

RISHE DEITSCH



“Talks & Tales Is Here!”

Throughout the 1960s, when I was a little girl growing up in Worcester, Mass., the day the Talks & Tales came flying through our big brass mail slot was the day my sister Zeesy regretted teaching me how to read. She didn't like having to compete with me for the new Talks & Tales. We loved the stories even though they sometimes made us stop breathing (temporarily). We read every word, even the halachos of Shavuot and the feeding habits of deer. And we took it for granted, as if it would always be there. But one day, after nearly a half-century, it stopped, making it probably the longest-running Jewish children's magazine ever. Now this wonderfully well-written magazine, all 48 years of it, has been bound and published in 16 volumes by Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, the publisher of Talks & Tales. We all want to give our children Torah-true reading material, yet we sometimes struggle with the quality of the writing in the kosher material. These volumes provide the best of both worlds.

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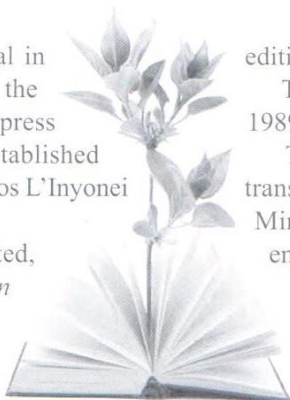
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Barely half a year after the Rebbe's arrival in America (28 Sivan, 1941) the first issue of the monthly journal *Talks & Tales* rolled off the press (Chanukah 1942), published by the newly established organization of the Friediker Rebbe—the Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch.

It continued to be published, uninterrupted, together with its Yiddish counterpart, *Shmuessen Mit Kinder Un Yugend*, for 48 years. *Talks & Tales* was also published in Hebrew (as *Sichos L'Noar*) as well as in French and Spanish



editions.

The final issue, number 586, appeared in Nissan 1989.

The magazines were edited by the noted author, translator and secretary to the Rebbe, Dr. Nissan Mindel. He remained with the magazine for the entire duration of its run, presided over its growth and basked in its popularity. The high literary quality of the *Talks & Tales* can be attributed to his skill and talent.

In the early years of Chabad-Lubavitch in

America, up to the histalkus of the Frierdiker Rebbe, the Rebbe served as Chairman of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch. After Yud Shvat 5710, the Rebbe became president of Merkos. During those early years, a great deal of effort was placed into the publication and dissemination of the *Talks* and *Shmuessen*. It was the first tool utilized by the Rebbe in combating the ignorance of American Jewry and bolstering their education in all matters Jewish. For the early Chabad-Lubavitch activists in America, the *Talks* was their most potent weapon in the war against assimilation.

The Rebbe's Shluchim continued to use the *Talks & Tales* as a tool to disseminate Torah for nearly half a century, from the '40s to the '80s. In 1979, Rabbi Hodakov sent a letter to all the Shluchim reminding them of their obligation to disseminate the publications of the Merkos, including the *Talks* and *Shmuessen*. Rabbi Hodakov reminded them that part of their contract included recruiting subscribers for the *Talks & Tales*.

The Rebbe was very involved in this work, from the writing and editing to the shipping of the magazines. Even after the Rebbe accepted the nesiyus, he never divested himself of the task assigned to him by the Frierdiker Rebbe. He continued his passion for the *Talks*, reviewing them month after month, editing and correcting, until the final copy rolled off the press.

Every issue of the *Talks & Tales* was reviewed, and often edited, by the Rebbe himself. This distinction was reserved for the Rebbe's Maamarim, Likutei Sichos, Lubavitch News Service press releases, and the *Talks & Tales*. The Rebbe also personally edited the N'shei Chabad Convention journals.

The *Shmuessen* were reviewed by the Rebbe's secretary and chief of staff, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Isaac Hodakov z"l. The Rebbe would customarily bring every new issue of the two magazines to the Ohel.

