

THAT CERTAIN POWER

BY CHAYAH SARAH CANTOR

Did you ever hear of *tefillin* that were so special they were able to infuse their owner with special energy? Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin's were precisely that — a gift handed down from his illustrious father, Rabbi Shalom. In turn, Rabbi Shalom had inherited them from his father, Rabbi Avraham HaMalach, the son of the Maggid of Mezritch.

So dear were these *tefillin* that once, when Reb Yisrael was arrested by the Kiev police, he carefully hid the *tefillin* inside a private place somewhere in his home. When he returned, he took them out, only to find the outer covering moldy and worn. "I felt," he said, "as if a thousand holes bore through my heart." In anguish he took them to the *sofer*, the scribe, to have them examined.

With professional scrutiny the *sofer* brought them close to his spectacles. Then he said, "These *tefillin* aren't unfit at all. Why, look here. The *parshiyos* — the four Scriptural sections — are completely intact. They're

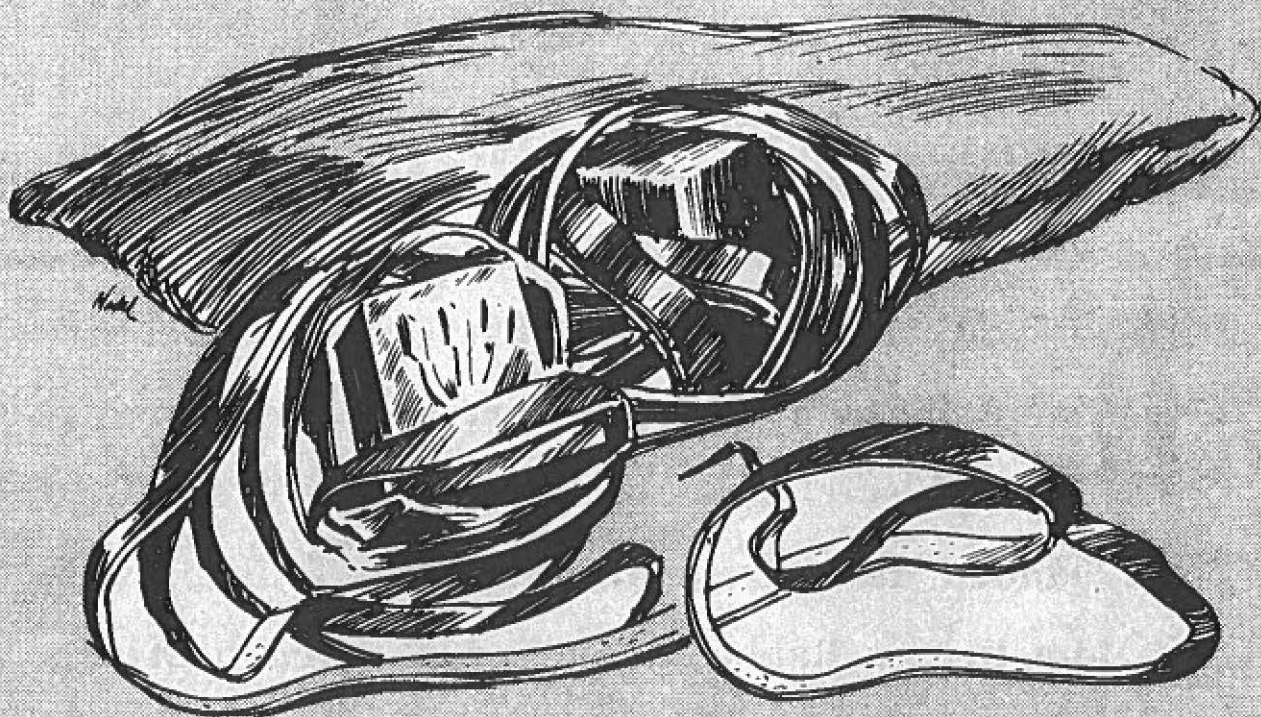
"These tefillin aren't unfit at all. Why, look here. The parshiyos — the four Scriptural sections — are completely intact. They're just as pure and unblemished as the day you received them."

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Rabbi Yisrael kept the holy *tefillin* all the days of his life. When his saintly soul finally left this world, his sons gathered to discuss the inheritance. It was agreed that each son would write up a list of the items he desired the most and place his list inside a sealed envelope. After each list was read aloud, the property would be divided accordingly.

