



# NAPOLEON'S MARCH

**A**s Napoleon's troops invaded Russia, many great Rabbis endorsed the invading armies. At that time in Russia, Jews were subject to life in ghettos and public humiliation, with special Jewish taxes and restrictions on their daily lifestyles. News of Napoleon's invasion breathed fresh hope into the hearts of a broken people. Napoleon was the heir of the French Revolution and was famed as a liberator of man. The Jews of Russia finally saw freedom and opportunity appear on the horizon.

However, the Alter Rebbe stood in firm opposition of Napoleon. Obviously the Alter Rebbe cared for the Yidden's *gashmiyus*, yet in his view, Napoleon would save the Jewish body but he would destroy the Jewish soul. He would rescue them from oppression, but his freedoms would not only free them from persecution, but from the rules of the Torah. In a letter, the Mittler Rebbe described the "*klipah*" of Napoleon's arrogance: "relying on his own strength, saying that 'it is my strength and power' that is accomplishing everything; he is removing the idea of belief and trust in G-d."

[In this stance, the Alter Rebbe stood squarely against another great Rabbi, Rabbi Yisroel of Koshnitz, and they began a contest *milmaylah* to ensure victory for their side.

The contest culminated on the morning of Rosh Hashana, the same morning that the Russian Army engaged Napoleon's troops at the Battle of Borodino. Chassidus teaches that the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashana effects Hashem's coronation as king of all creation. Thus, tekias shofar that Rosh Hashana loomed as the catalyst for ensuring victory.

The Rabbi of Koshnitz woke up early on Rosh Hashana and hurried through the morning prayers, hoping to beat the Alter Rebbe to the plate. However, the Alter Rebbe had also woken early, but before going to

shul, he went to mikveh and blew the shofar.

When the time arrived for Rabbi Yisroel of Koshnitz to blow the shofar, he lifted it to his lips but then inexplicably put it back down on the table, his face betraying a look of defeat. "The Litvack," he said, referring to the Alter Rebbe by his nickname, "has beaten us."]

The Alter Rebbe sent many Chassidim to spy on the French Army for the Russians – the most famous of all, R' Moshe Meizlish. In writing a letter to the Yidden of Russia, the Alter Rebbe asked them to help the Russian cause in any way they could, assuring them that the Czar would win the war. "Don't let your heart be weakened, and don't pay attention to the present victories of the enemy, for the ultimate complete victory will be with the Czar of Russia."

[Interestingly, the Czar rewarded the Alter Rebbe for his efforts with the title of "Honored Citizen." This title was hereditary, and was passed through the generations of Rebbeim. When the Friediker Rebbe was arrested, he protested: "Is this how you treat an Honored Citizen?"]

Napoleon's armies advanced steadily through Russia, and the Alter Rebbe was soon compelled to flee Liadi on Erev Shabbos, 29 Av 5572 (1812).

The Alter Rebbe considered Napoleon a *mechashef*, and so, before leaving, the Alter Rebbe instructed that his house should be



# “The Litvack has beaten us...”



emptied; the Alter Rebbe's shtender was torn out, along with the piece of carpet the Alter Rebbe would stand on in shul. The Alter Rebbe, his family and three hundred Chassidim fled Liadi, accompanied by two armed battalions of soldiers from the Russian army sent to them from Smolensk.

Not long after leaving, the Alter Rebbe instructed some of his Chassidim to go back to Liadi, just in case anything was left behind. The Alter Rebbe then commanded them that upon leaving, the house was to be burnt down. Indeed, two faded slippers (*"pantofels"*) were found and taken back to the Alter Rebbe.

When Napoleon arrived in Liadi, he rushed to the Alter Rebbe's home. Seeing the raging fire, he demanded the townspeople bring him any objects that belonged to the Alter Rebbe, or even something that he had touched. Although the soldiers used bribes and threats to persuade the townspeople, they came up empty-handed.

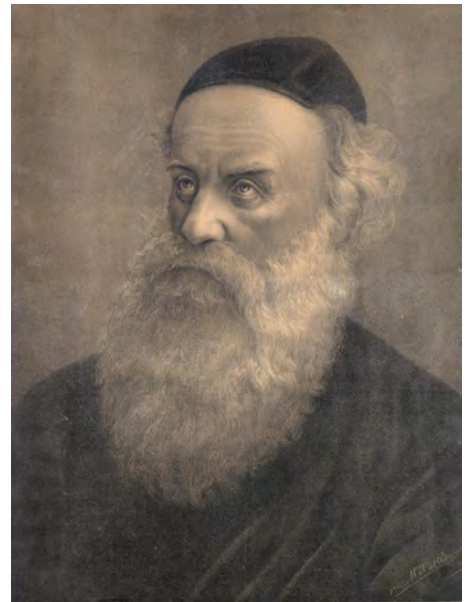
[The Friediker Rebbe writes that his soldiers did indeed discover a wooden pot in one lady's home, but it was used as firewood before they could retrieve it.]

Meanwhile, as the Alter Rebbe was traveling from town to town, escaping Napoleon's advance, he asked the Chassidim to find out the song that Napoleon's troops sang while they marched. When the Alter Rebbe – asking R' Moishe Meizlish to sing – heard it, he said that it was a niggun of victory, and he went into a deep *dveikus*.