Although written for youth, the writing style of the *Talks & Tales* was always made appealing for adults as well, to draw in the parents and older siblings. Early on, it was clear that part of the mission statement was to place a copy in every Jewish home. To the Frierdiker Rebbe, placing a copy of the *Talks* in a Jewish home was a sure way to bring the light of Torah and the warmth of mitzvos to an entire household.

Talks & Tales was meant for all Jewish children, not only Chabad. You will hardly find references to the Rebbe, or even the word Lubavitch, in most *Talks & Tales*. After all, how many Lubavitch children were there in the '50s and '60s?

Many interesting Torah facts and explanations of Jewish law and custom were incorporated into these magazines, with layer upon layer of interpretation infusing each of the magazine's 12 pages. The Rebbe would often answer questions from writers who asked and commented on the



Photo Credit: Devorah Goldstein

Schneur (left) and Chananya Niasoff of Ann Arbor, Michigan, enjoying *Talks & Tales* together.

content of the magazines.

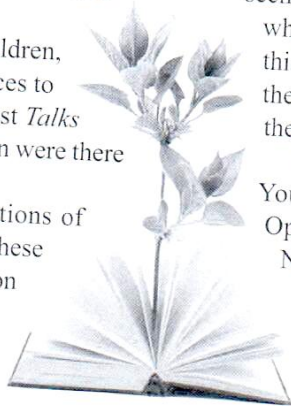
In 1942, the Rebbe wrote a booklet for children called The Young Scholar's Pocket Calendar. It was actually the first Hayom Yom. The Young Scholar's Calendar was published in English, a translation of the Rebbe's original Hebrew. The Calendar featured a saying for each day, and sometimes questions and riddles to challenge the young reader's mind. The answer to these questions appeared in the *Talks & Tales* of that month.

The first twelve issues of *Talks & Tales* were released in mimeograph typewritten form. The first issue to be typeset and published with the famous cover design was Teves 1943. The design depicted the world resting on the three pillars of Torah, avodah and gemilus chassodim, with the Kehot Publication Society logo at the base of the pillars. The luchos resting on the clouds were depicted above the world to the right, with the abbreviation B"H on top. This cover was unchanged for 48 years. In a very insightful letter (see sidebar) the Rebbe explains the profound philosophical message hidden in every detail of this design.

The depiction of the luchos as perfect cubes (not in the traditional form of elongated tablets with rounded tops), first seen on the covers of the *Talks & Tales*, astounded all who saw it. The Rebbe's insistence on promulgating this design is based on the Gemara and was a repeated theme in the Rebbe's writings and talks throughout the years.

Regular features of *Talks & Tales* included Test Your Knowledge, Things to Remember, The "I" Opener, The Gallery of Our Great, Let's Visit, In Nature's Wonderland, My Prayer, and Stories.

In the 1960s, the price for a single issue of *Talks* or *Shmuessen* was 10 cents. A yearly subscription cost \$1.00. A subscription to both was a whopping \$1.50 per year. Even in the



Fifty Years Later

Henya Laine

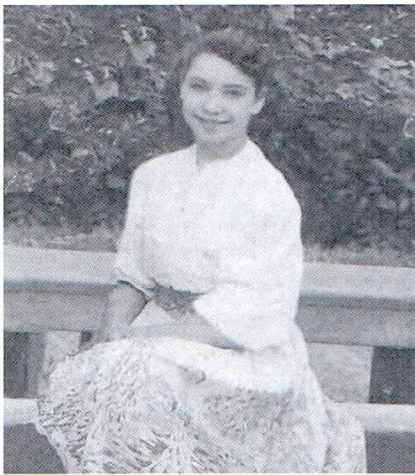
In 1953, our family had the zchus to have a yechidus with the Lubavitcher Rebbe (he had only been the Rebbe for two years at that point), during which he encouraged my parents to settle in Cleveland, Ohio.