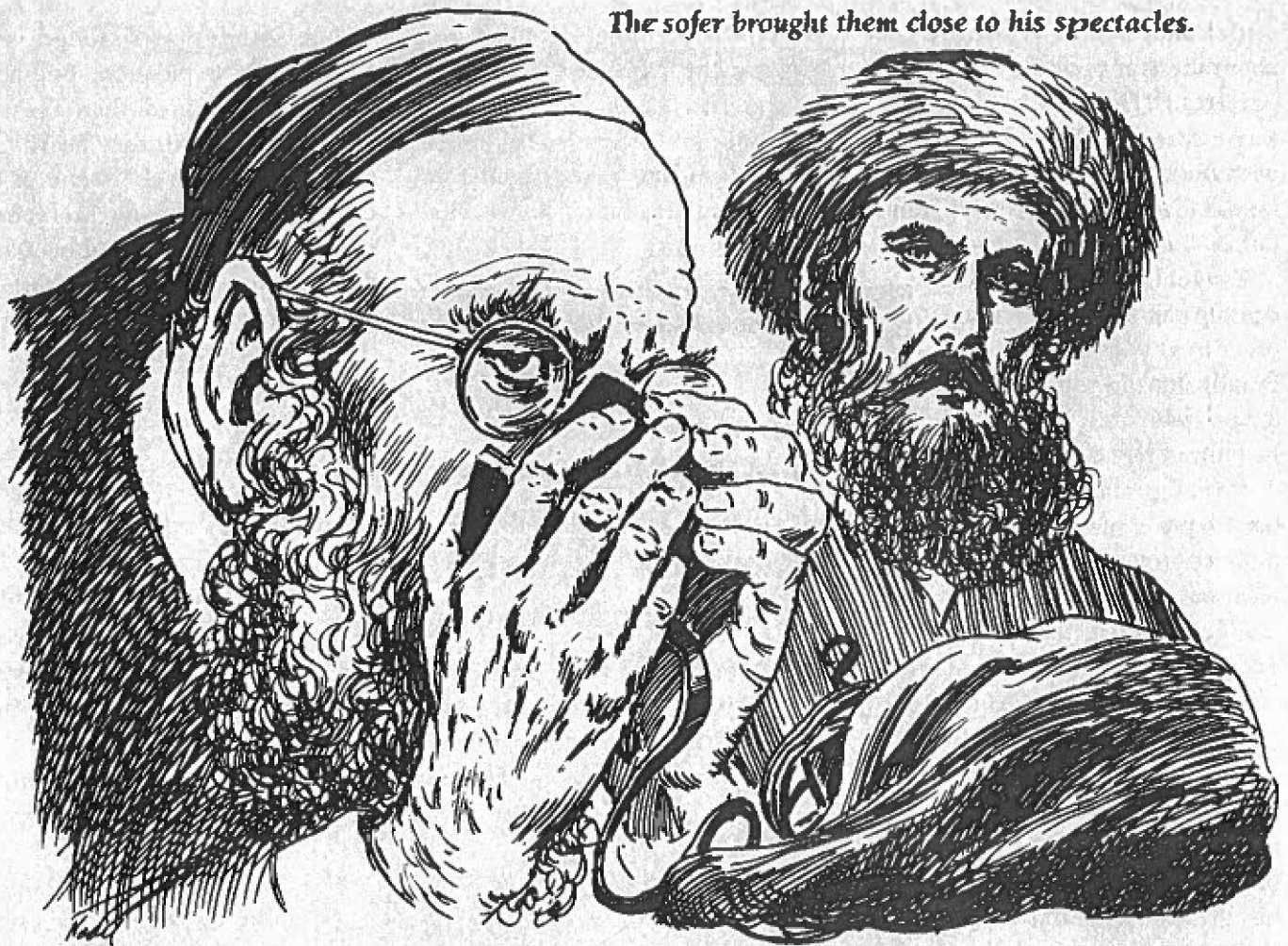
This suggestion, however, was soon vetoed for various reasons, even though the lists were already written up and sealed. It was decided instead to draw lots.

The lucky winner of the *tefillin* was David Moshe. Needless to say, he elicited more than a touch of



When he returned, he took the tefillin out, only to find the outer covering moldy and worn.

The sofer brought them close to his spectacles.



envy from the other brothers, who had also coveted the tefillin. But fair was fair.

After the rest of the lottery was done, the eldest brother, the saintly Avraham Yaakov of Sadigora, announced: "My brothers. For curiosity's sake, why don't we open up the envelopes and read each brother's list? It might be interesting, don't you think, to see what each person wanted." The others agreed, and the lists were read aloud.

