

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Vayeitzeh we read about how, on the way to Charan, Yakov Avinu stopped to rest for the night. As he slept, Yakov dreamt that he saw a ladder. The famous dream of the ladder contains some of the most inspirational spiritual lessons of the entire Torah. The verse tells us that Yakov "dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set on the earth and its top reached towards the heavens..." (Bereishis 28:12)

The Sages teach us that the ladder symbolizes the position of a Jew in this world. Although we stand on the ground like the base of the ladder, we strive to reach up to the heavens, like the top of the ladder in the dream. As the verse states, "A ladder was set on the earth and its top reached towards the heavens..." The following story told in the first person illustrates the amazing climb of a few Jews in this world.

My story starts many years before my own birth. My father grew up in Alexandria, Egypt, an avowed Communist and atheist. In 1949, when he was expelled from Egypt for illegal political activities, he moved to Israel, became an officer in the army and met my mother. Together they became members of a non-religious kibbutz.

In 1954 they moved to Tasmania, Australia. The small Jewish community in Tasmania was totally assimilated. The president of the community approached my father and requested of him that since he was the only Jew in the community who knew Hebrew, would he please lead the services in the synagogue?

Needless to say, my father was taken totally by surprise. "Are you absolutely crazy?" he asked. "I am an atheist. I know nothing about religion or G-d, nor do I believe in any of it!" Nevertheless, to his own amazement, the community won him over, and my father took on the job of leading the services. My father's belief in Communism had already been severely shaken years before when it became clear to him that the Communist "show" trials in Czechoslovakia were a sham.

As a result, he and my mother started looking into Judaism and their feelings towards G-dliness gradually grew. They began to be attracted to the Torah and mitzvos and wished to abide by at least some of them. My mother remembered some of the laws of Shabbat and kashrus from her parents' home, so they kept whatever they could and thirsted for more. Yet this was not enough.

Each day they prayed their own private prayers to G-d, that He should somehow send them some kind of information about Judaism. My mother, in particular, became convinced that since every generation in Jewish history always had a leader, anointed by G-d, to lead the Jewish people, there must be a leader assigned to lead and help the Jews of this generation, too. At that point she felt an urgency, and from the depth of her being cried out: "G-d! If there is a leader of this generation who has the absolute responsibility to help every Jew, then I demand of him, from this remote corner of the world, to reach out to us and help us, too!"

Soon after this, Rabbi Chaim Gutnick, a Lubavitcher rabbi from Melbourne, Australia, unexpectedly received a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, telling him to go to Tasmania. Although he had no idea why he was going, Rabbi Gutnick organized a visit to Tasmania.

The moment he arrived in Tasmania, he was accosted by my parents who triumphantly announced to him: "Rabbi! You are the answer to our prayers! We have begged G-d to send us some information about how to be Jewish, and finally you are here. You must come to our house immediately and show us the ways of a Jew."

So Rabbi Gutnick helped them and came back the following year as well. The Rebbe had literally stretched out his hand to a small island in distant Australia to answer the call of two lone Jews. This was the beginning of my parents' way up the eternal ladder of Judaism and their eternal attachment to the Rebbe.

Later, it was my parents' turn to be the envoys of the Rebbe to save a Jewish soul. One day, out of the blue, my father received an invitation to go for nine months to Malaysia, a Muslim country with no Jewish community. He wrote to the Rebbe, who advised him to accept.

During a private audience with the Rebbe, the Rebbe later told my parents that they were going to Malaysia on a mission to save Jewish souls. For the entire time that they were in Malaysia, however, they did not meet any Jews! They did meet a Buddhist monk called Mahinda. Mahinda greatly admired the teachings of the Jews.

One day, after they returned home to Sydney, Australia, my parents were contacted by a young Jewish woman from England. She told them that she had gone to Malaysia to search for spiritual truth and had wanted to study Buddhism with Mahinda. Mahinda asked her, "Why are you seeking truth in Buddhism? You can find all the truth you need in your own faith," and he sent her to my parents. The Rebbe's mission was successful: a Jewish soul was saved through their trip to Malaysia. The young woman is now married, and an active member of the Lubavitch community in Sydney!" **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

In memory of Shusha Malka bas R' Avrohom ob'm

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