



here is evidence that George Washington, the first President of the United States, admired the Jewish people. In a letter sent in 1790 to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, Washington wrote: "May the children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in the land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants."

How Washington's admiration for the Jews came about is not known. However, there is a story, which, if it is true, helps solve some of the mystery.

Washington was the general of the American army in its battle against the British. In the winter of 1777, his army was encamped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The weather was extremely harsh, and Washington did not know if his men would survive the winter.

As we all know, the American army did survive, and eventually won the Revolutionary War. Many years later, a Jewish man named Joseph visited the antiques store of his friend. He loved antiques, especially how they brought the past to life.

Then he saw the *menorah*. It was a simple design, and had obviously been used many times. He could tell that it was not merely a candelabrum, but a true, kosher *menorah*.

The owner of the store, Richard, finished up with a customer and walked over to Joseph. The owner said to his friend, "I was going to ask you about this object. Take a look."

Richard unscrewed the *shamash* and showed Joseph the letter which was rolled up inside. It was old and crumbling. "Joseph, this might interest you. It's in Yiddish or Hebrew; I don't know, since I can't read either language. The only thing I can make out is the date: 1777."

Joseph unrolled the letter and started reading the Yiddish words:

The Antiquaire

By DEVORAH KIRSCH

Chanukah 1777.

It is a bitter winter. We, the American army which supports General George Washington, are encamped here, twenty or so kilometers from Philadelphia. We are in a field named Valley Forge. We are suffering from hunger and cold, but the general will not surrender to the British.

The British are on the outskirts, and we are inside, completely surrounded. They are fed well and dressed properly. They are free to move around, just waiting for us to die or surrender!

But to surrender would mean that the colonies will always remain slaves to England, forced to do as the British desire — to pay the taxes levied upon us. The general is against this, and I also am against it. I want America to be free and equal for all of G-d's creations. Isn't this the reason I ran away from Poland — to be a free man in a free land?

For this freedom I am ready to go hungry and freeze in the army until better times will come, but not all the soldiers agree with me. I listen to their thoughts and debates, and it makes me feel sick to see many talk against the general and his war with England. They curse and ridicule this war. They want the war to end soon, even if they are

defeated and must surrender.

I do not understand these people; they do not know the difference between freedom and slavery. I often wish to tell them how my father lies in slavery before the nobleman, how he must bow before the nobleman and his family, how he must dance before the nobleman and his guests when he makes a ball and gets drunk.

If my tongue were not in exile and English were my native language, I would gather the courage to defend the war effort and would tell of the slavery by the nobility. But I am a newcomer!

What can I tell them in my words and in my language that will make them understand?

One who has not seen with his own eyes the

degradation of his father, when the nobleman forces him to wear the bear skin* and make a fool of himself as the musicians play and the crowd amuses itself, cannot understand why it is worth hunger and pain to achieve freedom.

When the cold reaches a point that almost makes me break down in tears, I reaffirm the commitment that I made to myself

* See the story "Bear Dance," in the May 1991 issue of *The Jewish Reader*.

For this freedom I am ready to go hungry and freeze in the army until better times will come, but not all the soldiers agree with me.

It was a bitter winter.



when I smuggled myself out of Poland: that I would never return to the land where my father must dance before the nobility, where he must make monkey faces and actions to satisfy the sadistic needs of the nobleman and his guests.

It all started when I was a child of ten. I accompanied my father to the nobleman. My father had been summoned to appear forthwith, but we did not know for what purpose. When we arrived, we found the entire noble family engaged in a great celebration with noblemen from

other territories. My father was told to lie down on the ground and rollover several times. The nobleman's belly rolled as he chuckled with laughter. I was frightened and embarrassed to see my father treated this way.

My father was then dressed in a silly bear outfit and ridiculed. I was terrified and embarrassed, and nothing could quiet my anger and concern. Finally, after hours of torment, my father was released. He left the ballroom white as a ghost and sweating.

Then the nobleman motioned to me and called me over. He pinched my cheek and remarked, "You see how well your father performed, little Shmulke. Soon you will take his place. It will be your turn to keep me and my family laughing."

I decided right then and there that I would rather die than face the day I would dance for the nobleman or his son and their guests.

When the time came for me to do the dance before the nobility, I fled instead to the new world. I had decided that neither I nor my children would go through the degradation. Often I think of that decision, and it calms my hunger pangs.

I agree with the general that we shall outlive this frost, despite the fact that we are not properly clothed and do not have quilts to cover ourselves by night, despite the fact that we are almost barefoot, having to wear torn boots.

I often see General George Washington making his rounds late at night in the barracks. The soldiers

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another miracle.*

are sleeping soundly. He looks at us with pity and tries to cover those he can. Sometimes I wish I would have the courage to open my eyes and say to him that I believe we will be victorious, that we will survive the cold and hunger. We must win!



When Chanukah came, my belief in victory strengthened. I contemplated the fact that G-d, who performed the miracle of the Maccabees, could certainly perform another miracle, this time

with General Washington and his army. We would defeat the healthy, well-fed, overconfident British. I prayed constantly in my heart.