Not surprisingly, the tefillin were mentioned on every single one. But one list differed, in that it included these words: *I will readily forfeit my*

share of the inheritance if I am given the set of tefillin of our holy great-

great-grandfather the Maggid. This list was David Moshe's.

"My brothers. For curiosity's sake, why don't we open up the envelopes and read each person's lists? It might be interesting, don't you think, to see what each person wanted."

The others gasped, then proclaimed, "Hashem is close to those who call Him and to all who call Him in truth. May they see and do His will."



The saga is further told by Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin:

Two years after the inheritance had been divided, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov of Sadigora was sitting in his study with his prize pupils. It was the first night of Chanukah, and right after the lighting of the menorah he

settled into a sort of fireside chat about the events of the day.

He said, "How I envy my brother, David Moshe. Every day he prays with the set of *tefillin* that once belonged to my holy great-great-grandfather, the Maggid."

Two of the pupils turned a deathly pale and eyed one another in guilt and vacillation. Finally one of them could no longer hold himself back, and he blurted out:

"My holy rabbi, forgive me, but I must confess my sin — mine and my friend's. It was a great sin, a dire and terrible one I committed, for which I ask your forgiveness."

"A terrible one?" asked the rabbi in stern interest.

"Rebbe, Hashem knows that my friend and I meant no harm, but we were aware of the pinings of our holy teacher for his great-great-grandfather's *tefillin*. My friend and I decided to give the Rebbe plea-

sure by presenting him with the Scriptural verses nestled inside the *tefillin* — the verses that give the *tefillin* that certain power.

"What did we do? We went to his brother and managed to wend our way into his chamber. There we found the holy *tefillin* and removed the *parshiyos*, replacing them with another set. No one saw us. With the holier set in our hands, we hurried out. We rejoiced over our good fortune and awaited the opportunity to show you our prize.

"However," the students sadly concluded, "days after our act, we realized the gravity of what we had done. Especially now, as we hear the words of our holy teacher, we have decided

to reveal everything. Here they are, and may the Rebbe do with them as he sees fit."

As the pupil recounted his words, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov stared in amazement. He didn't know what

"If David Moshe did not feel this missing until today, then it is a sign that perhaps these *parshiyos* are not the real ones. We shall find out for certain where the truth lies."

disturbed him more: their act, or their utter boldness. He was further amazed when, true to his word, the pupil placed the set of verses on the table.

The rabbi finally found his voice again. "If David Moshe did not feel this missing until today, then it is a sign that perhaps these *parshiyos* are not the real ones. We shall find out for certain where the truth lies."

He studied the tightly knit group of verses and placed them into a silk handkerchief. He then said to his students: "This matter is to remain a secret among us. None of you is to say a word. In the meantime I want you all to prepare for a trip. We are going to my brother's home, in Potik."

The students listened and trembled in trepidation. But none were more terrified than the two culprits. As soon as they heard they were returning to the scene of the crime, they imagined the worst from the wronged Rabbi David Moshe. Yet they had no choice but to obey their saintly master and accept his decision.



After Chanukah, all the students had gathered; not one was missing. Together they mounted the carriage with their rebbe and took off. They arrived in Potik a short while later.

"Greetings, brother!" called Rabbi Avraham Yaakov.

