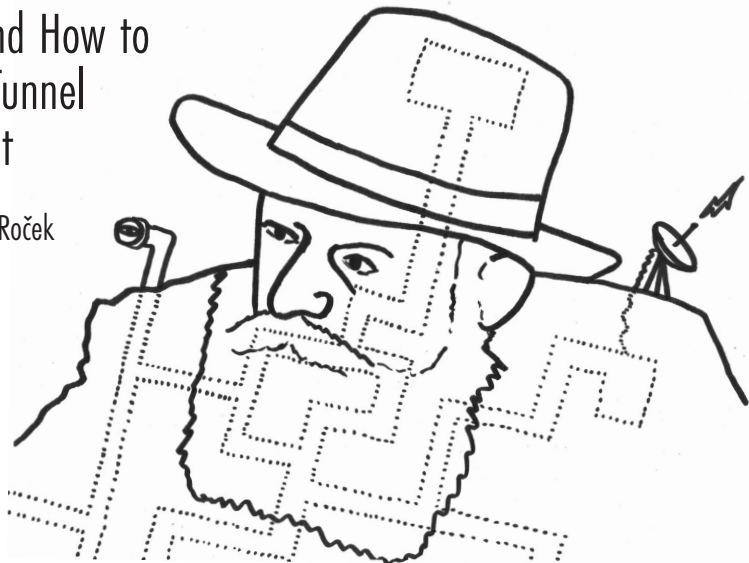


So Your Cult's Had a Schism: Why and How to Dig a Tunnel About It

by Miriam Roček



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So Your Cult's Had a Schism: Why and How to Dig a Tunnel About It is a humorous piece by Jews about the recent antics of a particular Jewish cult.

Preface

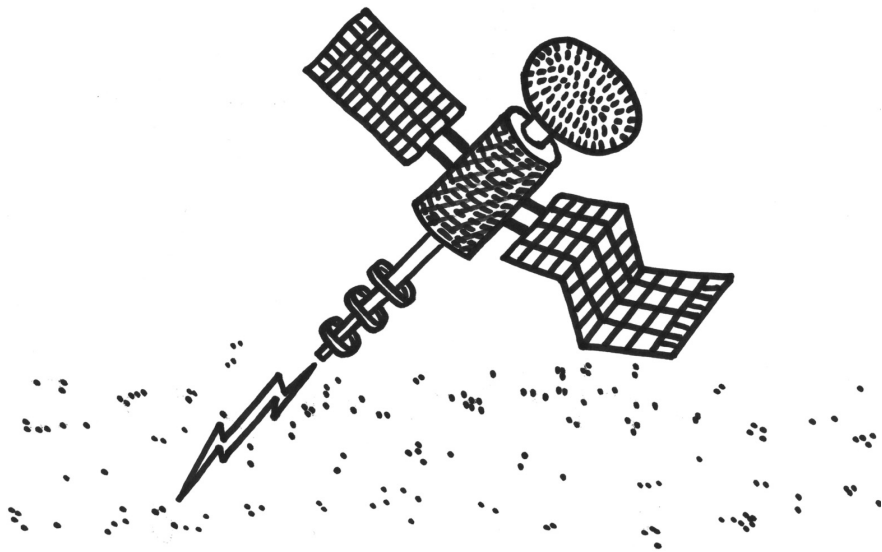
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, often known to his followers simply as “the Rebbe” was born in modern day Ukraine in 1902. After fleeing Nazi-occupied France in 1941 he came to New York City where he became an incredibly influential leader within the Chabad movement. His headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn has remained the center of that movement, and in early 2024 was the site of viral news stories relating to an absolutely batshit incident in which a bunch of guys dug tunnels under the building. For more information, read on, or seek a more comprehensive explanation from a reputable news source, or from this excellent twitter thread: tinyurl.com/267nurpf.

He died in 1994, and is buried in Queens. We cannot stress enough how not alive he currently is.