In order to ensure that we children would remain good, Chassidische children and proud Lubavitchers, my parents decided to take us along whenever they traveled to the Rebbe for Sukkos. It was too expensive for the entire family to travel together at once, so we children took turns going to the Rebbe with either our mother or our father.

The year that it was my turn to go to the Rebbe for Sukkos with my mother, I was 13 years old. My first Simchas Torah with the Rebbe was unbelievable! What an incredible Yom Tov! After Simchas Torah, the guests were permitted to have yechidus with the Rebbe. You can imagine

my excitement

When it was our turn to enter the Rebbe's room, my mother instructed me to pay close attention to the Rebbe and to answer any questions he would ask.



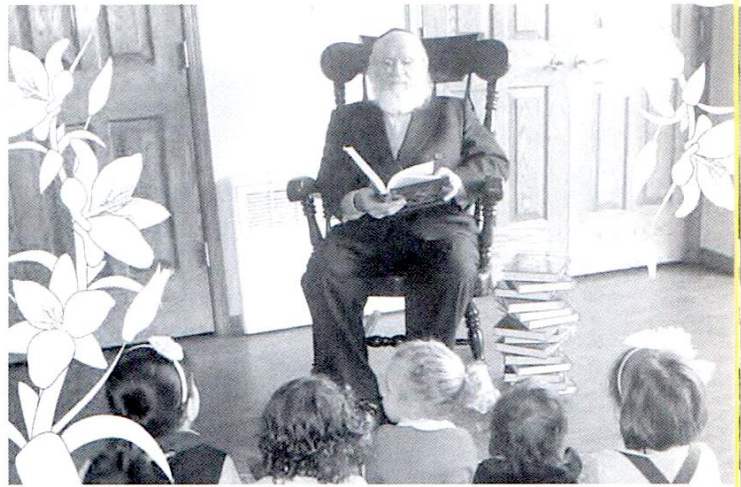
Henya Kazen at 13.

The Rebbe asked me what Chumash I was learning, followed by questions about the parshah. Luckily, I had good teachers and passed with flying colors. Then the Rebbe turned to my mother, and she motioned for me to leave the yechidus room so she could have her private audience with the Rebbe.

After spending some time with the Rebbe, my mother walked out to the waiting room and instructed me to quickly return to the Rebbe. "The Rebbe wants to talk to you," she said. I hurried back into the room.

The Rebbe lifted his holy, soft blue eyes, looked through me and said, "Your mother told me that you have a Mesibos Shabbos group. Tell me, what do you do?"

"Well, it's not a big deal," I said. "Every



This great-grandfather reads only the best to his descendants.

'80s, towards the end of its run, each issue cost only 30 cents. *Talks & Tales* was published monthly according to the Jewish calendar. So a leap year would see 13 issues rather than 12. Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky recalls the extensive correspondence he had with the United States Postmaster regarding retaining the privilege of mailing at second class rate, as the law only allowed for 12 issues to be mailed per year. *Talks and Tales* prevailed.

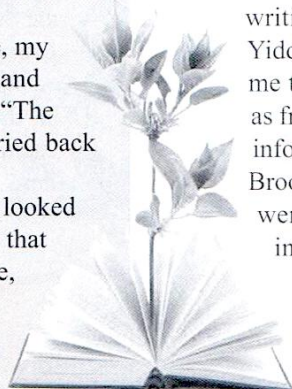
The Rebbe once questioned several bochurim how long one must wait after milchigs before eating fleishigs. When the bochurim were unsure, the Rebbe told them that it is a "befeirusher Shmuessen" that one should wait one hour according to the SheLoH.

Even a cursory perusal of the Rebbe's letters in Igros Kodesh reveal the Rebbe's involvement in the *Talks & Tales*, and his unbridled nachas from the effect it had on American Jewry.

The two-volume set *My Prayer* is a collection of essays that appeared in *Talks & Tales*, as is the five-volume set of *The Storyteller*.