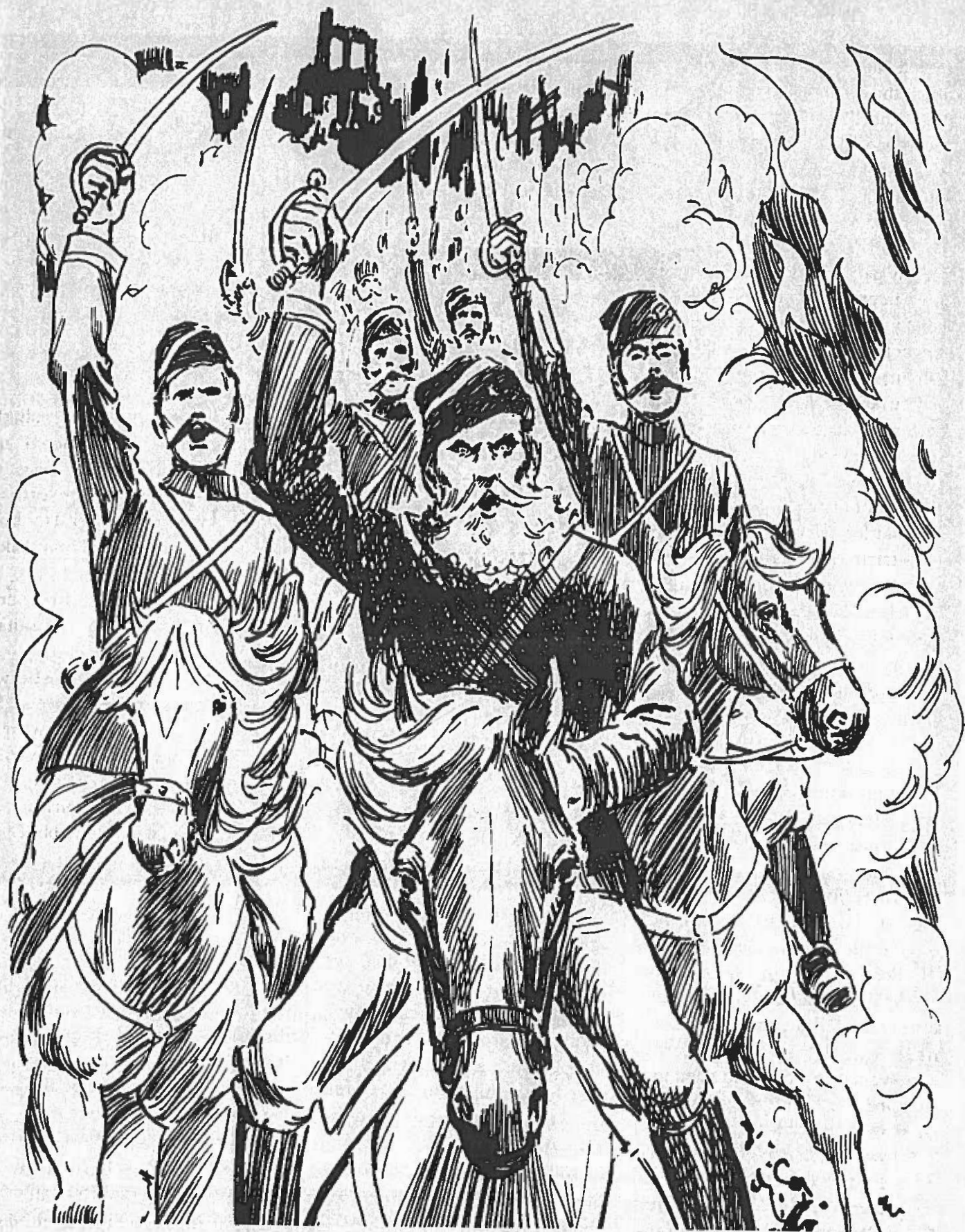
Rabbi David Moshe was quite surprised to see such a retinue, especially without any prior notice. Neverthe-

less, he received them happily.

Came *minchah* and *ma'ariv*, the two brothers went into Rabbi David Moshe's private study to pray together. The Sadigorer Rebbe still said nothing about the purpose of his visit. But the next day, when he came to the chamber for *shacharis*, he noticed two sets of *tefillin* on the table — Rashi's and Rabbeinu Tam's. It was the set of Rashi's *tefillin* which had belonged to their sainted great-grandfather and which had gone to Rabbi David Moshe in the lottery.

To Rabbi Avraham Yaakov's surprise, his brother did not put the *tefillin* on. Instead, as the time came to don them, Rabbi David Moshe

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This horde of savages swept through Chortkov on a rampage of looting and vandalism.

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That Certain Power

(Continued from page 7)

simply took them, held them in his hand for a good while, and sighed. Then he returned them to their place. Afterwards he removed a second pouch, where lay other *tefillin*, and placed them on his arm and head.

When Rabbi David Moshe had finished praying, his brother turned to him and said, "Why didn't you pray with the *tefillin* of our holy great-great-grandfather?"

Rabbi David Moshe answered sadly, "My dear brother, I shall have to tell you the truth. So many times, whenever I have worn them, I have felt the total holiness of my predecessors. But of late I have felt nothing. Something is gone — that spark, that holiness which gave the *tefillin* their special power. To me this clearly indicates that I am no longer worthy." He wiped away a tear.