I took out of my sack the Chanukah *menorah* my father had given me before I fled Poland. I wasn't sure whether I should light the first candle before the soldiers fell asleep, and with my limited English try and explain the act, or whether I should wait until they were asleep and then do the mitzvah. I decided to wait, because I didn't notice any Jews in my barracks whom I could aid in performing the mitzvah with me. And I didn't want to have to struggle to explain what I was doing.

They all were asleep and the snoring was heard loudly when I crawled from my thin quilt and lit the first little candle.

Suddenly the general appeared, out of nowhere. I lifted my head from the lit *menorah* and saw him staring at me. We were face to face.

"You can't sleep?" he asked me sympathetically. "Are you hungry and cold?"

I stood there, dumbfounded. What was I to answer? He came closer and took my hands to see how cold they were. My heart shuddered; I just couldn't answer, but I felt rescued because he was doing all the talking.

He then looked at the burning candles. He gazed at them strangely, then at me, and said, "Is this a religious or superstitious prayer and ceremony against the cold and hunger?" The general was ignorant

about Jewish customs, but he seemed quite tolerant.

I finally gathered the courage to speak. I told him that these were the Chanukah lights, the lights of victory. Many years ago they had been the symbol of victory for the hungry and oppressed. I briefly told him the story of Chanukah.

"Do you believe in miracles?" the general asked, smiling.

By now I had gained confidence. Here was something about which I knew more than the general. "I believe that the same G-d who performed a miracle then can perform another one with General George Washington, sir, with his army here at Valley Forge."

The general patted me on the face and smiled. "You are the son of prophets, and so I'm certain you are knowledgeable about what you are telling me." He made an about face and left.

I was up all that night. The candles were lit for a long time. I prayed and prayed.

◆
My prayers were answered.

Soon the weather began to change. It was getting warmer. The snow was melting, and the routes were now open for us to receive supplies. Food, ammunition, and clothing arrived. We were saved! We had held out! We had triumphed!

"Do you believe in miracles?"



Eventually America became free of British rule. We were independent. We soldiers were sent home. I never told anyone about that Chanukah night with George Washington. The story sounded farfetched; who would have believed me? I kept it all to myself.

Two years had passed, and General Washington was chosen to be President Washington. I was proud of him and myself.

Chanukah time came, and I took out my *menorah* — yes, the same *menorah* I had brought from Poland and lit at Valley Forge.

Then, after I lit the first candle, there was a knock on my door. Two officers in uniform came in and asked for me. I saluted. They handed me a box and opened it up. There was a medal inside, along with an official document. The officer pinned the medal on me, took the document, and started reading:

"This is sent to a devoted soldier of the revolution, from whom I received hope and encouragement in the most trying of times in my life, on the battlefield of Valley Forge. Blessed may you and your people be. Blessed be the menorah of your people, who taught me to believe in miracles."

George Washington

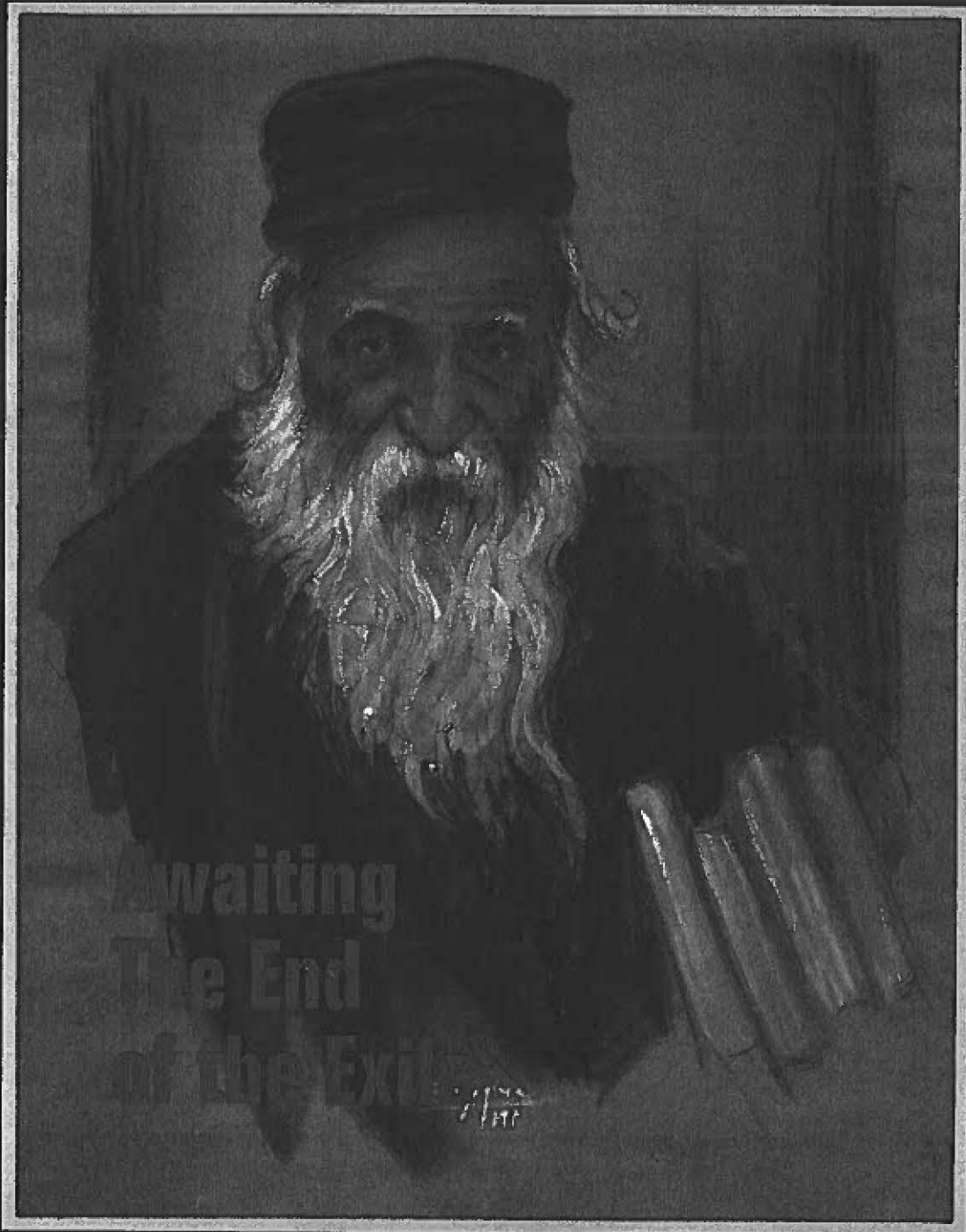
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TO OUR READERS

