
HOLY FUGITIVE

BY RABBI CHAYM S. CHASAN

The 3rd of Cheshvan marks the 141st *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Yisrael Friedman of Ruzhin. Born 3 Tishrei 5557 (1796) and passing away in 5611 (1850), the Rebbe was the son of Rabbi Shalom Shraga, the grandson of Rabbi Avraham HaMalach (the Angel) — both great chassidic leaders — and the great-grandson of the Maggid of Mezherich. With such a lineage, he naturally displayed a fire and flair for Torah learning.

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The town that Rabbi Yisrael made famous was located within the Russian empire, not far from Kiev, the capital and chief region of the Ukraine. Although loved and exalted by thousands of Jews, Reb Yisrael did not live a peaceful life. He was constantly harassed by the authorities, and always at the mercy of witch-hunts. The instigators, jealous of his greatness, looked for any opportunity to undermine him.

The day came, in 5597, when Reb Yisrael had to flee Ruzhin. The reason was a falsified story behind the murder of two government agents and notorious Jew-haters in the neighboring town of Dinawitz. The local police, unable to track down the culprits, were on the verge of closing the case, when several "witnesses" came forward and declared that Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin had had the agents eliminated, in order to protect his position.

The governor, a man named Lashkarov, acted swiftly. He knew the Rebbe could never be tried without an uproar, an uproar that might reach the Tzar. Were the Rebbe proven innocent, the governor's own position might be jeopardized. Therefore, he had the Rebbe arrested and locked away in solitary

confinement. It was there that the Rebbe was to spend a lonely twenty-two months.

Shortly later, just as he was arrested without reason, the Rebbe was released as inexplicably: the governor of Kiev had a sudden change of heart.

After returning home, the Rebbe knew his troubles weren't over, or his encounters with the governor. They would continue to dog his life,

as long as his adversaries could come up with crimes of which to accuse him. Finally he and his family packed up their belongings and moved to Kishinev.

Shortly after his arrival, he received word that the governor of Kiev was fast on his heels with a new claim: that the Rebbe had proclaimed himself King of the Jews, thereby placing himself in direct conflict with the Tzar. The punishment for this

A SOLDIER'S

A Jewish soldier, one of the Rebbe's followers, found himself on duty in the prison and tried to be as close to its unusual visitor as possible. After much conniving, he managed to be assigned a guard shift. He asked the Rebbe what could be done to ease his confinement.

The Rebbe replied, "I wish to be released on the night of the New Moon, so that I may recite the proper blessings."

The soldier did all he could to arrange to stand guard that evening, but in vain. Finally, as the moonless sky appeared, he approached the guard on duty with a bottle of whiskey and offered the man a drink.

Eagerly the guard accepted. He took one drink, then another, until soon his head began to spin. Drunkenly he decided to rest and allowed the generous Jew to relieve him until midnight, the next shift.

Immediately the soldier unlocked the prison door. He then informed the Rebbe that the new guard would come at midnight. The Rebbe nodded and began his prayer.

Time sped by. Minutes before midnight, the Rebbe was still engrossed in prayer, and the soldier nervously stared at the clock.

was exile. The "King of the Jews" would have to dwell in an area remote from any Jewish settlement. The Rebbe realized he would have to leave Russia altogether.

His hope lay in obtaining a passport in order to enter Moldavia, to the west, from where he thought he would not have to fear extradition back to Kishinev. Two messengers went to the governor of Kishinev and guaranteed that the Rebbe would

return to Russia at a later date. The plan worked, and the Rebbe was temporarily permitted to leave. Thus began an exciting saga.

After the Rebbe's departure, the governor of Kishinev received word from the governor of Kiev concerning the Rebbe's criminal charges. Alarmed, the governor of Kishinev sent word to the consulate in Moldavia to have the "King of the Jews" brought back to Russian soil

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MIRACLE

~~He longed to tell the Rebbe to hurry, but didn't dare.~~

~~Midnight came, but the Rebbe had not finished. Luckily the next guard had not yet appeared, and the soldier thanked the Lord for the guard's delay.~~

~~A half hour later the Rebbe was still praying. By now the Jewish soldier was frantic. Although there was still no sign of the guard, he might come any second and catch them both. Who knew what the penalty might be? In the Russian empire it could be death.~~