What I love about *Talks & Tales*, first and foremost, is that it is *good writing*. Children learn proper English and gain writing skills while at the same time absorbing Yiddishe, chassidische values. It's also fascinating for me to notice the things that clearly mark the writing as from the 1940s or 1950s. For example, the contact information is only an address, 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, New York. The first issues of *Talks & Tales* were published in 1942, before zip codes were invented, and before every home had its own telephone. For you youngsters – there were no faxes or internet then either.

In the *Talks & Tales* of the 1940s, '50s and '60s, readers were urged to send in bar mitzva



Shabbos, my sisters and I pick up the little girls from their homes, bring them to our home, hand out food and drinks, make brochos with the girls, sing and dance with them, tell them Jewish and Chassidische stories from the *Talks & Tales*, and then we walk them back home.”

The Rebbe gave me a big smile and lots of brochos for success in my work. Then he added, “In the future, I should not have to ask you what you are doing, but instead you should inform me on your own.” (After that yechidus, I always wrote to the Rebbe, and now I bring my letters to the Ohel.) Then the Rebbe continued to give me and my sisters brochos for hatzlachah in our Shlichus work, and that we should inspire the girls who attend Mesibos Shabbos. At that moment I felt 10 feet tall, like the most important and capable 13-year-old in the entire world.

Fast forward 50 years. Over the course of a lifetime, my parents, Rabbi Zalman and Rebbetzin Shula Kazen, may they live and be well, diligently brought hundreds of American and Russian kinderlach to attend the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland. The school therefore decided to honor my parents at their annual dinner.

My sister Rivka Kotlarsky and I flew from New York to Cleveland for the occasion. While waiting to deplane in Cleveland Hopkins Airport, I noticed many frum-looking women standing and waiting to deplane, too. My sister and I were both puzzled.

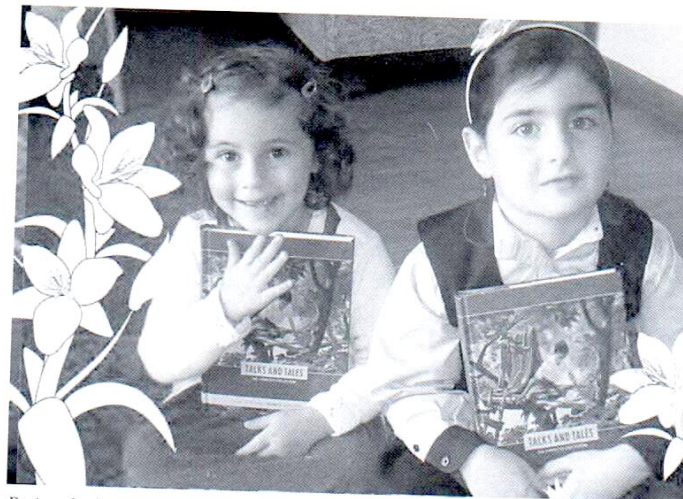
One young lady kept smiling at us and finally mustered up the courage to ask, “Are you Blumah or Rochel?”

“Those are my sisters,” I answered, “Blumah Wineberg and Rochel Goldman. My name is Henya Laine, and this is my sister Rivka Kotlarsky.”

(There are two other sisters as well – Esther Alpern, a”h, and tbl”ch Dvora Alevsky, and one brother, Yosef Yitzchok Kazen, a”h.)

The women in the airport introduced themselves and told us that some 40 years earlier, they had attended our Mesibos Shabbos group. As a result, some had left public school to attend the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, and were now returning for the dinner.

What turns had their lives taken after they had left public school and joined a frum school? Some went on to seminary in Israel. One of the women authors Jewish children’s books; others are educators, businesswomen and professionals. All had attended the Kazen sisters’ Mesibos Shabbos group, and all had become frum, erlicheh Yidden with strong Jewish values. I had the zchus to see how the Rebbe’s brachah of hatzlachah to a little 13-year-old girl came true, with the result of dor yesharim yevorach.



