

## THE DISCOVERY

It was midnight at the home of Reb Asher, the rabbi of Pzedburz. After an evening of study, which usually ended hours after the rest of the community had gone to sleep, he at last decided to retire.

The rest of the household lay still and silent, preparing for the day ahead.

Or so he thought. Lovingly returning his holy books to the shelf, the rabbi found himself contemplating his little son, Yaakov Yitzchak, and growing apprehensive. He did not know why. After all, hadn't he put Yaakov Yitzchak to bed — heard the boy recite *Shema* and then put out the candles? Hadn't he ensured that the windows were shut, blocking out the howling frost? Why should he suddenly be concerned?

Both parents stood, terrified and desolate, over the empty little bed. Tiny pools of tears began to ooze from Chava's eyes and trickled down her cheeks.

"Asher," she murmured, "do you suppose he was kidnapped?"

"I hope not," her husband answered mournfully. They had both heard tales of child-snatchers — Jewish children seized and sold into slavery or forced into the army.

The moon had risen over the evergreen hills, causing the snowy landscape to glow. Gazing out the window, Reb Asher caught side of a pattern imbedded in the snow. Footprints! The small shape of a child's feet. One pair.

"Chava," he said, pointing outside, "let's go."

Quickly getting dressed, husband and wife left

# A Child's Secret

By CHAYA SARAH CANTOR

Nevertheless, Reb Asher decided — for the child's peace of mind, he told himself — to go to the little room and look in on the lad.

Tiptoeing up the stairs, the rabbi pushed the door slightly ajar and peeked in.

The room lay silent and still. Only the light from the bursting full moon penetrated the darkness, illuminating the child's bed in the corner. The covers were gathered near the pillow in a crumbled heap.

"Yaakov Yitzchak," the rabbi whispered.

Advancing to the bed, he slowly pulled the covers back. Empty! The boy was gone!

Frantic, the rabbi looked around, in the hopes of seeing his son pop out from under the bed or table, laughing at his little joke. The rabbi lit a candle and searched the room. No one was there.

He hurried into the adjacent room, where his wife lay asleep.

"Chava, wake up," he said, shaking her bed. "Yaakov Yitzchak is gone."

Instantly the woman's eyes opened wide, as if she were a doll turned on by a switch. She threw on her robe and hurried into their son's room.

their cottage and stepped into the nocturnal chill. The wind had died down. The powdery fresh snow crumpled and fell aside at their feet as they followed the trail of footprints.

Around them wolves howled, but the couple ignored them. They kept their faces down, toward the snow, never taking their eyes off the footprints. To their surprise, they found themselves being led straight toward the synagogue, a certain distance from the village proper. Inside the little building, the reddish-orange light of a candle was visible.

Instead of entering the synagogue, they circled the building until they came to the window near the front. As they drew closer, they heard the chanting of a child who was reciting Psalms and then talking out loud to himself. Curious, they peeked through the glass.

Their eyes widened in amazement. There, standing before the aron kodesh, the ark, was their son. Not only was Yaakov Yitzchak reciting Psalms from a battered, well-worn book, but he was rendering explanations as if having a private, direct discourse with G-d.

"You don't suppose the child walked in his sleep?" his mother whispered.

"I have no idea," his father answered. "He doesn't look like he's asleep. But thank G-d he's all right."

"Should we disturb him?"

"No. It would only upset him."

"Why do you suppose he came here? Why would he be reciting Psalms at this time of night?"

"I don't know," Reb Asher answered. "There must be a reason for this strange behavior."

"I have never known the boy to do this sort of thing."

"Neither have I," seconded Reb Asher. "Perhaps we should wait to see if this happens again. Leave him, Chava; let's go. I think he'll return home safely. Hashem will surely protect him."

The parents turned around and trudged home. On the way back they discussed what to do. Reb Asher resolved to stay up the next night and observe his son.

No sooner did the parents lie down to sleep than they heard soft footsteps downstairs. They hurried to the bedroom door.

The footsteps grew louder, landing on top of the stairs and sweeping across the corridor. The door to the boy's bedroom creaked open, then shut. Silence.