When he came out of his *dveikus*, the Alter Rebbe promised there would be a "*Didan Notzach*," and as the Alter Rebbe reached Pienna – 140 days and 600 kilometers later – the Chassidim heard of Napoleon's big losses. The Mittlerer Rebbe wrote: "On Yud Tes Kislev, we heard that there was a big loss for the enemy next to Krasna, and they're chasing him [Napoleon] like a dog. And we rejoiced because everything [promised] was being fulfilled."

At a farbrengen on the night of Simchas Torah 5734 (1973), the Rebbe asked that the French National Anthem be sung to the words of *HaAderes Vihaemuna*. Explaining the significance of taking the national anthem and transforming it into *kedusha*, the Rebbe mentioned that this same idea was accomplished with the niggun of 'Napoleon's March'; it was a song that was sung by the enemy, and not only was the niggun "*niskabel*" by the Alter Rebbe, but it was even named after Napoleon!

Each year, after Neilah, Chassidim sing Napoleon's March before tekias hashofar, reflecting our confidence that Hashem has accepted our tefillos and we were "victorious" in securing a good new year.



In his Reshimos (Reshimos Hayoman pg. 261), the Rebbe writes that Chassidim began singing Napoleon's March before Tekios in the year 5659 (1898). "In fact," writes the Rebbe, "Chassidim always sang a niggun at this point – even by the Alter Rebbe. But in 5659, the Rebbe Rashab instructed to sing Napoleon's March."

[During the samachs, (1900's) a man came to Lubavitch from Poland whom the bochrim called "Yankele Poilisher." He taught many new niggunim to the bochrim, including many marching songs. One of the marches was called the "Yapunsker March" – Heichal Haneginah, pg. 4, 9-10, – and that year by Neilah, the Rebbe Rashab sung it instead of the already regular Napoleon's March. Later, when the Friediker Rebbe became Rebbe, he established Napoleon's March as the one niggun after Neilah.]

## NAPOLEON'S MARCH BY THE REBBE

Napoleon's March by the Rebbe was an amazing sight, and only a first-hand account could do justice. The *Derher* has compiled several yomanim to paint the scene as it was.

After Maftir Yonah and the Rebbe's return to his place, there would be a tremendous crush, pushing towards the front. Everyone wanted to be as close to the Rebbe as possible for Napoleon's March.

Neilah was a real earnest time by the Rebbe. The Rebbe was seen, many times, with his holy head deep under his Tallis. Certain years it was very evident that big things were happening. Interestingly, though, it could have been at any time: During Shmoneh Esreh, Piyutim, Ovinu Malkeinu and Napoleon's March. In other words, Napoleon's March is not Stam a good time to celebrate and to be B'simcha, but *very much* a BIG part of Yom Kippur and of Ne'ilah.

After the Chazan reached Da'amiron B'olmo V'imru Omein, the Rebbe would bang on the Shtender to begin Napoleon's March. Sometimes, the Niggun would go through a whole cycle before the Rebbe turned around.

Starting from 5724 until (and including) 5742, the Rebbe would climb onto his chair and encourage the signing while dancing on that chair.

Just imagine how the Niggun took off after that, as every mouth in 770 began to roar that Niggun...

Words fail me to describe what this was like. It was a Simcha that could not have been anything less than Yismechu Hashomayim Vesogeil Ho'oretz. One felt that the entire Seder Hishtalshlus, and certainly every inch of that Shul, was piled onto that chair, dancing with the Rebbe.

As the singing and the dancing intensified, the Rebbe's Tallis began to fly in all directions. Many times, the Rebbe would fling the sides of his Tallis back over his shoulders, and continue encouraging the Simcha.

I defy anyone to get onto a chair with a cushion, and try to dance... And yet, here was the Rebbe clapping, swinging his arms and dancing on his chair. What a sight to behold!"

#### **A NAPOLEON'S MARCH TIMELINE**

In 5734 (1973), during the Yom Kippur war, the Rebbe climbed onto the chair, but his face was covered the entire time. The Rebbe pulled his Tallis all the way down to his chest area, and remained there for the entire

duration of Napoleon's March, and was visibly crying the entire time. There was a more "controlled" Simcha.

In 5742 (1981), the Rebbe lost his footing a couple of times during the dancing. For Yom Kippur 5743 (1982), with the Rebbe's agreement, they built a platform with stairs leading up to it. The Rebbe was now on sturdy footing, and was much higher so that more of the Oilom could witness the scene of Uv'chein Mah Nehdar Hoyoh Kohen Godol Btzeiso...

Indeed, the Rebbe would usually dance for a longer time after this special Bima was made. Many times, the Rebbe would be swinging both arms around. Also, many years, the Rebbe's face was covered by the Tallis. In 5745 (1985), the Rebbe was (still?) crying during Napoleon's March.

