

# A Providential Deal

By CHAYA SARAH CANTOR

**R**av Yosef Caro was a man whose mind was constantly immersed in Torah. Nonetheless, he was able to acquire substantial wealth, enough to permit him to carry on his studies and to publish his works.

When Rav Yosef first came to Salonika, uncertain of his future, he was introduced to a businessman named Simcha. This man, with his compact body and busy, darting eyes scanned Rav Yosef and offered a profitable venture. In exchange for money, Rav Yosef would be made a partner. He, Simcha, would invest it, and support Rav Yosef's studies.

The arrangement was obviously one made in Heaven. While Rav Yosef was supposed to spend time with the business, he scarcely put in an appearance. In fact, at times he forgot that he even had a business. It was up to Simcha to run it and periodically inform Rav Caro of anything important. Rav Caro, completely indifferent, spent his days in the yeshiva — praying, studying, and compiling his *Bals Yosef*. Simcha did not mind. The business was profitable, and he attributed its success to his partnership with the great Torah scholar and *tzaddik*.

Simcha not only came at the right time, but left at the right time as well. Rav Caro had by then yearned to be in Safed; these feelings were expressed many times to his colleague Rav Shlomo Alkabaz. The latter himself had finally gone. Rav Yosef yearned to free himself of ties and board the next ship out of Salonika.

The next morning, a street urchin appeared with a message from Simcha.

"He is bedridden," said the boy,

"and unable to meet with a client. He bids you come in his stead."

With a sigh of annoyance, Rav Yosef nodded. He hated to interrupt his work — especially now, while he was sifting through some especially pertinent material. Nevertheless, he made a mental note to meet with the man that afternoon.

Eight hours later, he stretched his back after bending over the *Arba'ah Turim* in pious contemplation. When he saw the darkened sky, he remembered the meeting, which was supposed to have taken place five hours ago.

Instead of the urchin, Simcha himself appeared the next day. His angry eyes glared, while before him Rav Caro grinned in embarrassment.

"I am glad to see you have recovered," said Rav Caro.

"Rav Caro," began the wholesaler, "forgive me. But because of you we have lost a major customer. He has gone to our competitor."

"I am terribly sorry, Simcha. But perhaps his patronage was not our destiny. We should trust in Hashem, who provides."

"Rav Caro," the wholesaler spluttered, "Hashem leaves the task of making a living in our hands. He guides us, but we must make of it what we can. An indifferent partner is more than a liability to me — he is a detriment. I am best off making what I can on my own."

He offered to sell the business and split the profits in half. Rav Caro,



The seller carried the grinder to Rav Yosef's home.

whose knowledge of business came more from holy books than experience, decided to consult his wife.

She listened, nodding, as her husband enumerated the conditions. At last she agreed. "But make sure he also includes the money you originally invested."

The deal was consummated in the presence of witnesses, and Rav Caro walked away with a pouch full of gold pieces.

But his wife was consternated. Hands on hips, she shook her head worriedly and said, "The gold is hardly enough for us to live on. I'll wager it lasts only a few years. No, the way to build our savings is to invest. You must buy merchandise at a low price and sell it for a profit."

Rav Caro blanched. "If I had a head for merchandise, would I have just sold my business? I am afraid I would not possibly know what to buy."

Her tone changed, and she laughed. "It's really quite simple. Find something that has mass appeal. . . and long-lasting value."