The parents looked at each other in bewilderment, then returned to bed. "I definitely must see what becomes of this," was the last thought of Reb Asher as he drifted to sleep.

The next morning Yaakov Yitzchak bounced down the stairs, schoolbooks in hand, smiling. His dark brown earlocks twirled softly around his cheeks, and his deep-set eyes shone with vigor. He looked rested and well — not at all like someone who was up half the night praying and romping through the snow.

The boy made no mention at all of the previous night. Even when his mother carefully asked him how he had slept, he shrugged and replied, "Fine, **baruch Hashem.**"

Reb Asher, finishing his tea, remained wordless.

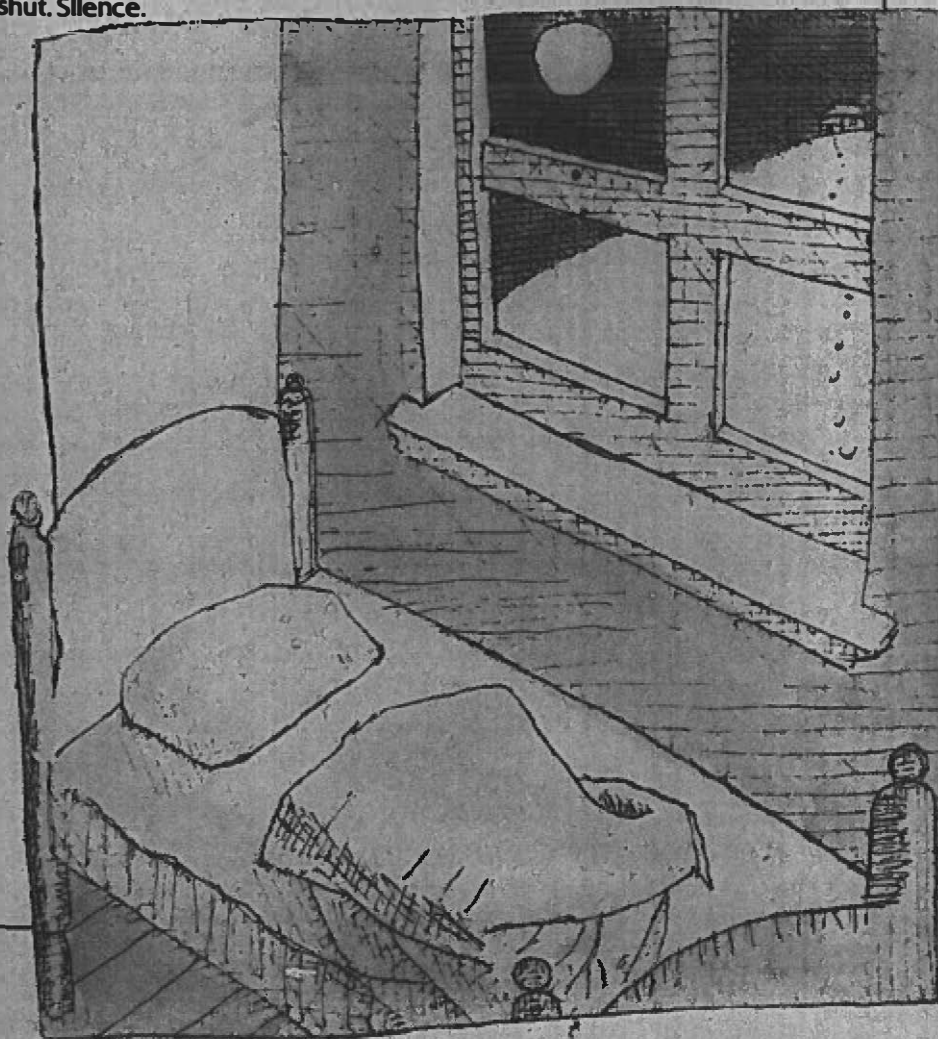
## THE LECTURE

The next night, Reb Asher, as usual, was up finishing his work. He had had a rather frustrating time, sitting at his desk, staring at a blank page. He knew he was supposed to deliver a lecture that Shabbos on the **parsha**, the Torah portion, and had spent hours poring over the various commentaries. However, this night he was simply unable to concentrate. Thoughts of his son returned to him, preventing the wisdom of the Sages from penetrating. At last, at midnight, he put down his quill pen.