So Your Cult's Had a Schism: Why and How to Dig a Tunnel About It

So you're in a cult, your leader has died, and you've had a schism. That's a lot to deal with, by any standards, but what if, and stay with me here, because I know you probably don't feel like taking on anything else right now, but what if you and your buddies start digging a clandestine tunnel for some sectarian spelunking?





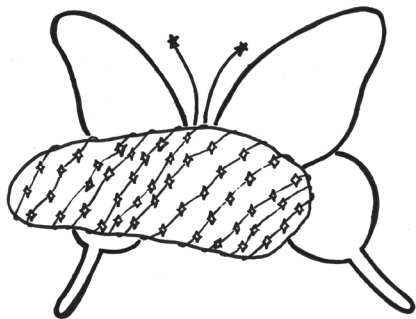


group's website until everyone else gets back from space,¹ or stepping into the power vacuum they left behind.² You might be wrapping their mummified

There's plenty of options when you have a dead cult leader. More than when you have a live one, especially depending on how many of you are still around. Assuming you're not on the run from or being imprisoned for whatever led to this whole dead-leader situation, you might be quietly maintaining your

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- 1 The Heaven's Gate website remains active at the time of writing, maintained by Sarah and Marc King, cult members who forewent the groups infamous mass-suicide for the purposes of telling their story until their anticipated return. The website can be found at www.heavensgate.com/
 - 2 David Miscavige is a scary motherfucker.

body in Christmas lights while you wait for them to wake back up.³ Your options abound! But, let's say it's been a couple decades since their "death," and you're part of a sub-sub-faction within your sect that



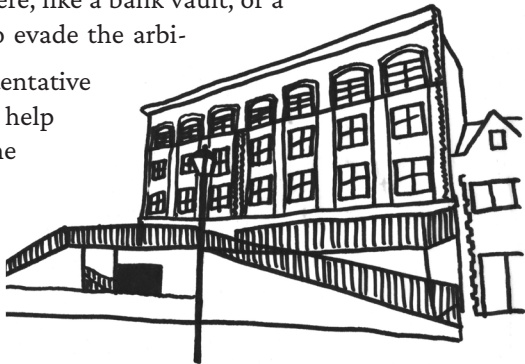
- 3 Amy Carlson, known to her followers within the group Love Has Won as "Mother God" died of a combination of anorexia, chronic alcohol consumption, and colloidal silver ingestion in April of 2021, and was found several weeks later by authorities in a home housing several of her living adherents; her body was wrapped in a sleeping bag which was itself wrapped in strings of Christmas lights, laid on a bed that had been turned into a makeshift shrine. Charges for abuse of a corpse and desecration of human remains were dropped when the state decided that her body had been treated with respect, albeit in an unusual and eccentric way.

not only believes your former leader, the Rebbe, didn't really die, but that he's still kicking around (over 120 years old) somewhere inside the world headquarters of your group, for which you've been fighting for control for several decades with the other faction, made up of people who definitely believed your leader was the messiah when he was alive, but think it's a little embarrassing that you keep going around saying it after he died.⁴

Under those circumstances, friend, you've really gotta dig a tunnel.

People dig tunnels for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes it's to break into, or out of somewhere, like a bank vault, or a prison, and sometimes it's to evade the arbi-

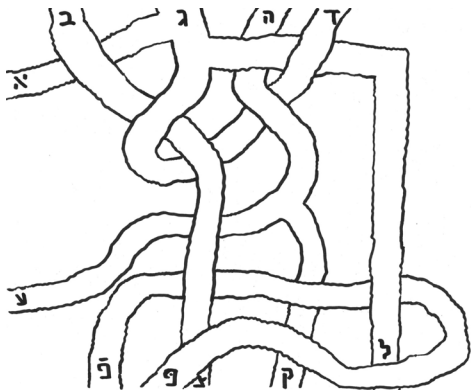
- 4 You may have achieved a tentative balance of power, with the help of your own Sykes-Picot line partitioning the messianic basement (or "garden level", if you prefer) from the upper floors.



trary and violent presence of national borders getting in the way of human migration. Sometimes nations do goofy things like ban the production and sale of alcohol, and tunnels experience a renaissance. Other times there are bodies of water to get under, or public transit systems to establish. Tunnels can be used to smuggle or hide people, products, or works of art, but sometimes you dig a tunnel because you just gotta.

