

THE "LITVAK OF KUTNO"

by Ryvka GWIRCMAN

translated from the Yiddish by Carole
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Honest and fair were the ways of Mordechai Gwircman, a believer in God, and a good person, always loyal and hopeful. His gentle, pale face said what was in his heart. His eyes looked out good and quiet.

He came to Kutno at the beginning of the First World War. The children were sent to the *cheder* [infants' school]. His home was strictly religious – he was generous towards everyone. There was a bag of flour for everyone from his own pantry.



Mordechai Gwircman and his wife z"l

No one knew who he was or where he had come from. Altogether from a great Torah-learned family from Brest Litovsk, in Lithuania, in his youth he had studied with the father of Rabbi Unterman¹, who today is the chief rabbi of Israel. In our little town he was called "the Litvak". All the Jews in Kutno knew him as the Litvak who did good deeds.

He requested his children to take part in the rebuilding of Israel and worked to send them all to the Holy Land. One son was away on training to emigrate to Israel. Unfortunately, he never returned – that turned out because of a tragedy². The second son went to Israel in

¹ TN: Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman (19 April 1886, Brest Litovsk – 26 January 1976, Jerusalem). He was the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi from 1964 to 1972, after Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog and before Shlomo Goren.

² TN: Pesach Gwircman drowned. See article on page 170 of the original book.

1925 and worked there, and the whole family emigrated. And so, the dream of Mordechai Gwircman came true.

When the first Jews from Kutno appeared in Israel, he was there with his smiling face, saying: "Don't worry, we are in Israel now", and he secretly slipped them a small sum of money. His daily life was divided into two, between the first half of the day in working because he had to make his own living, and the other half of the day he spent teaching the Torah in the *Beit Midrash* [bible study hall] to the other Jews. He used to say: "Good deeds and the Torah are the best merchandise". He always knew who needed help. Everyone who was close to him used to call him "One of the 36 righteous men, on whose worthiness the world existed"³. When he was in the hospital dying, visitors requested his "blessing". His same fine stature with his lovely face and white beard made him look like a saint. He did not disturb anyone. He went with such peacefulness.

This was one of the people of Kutno – the "Litvak". A reader from the Torah, a prayer leader, whose prayer book was sacred.

³ TN: according to Jewish tradition, life will continue as long as there are 36 righteous men ("the *lamed-vav*") in the world.