Then he heard them. The sound of footsteps from the upstairs corridor filtered through his study, growing louder, then even louder. The front door opened and closed. Then there was silence.

The rabbi waited a few minutes. Then, throwing on his coat, he headed off toward the synagogue.

He stood outside the window and listened to the entire discourse. The boy's eyes were brilliant, like lighted charcoals, ready to ignite the curtain before the ark. Sonorously, with an almost adult voice, he recited the sacred words of King David, emotions pouring and overflowing from each syllable like bountiful vintage. In between verses the boy spoke



out questions and explanations, interweaving the different commentaries and advancing original ideas.

So mesmerized was the rabbi with his son's oratory that he was completely unaware that it had begun snowing. Not until the boy silently closed the Psalms book did the rabbi shake himself alert and notice the snowflakes floating onto him like dandelions. Quickly, he turned and headed back.

Night after night, for the rest of the week, Reb Asher continued this activity — following his son and listening through the window. So absorbed was he with his son's well-guarded wisdom that after a while he simply longed to hear the boy speak; he was not there to spy on him.

Thursday night, after returning home and listening for his son to do the same, Reb Asher eagerly wrote down what he had heard. On the table lay sheets of paper, filled with writings from the previous nights.

Reb Asher studied the writings, as well as the material he had prepared for his Shabbos lecture. Compared to his son's, his discourse looked amateurish.

**T**hat Shabbos, the congregation found a change of routine. Instead of the usual lecture on the **parsha**, Reb Asher, standing before the ark, delivered a sermon on the Psalms.

The crowd, listening, was astounded. No, it wasn't just Reb Asher's fine, resonant voice that captured their attention. It was the wisdom and insight that emanated from his speech. How brilliant! How original! The congregants exclaimed.

The discourse became an unending subject of discussion, both at home and in the yeshiva. The following week the little synagogue was crowded with listeners. Again Reb Asher delivered a lecture on the Psalms, delighting his listeners. Again people related, in breathless wonder, what they had heard that day.

Each week the synagogue grew more crowded, spilling over into the back and out the door. Extra benches had to be provided, until there was simply no space left. The women's section, too, was packed, and the children sat on their mother's laps to make room for more listeners.



Reb Asher was begged to reveal the source of his knowledge, but he merely smiled and answered, "Hashem is the provider of all insight. There is no other secret."

He turned knowingly to his son, who sat impassively all the while.

## THE NEWCOMER

Shortly after Purim, a carriage was seen bouncing through the slush of the melting snow. Occasionally a white-haired head poked his head out the window and asked the driver, "How much farther, my good man?"

"Just another mile, sir," the driver would answer.

The old man smiled. He had had a most trying time, traveling from town to town to deliver his sermons. But he had been successful, thank G-d. So many Jewish hearts had been touched.

This man, Reb Moshe Leib of Sasov, had looked forward to this journey. It had been awhile since he was last in Pzedburz, and he was curious to see the little town again. A progress report, he thought ironically. With the Jews of this town, he had often felt that he was banging his head against a stone wall. Though his sermons were enjoyed, though he was respected, somehow he felt that he had not been taken seriously enough by the people. Only a handful truly did respond, particularly Reb Asher, who inhaled the fire of Reb Moshe's words and felt properly inspired. How Reb Moshe looked forward to seeing him again.

Walking through the town holding his suitcase, Reb Moshe let his eyes drift the entire breadth and width of the town square. More orderly, he noticed. And happy. There was something in the air — he could not place it. Could it be the arrival of spring? Of Pesach? The sky was a sparkling crisp blue, the sun intense, like a sapphire ring with a topaz inlay.

"May I take your bag, sir?"

