



BEHIND THE PICTURE

TWO PRECIOUS MINUTES

Mayim Shelanu

Photo Credits: JEM/The Living Archive

As the years progressed, especially in the late 5740's and 5750's, more and more Chassidim wanted to witness the great spectacle of the Rebbe drawing Mayim Shelonu. At times, the entire service lane of Eastern Parkway was bedecked with a canopy of black hats and, as can be imagined, there was tremendous pushing as everyone jostled closer to observe the Rebbe.

Some Chassidim stood on the steps of 770, while others were up against the small fence in front of where the drawing would take place. In general, Chassidim look for any opportunity to observe the Rebbe, but with Mayim Shelonu there was an added excitement, because the Rebbe didn't always come out. Thus the crowds waited with anxious excitement, hoping for the Rebbe to arrive.

To better understand the significance of this ceremony, let us briefly review the premise of Mayim Shelonu in Halacha.

The ingredients for Matzo are just flour and water. While it is true that much precaution and work goes into insuring that the flour is fit for use, the water also needs to meet certain specifications; it can't just be taken from the nearest faucet. Halacha mandates that the water is to be drawn the night before its intended use and left overnight, and

only then is it deemed Matzo-worthy.

The reason for this, as explained in Seforim¹, is because we don't want the water to be too cold (as it is when underground) as this may trigger the leavening process prematurely. Therefore, the water is left above ground for a full night, so that it is a suitable temperature for baking on the following day. Hence the words, Mayim Shelonu—water that has stayed overnight. [The drawing of Mayim Shelonu should be conducted right after Shkiya.]

Keeping in mind the great caution and care that the Rebbeim had in the preparation of the their Matzos, both the explicit concern for every detail and Chumra brought in Halacha and in the Ruchniyos'dikke realms, it is no surprise that the ritual of Mayim Shelonu was also given extreme importance.

In the year 5671, the Rebbe Rashab expressed this very clearly. It was Yud Gimmel Nissan in Lubavtich and the Mayim Shelonu drawing had just finished. The Rebbe had returned to his mother's (Rebbetzin Rivka) house and was waiting for the Rav to come so he could sell his Chometz, after which he would daven and perform Bedikas Chometz.

Taking up a position by the window in the room overlooking the courtyard, he

observed some bochurim exiting the dining room and walking passed where the Mayim Shelonu was being kept. One of the bochurim passing by was a big learner and had many Chushim, yet he enjoyed joking around too. [A few years previously his Ruchniyos'dikke standing had greatly bothered the Rebbe Rashab.]²

Turning to the Frierdiker Rebbe beside him, he exclaimed, "See what Avoda can accomplish, he is completely different from what he used to be. Drawing Mayim Shelonu with a hergesh changes one's very essence."

The Frierdiker Rebbe would (often) draw the water himself. In a Reshima written in Riga in the year 5691, the Rebbe gives a brief description:³

"The Frierdiker Rebbe personally went to the water drawing that would be used for his Matzos. The glass pitcher was left overnight in his room. The next day, it was covered with a piece of paper and a towel and taken it to the bakery."

As the assembled crowd eagerly awaited the Rebbe's arrival, they would sing the niggun 'Keli Ato' with great fervor. An inspired air would surge through the crowd. During certain years, the new Yud Aleph Nissan niggun was also sung before the Rebbe came out.

The moment the Rebbe walked out of 770 the Chassidim would fall silent, and then, all at once, they resumed singing 'keli ata' with renewed enthusiasm. Those who had secured a good position, stood frozen in their places and those that hadn't been so lucky joined in the well-meaning pushers to try and catch a glimpse.