Raiza Lakein and Menucha Rochel Liberow love hearing stories from *Talks & Tales*.

notifications so *Talks & Tales* could publicize their names. Bas mitzvahs were not recognized. That is how it was in those days.

In the stories from those same decades, American mothers are all full-time homemakers and American fathers are the sole breadwinners. In the shtetl, mothers sometimes have stores. Also, there are some idiomatic expressions used that are no longer used today. There’s little knowledge of nutrition as we know it today; small children are shamelessly served coffee and cake. (That’s part of what makes it interesting to read things written 50, 60, almost 70 years ago!)

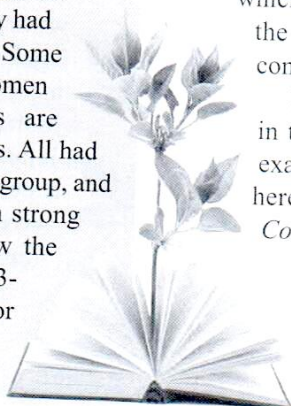
For children who love *Ranger Rick* (a popular nature magazine), and want to know about different animals, *Talks & Tales* has that too, called “Nature’s Wonderland,” in every single issue. Of course it cannot compete with *Ranger Rick*’s full color photography... but *Ranger Rick* cannot compete with the Torah-pure hashkafos of “Nature’s Wonderland.”

I love the way that *Talks & Tales* teaches children the halachos and minhagim of every date on the Jewish calendar. Rather than lecture children on the meaning of a particular holiday, yahrtzeit or fast day, *Talks & Tales* tells stories which include the most natural conversations. Just “by the way,” the information is included in the conversations.

I love how lessons are driven home to children – in the kindest, gentlest, subtlest way possible. For example, to teach children not to be over-confident, here is a story from Vol. 1 of *Talks & Tales: The Complete Collection*:

THE BROKEN FAST

“Daddy,” said little Meir to his father, on the way from the morning service which they had just attended at shul, “today is the Fast of the



Seventeenth of Tammuz. May I fast too?"

"Do you know what this Fast is about?" asked Father.

"Of course I do," said Meir'l proudly. "I learnt about it at school: On the 17th day of Tammuz the wicked Titus made a breach in the wall of Jerusalem, invaded the Holy City, slew the innocent inhabitants, women and children, young and old, and finally burnt and destroyed it. On this day, many years earlier, Moses let the tablets fall on the ground when he saw the Golden Calf in the camp of Israel... Oh, many calamities befell our poor people on the fateful day of the 17th of Tammuz. Please, Daddy, I want to fast today, like everybody else!"

"But you are too young yet, my boy. When you are thirteen you will fast."

"Please, Daddy," begged Meir'l. "I am old enough to fast. Suppose I were in Jerusalem at that time when Titus besieged it. Why, even babies must have fasted then, for there was no food to be had, isn't that so? Oh, please, Daddy, let me fast today!"

"Alright then, you may fast if you like, but don't expect any sympathy from me when you get hungry..."

For a moment Meir'l forgot it was a sad day. He was very happy that Daddy allowed him to fast, like a grown-up. He was bursting to tell it to his pals.

As soon as he was alone, he darted outside again and hailed his neighbor's boy: "Hey, Reuben, do you know, I am fasting today! Are you fasting too?"

"Not I," answered Reuben. "Mother says I am not old enough yet. I guess you are not, either. I'll bet you, you won't last till noon!"

"Baby!" Meir flung at him mockingly, and ran off to find his other friends.

Soon there was not a boy left in the whole street, on either side of it, who did not know of Meir's great feat.

After the excitement was over, Meir'l began to feel hungry. Something began to nag inside of him. He thought how nice a cup of coffee and cake would be now.

At lunch time, his mother fed his little sister and asked him if he wouldn't like to have his lunch. But Meir'l bravely resisted the temptation.

