

Name: waleed  
khokhar

Religion, Christianity



Name: Waleed Khokhar Date: 11/13/12 Word Count: appx 900 Which character intrigues you the most? The protagonist and narrator of the book, "My name is Asher Lev" Asher Lev's story begins with him as a young boy from a Jewish family. A young boy who lived in conservative community that was strict and fascist in nature when it comes to religion. Two conflicting forces play an important role in Asher Lev's story. One, Asher Lev's up tight and all-encompassing religious community, and the other his intense passion and desire to create art. Throughout Asher Lev's life as a young child and as an adult, he had to trade-off between his love of creating art and/or following his family and community religious traditions. How Asher grows up with such intense friction in his mind of these two subjects is something important to elucidate. The decisions he made and the actions he took shaped his future. Asher grew up in an old-fashioned Jewish community of Ladover; a community filled with narrow-minded people who did not want to look at the world beyond their realms. Due to this, Asher Lev was always in conflict with himself, his family and the community. As Aryeh, Asher Lev's father said, "If you were a genius in mathematics, I would understand. If you were a genius in writing, I would also understand. If you were a genius in Gemorra, I would certainly understand. However, a genius in drawing is foolishness, and I will not let it interfere with our lives. Do you understand me, Asher?" (pg. 136). Asher's father always condemned his work and wanted him to give up art. However, art surrounded and reflected in every part of Asher's life. It is interesting to see even under immense pressure of his father Asher continued to draw. Usually, kids become rebellious if restricted. In this case, Asher just suppressed his feelings and confined to

himself. Asher's personality is the most mesmerizing in this book. Living in a strictly religious family as boy and continually opposed by several people on creating art, Asher still managed to pursue his passion. It was a marvel in its own. Nonetheless, these two aspects of life balance out each other and play the most apprehensive part in his life. Asher's creativity is one of the reasons he was able to continue with his work. One can see this when Asher uses common life material and create tools to paint (citation required). It is obvious that Asher possessed the gift of drawing.. Another aspect one needs to look at is Asher's desperation and his urge to find such creative ways to express him in form of art. He was burning with desire to express his emotions by drawing. On one occasion, his strong influences lead him to steal paints from a shop. However, ethics and morals from his family teachings embedded in him evoked his conscience, and he eventually returned them. Such endeavors, at such a young age, living in such ascetic society requires a lot of guts. It brings the crisp and twist in a story and binds a reader to discover of what lies ahead. In addition, it is hard to ignore how a young child with such creativity uses such ingenious ways to pursue his passion as Asher uses ashes to paint. It reminds me of a famous idiom ' necessity is the mother of invention'. In the beginning, Asher did not understand his cravings as a child and innocuously doodled which turned into structured drawing later in his life. Furthermore, an on-going friction permeated inside Asher. He was confused with what was allowed to draw and what was deemed intolerable in his community. This is most evident when Asher's father would not come to Asher's art exhibitions, which displayed nude and crucifixion pictures. Asher justified such painting by

saying (Book 11, pg. 303), “ A naked women is a women without clothes. A nude is an artist's personal vision of a body without clothes.” “ Is such a personal vision important in your art?” “ That's what art is, Papa. It's a person's private vision expressed in aesthetic.” This brings Asher in the contradiction to his upbringing, what his beliefs were and what the world of art wants. It is astonishing for a reader of how Asher well aware that his father reprovved nude paintings and yet without hesitation he invites his father. An analysis to this could be that Asher was so lost in the hymn of his passion that his childhood values were fading away. Whether these values would instill in Asher is something that intrigues a reader to continue with the story. Additionally, Asher’s interaction with an artist named Jacob Kahn, who immensely drew Asher towards new dimensions of art played the most significant role in this story. Asher learns different styles of painting and hones his skills under Kahn’s mentorship. Working with Kahn once again Asher faces the dilemma of whether to follow his religious teachings or follow the eccentric ways of world of art. Kahn played a pivotal role in Asher’s life and persuaded him to draw nude and crucifixion pictures, which were against Asher’s religion, Asher hesitant but open to learn suppressed his feelings and drew. Here once again, Asher prioritized art over his family and religion. In contrast, it is evident that Asher has not completely strayed away from his religious teaching as he continued to observe his Jewish dietary laws when he was away at Kahn’s beach house. Likewise, Asher leaves the reader tangled that whether he would lean back to his childhood education or ensue the world of art. Finally, the most controversial side of Asher becomes flamboyant when he drew his mother’s picture in form of crucifixion and

invited his parents to his exhibition. Asher was well aware that his painting would bring great pain to his family and his community as crucifixion in Judaism is a taboo. Asher knowing the consequences will be dire yet he prioritized artistic world over Jewish world. From Asher's point of view, this drawing only portrayed his emotions and it was targeted toward world of art where it carries a different meaning and only artists understand its value, whereas, Jewish community was naïve of language of paint. Asher's motive to invite his parents to gallery is questionable. A concern that arises is why Asher would invite his family to his exhibition. Did he deliberately want to inflict pain to his family and finally part away or was it another episode of innocence. The most bewildering scenes of this book which must have left several readers confused was in the ending chapter of the book where Asher stood thinking about his decisions in his life. Asher had to decide whether he wanted himself or religion; himself or family; and/or himself or art. Similarly, the writer has portrayed Asher's uncanny nature and it leaves many questions in a reader's mind. The book concludes in many ways unresolved, as Asher was not fully comfortable with the decisions he had made. My Name is Asher Lev ends with protagonist banished from his people as Rebbe asked him to leave. So far, there are no means to conclude that Asher had embarked himself away from his family and community. No conclusive or unanimous consensus about Asher's future choices