His brother was equally moved. "My dear David," he said, "don't ever say such a thing. G-d forbid that you should believe you are unworthy. The reason you feel the lack of holiness lies in the *parshiyos*, not in the owner. The *parshiyos* which you have inside these *tefillin* are not the ones which belonged to our great-grandfather."

After Rabbi Avraham Yaakov had related the tale of his two students, he withdrew from his pocket the silk handkerchief with the precious contents.

"Place these inside and don the *tefillin* once again. This time I am sure you'll feel what you were sorely missing."

Rabbi David Moshe listened in wonder and then studied the *parshiyos*. True to his brother's words,

After carting off all the valuables in sight — particularly those the Jews had hidden in their cellars — they set fire to the buildings. The mansion of Rabbi Yisrael was no exception.

the *tefillin* again permeated his mind with holiness, with the special power they held.

Wiser due to his experience, this time he hid the *tefillin* in a special place, away from any overeager students.



Years passed, and Rabbi David Moshe left Potik for Chortkov, in Galicia, whence his fame and righteousness spread. Visitors came from near and far to receive his advice and blessing, or even just to bask in his presence.

When his time came to leave this world, he bequeathed his set of *tefillin* to his only son, Yisrael. The new rebbe, who inherited his father's greatness, immediately saw what a treasure the *tefillin* were, and he guarded them like diamonds, donning them but twice a year — on Purim and *erev* Yom Kippur.

When the First World War broke out, Galicia was directly in the line of fire. As the Russian army advanced, the people of the towns fled in terror and confusion. Rabbi Yisrael was forced to leave his magnificent court and his father's legacy. He hid in a neighboring town to await the deliverance of the Austrian army.

In his haste he had left the special *tefillin* inside his study, at the mercy of the invading Cossacks. This horde of savages swept through Chortkov on a rampage of looting and vandalism. After carting off all the valuables in sight — particularly those the Jews had hidden in their cellars — they set fire to the buildings. The mansion of Rabbi Yisrael was no exception.

When word was brought to the rabbi of the terrible devastation, he fretted over the loss of his *tefillin*. He blamed himself for forgetting to bring them along. Now his father's and grandfather's precious item was probably lost.

His next stop was Lvov, where he waited several weeks, still praying for the arrival of the Austrian army. But when the Austrians continued to retreat and the Russians continued to conquer and plunder, he knew he

had to take to the highway again. He finally arrived in Vienna, the Austrian capital.

He found a suite of rooms for himself and his family — a temporary dwelling, he hoped. But as the war years dragged on, the dwelling was in danger of becoming permanent housing. Finally the Russians were driven out. As soon as Galicia was liberated, Rabbi Yisrael sent a messenger to explore Chortkov and to find out in particular what had become of his *tefillin*.

The messenger beheld a sorry sight. Chortkov lay in smoldering ruins; hardly a Jew was to be found, save for those who wandered listlessly through the rubble or hid fearfully underground, still imagining that the Russians were above. The rabbi's famous mansion was little more than a heap of bricks — pieces of broken furniture scattered about like stones.

The messenger tarried there two weeks, then returned to Vienna with a description of the devastation he had witnessed. Finally Rabbi Yisrael asked, "What about the *tefillin*?"

The messenger sighed. "I asked around, but no one has seen them. I'm afraid to alarm you, but it seems that the *tefillin* were destroyed along with the rest of the rabbi's articles."

The rabbi was incensed. "How can you compare my *tefillin* to any other of my possessions? The *tefillin* were holy, blessed by my ancestors. They cannot simply have been ruined!"

His family tried to console him, but like our forefather Yaakov, who was unconsolated over Yosef's death, the rabbi could not be comforted. He thought bitterly of the prize possession, which he had merited to receive yet failed to protect properly.



He blamed himself for its absence.

Most of all, he missed the *tefillin* on Purim and *erev Yom Kippur*. Forced to don an ordinary pair of *tefillin* on those days, he felt a tremendous lack of spiritual fire.



Not long after the end of the war, a Jew came to the door of Rabbi Yisrael, who was still in Vienna. The visitor's clothing, though tattered, were military; in fact, they identified him as a former soldier in the Russian army.

The Jew knocked on the door.

The *gabbai* answered. "Yes?" he asked coldly.

"I would like to speak to the Rebbe, please," the Jew said.

"The rabbi is busy," snapped the *gabbai*, looking at the Russian uniform in distaste. "Come back later this afternoon, during visiting hours."

"Please!" The Jew held the door open, refusing to let it shut. "I came all the way here for something urgent. I refuse to leave until it is taken care of."