He was getting hungrier every minute. It was getting really difficult.

"How long is it to sunset, Mother?" little Meir asked cautiously.

"Oh, some seven hours, I should think," answered the mother. "Of course, you need not wait that long, you know," she added.



Chaya and Raiza hold the place for Zaide while he takes a break from reading to them.

That's a terribly long time, thought Meir'l, and the nagging inside of him became even more painful. The cookies on the table looked so tasty, so inviting. Meir'l couldn't keep his eyes away from them. Would just one little biscuit break his fast? Of course it would. His mouth watered. Better not look at the cake, and not smell it. Meir'l went out.

It was very hot outside, and he wanted to drink. A cool glass of milk would have been so refreshing now, he thought. He went back into the house and looked at the clock. Only half an hour had passed! He ran out into the yard, again, and tried to stifle his sobs. But his mother heard them when she happened to go out into the yard, too.

"What are you crying about?" asked

the mother.

"Well, I want to fast," said Meir'l.

"But you are fasting, aren't you?" said his mother.

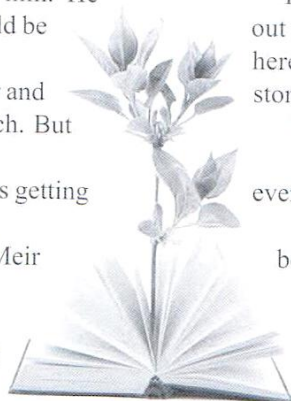
"Yes, so I am, but I am hungry..." and Meir'l burst out sobbing again. "Oh, Mother, it is very painful here," Meir'l complained, pointing to his empty stomach.

"Why don't you eat then?"

"Well, I told everybody that I would fast today; everybody will laugh at me now."

"You see, my boy, what comes from being boastful. Never blow your own trumpet, especially about your good deeds. However, you can go and eat and the boys will not know about it."

Meir'l did not wait for a second invitation. He went to wash his hands and sat down to



break his fast. After he had eaten and said grace after his meal from the Siddur, Meir'l decided to stay at home. If he went out, his friends would surely ask him to show them his tongue to see if he was still fasting. His tongue would give the game away. No, he would stay at home.

In the evening his father and older brothers returned from shul and sat down to break their fast. His mother fussed about them and served them tea and cake. The table was set with many nice things on it.

But Meir'l was almost forgotten. How he envied them that moment. "What a baby I have been," Meir'l thought bitterly. "If I could have waited but another few hours, what a feat it would have been. Now, I have been forgotten, just like a stranger..."

Meir'l lowered his head on his arms and cried. He would not say what he was crying about. Gradually his sobs subsided and he fell asleep.

Lest you think we have accidentally lost a few pages on our calendar, and we think it is Tammuz already, here is a Purim story, also from Volume 1 of *Talks & Tales: The Complete Collection*:

A PURIM GIFT

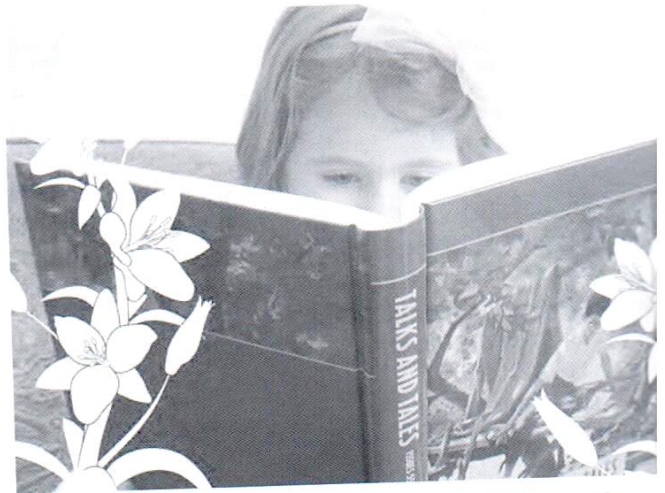
The story that I am going to tell you, dear friends, took place in the town of Berditchev in Russia, on the day of the Fast of Esther, just before reading the Megillah. The last rays of the setting sun played on the ceiling of the House of Worship. The crowded worshippers fell into a respectful silence. Their eyes turned to one place by the holy ark where sat the beloved prince of Israel, the saintly and revered Rabbi Levi Yitzchok. He sat motionless, obviously engrossed in his saintly, lofty thoughts. Presently the beadle approached him and in a quiet voice told him most reverently that a woman had come to ask him to examine her chicken and pronounce it kosher, or, heaven forbid, treif. The saintly Rabbi emerged from his thoughts and hurried to the anteroom where the woman was waiting.

