

ted to endanger his life.”

•

The non-Jewish elders of the city accorded Rabbi Levi Yitzchak great respect, recognizing him as a personage of superior stature. In fact, when disagreement arose between the elders, they would send a delegation to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and put their problems before him, listening silently as he responded to their queries. Whatever the Rav said they immediately accepted as true and just; his word was final.

### THE RAV'S ILLNESS

One Shabbos, several dozen men came to the Rav's house to hear words of Torah from him. By that time the Rav was writhing in pain from his illness and unable to tolerate the sensation of a garment touching his skin. He therefore dressed simply in a long black Chasidic robe, apologizing to his guest for appearing in this manner in public. "A person gets what he deserves" he remarked.

The Rav then began to speak, and words of Torah flowed from his lips for several hours. Were it not for his appearance and mode of dress, it would have been possible to think he was a perfectly healthy man.

•

As the weeks went by, the disease which has been ravaging the Rav's body deepened its hold, and the pain which it caused him grew steadily worst. A physician examined the Rav frequently and treated him on a regular basis, and occasionally, two other Doctors would examine him as well. Seeing that there was no improvement in his condition, the three made contact with a well-known Leningrad Professor who was in charge of the main military hospital there. It was virtually impossible to get him to leave his post to see a patient privately, and only after an energetic campaign that involved the intercession of several people who had access to him, and bestowal of a

handsome gift, did he consent to see the Rav.

The professor, a gentile, was a religious man, and after being informed about the Rav's stature, agreed to make the trip to see him, even though he neither had the time nor authorization to do so.

Upon seeing the Rav, the Professor immediately diagnosed the illness. His facial expression revealed the true nature of the patient's condition, and the Rav too could read it on the Professor's face.

The Rav told the Professor everything he had gone through since his arrest. "What did these people want from me?" he wept. "and what have they done to me?"

Afterwards the Professor commented that throughout his long career, he had never before encountered a person as extraordinary as the Rav.

•

The disease grew progressive-

## NIGGUN HAKAFOS

One of the most joyous and memorable niggunim sung with the Rebbe, and often started by the Rebbe himself was the famous Hakafos niggun of Rav Levi Yitzchok. Below you will read of a few of those moments with the Rebbe throughout the years.

Generally, the Rebbe began from the middle of the niggun – the liveliest stanza. This is the stanza the Rebbe would often instruct the Chassidim to repeat while singing, sometimes even ten times. As a matter of fact, on Simchas Torah day, 5748 ("Tismach"), this stanza was repeated 125 times over!

Beginning from the year 5748 and on, it was with this *niggun* that the Rebbe danced at his own *Hakofa*, in addition to the regular *Hakofos niggun*. (This was when the Rebbe danced at his own *Hakofa* alone, after Rashag was not well enough to join).

In the later years (from 5746 and on), it was with this *niggun* that the Rebbe would dance while standing in his place at Farbrengens more than with any other.

### EARLY YEARS

During farbrengens in the earlier years, it was not common for the Rebbe to ask to sing the *niggun* of his father, Reb Levik, as he did with *niggunim*

ly worse. Since the Rav couldn't tolerate anybody other than Rebetzin Chana tending to him, he would not permit volunteers from the community to help with his care. Nevertheless, all felt a personal obligation to visit and lend a hand, and even when it became clear that the battle was lost and he did not have long to live, people devotedly did whatever they could for him, hoping somehow to alleviate his suffering.

A short while later, the professor returned to examine him again. One of his directives was that the patient be taken out to the porch frequently for fresh air. This entailed the acquisition of another bed, which was a problem—such things were difficult to obtain in those days, even for wealthy families. Nevertheless, within a few hours of the community learning of the doctor's order, four beds stood in the Rav's front yard!

Reb Levi Yitzchok was deeply touched by the local people's devotion to him. Realizing what

his presence meant to them and how much they needed him, the Rav prayed for his own full recovery so that he can faithfully serve them with all of his capabilities.

When the Rav's condition worsened to the point that he was completely bedridden, the Doctor ordered that the patient's bed be placed next to a window that would be kept open permanently to allow fresh air to enter. Since the window had to be opened throughout the night as well, it became necessary to install iron bars as protection against thieves. But where were they to acquire such bars?

