

# Forty Years, Forty Tanks



In the weeks and months preceding Yud Shevat 5750, Chassidim were looking for ways to appropriately mark the momentous occasion. For nearly a full year prior, the Rebbe had mentioned the idea of *לב לדעת עיניים לראות וזכר*, the special quality of the fortieth year, and the hype swelled as the holy day approached.

Shluchim and Chassidim the world over prepared to converge on 770 on this once-in-a-lifetime occasion, to celebrate at the Rebbe's side and *farbreng* with fellow chassidim.

Those who merited being there, fondly remember 770 pulsating with the thousands of people who had come to be with the Rebbe. There were Jews of any and every denomination; some were spurred by curiosity, some by a deep sense of respect, and others simply wanted to see the Rebbe's holy countenance.

[Until today, people claim that 770 was more crowded on that day than at any other point in its long history of overcrowded *farbrengens* and gatherings.]

The rare milestone called for something out of the ordinary, and thus a special *Mitzvah Tank* parade was organized to roll out of Crown Heights on Monday, Yud Shevat. The parade consisted of forty *Mitzva Tanks*—an enormous number for its time—each bearing a sign with a different year of the Rebbe's *Nesius* from 5711 all the way to 5750.

Although the Rebbe did not always visit the Ohel on the day of Yud Shevat, this year he would. (In the *sicha* of 14 Teves a few weeks prior, the Rebbe notified the public that he would indeed do so). The organizers thus planned for the parade's departure to Manhattan to coincide with the Rebbe's exit from 770 on his way to the *mikva* on Union St.

Given the fact that the Rebbe would be outdoors for only a few moments, the opportunity to be seen by the Rebbe was very small, and precision was of utmost ne-

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cessity.

It was expected that the Rebbe would walk out of the building around noon, from the door located by the driveway where the car was usually parked and waiting. In accordance with this, the parade was to begin its march from President St. around 11:45, continue up Kingston Ave. and head onto Eastern Parkway approximately at the time the Rebbe would be walking to his car.

But notwithstanding the organizers' best efforts, the Rebbe planned otherwise. Within a very short time it was circulated that the Rebbe would be exiting 770 fifteen minutes earlier than expected, which when coordinating with the police department and big crowds is a significant amount of time.

The procession departed its station on President St. making its way to 770.

At 11:45 the Rebbe appeared at the door by the driveway, and as the Rebbe walked, Reb Leibel Groner approached and notified the Rebbe of the Mitzvah Tanks passing by. The Rebbe glanced upon the column of Mitzvah Tanks and in an utterly surprising and unexpected turn of events, passed the car and slowly advanced towards the edge of the sidewalk and into the service lane, while waving to some people.

As the Rebbe moved further along, the gathered crowd split to give the Rebbe a view of the Mitzva Tanks as they went past. It was a rare public display: the Chas-

sidim sang Napoleon's March while the Rebbe stood for four long minutes in the bitter cold and watched the last twenty tanks drive by.

Finally, after the last of the tanks passed, the Rebbe turned to Reb Leibel Groner to confirm that there were no more tanks left to see, and then headed towards his car.

The Chassidim were elated, seeing clearly the Rebbe's satisfaction with their effort.

With the contagious cheer and joy that is the hallmark of the Rebbe's chassidim, the Manhattan-bound Tanks took off to the city where each one split to its respective area to spread the wellsprings of chassidus with one and all. ■



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