"Dear me," the woman frowned, her face and her clothes clearly indicating that she was very poor and worried, "I have come with a query about this chicken."

The saintly Rabbi examined the chicken, then said gravely: "This chicken is not kosher."

"O, Rabbi," the poor woman exclaimed, stunned by the verdict, "I spent my last coins to get this chicken for my sick husband. He needs the chicken soup to strengthen him. The kiddies, too, looked forward to some chicken on the occasion of the festival. Oh, what shall I do?!" It was a pitiful sight to see the woman wringing her fingers in utter despair.

"Do not cry, daughter," said the saintly Rabbi, greatly stirred. "I promise you that G-d



Only the best Torah-true literature for this Bais Rivkah maidele.

will provide you with another chicken, a kosher one and even a better one. You and your family will have a feast the likes of which they have never had. Now, now, don't cry. Tell me your name and where you live, then go safely to hear the Megillah. Don't worry."

Greatly comforted, the woman told him her name and address and went to the Ladies' Gallery to listen to the Megillah.

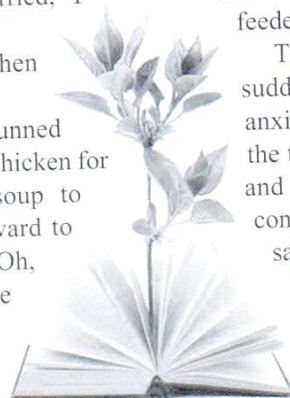
Without returning to his seat, the saintly Rabbi put on his overcoat and walked home briskly. There was nobody in, for they had all gone to the synagogue to hear the Megillah. The maid was busy in the parlor. The saintly Rabbi went straight into the kitchen and headed for the pantry. He dived in and out carrying with him everything he could lay his hands on. Bread, cake, fish, meat, chicken, and so on. He wrapped it all in a cloth and slipped out of the house. Briskly he strode along the narrow streets and finally located the shanty. He entered the house very quietly and emptied his bag of provisions on the table.

"Who's there?" a sick voice called from the bedroom.

"Never fear, my son," answered the saintly Rabbi. "I am a G-d-sent messenger bringing you and your family a good and wholesome meal. Eat and drink, and thank G-d who feedeth all the world. Good Purim to you!"

Then he hurried back to the synagogue, where his sudden disappearance had caused a great deal of anxiety among the startled worshippers. Moreover, the time for the reading of the Megillah had arrived and the saintly Rabbi had not returned. The congregants were getting seriously worried when the saintly Rabbi finally arrived. As if nothing had happened, the Rabbi went up to the bimah and began reading the Megillah, as he always did.

Many, many years later, the old men of that generation were still relating to the youngest



how extraordinarily wonderful and impressive the reading of the Megillah was on that occasion. When the saintly Rabbi reached the passage where it is stated that Purim is an occasion for "sending gifts to one another and donations to the poor," his venerable face lit up and all the congregants present felt a remarkable elation.