In this case it's a combination. You need unfettered access to your religious movement's headquarters, obviously, but you're also a guy in your late teens or early 20s, venerating a man who died before you were born, enacting his wish to expand his Brooklyn headquarters in the most insane way pos-



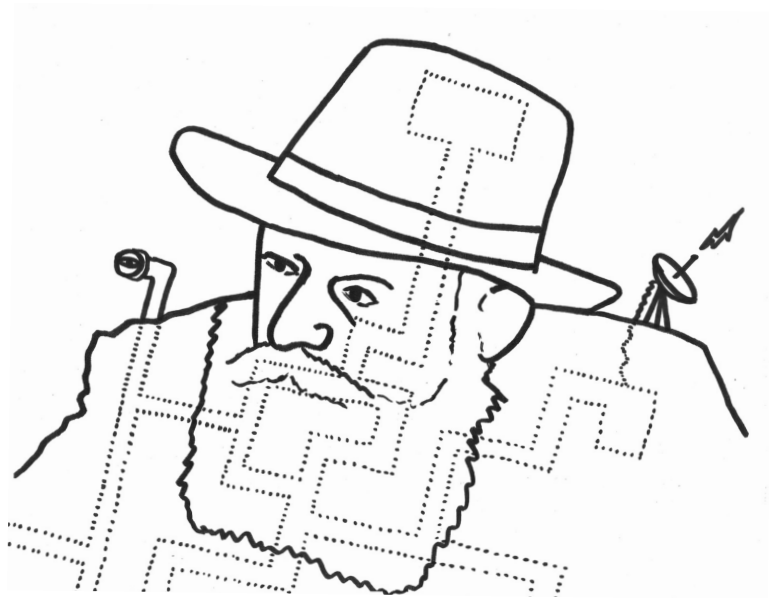


group of college-aged single men dug a tunnel between a synagogue and a women's ritual bath and immediately make unwarranted assumptions about

sible.⁵ What can you possibly do BUT tunnel? You might even run into the man himself! What's he doing down there? Stop asking stupid questions buddy, you've got a tunnel to dig!

You're going to need an abandoned mikveh. Be prepared for the fact that this will lead to misunderstandings; some people hear that a

5 Rabbi Schneerson did indeed express a wish, while alive, to expand his 770 Eastern Parkway headquarters. It is unknown whether he meant for this to be done by digging illegal tunnels.



what kind of peeping you might be getting up to; this is a slander that you're just going to have to deal with, as you will be too busy tunneling to explain that the baths have not contained actual women for years and are the perfect place to dump all this dirt and rubble. Shut up and keep burrowing.

Should the police show up—WHEN the police show up, really, you didn't honestly think you were going to get away with unsanctioned tunnels around a high-traffic house of worship in a major urban center did you?—it's time to go hard. Yell and daven. Climb in the tunnels so they can't fill them in with cement. Rip down walls, and build up barricades. Throw a pew at a cop!





Flash by porknap

raid your tunnels, at least one of you escapes the subterranean riot by popping up out of a sidewalk grate and scurrying off into the night like a Teenage Mutant Ninja Bochur.⁶ You're here for a good time, not a logical time.

6 A bochur is a young unmarried yeshiva student. They do not usually pop up out of sidewalk grates and scurry off into the night.

Those are your TUNNELS they're fucking with, and who invited these pigs to bring their treyf asses down here anyway? Fuck em. Distract them while someone else goes up and screws with their cement mixers; disconnect the pipes they were going to use to fill up your DIY religion cave; you are the Monkeywrench Gang of messianic wingnuts.