A young man, smiling, approached Reb Moshe. The latter hesitated. The last time he had given his suitcase to someone here, he had not seen it again. Yet something about this man — his kind demeanor,



his yarmulka perched neatly and disarmingly on his head — made Reb Moshe hand over his treasured valise.

The man turned and walked up the stairs of an adjacent house.

"It will be here when you return," he called. "My name is Mordechai — Mottie, for short. You're welcome to spend the night here if you like. You can even stay for Shabbos. Enjoy your visit."

Reb Moshe felt dazed. He had planned to stay at the local Inn, or at the home of Reb Asher. Pzedburz, he knew, had never exactly been a town noted for its hospitality. Yet here he was, a stranger; a fellow Jew, yes, but nevertheless a stranger! And he had just been treated like royalty.

It also occurred to him that he had once met this Mottie before. Unfortunately, it had not been under the best of circumstances. Mottie, formerly the town

bully, had preferred to spend his days hanging around the lake or tavern with his friends. He was known to harass strangers, not to invite them for Shabbos. In fact, it was on Shabbos that he had heckled Reb Moshe for his sermons. An opportunity to harass was the only time Mottie ever saw the inside of a shul.

The old man scratched his head and walked on. In the marketplace, he overheard an old woman selling apples to a man in a tattered coat and his little daughter. The man was asking the price.

"A penny each, three for two," the woman replied.

The man looked doubtfully at his wallet. "I'm afraid I can't afford it." He looked sadly at his daughter. "I'm sorry, Sheina, I can only afford one apple."

The old woman smiled. "Here, let me give you the apple. G-d willing, you'll pay me back in better times." She handed the girl a shiny ripe fruit.



Reb Moshe was stunned. This woman, whom he remembered from before, used to snap at children and hoard her produce as if they were jewels. Yet here she was generously giving away her apples, her source of livelihood, to an impoverished girl. Not only that, but she mentioned Hashem's name, and the faith that times would be better soon. How had this change come about? What had inspired the town of Pzedburz?

Throughout the day Reb Moshe saw more signs of change. Personalities were transformed, appearances improved, intellects developed. Men who had to be forced to attend **minyan** now showed up promptly for **davening**. Little boys who fell asleep in **cheder** were now reciting Torah passages. Misers who had turned away beggars now showered alms to those in need.

By day's end he felt as if he were in Jerusalem. With great excitement he returned to the home of Mottie, who was sitting at the table with his bride Malka, a pretty woman in a green kerchief.

"How was your day?" she asked sweetly.

"Wonderful, **baruch Hashem**, just wonderful," Reb Moshe gushed. "Why, it's unreal. I can't even begin to tell you."

But begin he did, in great length and enthusiasm. He described the town's almost magical transformation, and recalled in detail certain incidents, beginning with the old market woman.

Mottie smiled. "Yes, we've all changed, haven't we? I, as well. If not for Reb Asher . . . why, I probably would never have settled down . . . or led a Jewish life."

"Reb Asher?" Reb Moshe asked. "You mean the rabbi?"

"Yes," Mottie answered. "A wonderful man . . . and brilliant, unbelievable. He was the one who brought me back to shul."

"How?" Reb Moshe asked, wide-eyed.

"His speeches. His lectures. On **Tehillim**, mostly. Brilliant sermons." The young man's eyes grew misty. "And mind you, I was never a learner. I left **cheder** after my father died and took up a rougher kind of life. I barely knew **alefbets**. But hearing about the lectures by this man . . . watching groups of people leave for shul Shabbos morning . . . people

who had abandoned their observances long ago but had now come back . . . made me curious.

"Originally, I had planned to go to the synagogue and give the rabbi a hard time — put him in his place, so to speak. Well, he put me in my place. Listening to him, my heart melted like wax and my soul cried out with longing to be with G-d."

The young man sighed. "Since then, I have been coming to shul every Shabbos, and during the week as well. I began studying, reading — **anything** to gain a sliver of Reb Asher's insight. It seems he was impressed enough with my progress to make me a **shidduch**. I was married last month."