When the Rabbi's wife returned home, however, her festive mood and inspiration disappeared immediately when she looked into the pantry. With a sinking feeling she discovered that it was raided lock, stock and barrel. No bread, no meat, no fish – even the roast chickens had flown away. She reeled and was about to swoon when her eye caught a smile on her husband's face, as he was striding



Rabbi Yisroel Gordon has been a Talks & Tales fan since 1942.

Hashem Above, the Earth Below

Free translation of a letter of the Rebbe explaining the meaning of the cover illustration, printed in *Likutei Sichos* vol. 11, p. 257, and in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 18.

Translated by Chaya Shuchat

He dwells in particular on the cover illustration of *Sichos L'Noar*, which is published by Malo"ch (Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch), and he critiques three points:

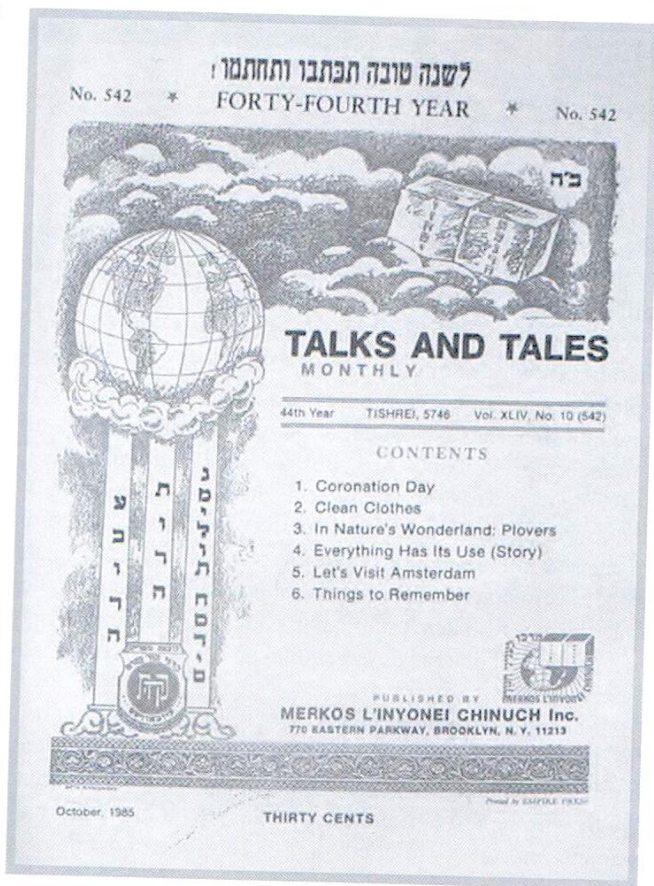
1) The way the luchos are drawn and placed; 2) the way the globe is drawn and placed; 3) the graphical depiction of the saying of Chazal, "The world stands on three pillars: Torah, avodah and gemilus chassodim," with three literal pillars. He asks for my remarks on all of the above.

I will begin with the point, which is surely understood by the writer, that this cover has already been in print for over 18 years. It is distributed far and wide, both in the Land of Israel and in the diaspora, and for this reason the cover should be kept as is, as long as there are no strong arguments against it which would completely negate the use of the drawing as it is now.

To respond to his points in order:

1) When it was decided to publish this monthly, it was understood that the inner reason for it was to strengthen Judaism and to instill it in the hearts of the youth in every manner possible. This includes not only reading the articles but also the first glance at the cover of the magazine, which entails two points:

That Yiddishkeit and the way it is expressed in actuality, i.e. Torah and mitzvos, are the most lofty matters in creation, and, on the other hand, there can be no matter in the world that



calmly hither and thither in the adjacent room, humming a sweet melody. She knew immediately who the culprit was.

Word went round, however, and immediately friends began to bring all kinds of foods. The pantry was quickly replenished, and Purim was celebrated as never before. The whole town of Berditchev rejoiced exultantly, and the happiest man in town was the saintly Rabbi Levi Yitzchok himself, the beloved prince of Israel.