In 5752, when the march ended, the Rebbe, unusually, did not step off the platform. The Rebbe stayed on the platform, through the Tekiah and L'shonoh Habo'oh, after which, the Rebbe signaled to continue Napoleon's March! At this point, the Rebbe headed down the stairs, and continued to be Me'oded the singing at the Shtender. Only then, was Kaddish finished, along with the rest of Davening.

A very unusual Napoleon's March occurred on Yom Kippur 5737 (1976). Before Avinu Malkeinu, the Rebbe requested for all children under the age of bar mitzva to come up on the bima for Neila, during which the Rebbe wept openly. It seemed that this was connected to what had happened on Erev

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A picture taken Moztoei Yom Kippur, 5751, immediately after Maariv. Notice the banister of the platform upon which the Rebbe danced during the singing of Napoleon's March.





Yom Kippur in Chevron. Arab terrorists had entered Meoras Hamachpeila and burned Sifrei Torah next to Yaakov Avinu's kever. The atmosphere in 770 grew tense; the Rebbe seemed to be dealing with "himilshe iynanim."

Finally, it came time for Napoleon's March. The bima was packed with all the children, and the Rebbe's chair was in the corner next to the Chazan, having been moved to make more room. It seemed at first that the Rebbe didn't want to stand on his chair to dance, and when he did, he only waved his hands a few times before stepping down.

Two weeks later, on the night of Shmini



Azteres, the Rebbe stopped before the 5th Hakafa and said a sicha. The Rebbe spoke about how Chevron is one of the 48 cities that was designated to be given to the Leviyim and instructed that all Leviyim in 770 – both those who live the whole year in Eretz Yisroel and those who (still) live in the Diaspora – should go up to say this Hakafa. The Rebbe added that they should sing Napoleon's March and announce "Anan Nitzchaya" – "We have won."

Right after the Hakofo, the Rebbe turned to the Leviyim and said, "Nu...Hamarsh hayadua." The Leviyim led the crowd in Napoleon's March and the Rebbe greatly encouraged the singing; it seemed as though the Rebbe was making up for the Napoleon's march of Yom Kippur.

On Shabbos Parshas Bresishis, the Rebbe

instructed:

"In continuation of the Hakafos that took place in the daled amos of the Frierdiker Rebbe, the Hakafos should continue with a sefer Torah in Chevron, by the Kosel, and by the Tzemach Tzedek's shul, together with the "Victory March," which the Frierdiker Rebbe instituted to sing every motzei Yom Kippur."

#### **NAPOLEON'S MARCH THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

We know of course that Napoleon's March wasn't only sung on Yom Kippur. It was also sung all the times the Rebbe came out to see the Tahalucha off (mainly Shavuos), and when they returned. When the Rebbe would

ask all those who went on the Tahalucha to say L'chayim at the next Farbrengen, the Rebbe would instruct, or they would do it on their own, to sing Napoleons' March.

During Tishrei 5781 (1980), the Rebbe established Tzivos Hashem. On Sunday 25 Tishrei, Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah (J.J.) Hecht asked the Rebbe what he should do with the bottle of mashke he had received on behalf of Tzivos Hashem at Kos Shel Brocha the night before. The Rebbe responded that there should be a children's rally on Wednesday with a band, and before Mincha they should sing Napoleon's March, because "that is the way an army begins."

#### **NAPOLEON'S MARCH AND BOCHURIM**

On Simchas Torah 5716 (1955), the Rebbe

explained that victories are secured by the youth, because they [who aren't involved in "inyanei haolam," like parnosos etc.] have the necessary strength and energy to win.

Concluding that all successful campaigns are accompanied by victory marches, the Rebbe then asked the bochrims (before chasunah) to sing Napoleon's March, adding that the married men should clap along with them."

[After they finished singing Napoleon's March, the Rebbe said "that to make everyone happy, we'll sing a *new* niggun, and *this time* the married men will sing and the bochrims will clap along!"]

Years later, on Parshas Noach 5752 (1991), the Rebbe spoke about the idea of teshuva on shabbos, and drew a comparison with tefillas Neilah when we say "Shema Yisroel," "Boruch Shem," "Hashem hu HaElokim" seven times (which the Rebbe said in the customary tune), and Lishono Haba BiYerusholayim. As if on cue, the crowd of Chassidim in 770 joined together in singing Napoleon's March!

An interesting twist to this Farbrengen: Present at that time was a Shliach from North Europe who had recently moved on shlichus. He had been bothered that he would be missing the entire Tishrei with the Rebbe due to his new responsibilities, and had resolved to "chap" the last Shabbos of Tishrei, Shabbos Beraishis. However, when Shabbos Beraishis came around, he was unable to take leave of his mokoim hashlichus and so resolved to travel for Parshas Noach. When the Rebbe concluded the farbrengen in saying out loud "Hashem Hu HaElokim," "Lishono Habo biYerusholayim," and then Napoleon's March, he felt he had experienced Yom Kippur by the Rebbe!

In signing off, we give ourselves a brocho that – just as the Rebbe explained on Parshas Vayeira 5752, that not only was Napoleon conquered by the Alter Rebbe, but indeed now the entire France has been conquered through the shluchim – we too should immediately see the kibbush of the entire world with the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, when we will sing the ultimate Victory March, together with our Rebbe once more. Amen.