Malka picked up the story. "The women, too, come from all over to hear him. My friends get so excited listening to him. We formed a group that recites Psalms every day and visits the sick. I feel so spiritually enriched; I really can't describe it."

Reb Moshe decided that he must see his old friend, and as soon as possible. Perhaps Reb Asher, too, had changed.

That Shabbos the services were moved to a larger building, in order to accommodate the swelling congregation. Reb Moshe, seated near the back, was nearly dizzy from the crowds of people lining the walls to hear Reb Asher.

After the Torah was reverently put away, Reb Asher stood behind the altar

and started his discourse on Psalm twenty-three.

"**Bine'os deshe yarbitzayni** . . ." he began, and rendered an interpretation that took Reb Moshe's breath away. By the end of the sermon, the old man was left stunned with awe and admiration.

Later that afternoon, Reb Asher, while studying Gemara, was interrupted by a loud knock on the door. He opened it and beheld the face of Reb Moshe, which was flushed with excitement. "**Shalom aleichem**," Reb Moshe said hastily.

"**Aleichem shalom**, Reb Moshe," Reb Asher replied, and let him in. He bade the man sit and served him refreshment. "How nice to see you again! Had I known you were in town, I would have had you speak this morning, instead of me. Your sermons were always most inspiring."

"Not half as inspiring as yours, Reb Asher," breathed Reb Moshe. "Why, your lecture today was

"May I take your bag, sir?"

A young man, smiling, approached Reb Moshe. The latter hesitated. The last time he had given his suitcase to someone here, he had not seen it again.

wonderful! Brilliant! Not only brilliant, but powerful. Never have I seen a town so swayed. And not since Nineveh has there been a town so changed."

Reb Asher answered modestly, "If I can move a town to change that way, then I know I am doing G-d's will."

"But tell me, please, Reb Asher," the other pressed, "what is the source of your knowledge? From where do you obtain such insight?"

Reb Asher paled, and was silent. At first he vaguely answered that G-d instilled in him the wisdom. But Reb Moshe's pleading eyes and urgent, insistent voice at last moved him.

"Meet me here at midnight," he announced solemnly. "I will tell you. But only you. No one else must know."

Reb Moshe nodded eagerly.

That night, Reb Moshe knocked stealthily at the door of Reb Asher. Naturally, he expected to be let inside. To his surprise, Reb Asher appeared at the door, dressed in a heavy coat and boots.

"Follow me," he sternly said.

Quizzically, the older man trailed behind the rabbi. The ground, dotted with snow, was dark, only slightly lit by the crescent moon. Through a small patch of white Reb Moshe thought he saw a child's footprint, but he dismissed it as the mark of an animal.

They approached a small building. Through the window Reb Moshe saw a pale orange light shining against the Torah ark.

"The synagogue," Reb Asher explained. "This is where I davened. Until lately."

Reb Moshe crinkled his face meditatively. In the distance, he heard the sound of a child. Yet, not a child. It was the assertive, knowing voice of intellectual maturity.

Standing outside the window, Reb Asher motioned toward it with his hand.

"My son," Reb Asher whispered. "Yaakov Yitzchak."

The boy, as usual, was standing by the ark. Waving his arms before the curtain, he conversed and argued with the unseen. His voice was rich with the inflections of one skilled in logic and debate, one whose wisdom carried impact and who delved in secrets known only to the privileged few.

Reb Moshe was one of them.

Brushing past the boy's father, he circled the building and burst into the hall.

The boy heard the door slam and turned.

However, the sight of Reb Moshe of Sasov staring benevolently at him, his tall frame covered in a gently flowing cloak, soothed him. Still, he cowered near the ark. Then he saw his father, and was even more astonished.

"It's all right, child," Reb Moshe cooed. "We will not punish you."

"You were listening?" the boy stammered.

Reb Moshe nodded. "And G-d willing I will hear more — much more."

With great tenderness he took the boy's hand and led him to a seat by the back bench. Slowly he began asking Yaakov Yitzchak questions — deep questions, serious questions about the boy's Torah study.

"Never have I seen a town so swayed. And not since Nineveh has there been a town so changed."