~~Hours continue to pass, until the rays of dawn flooded the sky. The Rebbe finally ended his prayers and asked to return to confinement. Just as the prison door echoed shut behind him, the new guard came running.~~

~~"Please forgive me," he stammered to the soldier. "I shall be forever indebted if this little mishap remains a secret. In all my professional life I have never been late for duty. But for some reason, I was last night.~~

~~"I awoke, ready to prepare for work, when I found I could not get out of bed. Though I tried, I felt as if a force were holding me down. I couldn't move or even cry for help. I lay there, utterly paralyzed, until moments ago!"~~

in chains. The Rebbe, notified by friends, knew he would have to move on to Galicia.

He came as far as the border, in mid-winter, when he realized he would need a pass with which to enter Galicia. The one he possessed had only allowed him travel into Moldavia. Documents originally belonging to someone else were procured for him, with just one problem: the original person was listed as twenty-six years of age. The Rebbe was over forty.

Luckily, another individual came to the rescue. Shimon of Shatz was a merchant, who imported and exported goods between the countries and who therefore knew the border police quite well. They simply smiled at him as he floated past, his companion flashing the twenty-six-year-old's passport before them.

Once they arrived in the city of Kampling, the Rebbe was left alone with his *shamash*, Reb Shmuel, and another follower, Reb Yudel Shochet. Unsure of what to do next, they sent out messengers to rally a group of close supporters, without divulging the Rebbe's whereabouts.

Secretly the supporters met in a neighboring village, and from there

the messenger sent them on to Kampling. Just then they received word: the Baron of Sadigore, in Galicia, had granted the Rebbe asylum! Apparently the Baron believed that Sadigore was the Rebbe's birthplace, thus giving him citizenship, as well as protection from extradition.

How did this strange information come about? No one knows. Apparently the city records revealed that fifty years earlier a boy named Yisrael had been born to an impoverished family named Dannenberg. As the parents had long ago died, the boy's current whereabouts were unknown. Only this fact existed: the boy had been brought to Russia by a sympathetic

Apparently the city records revealed that fifty years earlier a boy named Yisrael had been born to an impoverished family named Dannenberg.

relative named Shalom Friedman, who adopted him. Now the "son" had returned to Galicia, in the flesh, to claim citizenship.

In the meantime, the governor of Kishinev did his own legwork. He placed guards at the Rebbe's home in

Kishinev, arrested his family and guarantors, and threatened them with a trip to Siberia if they didn't contact the Rebbe, persuading him to come home. Sadly the Rebbe's wife and son wrote a letter. They asked forgiveness for their act, which was being done under duress, and added that they would willingly accept their fate if the Rebbe willed it.

The guarantors, arriving in Sadigore, told the Rebbe of their troubles. The Rebbe comforted them, telling them not to worry. In the meantime the Baron sent a letter to Russia, stating that these people were his countrymen and hence protected. Although the governor of Kishinev was satisfied, the governor of Kiev was not. Immediately he sent an investigator.

The result was amazing: local residents, Jews who had never before seen the Rebbe or understood the reason for the investigation, came forth and stated that they knew the Dannenberg family! They even remembered the boy and his relative, who had brought him to Russia forty-five years ago.

And two non-Jews came, studied the Rebbe, and declared that he looked exactly like the elder Dannenberg, who was fifty years old at the time. The Rebbe himself did not have to undergo questioning, since he had been only a young boy back then and considered incapable of remembering anything important.

If the investigator harbored any more suspicions, they were no longer of any danger: a message had arrived from the Tzar that Rabbi Yisrael Friedman was forbidden to return to Russia. The "King of the Jews" was to spend the rest of his days in Galicia, where he had miraculously been reborn. **JR**

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**“When I behold Your
heavens, the work of
Your fingers, the moon
and the stars that You
have set in place.”**