A man from Kharkov who worked in a military factory had endangered himself by acquiring the materials and doing the job, together with another worker whom he had brought along. By the following morning, the bars have been installed.

This friend from Kharkov stayed at the Rav and Rebitzins' home for a few more days and helped them with various repair

jobs. It pained him greatly to see the Rav's grave condition, and he once exclaimed, "Rabbi, must you suffer so? Better that I should suffer instead of you!"

•

Rav Levi Yitzchok's condition worsened steadily. Additional Doctors who examined him shook their heads despairingly. Less than three weeks before his passing, on Shabbos Matos-Masai, the Rav spoke at length about world events, and called on his small audience to strengthen their adherence to the Torah and its mitzvos. "Matos means staffs" he explained. "Allegorically, this refers to the two staffs of Stalin and Hitler, who struck out against the Jews. Both shared the same agenda; both aspired to the same goal. The difference is only that Hitler is out to exterminate the Jewish Body, while Stalin is also determined to vanquish the Jewish Soul".

The small group gathered around Rav Levi Yitzchok's table listening in fascination, but stiffened uneasily when the door

from the other Rabbe'im. However, at the Chof Av Farbrengen of 5714, which marked ten years from the Histalkus, to the surprise of the assembled crowd, the Rebbe requested that a niggun of his father be sung.

Rabbi Tuvia Bloi writes in his diary:

The first time the words "*Hayom T'amtzeinu*" (which are said at the end of Mussaf on the Yomim Noraim) were sung to the tune of Reb Levik's niggun, was at Mussaf on Rosh Hashona 5723, by the Chazzen Reb Shmuel Zalmanov.

Later on in the afternoon, when the Rebbe came down for Mincha (or after Mincha) the Rebbe said to

Reb Shmuel: "Yasher Koach for the niggun of '*Hayom T'amtzeinu*'".

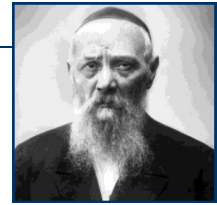
## A NEW NIGGUN

At the seuda of Shmini Atzeres, 5729, Reb Levik's niggun was discussed:

**Reb Zalman Duchman:** There is a niggun attributed to the Rebbe's father – Reb Levik's niggun – others say that the Alter Rebbe sang this niggun during Hakafos.

**Rashag:** I also have heard this

**RZD:** Rebbetzin Chana – the Rebbe's mother –



opened and the father of a hated communist entered the room. Though the father had remained a faithful Jew, the communist son used his father's naiveté to learn information about the Rav and his latest activities. "Please stop," the Rav's admirers begged him. "These words might incriminate

tents. Much later, after the Rav's passing, a close friend opened the letter and found it contained a message regarding the passing of Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson, the Rav's brother. Apparently the Rav had divined its contents and knew that he lacked the necessarily strength to handle such

having his head-tefillin knot lay in a specific spot, they stayed near him to readjust the head tefillin accordingly throughout his prayers.

When Reb Yakov Yosef related that he had just performed a bris on a four-year-old child, the Rav's face lit up and he grabbed Reb Yakov Yosef hand excitedly. With great emotion, the Rav described the tremendous spiritual effect of such a mitzvah and went on to discuss various Kabbalistic ideas symbolized by the number four. Another Chossid devoted to the Rav's needs was Reb Yosef Nimotin, to whom Rav Levi Yitzchok showed great appreciation for his efforts.

One Shabbos afternoon, when a small crowd had gathered to hear the Rav discuss Chasidus and Kabbalah, Rav Levi Yitzchok complained of his weak health. The crowd began to disperse but the Rav did not allow Reb Yosef to leave and invited him to remain for the Shabbos meal.

## **"WHEN I AWOKE THIS MORNING, I FELT THAT MY FATHER WAS GONE. I KNEW I WOULD RECEIVE WORD OF THIS SOONER OR LATER, SO I CAME TO THE OFFICE AND WAITED."**

you." Rav Levi Yitzchok halted in mid-sentence, leaving his listeners to wonder what else he had left unfinished.