In vain the *gabbai* tried to shut the door. But the Jew glared at him, firmly rooted to the ground. Finally the *gabbai* muttered, "Just one moment. I'll speak to my master."

Irritated, he went to the rabbi's study, where the rabbi was busy poring over some letters.

"What is it?" asked Rabbi Yisrael.

"Rebbe, there's a soldier here to see you."

"A soldier?" exclaimed the rabbi.

"A Jewish soldier, Rebbe — a Jew in Russian uniform. A Jew who fought for the desecrators of your mansion."

"What does he want?"

"Something urgent, he says. He won't budge until he discusses it with you. I tried shutting the door,

ing, down to the smudges, and he fingered the leather straps, over and over, feeling the surge of power.

He raised his head. "How did you find them?"

"In your mansion in Chortkov, Rebbe," explained the Jew. "Blessed

be He who bestowed me the honor of such a find. These did me an enormous favor while I was serving the Czar. They saved my life over and over. Now that the accursed war is done, I feel I must return them to their proper owner."

The rabbi continued to examine his *tefillin*. As the tears began to run down his face, he whispered, "Certainly it is not in my merit that these were returned. Rather, the merit of my father and grandfather was the cause for the *tefillin's* return. Blessed be the One who has returned a lost object."

He turned to the soldier. "And blessed be the one who performs such a mitzvah."

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but he won't let me. He is as obstinate as a mule."

The rabbi wavered, still holding a stack of letters. Finally he put them down. "All right. Let him in."

The soldier entered. He stood by the alcove, waiting.

"Why have you come?" asked Rabbi Yisrael.

Wordlessly the Jew reached into his torn pocket and removed a small folder, which he placed on the desk.

Curious, the rabbi opened the folder. Inside lay his *tefillin*.

Rabbi Yisrael gaped in shock and gratitude. He recognized the cover-

At the rabbi's request, the soldier pulled up a chair and recounted how he had made his amazing discovery.

"I was born in a Russian town," he explained, "and when the war broke out, I joined a Russian regiment and was stationed near the Austrian border. At the beginning of the war, I worried more about dying from boredom than anything else. Other than occasional skirmishes, I had little to do with the enemy."

"But when we were ordered to move westward, I sensed that the

war was truly starting for me. The Russian army was initially victorious; the Austrians were poor fighters compared to their German brethren. We surged through Galicia, pursuing the opponent, but other than a few stragglers — the hungry, wounded, tired, deserters, all of whom we took captive — we couldn't catch up with the rest.

"Finally our troops arrived in Chortkov. I remembered the town well; my father, you see, was a disciple of your father, Rabbi David Moshe, and often brought me there. I recognized every building, even every stable. So of course I remembered the famous court of Rabbi David Moshe. How splendid it was — the high mansion, filled with thousands of followers seeking and obtaining the Rebbe's counsel.

"What a difference now! It lay in ruins. The Cossacks had come and ravaged the town. Seeing the mansion destroyed and desolate, just like our Holy Temple in Jerusalem, I sat down and wept like a child. I wandered through the rubble, still smelling the smoke and ash, and I saw soldiers helping themselves to anything of remotest value.

"Trembling, I decided to see what lay inside; perhaps there was something I could retrieve. I went from room to room, where soldiers continued to sift through the broken crystal and porcelain. Finally I came to the room that was the furthest back from the road and completely empty of plunderers.

"What did I find? A bookcase. A

miniature library, filled with all kinds of holy books — new and old, mint condition and torn. Something was sticking out at the very end: a folder.

"I raised it high and opened it, and out slipped the *tefillin*. Right away I recognized their holiness, for a feel-

"I held them tightly and whispered, 'These tefillin are holy, and I have no right to use them, only to see them' — just as with the Chanukah menorah. To me the discovery of the tefillin was similar to the miracle of the Maccabees and the jar of olive oil."

ing gripped my very soul, and my head swelled with light.

"I held them tightly and whispered, 'These *tefillin* are holy, and I have no right to use them, only to see them' — just as with the Chanukah menorah. To me the discovery of the *tefillin* was similar to the miracle of the Maccabees and the jar of olive oil.

"I placed the *tefillin* back in the folder and said, 'I will take these with me. If I merit to get out of this infernal war in one piece, I shall wander all four corners of the earth for the sake of my master, rabbi, and teacher, and will fulfill the commandment to

return lost objects.'