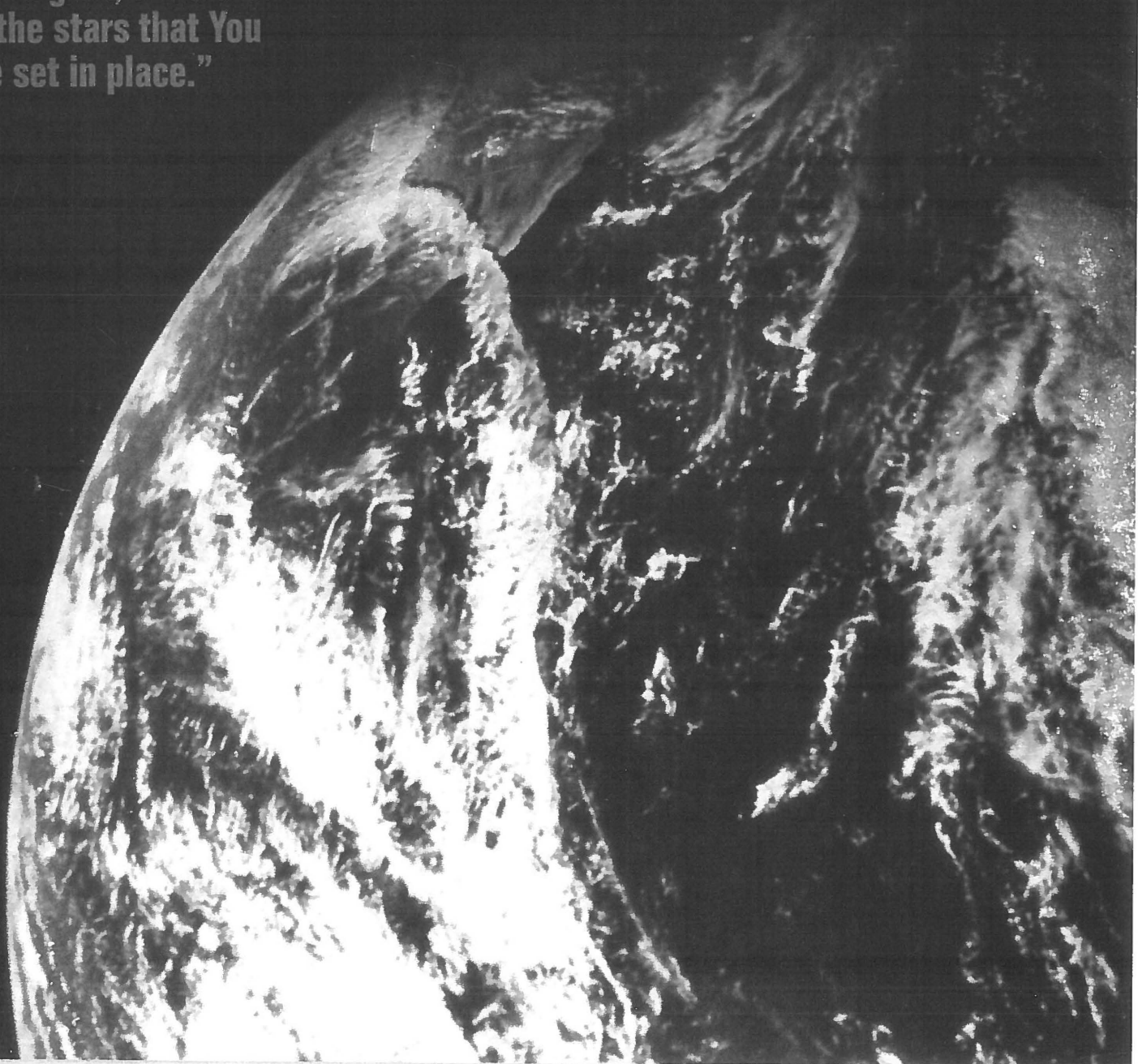
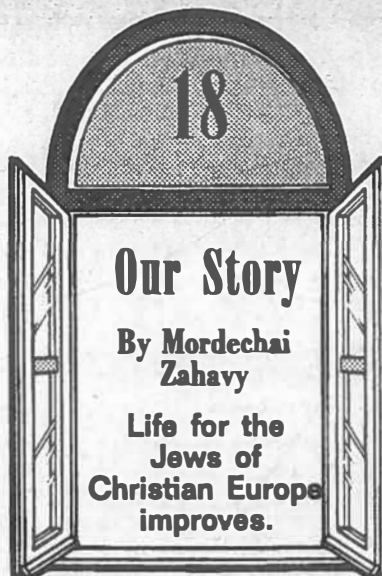
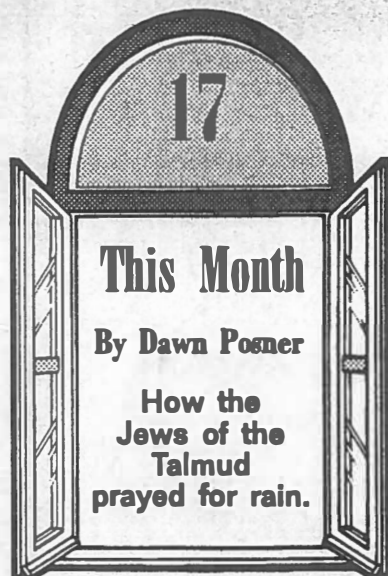
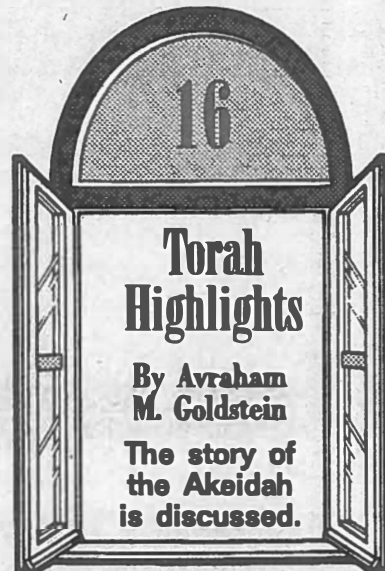
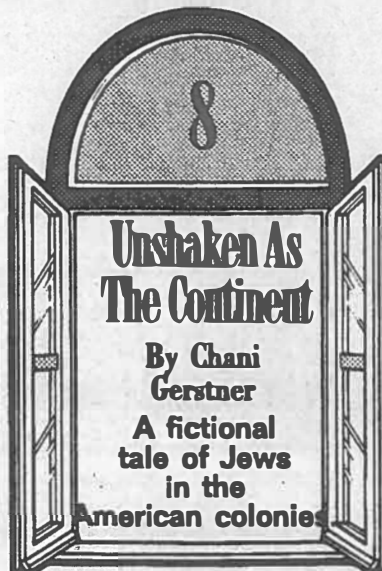
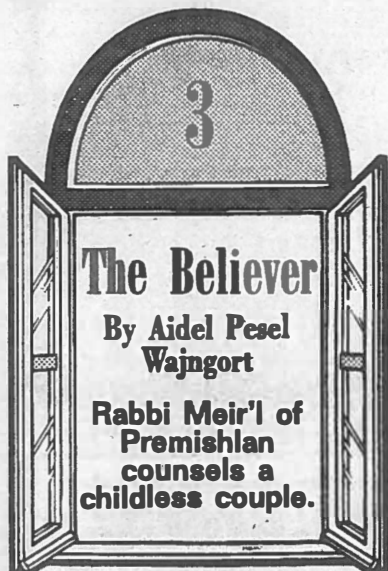