Carefully, and with great articulation, Yaakov Yitzchak described how he had been studying in secret for quite awhile. In cheder he was a

bright student, but nothing more. Privately, however, he studied his father's and his rebbe's books. His insights, though, came to him at night. He did not control them; they flowed freely. He had never intended to do anything bad.

"Oh, no, of course not," Reb Moshe assured him. "You have a gift. A gift from Hashem. And you were kind to let your father share in it — and the entire community."

After more conversation, the boy began to yawn, and the men took him home. Before going to his room, however, he was stopped by Reb Moshe.

"Yaakov Yitzchak," said the man, "I hope you will let me have a share in your wisdom."

Henceforth, Reb Moshe traveled more frequently to the town of Pzedburz. Whenever he did, he was sure to stay at the home of Reb Asher.

Late at night, when the populace lay asleep, the light of a candle would be pulsating in the synagogue near the forest. There, an old man would sit with a growing boy and discuss the deep mysteries of the Torah.

In time the child would be known as the **Yehudi HaKaddosh MiPshischa**, the Holy Jew of Pshischa, the forerunner of the great chassidic dynasties of Poland. From him would emerge Rabbe Simcha Bunem of Pshischa and Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, as well as Rabbi Yitzchak Meir (the Chiddushel HaRim) and the other rebbes of Ger.

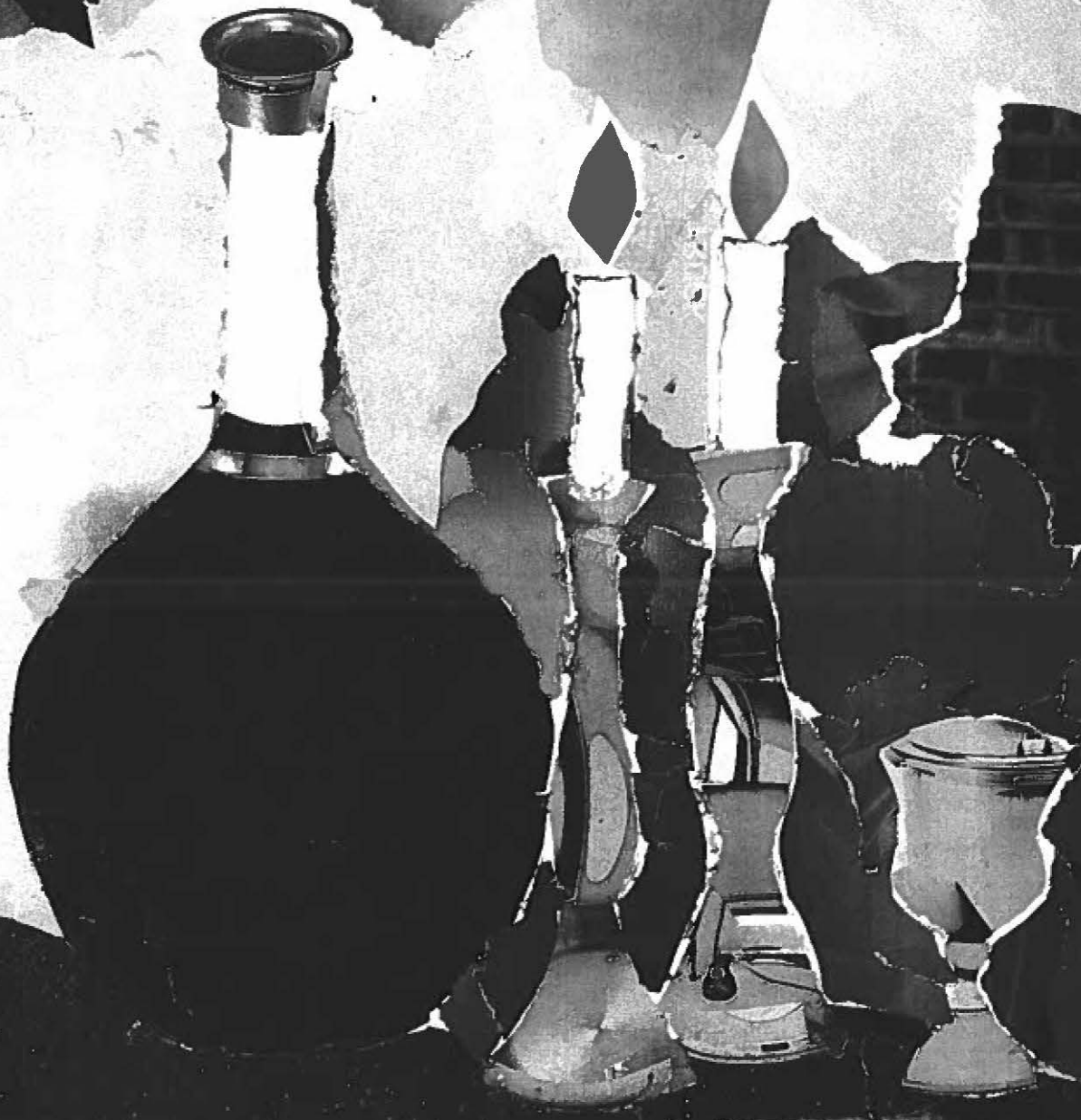
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"Between Me  
and the people of Israel,  
it is a sign forever."