On our cover this issue is a drawing of a "simple Jew." Of course, this man is "simple" only in the sense that he follows Hashem's Torah with simple, pure faith. He spends as much time as possible in the *bais midrash*, studying Torah.

It is this picture that the Syrian-Greeks, under Antiochus, tried to destroy, by their rules against the learning of Torah and the performance of mitzvot. The Chashmonaim, under Yehuda HaMaccabee, defeated Antiochus, rededicated the Temple, and restored the Torah to its rightful place.

Our main story is one of the most famous told about Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. Due to its length, it will conclude next issue.

Also of special interest is "letters from Kiev." How do young Russian Jews feel about our heritage? In this moving article you will come to gain a better understanding of our brethren in the Soviet Union.

We wish our readers a very Happy Chanukah.

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MAIL ROOM

Enjoys Good Writing

Aidel Pesel Wajngort is a really fine writer. Her latest story ["The Believer," Cheshvan] was very exciting and interesting. How Rav Meir of Premishlan helped the couple in trouble made me think of the important *tzaddikim* that we have.

I hope you will print more stories by Aidel Pesel Wajngort in your next issues.

I also remember you used to have Torah contests. Please print some more of these contests.

Gila Bracha Braun
Brooklyn, NY

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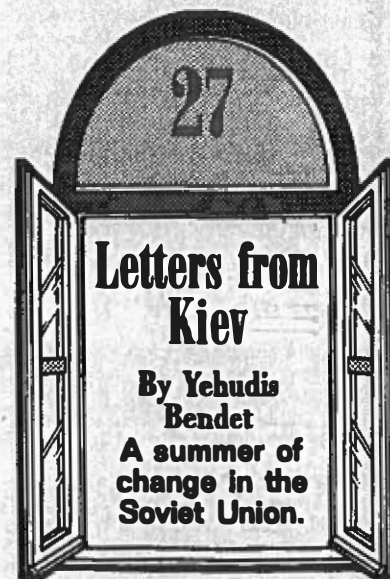
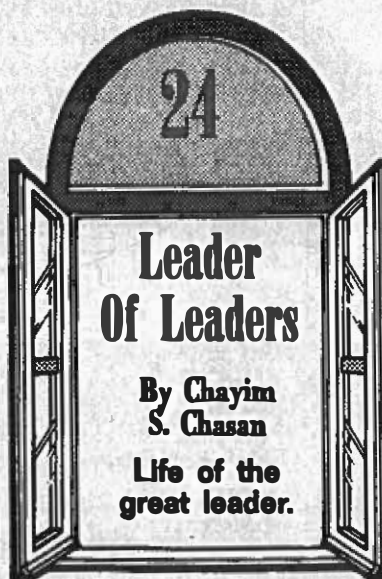
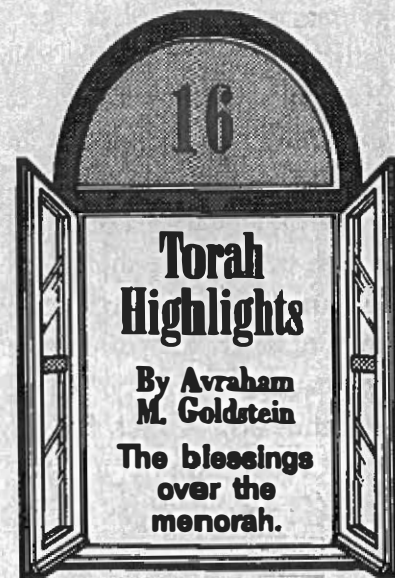
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