Around that time, a letter arrived addressed to Reb Levi Yitzchok. "No one should open that letter now," the Rav said, arousing curiosity about its con-

devastating news.

In his last weeks, critical ill and confined to bed, Rav Levi Yitzchok relied on others to help him don Tefillin. Reb Yakov Yosef Raskin and his sons visited the Rav often, and they came to help him with his tefillin. Knowing the Rav precise Minhag of

told me that her husband was accustomed to singing this niggun by Hakafos.

**The Rebbe:** I also heard this niggun from my father, but I never asked him about its source. When I was in Rostov and Petersburg, I did not hear this sung by the Friediker Rebbe's Hakafos.

At the Chai Elul farbrengen of 5732, the Rebbe requested the Chassidim to sing "The *Simchas Torah'diker niggun*".

They sang the common Hakafos niggun. When they finished the Rebbe said, "This is a good niggun, but I was referring to 'Dem Tatten's niggun'".

They then sang Reb Levik's Hakafos niggun.

At many different occasions, the Rebbe started his father's niggun; during farbrengens, after distributing bottles of Mashke, or while walking in and out of shul.

From the year 5750 and on, the Rebbe always began this niggun following the distribution of *Mashke* at the Shabbos farbrengens. (Until then, the Rebbe would usually sing "*Ve'harikosi lachem brocha...*")

One Friday, the local Doctor summoned Reb Yosef to procure a certain medicine. "But how is the Rav?" asked Reb Yosef Worriedly.

The Doctor pursed his lips. "That is not why I called you," he said. "Just get him that medicine."

Reb Yosef did get the medicine and brought it over to the Rav's home. The next day, Shabbos, a messenger to call Reb Yosef and his wife to Rav Levi Yitzchok's home. They found him lying in bed, greatly weakened, but he opened his eyes and beckoned the couple to approach his bed, showering them with blessings for their devoted care and assistance. Shortly after, Rav Levi Yitzchok lost consciousness. Later on Reb Yosef returned to the Rav's house, where he found wandering around and crying bitterly. Asking her what had happened, she replied "When I went into the Rav's room I found him lying in bed, weeping. I

asked him why he was crying and he said, 'With whom will I leave you?'"

"Don't worry," Reb Yosef assured her, "something tells me I don't quite know what- that you will be reunited with your sons." Rebitzin Chana reacted with a startled look, as if to say that that would be practically impossible!

During the Rav's last few days, he said to a visitor, "look how weak I am." Pointing to his wasted flesh, he remarked: "I don't even have the capacity to taste food any longer...."

Throughout the final period of Rav Levi Yitzchok's life, many of the Rav's admirers and followers risked their livelihood by spending time at his bedside instead of their required jobs. In Russia of old, this alone could amount to treason and its dangerous ramifications it was mandatory for all workers to meet a certain daily quota- being absent put their positions at peril. Yet, the Rav's influence alone war-

ranted this great personal sacrifice. These simple Jews were willing to do anything to spend a few hours more near this great personage, even if it meant turning their backs on their homes and jobs.

People of all persuasions came to visit Rav Levi Yitzchok in those final moments. The outer layer that differentiates one Jew from another vanished entirely; all were united in his presence.

#### END OF A SAINTLY LIFE

On Tuesday night, the eve of 20 Menachem Av, the Rav lay with his eyes closed, his lips moving incessantly, yet silently. Suddenly Rav Levi Yitzchok opened his eyes, asked for some water to wash his hands, and said: "It is time to prepare for the journey to the other side..."

Those were his last audible words.

The next morning, the Rav's condition became critical. Writheing in terrible pain, several times

#### BIRKAS HACHAMA CEREMONY

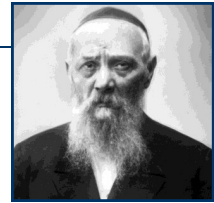
On 4 Nissan 5741, the Rebbe held a grand Birkas HaChama ceremony in the street outside 770. It began with the Alter Rebbe's *niggun*, followed immediately by Rav Levi Yitzchok's *Hakofos niggun*.