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TO OUR READERS

One of the greatest of all the chassidic rebbes was Rabbi Meir'l of Premishlan. Many stories about his powers have been handed down in chassidic lore.

In "The Believer," a childless couple approaches Rabbi Meir'l for help. The interaction between the Rebbe and the couple make for fascinating reading.

"Unshaken As the Continent" is a completely different kind of story. Continuing for the rest of the year, it is the account of a fictional Jewish family in Colonial America. Please keep in mind that, while the main characters are fictional, all the historical figures, events, and places existed. (For example, the yeshiva mentioned in the present issue was an actual yeshiva.)

At the beginning of the year, as we read the story of Creation in Bereishis, we look at the universe and admire the work of Hashem. Our cover photograph, of the space beyond our planet, celebrates Hashem's universe, accompanied by an appropriate quotation from Tehillim 8:4.

This Publication is made possible by a grant from the educational division of the



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MAIL ROOM

Beautiful Cover

I had to write and tell you how much I enjoyed the cover of your Tishrei issue. Can you tell me something about the artist?

Also, the stories about Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev were very inspiring. I like the fact that you have been featuring stories about Rabbinic

leaders in recent issues.

Rochelle Martin
Philadelphia, PA

Michel Schwartz is a world-famous artist whose work has graced our covers several times over the past year. His art has been praised by many of our readers, and we are sure he is glad to hear that you enjoy it..

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