

“And to Asher he said....”

By Isaac Cohen

When I am in trouble, when I need to ask for God's help, for His guidance, I don't just pray, I always recite a section from the Bible, the Torah, the same section, which I recite for the first time when I was 11 years old, just two years before my Bar Mitzvah.

I was a happy boy who was interested and busy with playing games outside.

Father was a hard working man, a taxi cab driver. He would come home every night tired from the aggravations with his customers and the horrible traffic.

Then, one evening father came to me and said: "Come Sambi! Sit down! I would like you to go to the Bima and recite a section on the coming Simchat Torah holiday."

"Dad, I am only 11."

"That's fine! On Simchat Torah you can read from the Torah at any age!"

"But I don't know how to recite..."

"I will teach you!"

I was in shock. Me? At the age of 11? Reading the Torah in front of the whole synagogue? But when I saw the expression on my father's face I agreed immediately.

And so, we sat every night and studied that portion of the Torah starting with: "Oleasher amar..."

While we were studying, I saw a different side of my father, the patient teacher, polite, and knowledgeable.

And slowly but surely, evening after evening, by the end of the hard work day he had and after a day of game and play for me, we would sit together and study the portion.

I was amazed how much patience my father had. Usually he would come home tired and all he wanted was peace and quiet; even a sound of a soft radio playing would bother him.

One evening, after I read the portion perfectly, my father smiled, turned his big mustache and said: "Good! Now you are ready!" And to my mother he said: "Come this Saturday to synagogue! Bring the whole family."

"Why? What's on Simchat Torah?"

"Doesn't matter! Just come!" said my father and again turned his mustache.

And the day arrived.

At the synagogue they did not really like father; the reason was that he worked on Sabbath. He always said that he had to work so hard because he had to support 10 people : himself, his mother and her brother, his two daughters from his first marriage, his present wife and their four children.

The day came and we all went to the synagogue.

Simchat Torah: it is a special holyday in which the Jewish people gave the Bible, the Torah, its proper respect. The Torah is divided into fifty parts and every week one part is read. When all the part get read, it starts all over again and this day is Simchat Torah. Everybody is happy to finish reading the Torah.

Everyone is dancing with the Torah in their hands. Children dance as well, with special flags in their hands.

The whole synagogue was in a festive mode.

We came in full attendance. My father, dressed in his dark blue suit (his only suit), and even I had to be dressed in fancy clothes. The nickname of my father was STALIN because of his amazing resemblance to Stalin, especially the mustache, exactly the same!

Whoever met my father for the first time immediately saw the resemblance and called him Stalin. We got used to this name and even his friends, the drivers, did not know his real name and called him Stalin.

On that day, everybody in the synagogue was requested to sponsor a portion of the Torah, and then at the end, all the kids were gathered underneath the Tallit and the rabbi would recite the same portion for all the kids

And the time came. "All the children, come get underneath the Tallit!" said the rabbi. "You too Samb!"

"No need! He can sing it by himself!" said my father.

And indeed, I went on the bima. All the eyes were on me.

Everybody was silent.

I made the proper blessing and then started to recite...

"And to Asher he said..."

The letters were as if they were coming from the handwritten scroll of the Torah and flying in the air directly at me...

I expressed every word, every syllable, exactly as my father had taught me. With a clear strong voice!

When I finished, it was like an explosion; all the family threw candy at me and everybody was jumping to get some. I looked at my father and saw my father's face' is shining.

I felt that things would never be the same from then on.

Since then, whenever I pray to God I always say, "And to Asher he said..." and recite the whole portion. I feel that it is like a special personal covenant between me and God.