"Thank G-d the war was soon over for me. As the tides of fortune turned and the Russian army began to retreat from Galicia, I was captured by the enemy and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp near Italy. I remained there till the end of the war.

"Do not think, however, that a prisoner's life is any more idyllic than a soldier's in the battlefield. The camp was just as deadly. Beforehand I had watched comrades die in combat; now I watched them die of hunger, thirst, disease, and a hundred other curses plaguing the camp. Only I survived with health and body intact.

"I firmly believe, with complete and abiding faith, that it was these *tefillin* which saved me. It was the *tefillin* that kept me alive during those perilous months. Just as I kept watch over them, so too did they keep watch over me, and I merited to live until the end of the war."

He smiled. "And now I have merited to return the *tefillin* to their proper owner — and to see the holy face of the Rebbe."



All this time Rabbi Yisrael had been watching the soldier intently, never interrupting, not even making facial reactions.

Finally he shook himself, as if out of a dream, and said, "How great is the merit of our fathers. Did you know that these *tefillin* belonged to my father and his family going back

to the Maggid of Mezhirech? No wonder you felt their holiness. So powerful was the holiness that it prevented the tefillin from falling into the impure hands of the Cossacks.

"And you, whom Hashem chose to be the performer of this task, went through a trial of fire and water, to come out unscathed by evil. He who runs to perform a mitzvah can never come to harm.

"And just as the Divine angels have guarded you until this day, may they guard your comings and goings, yours and your children's, in reward for your great kindness. And may you all merit to see the final redemption, may it come speedily."

Finally the rabbi rose. "Now to more practical concerns. I must certainly repay you for your kindness."

"Oh, Rebbe, that isn't necessary,"

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He asked around for information about the lost man. No help. When the rabbi returned home, he sent out the gabbai to try to find the soldier. The gabbai too began a complex and futile search. For the Jew in the Russian uniform was never found.

objected the soldier.

"But I would like to do something. Your clothes. They certainly look as if they've been through a war, don't they?"

Chuckling, the rabbi pulled out a wad of paper bills. "The very least I can do is help you to get started in civilian life. Buy yourself a fine set of clothes. Here." He handed the soldier the money. "This should be sufficient. If it is not, come back for more. And please, don't skimp on anything. That is an order!"

Reb Yisrael escorted the young man out the office door with a blessing and the instruction to come back later in the day.

But the man did not return. A few hours passed, and Rabbi Yisrael wondered what had happened.

At last he went to the gabbai.

"Did that soldier ever come back?" he asked.

"What soldier?" asked the gabbai.

"You know. That Jew in the ragged Russian uniform. I gave him money for a set of clothes and told him to come back."

"Rebbe," stammered the gabbai, "I didn't see any soldier leave the building."

"What?" insisted the rabbi. "What are you talking about? I showed him out the door. You yourself let him in."

"But he never came back out, Rebbe," answered the gabbai.

"You must have missed him, then."

"Rebbe, I've been standing here all day."

In a daze Rabbi Yisrael searched through the town,

through every Jewish sector, in search of the Russian soldier. He spent hours wandering around the markets, streets, and alleyways, and saw countless people. But not one wore a Russian uniform.

He asked around for information about the lost man. No help. When the rabbi returned home, he sent out the gabbai to try to find the soldier. The gabbai too began a complex and futile search. For the Jew in the Russian uniform was never found.

This man never did reappear in the court of Rabbi Yisrael. Why? Because he was needed somewhere else. Every Pesach, every bris — every time there's a mitzvah with that special power, a power just as special as tefillin, Eliyahu HaNavi may step in with that certain power of his own. JR