## TO OUR READERS

A popular bumper sticker reads, "Don't worry, Shabbos is coming." In one brief sentence, that sums up the way Jews are supposed to approach each week. For us, the week is not seven days, one following the other. A week contains two distinct units: the first six days; and Shabbos. There is no comparison between these two units. The other six days of the week are set aside for work and other forms of activity. Shabbos is set aside for spiritual experiences.

Our Sages describe Shabbos as an experience that is similar to how *olam haba*, the next world, will be. Just as one who has not been in the next world cannot have any understanding of what it is like, so is it impossible for one who has not experienced Shabbos to comprehend its uniqueness.

"The Shabbos Will Watch Over Me" is the remarkable, true story of how a rabbi in Russia was saved from death by his belief in the power of Shabbos. "Torah Highlights" discusses several aspects of Shabbos as related to Parshas Ki Sisa.

With this issue, **The Jewish Reader** is taking on a somewhat different look. Watch for more adjustments in upcoming issues, as we continue our effort to bring you an attractive, exciting magazine.

This publication is  
made possible in part  
by a grant from



Laboratories.

# MAIL ROOM

## Heart Transplants

Dear Editor,

Congratulations to you on your new, very enjoyable, and readable magazine. Our students really seem to be enjoying the magazine immensely.

I just wanted to point out, however, that I was surprised to read in your third issue about the medical advances made in Israel concerning heart transplants. I am sure you are aware of the *halachic* controversy concerning the permissibility of heart transplants, in general; and, in Israel, this issue is of even greater sensitivity.

Best wishes for continued success.

**Rabbi Michael Levi**  
Brooklyn, NY

*Rabbi Levi is the principal of Beth Jacob Day School for Girls, in Brooklyn. We agree that the article in question should not have run in The Jewish Reader.*

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## Torah Highlights Come In Handy

Dear Editor,

On Shabbos VaEira, I was asked, out of the blue, to give a *d'var Torah* to my B'nos group. Fortunately, I

remembered the "Torah Highlights" in your magazine. It really saved me from embarrassment.

**Shaina Katz**  
Staten Island, NY

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## Yad Batya L'Kallah

Dear Editor,

I found your article on Yad Batya L'Kallah inspiring. In a time of rampant selfishness, it's nice to know there are people willing to give of their time and resources. To plan a wedding is no small thing, but when one is inexperienced or inundated with other problems, a helping hand is certainly a blessing. I'm sure that Batya would be proud of this organization.

**Shoshanna Friedman**  
Los Angeles, CA

□ □ □

Dear Editor,

I know another name for Yad Batya L'Kallah. How about Yad Batya L'Chassan? It should be up to the groom, too, to help with the wedding — especially when his bride is either poor or overworked.

**Michael Rosenberg**  
Cleveland, OH

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