was truly a Chanuka miracle!

Reb Asher never understood that night. Who was that warden? Was he a fellow Jew who was drawn to the sight of a menorah? The Chanuka miracle remained a mystery to the end of Reb Asher's life.

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

*On the Weekly Torah Portion*

**And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven (Gen. 28:12)**  
 The numerical value of the Hebrew word "sulam" (ladder) is the equivalent of both "mamon" (wealth) and "oni" (poverty), to teach us that a person's financial status is likened to a ladder, enabling one to experience both ups and downs in life: G-d "humbles the proud and raises the humble." (*Baal Shem Tov*)

**And Jacob went on his way (Gen. 32:2)**  
 Every Jew, no matter who he is, is entrusted with the special mission of going from "strength to strength" in the path of the Divine King. We learn this from the above passage. The name "Jacob" comes from the word meaning "ankle," symbolizing that this mission applies equally to all Jews, as one ankle is indistinguishable from another. The word "went" teaches us that a Jew must always be on the move, growing and ascending higher and higher in his service of G-d. "On his way" indicates the way of G-d's Torah and its laws, for which purpose an individual's soul is brought down into this world. (*Lubavitcher Rebbe*)

**And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuven, for she said: Surely, G-d has looked at my affliction, because now my husband will love me (Gen. 29:32)**  
 Our sacred writings compare the relationship between G-d and Israel to that between a husband and wife. In the time of galut (exile), the "wife" suffers from spiritual poverty and deprivation. We are exiled from our land and our Holy Temple is destroyed. The special love between the Jewish people and G-d seems to be concealed and is not fully expressed in the open. Yet even during such difficult times, when the Jewish people remains faithful to G-d, this special love can still be evoked. When G-d sees that Jews continue to observe Torah and mitzvot in spite of affliction, His love for them is fully restored, a love that will ultimately be manifested through the full and speedy Redemption. (*Likutei Sichot Vol. XXII*)

**4:12 PM Candle Lighting Time**  
 NY Metro Area  
**8 Kislev / November 28**  
 Torah Portion Vayetze  
 Shabbat ends 5:14 PM

לעילוי נשמת  
 הרה"ח הרב"ה ר' שמואל מנחם מענדל  
 בן הרה"ח ר' שניאור זלמן ז"ל בוטמאן  
 מנהל צעירי אגודת חב"ד המרכזית

Dedicated in memory of  
**Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman OBM**  
 Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization  
 and founder of the L'chaim Publication

# L'Chaim

בס"ד  
**1900**  
 8 Kislev, 5786  
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**The Weekly Publication  
 for Every Jewish Person**  
 נוסד תוך ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson  
 "Our help is in the name of the L-rd, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalms 124:8)



### LIVING WITH THE REBBE

*from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion*

"And Yaakov (Jacob) left Beersheva and went toward Charan," relates this week's Torah portion, Vayetzei.

When darkness fell, Yaakov had traveled as far as Mount Moriah. Placing a stone under his head for a pillow, he lay down and fell asleep. That night G-d revealed himself to Yaakov in a dream.

"The land on which you are lying I will give to you and your seed," G-d said, promising Yaakov the land of Israel as the inheritance of the Jewish people forever.

To demonstrate just how effortlessly the land would be conquered by Yaakov's descendants, "G-d 'folded' up the entire land of Israel and placed it beneath him, alluding to the ease with which it would be acquired," comments Rashi, the great Torah commentator, citing the explanation given in the Talmud.

Generations before, a similar promise was made by G-d to Avraham (Abraham). "Arise, walk through the land in its length and breadth, for I will give it to you."

According to the Talmud, this commandment was given to Avraham to facilitate his descendants' subsequent conquest of Israel. Avraham's sojourn through the land demonstrated his Divine claim on the territory and paved the way for his descendants years later.

It is interesting to note that whereas Avraham was commanded by G-d to perform an actual physical action ("walk through the land"), Yaakov was not. Lying on the holy ground of Israel was sufficient for G-d to reveal Himself and promise it to his descendants.

Furthermore, G-d "'folded' up" the land of Israel beneath Yaakov to emphasize that not only would it be easy for the Jewish people to conquer, as already alluded to Avraham, but its acquisition would require no more exertion than merely lying on the ground.

The land of Israel would be given over into their hands without effort, without their having to perform any special feats or extraordinary actions. The Jewish claim on Israel was fixed as incontrovertible in the consciousness of all mankind forever and ever, as Divine right.

This potential could have been achieved immediately with Joshua's conquest had the Jewish people possessed sufficient merit. Because of the sin of the spies, however, this merit was taken away, and the Jews were forced to fight to acquire the land.

When Moshiach comes and ushers in the Final Redemption, this potential will be fully realized, without their having taken the slightest overt action whatsoever.

Even now, before the Redemption, may it occur speedily in our days, when Jews stand firm in their Divine claim to the Holy Land all the arguments of the Gentiles against the Jewish people are nullified, and the arrival of Moshiach and the Redemption is thereby hastened.

*Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Vol. 20*

### What To Give The Child Who Has Almost Everything

*By Rabbi Eli Friedman*

The debate is over: every child in America should be given the gift of faith in G-d. It is a gift that can only be given by the parents of this great country.

Life is a grand, complicated journey and to send off a child on that trip without faith is just impossible. To send a child to college or to a university campus without imbuing him or her with faith is akin to giving them a powerful new car with a defective steering wheel. To expect a child to enter a relationship and get married without faith in G-d is just not fair. Children deserve to be taught to believe, and this is not very hard.

Every normal parent has expectations of his or her kids. Keep your hands to yourself; don't touch what's not yours; use your words, not your hands; be kind to animals; be loyal to friends and relationships. Practice justice and kindness and be respectful.

Since we all want this from our children, it isn't such a stretch to teach them that there is a Creator in Heaven Who has the same expectations.

A lost child is every parent's worst nightmare. Younger parents often have their children on an actual leash as they stroll the mall or the zoo - so that they don't get lost. Older parents will give their children every kind of guidance system available on the market.

And yet. Millions of children in America are lost. The parents watch in horror as the children

march in support of causes that make their skin crawl. The children don't know who they are, or what to believe, or what to fight, or what to flee.

Does anyone think their parents are proud and full of satisfaction?

The grand pointless experiment of teaching children that they come from nowhere has ended in disaster. The poor children have been sent off to live life without a single note of direction, not even a hint, not even a map scribbled on a napkin. Nothing.

Faith in G-d is the ultimate guidance system. One cannot and must not allow a basic belief in a Creator and a faith in G-d to be optional.

Children of every background, persuasion, race or creed can believe with strength of conviction: I was created and put here by a Higher Power, for a higher purpose, and I am answerable to that Power and that purpose.

This week's Parshah ends with these words:

As Yaakov approaches Israel upon his return, he is greeted by a group of angels. And Yaakov says to his children, "These are G-d's angels."

He knows them when he sees them. He is well raised, educated, guided and gifted. And he has passed the wisdom on to the next generation.

We should be so wise, so blessed and so lucky.