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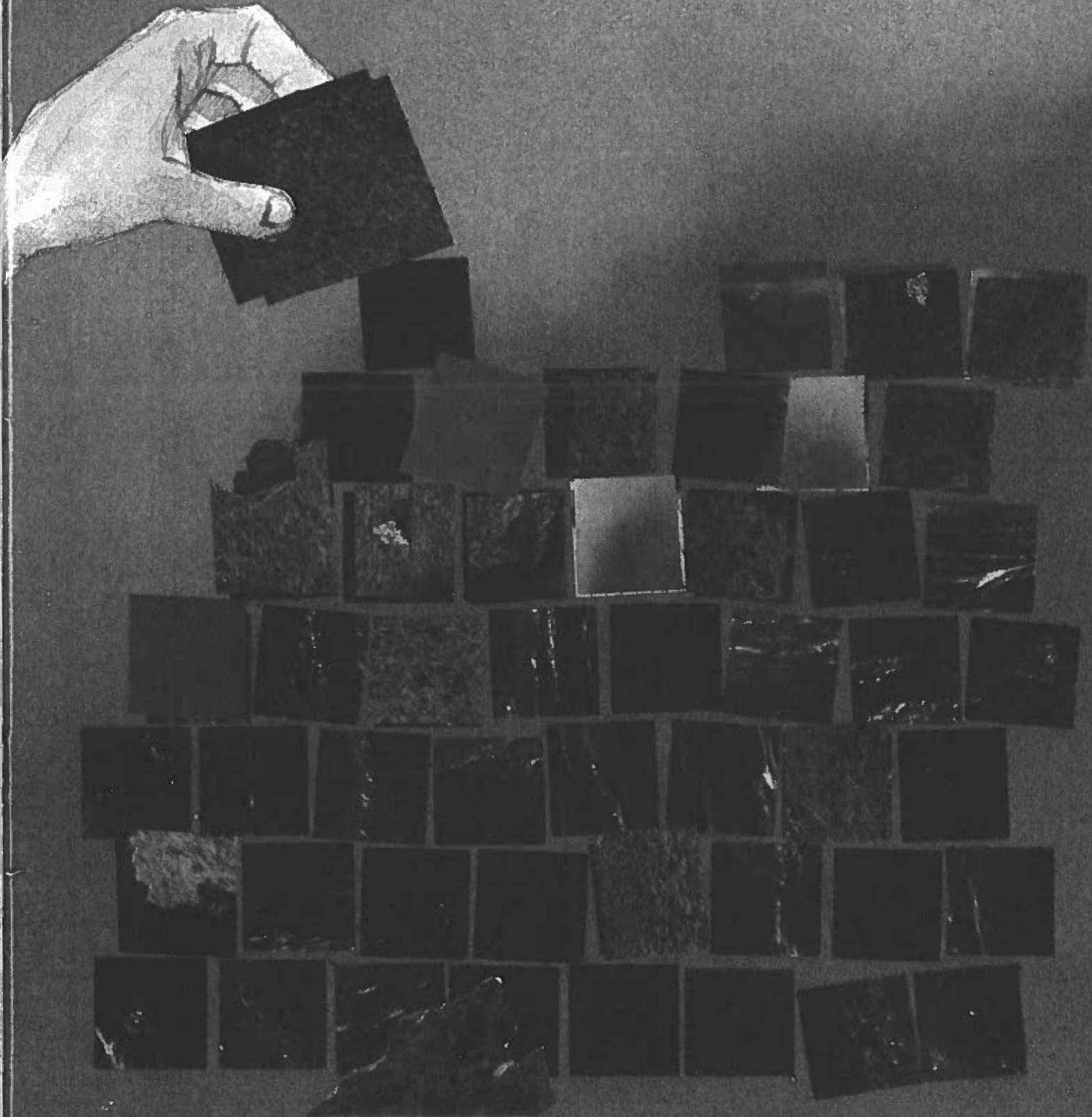


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TO OUR READERS

Lag BaOmer is one of the happier days on the Jewish calendar. Although it is considered a minor holiday, Lag BaOmer has become a day of celebration.

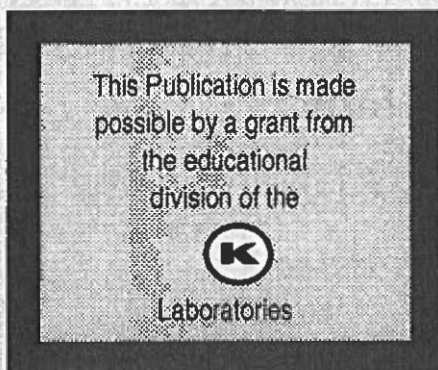
This is especially true in Meron, Israel, where can be found the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, whose yahrzeit falls on Lag BaOmer. On that day every year thousands gather in tiny Meron to light celebratory bonfires and sing and dance.

Rabbi Shimon is considered the father of Jewish mysticism — the Kabbalah. "To Live Forever" tells the tale of one particular Lag BaOmer in Meron and a miraculous event that occurred there. Rabbi Shimon is also the subject of this month's biography.

In "That Certain Power," a special pair of *tefillin* makes its way from owner to owner, surviving against all odds.

The Cordoba family saga continues in "Unshaken As the Continent," with the story moving towards the Revolutionary War.

A happy Lag BaOmer to all!



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