#### THE TRUE RA'ASH!

At the farbrengen of 12 Sivan, 5744, the Rebbe invited all the Rabbonim present to say L'chaim, and with a great *Shturem* – a "*Rabbonisher Shturem!*"

As it seems, the Rebbe was anticipating that a joyous Niggun would accompany the Le'chaim (especially considering that he had specifically instructed that it be done with a "*Rabbonisher*

*Shturem*") but the Shul remained relatively silent, so the Rebbe said: "We know that Tzaddikim are likened to their Creator, all the more so Rabbonim. Therefore, they act like Him in a sense that even a most quiet voice ("*Kol d'mama daka...*") is considered a loud roar, capable of breaking through mountain and stone. We however, are *Ballei-batim*, not Rabbonim; we will therefore make a 'true noise!'" With that, the Rebbe began his father's Hakafos niggun, and encouraged the singing immensely.



he gestured that he be raised in a sitting position or turned on his side.

Reb Hershel Rabinowitz, the faithful assistant who stood ready at the Rav's bedside at all hours, put his ears near Rav Levi Yitzchak's lips to hear what he was saying, but all he heard were fragmented sentences accompanied by deep, anguished sighing: "Ay, his footsteps are not known (Kapitul 77) ...Ay, the footsteps of Moshiach ... Ay, the footsteps of Moshiach."

In the late afternoon, when his condition deteriorated further, a doctor was summoned and he prescribed several medicines to ease Rav Levi Yitzchak's suffering. Rav Levi Yitzchak did, in fact, take some of the medicine.

As the hours went by, Rebbetzin Chana felt overcome by exhaustion. Knowing that friends would not leave the Rav's bedside for a moment, she went to take a short rest, hoping to conserve

some energy to resume her watch at the Rav's side. When she arose a half-hour later, the house was filled with mourners...

The Chassidim approached her with reddened eyes. "Did the Rav leave any specific instructions regarding his funeral and burial?" they asked.

"Yes," she responded quietly. "He requested to be buried in shrouds made of pure linen, and that all who participate in washing and purifying his body should first immerse in a Mikva."

Of course, only those close to the Rav took part in the purification and arrangements for his burial. These were Jews who knew him from Leningrad, from Rostov, and from Kharkov. Theirs was a daunting task indeed: among other obstacles, no Mikva existed in Alma-Ata, obliging them to immerse in a freezing stream a considerable distance away. Reb Yosef Nimotin was ill with fever at the time, yet he immersed anyway, in

order to participate in the purification rites.

## BURIAL

The next morning, those taking care of the funeral went to the Jewish cemetery to choose an appropriate spot to serve as the final resting-place of Rav Levi Yitzchak. To ensure that no one unworthy would be buried near the Rav, the Chassidim purchased all six surrounding plots as well.

Finding boards with which to construct a coffin was almost impossible. Instead, the wooden chests that had held the Rav's seforim - and which had served as his table while studying and writing his Torah thoughts - were used to build a coffin. When the coffin arrived at the Rav's house, it aroused the curiosity of pedestrians. To deflect prying eyes, a man who had once worked for the N.K.V.D donned his official uniform and stood at the door, effectively discouraging unwelcome inquiries. Meanwhile,

## MOTZOEI TISHAH B'AV

One of the more unexpected times when the Rebbe began this joyous niggun was at the end of the fast of Tishah B'Av, 5751. That year, Tishah B'Av fell out to be on a Shabbos so the fast was postponed until Sunday.

Just before *Maariv* at the end of the fast, the Rebbe said a *sicha*, explaining that Tishah B'Av is the birthday of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* and is therefore an opportune time for his arrival.

After *Maariv*, on his way out of shul, the Rebbe started to sing his father's niggun! The startled crowd broke out in a joyous dance, continuing long after the fast had already ended.

## EREV YOM KIPPUR

Just a few months later, on Erev Yom Kippur, this incident repeated itself. After *Mincha*, the Rebbe said a *sicha* blessing *Anash* before Yom Kippur. The unbelievable statements and expressions about the imminent arrival of Moshiach were unprecedented. Then, at the end of the *sicha*, the Rebbe wished that we will dance into the *geulah* with the most joyous dance, singing the most joyous niggun... And he immediately began to sing his father's *Hakafos niggun*; something quite unexpected on a day as solemn as Erev Yom Kippur. ■