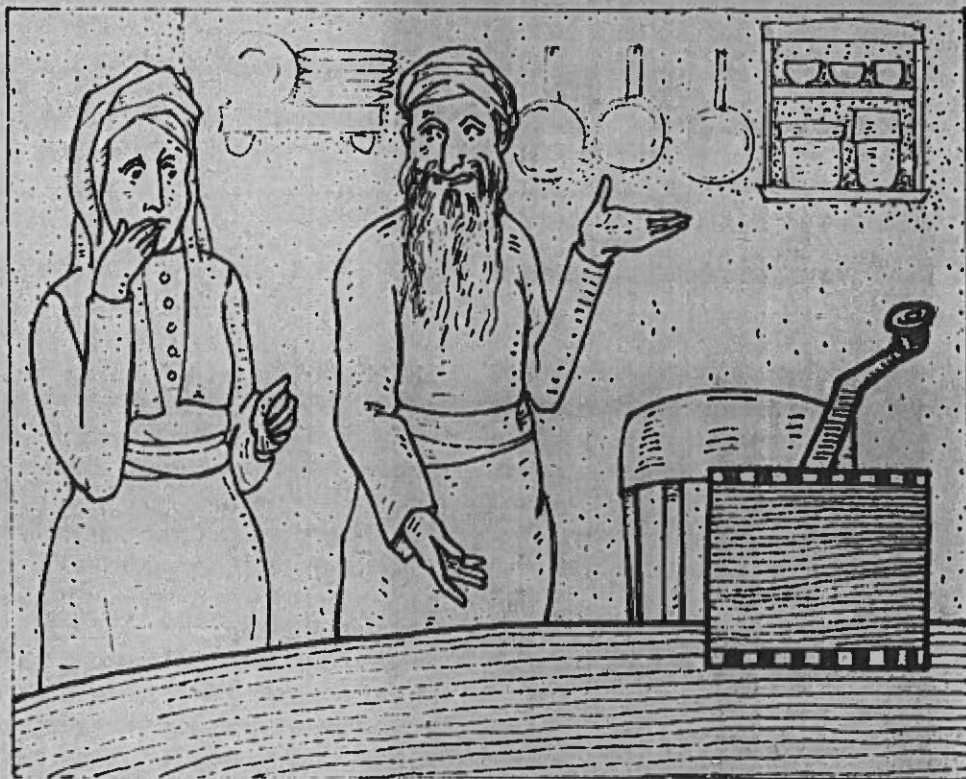
**T**he following day the marketplace was swarming, bee-like, with humanity. Some of the shoppers recognized Rav Caro and parted way; others, in their haste to conduct business, brushed past, almost knocking him down.

Rav Yosef drilled the marketplace, examining the stalls. In one merchants hawked caged parrots; in another they were selling succulent pears. By late morning he was feeling dizzy from the clamor of activity, and longed to be away.

"For sale! Cheap!"

Rav Yosef looked to his left. A hunchbacked vendor, in rags and chinked-up breeches, was holding high a mounful-looking contraption. He continued to cry out, but to non-existent crowds.

Rav Yosef stopped. He squinted and drew closer. He did not know why, but the contraption



"What is that?" she asked.

commanded his attention. Box-like, it resembled a sort of animal trap, or possibly a discarded clock.

The vendor grinned, showing a mouth full of gums. "Would you like to buy it, sir?"

"What is it?"

"Was, exactly. A grinder. Needs fixing, that's all. Then it will be as good as new."

Rav Yosef doubtfully examined it. Its yellow exterior was horribly tarnished. He raised the grinder. It clattered heavily, as though the inside contained many loose parts.

He put it down and smiled apologetically. Actually he felt sorry for this merchant, who was attempting such a futile sale.

"Good as new, sir," the vendor repeated hopefully.

Rav Yosef tried to shake his head, but the man said, "Lasting value."

Rav Yosef froze. Remembering his wife's words, he said, "Lasting value?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Grinds very nicely. Pepper, nutmeg. . . just the thing for the kitchen."

Rav Yosef placed his hand to his chin and scratched his beard. He had

heard of the open trade routes . . . the New World, the Orient. A plethora of exotic spices awaited. Definitely mass appeal. Cooks everywhere could enhance their cuisine with an array of new flavors.

"How much?" he asked cautiously.

"Eight guldens," the vendor replied.

At the price, Rav Yosef balked. But he hated to haggle, and, he decided, eight guldens mattered little compared to the potential income he could reap. He paid.

The grinder was heavy. Rav Yosef wondered how such a little item could weigh so much. The seller, noticing Rav Yosef's struggle to carry it, agreed to bring the grinder to his home.

When they arrived at the Caro home with the purchase, the merchant quickly took his leave. Rav Yosef immediately displayed the purchase to his wife. But at the sight of it, she turned alabaster white and nearly dropped the fruit platter she was carrying.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Aspic grinder. Can't you see?" Rav Yosef raised it slightly. A cog fell



out. He bent down to pick it up and sheepishly added, "I'm afraid it is in slight need of repair."

"Evidently," she replied. Then she asked, "How much did you pay for it?"

"Eight guilder."

"Eight guilder?!" Her eyes bulged. "You paid eight guilders for that?"