Make sure that when the police

Watch out for all the news vans. This is the most delightedly bemused attention the extremely orthodox Jewish community of the greater New York area will receive since that time a decade or two ago when everyone found out there was an organized crime ring made up of rabbis beating the shit out of men who wouldn't grant their wives religious divorces. You're about to join the ranks of Rabbi Mendel "The Prodfather" Epstein⁷ in the pantheon of in-

7 In traditional orthodox Jewish communities, a religious divorce, called a get, is a document presented by a husband to his wife. While a wife can both request a get and leave her husband without one, she is unable to remarry without one, and any children she has with another man would be considered illegitimate. While a get cannot be forced, it's commonly accepted that get-denial is a real piece of shit thing to do, and men are often shunned by their communities until they grant their wives a divorce. Rabbinical courts have also imposed fines, corporal punishment, and forced men to sleep in open graves to really make them consider how committed they are to being a dick about this. Rabbi Epstein, who was part of a divorce coercion gang that kidnapped, beat, tortured, and threatened to

ternal scandals that will emerge (as if from a tunnel) to the intense interest and confusion of the rest of the world.

If you think you smell something burning, don't worry, that's just the other Jews of New York City making an unprecedented amount of popcorn to munch while they watch this drama unfold and text each other in fascinated glee. Politically they still think you're a bunch of gender-essentialist conservative Zionists, and they're right, but that doesn't mean they won't watch this incredible magical shit-show unfold, and the anarchist-Jewish Signal thread is lighting the fuck up right now. You probably don't get cell reception down there, but trust us, it's great.

When the dust settles and the police tape comes down, and you reckon with the fact that your tunnels are lost, you can take comfort in the fact that you fought bravely and bananas-ly in their defense. Like Steve McQueen at the end of *The Great Escape*, you have lived, and you are sure to dig again.

murder men who were refusing to divorce their unhappy wives, and who allegedly used cattleprods to shock the genitals of these insistently married men, took things a step further.

Nothing can hold a good tunneler down, though by all accounts in terms of engineering you're an enthusiastic amateur tunneler at best; you may have done as much damage to the structural integrity as to the public reputation of your synagogue. What's important is that you tried.

You can expect a slew of ugly antisemitic conspiracy theories to follow from all this business, but that's not really your fault and I'm frankly tired of explaining why those are bullshit. Can a Jew not dig a weird hole without being accused of child sex traffic blood libel mind-control? Buddy, if Jews controlled the world the NYPD would not have poured cement into their beautiful tunnels.

Try not to take your 15 minutes of notoriety too hard. In the scheme of things perpetrated in high control religious groups, what have you really done? You haven't forced anyone to sign over their life savings, alienated anyone from their friends and family, or coerced them into sex. No children were harmed, no fake medicines were peddled on the internet, and no one died. You simply did the most bizarre thing possible with the materials given to you, and for that you have, if not our respect, our sincere appreciation.



About the Author and Illustrator

Miriam Roček is a street medic, healthcare worker and fiber artist. Often to be found training activists in the first aid skills that keep them a little bit safer in the streets, she would like to ask that you always wash tear gas and pepper spray out of people's eyes with plain, clean water, and please wear a helmet if you ride a motorcycle.

rosza daniel lang/levitsky is a cultural worker, agitator, and organizer who lives within earshot of the shabes siren at 770. never learned how to make art for art's sake; rarely likes working alone; can't stop picking things up on the street and making other things out of them: outfits, collectives, performances, barricades, meals... just another diesel fem diasporist gendertreyf mischling who identifies with, not as. active in palestine solidarity work since the al-aqsa intifada; currently finding a political home with Survived & Punished NY and several less formal crews. active in the yiddish cultural re-

vitalization svive as a theater-maker, singer, dancer, writer, and general kultur-tuer. some thoughts on jewish culture as a resource for our movements are in c. b. milstein's *There Is Nothing So Whole as a Broken Heart: Mending the World as Jewish Anarchists* anthology. zines, writing, and other stuff are at meansof.org

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