"Did I not hear you tell me to buy something of lasting value? I have done the best I can. I will leave the rest in G-d's hands. If He wants me to succeed, then I shall."

His wife smiled. Her husband truly was a leader of his generation. His trust in G-d was inspiring to her.

**C**almly Rav Yosef placed the grinder in the pantry, then entered the dining room and sat down to a dish of stewed prunes. He then immediately set out to his yeshiva, to spend the rest of the day ensconced in Torah study.

After he left, Rav Yosef's wife decided to examine the grinder again. If it couldn't be put to profitable use . . . well, at least — once it were repaired — she could treat herself and the family to spicy dishes.

She went to the pantry and opened it. On the shelf sat the spice grinder, faded yellow and badly tarnished. When she removed it from the shelf it rattled, and another cog fell out.

She studied the dismal contraption and wondered if it could even be repaired. "It looks like it hasn't been in use since the fourteenth century. Alas, it may be beyond salvation." She shook it slightly. This time a coil flew out of nowhere. She sighed and put back the flying pieces. "Oh, well, nothing ventured, nothing gained, I suppose. I should at least have it appraised."

She called in a goldsmith. The man, upon examining it, trembled, and his eyes almost dropped out. "Why, it's gold — solid gold!"

"What?" she exclaimed.



**"Madame Caro, this is not an ordinary spice grinder."**

"Madame Caro, this is not an ordinary spice grinder. Here . . . in the corner. Do you not see some letters engraved?"

"Yes," she answered, bending over.

"They belong to the previous owner . . . an Italian duke. After it broke he must have considered it useless."

"Is it?"

"Unfortunately, yes. See? The cogs and wheels are in a horrible jumble. I wouldn't know where they fit in. Nevertheless, the grinder itself is a marvel of craftsmanship. Why . . . look at the sides. I never saw such inlay."

She pulled the grinder back possessively. "So you believe it is worth something?"

The goldsmith gasped. "Worth something?" His face flushed. "Madame, the gold itself, with or without the grinder, costs a fortune. Why, anyone can see that the quality of this gold surpasses the usefulness of the object."

Rav Yosef's wife beamed, until she shone like the grinder after it had been polished. She could envision herself in Safed, or even Jerusalem, living in splendor off its sale. She waited eagerly to tell her husband and reprimanded herself for not believing him. Wouldn't he be amazed at what she had to say!

However, when he returned home, eyes red from hours in front of the printed page, she refrained. Yawning, he seemed barely receptive to the laughter of his children, who scampered into the room and flew into his arms. During dinner he finished his meal with difficulty, and in between bites he found himself nodding off. With a "Good night," he retired to his chamber. Though he normally got by on a few hours sleep, he was utterly exhausted.

In bed Rav Yosef sighed and turned, then momentarily opened his eyes in semi-alertness.

A voice came to him. It was the

(Continued on page 31)

discussed — with emigration as the goal. Some Poles tried to work out a plan with the Zionists to evacuate the Jews. Others even considered shipping them to Madagascar, a large island off of east Africa.

The years 1935-1939 marked the sunset of Polish Jewry. Legislative efforts against them increased, along with brutal attacks — all with Church support. In 1936, *shechitah* (ritual slaughter) was outlawed. Jews were forbidden to work on Sunday. As many depended on this day for business and could not afford a two-day weekend, they suffered greatly.

In Polish universities, Jews were required to sit on “ghetto benches” — segregated areas of the classroom, away from the other students. White collar workers were ousted from professional positions and societies. Jewish businesses were boycotted.

By the late 1930's the Jews were despondent. The number of suicides increased. The younger generation called itself the “youth without a future.” In anger some joined the Revisionists, a new Zionist branch which denounced the British and Arabs and set out to forge a Jewish state through military means. Their youth group, called Betar, was virtually an army boot camp. Menachem Begin, the future Prime Minister of Israel, was one of its members.

The push for *aliyah* increased prodigiously during this time. It was not always idealistic; for many Jews, emigration — anywhere — was the only way out. Clearly they were no longer welcome in Poland, where the economic situation worsened each day.

Sadly, at the time when unity was needed the most, it was farthest away. The Zionists had grown so divided

that they could not even convene a Jewish Congress. The Agudah, though it successfully rallied the Orthodox, could not halt the rapid secularization, even within its own ranks. More and more Jews attended state schools, read newspapers, spoke Polish, and entered the secular world — with limited success. The Bund, though it had gained support among the trade movement and waged strikes against anti-Semitism, did little to alleviate the plight of Jewish workers.

In the long run, what did these groups accomplish? Politically, very little. Rather than convey forcefulness, they revealed the powerlessness among Poland's 3,000,000 Jews. By 1939 they were in no better a situation than in 1918. Broken, dispirited, and

impoverished, they struggled to survive. Their misery, as well as disunity, would aid their extermination at the hands of the Nazis.

Spiritually, culturally, and intellectually, however, the Jews of Poland achieved in a way unsurpassed elsewhere. Their identity was strong and powerful, permeating the lives of millions. The Jews of Poland were a nation in every respect. They created a glorious society — one imbued with Torah scholarship and chassidus — which did not die of old age. In 1939, it came crashing down — along with all its institutions — and sank into a quagmire of blood and ash. But though gone, it can never be forgotten.

## A Providential Deal

(Continued from page 23)

**maggid**, the heavenly voice which often spoke to him regarding Torah matters. “Rav Yosef, it has come . . . good fortune awaits.”

“Fortune?” he murmured.

“The item you have purchased has brought you wealth. Soon . . . you shall go to Safed. But you must not tarry longer.”

Rav Yosef awoke and hurried to his wife's bed. He shook her awake and told her what had transpired.

She listened, nodded, and smiled groggily. “Oh, yes, the grinder. Yesterday I took it to the goldsmith. He said it was solid gold. I wanted to tell you. But seeing you were weary . . . I waited. I knew it was not news you had to know immediately. You trusted in Hashem; you left our income in His hands. Your trust has paid off.”

The journey to Safed took well over a year. The seas were rough, and

twice their vessel was threatened by pirates. Nevertheless, they arrived — battered, but grateful. With the money from the spice grinder Rav Yosef was able to print his works, as well as support himself and his family.

### 100-Point Contest winners

Congratulations to  
N——— Linda Cohen  
for winning the  
Shevat 100-Point Contest  
and to  
Rochel Leah M. Maus  
— for winning the  
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Your prizes will be  
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# The Jewish Reader

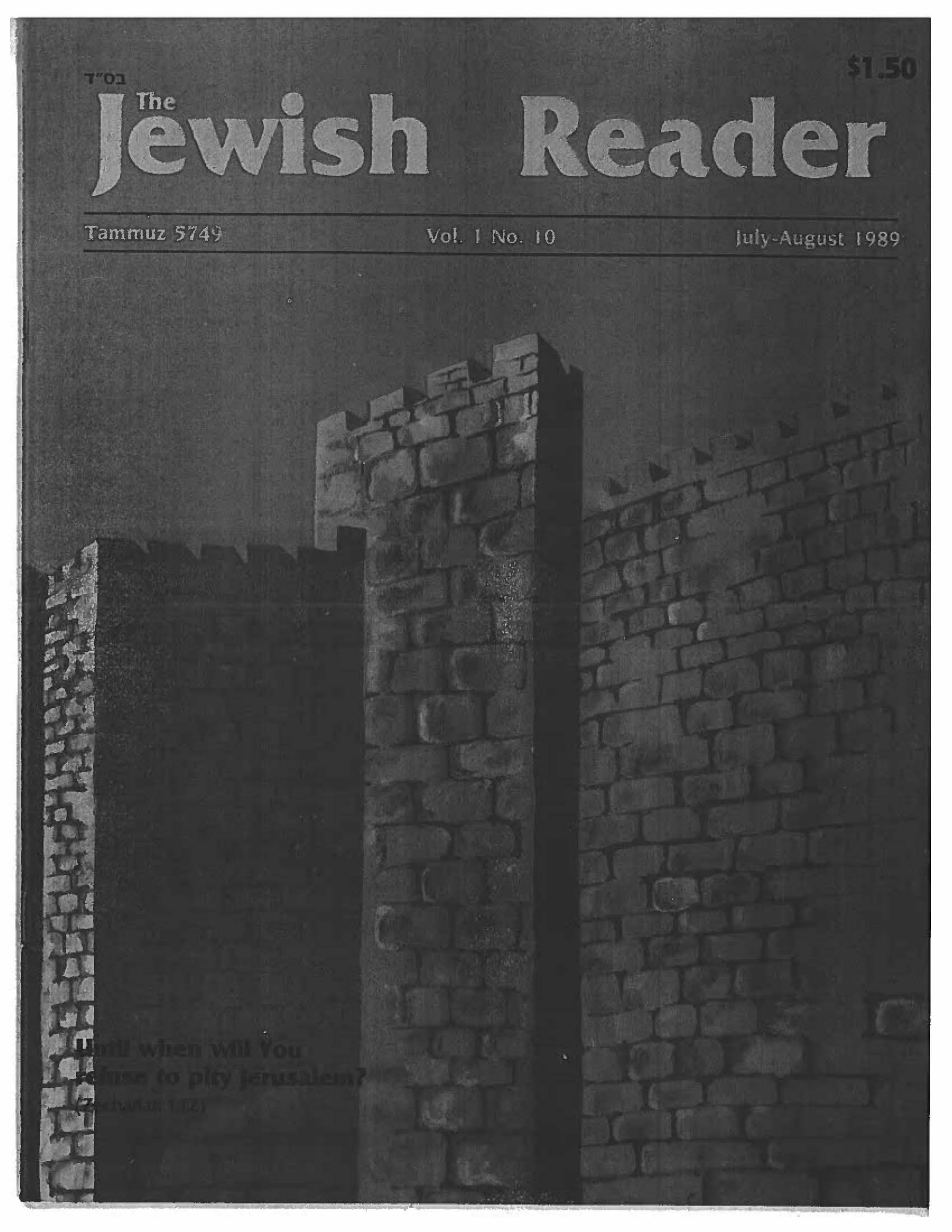
Tammuz 5749

Vol. 1 No. 10

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Until when will you  
refuse to pity Jerusalem?

(Zechariah 1:2)





## TO OUR READERS

While summer ushers in a time of vacation and outdoor fun, for Jews it also signals the onset of the mourning period we call the Three Weeks — beginning with Shiva Asar BeTammuz and culminating with Tisha B'Av. During this time we mark the destruction of the First and Second Temples. We pray for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the construction of the Third Temple, which will never be destroyed.

Our cover, of the wall surrounding the Old City of Yerushalayim, is meant to serve as a reminder of what we once had and what we will have in the future, once again. May the rebuilding of the Temple and the arrival of the Mashiach take place soon!

"Music of the Heart" is the poignant tale of how one girl gets an education during her summer vacation.

The stories about Rav Yosef Caro and the Jews of Poland conclude in this issue, as does "Across the Atlantic."

We at *The Jewish Reader* have enjoyed our first year immensely, and we hope the feeling has been mutual. Our best wishes for a happy and healthy summer. We'll be back in Elul with exciting new features. See you then!

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is made possible  
by a grant from



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# MAIL ROOM

## The Iyar Issue

Dear Editor,

I really liked "Torah Highlights" (Iyar). I lived in Israel with my parents, and I remember how tough it was to keep the *shemittah*. We had to look for special stores to buy fruits and vegetables that weren't grown during the year. But when I knew we were doing what Hashem wanted, somehow it all didn't seem that bad.

Yossi Stern  
Chicago, IL

□ □ □

Dear Editor,

Part 2 of the "The King and the Pawn" (Iyar) brings to mind the time I started keeping Shabbos. A *ba'al teshuvah* and a basketball player, I was once sorely tempted by a game which was scheduled for Friday night.

I thought I could do both — participate without violating Shabbos. I even tried to rationalize — same as Eli — that I was performing some great sacrifice.

Sorry. Even if you score a basket, you lose. The Torah tells us to keep

and remember Shabbos. The day does not become holy just by avoidance of physical activity. It's a mental and emotional experience.

By the way, I didn't go to that game. At the last minute I decided not to, "for some reason."

Daniel Silverstein  
Cleveland, OH

□ □ □

Dear Editor,

Your "Jews of Poland" (Iyar) was interesting. I thought you might like to know that in Kiev there is a statue of Bogdan Chmielnicki. Can you believe this killer of Jews is considered a hero by the Ukrainians? But then, they liked the Nazis, too.

Shmuel Levy  
Flushing, NY

□ □ □

## Likes Puzzles

Dear Editor,

I love your magazine.

I wish it would come out twice a month, because I like the puzzles and contests.

Chaim Eliezer Zalmanov  
Brooklyn, NY

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