A table was set up near the fence and faucet, which was turned on by the time

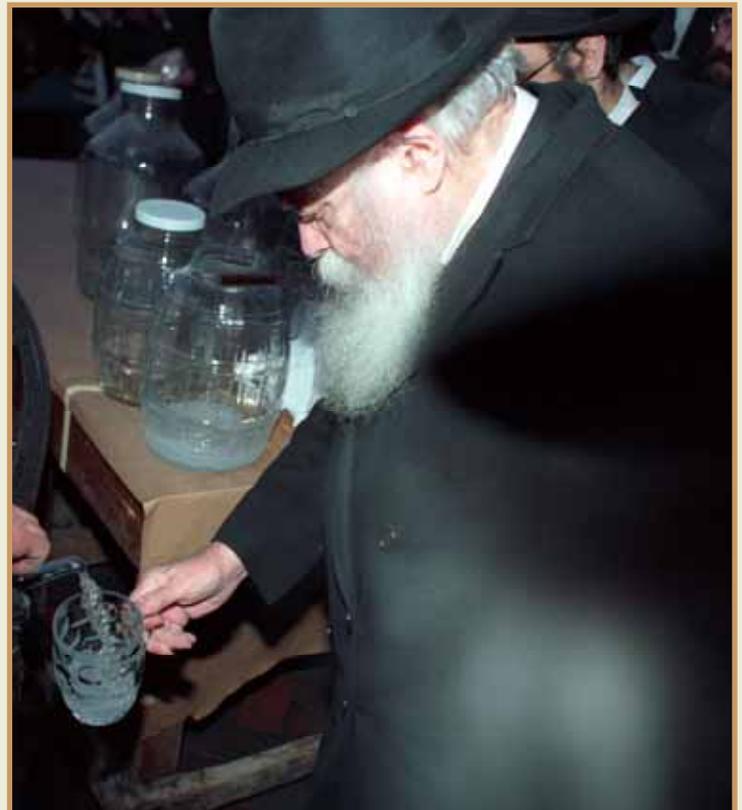
the Rebbe arrived. A white tablecloth adorned the table and on top of it stood a glass measuring cup and a few glass bucket-type containers.

The Rebbe took the cup and rinsed it out three times from the flowing water. [Some years he rinsed the bucket too.] The Rebbe then filled the cup with water and poured it into the bucket. Doing so three times, the Rebbe turned around and went back to his room while urging the singing with his hands.

The Mayim Shelonu of 5748, gives us a small glimpse as to how important and precious this was to the Rebbe. The Rebbe at that time was based in his house (davenings etc. were all held there) yet came especially from his house to 770 to take part in Mayim Shelonu. As soon as it was done, he got in to the car to return straight back home. While doing so, he encouraged the singing of the Chassidim.

Standing right next to the Rebbe was the Mazkirus and specifically Rabbi Mentlik.

Rabbi Mentlik, the then Rosh Yeshiva of 770, was the one who oversaw the baking of the Rebbe's Matzos and thus had a significant role in the drawing of



Mayim Shelonu. After Rabbi Mentlik's passing in 5748, the Labkowsky brothers, Rabbi Zalman Labkowsky—Rosh Yeshiva of 770—and Rabbi Yisroel Labkowsky—Rosh Yeshiva of Lubavitcher Yeshiva—assumed this role.

SCRUTINY IN THE BAKERY

Throughout the years, the Rebbeim would only eat Matzo on Pesach that was baked on Erev Pesach after Chatzos. Some of the Rebbeim would personally go to the bakery to supervise the process.



The Rebbe himself did not go but appointed someone to do this for him. At first it was Rabbi Simpson.

One time, in the mid 5720's, the Rebbe asked, "is everything set up and ready for the Matzah baking tomorrow?" Those standing around answered that Rabbi Simpson was in charge. The Rebbe went on to say, "Rabbi Simpson is a Rov in Boro Park and will be busy tomorrow. Who is in charge?"

Reb Meir Harlig, who was observing the operation, told the Rebbe that everything was in order and that they had already changed the papers and rolling pins, and had made all necessary preparations. However, the Rebbe wasn't satisfied with his answer and said, "A paper more, a paper less, a rolling pin more, a rolling pin less. The Ikar is, who will

stand by the oven and take responsibility?" From this point on, Rabbi Mentlik was responsible for the baking.⁴

The Rebbe showed special interest that the baking process be supervised and done properly. In a letter written by Hatomim Avrohom Ber Blesofsky to his friend, Reb Osher Zeilingold, around Pesach time, 5722, he recounted an interesting anecdote. He had been one of the Bochorim baking the Rebbe's Matzos and in middle of the preparations in the bakery he received a call from Rabbi

Hodakov saying, "the Rebbe wants to know if everything is in order and that all the Chumros and Hiddurim are being kept."

NO NEED TO WAIT!

In the year 5717, shortly after the massacre in Kfar Chabad, the Rebbe sent some of his own Matzos to Eretz Yisroel. As the years went on, Matzos would be sent to other locations too. To facilitate their arrival in time for Pesach, they obviously had to be baked in advance. The baking of these Matzos usually took place at the onset of Nissan and subsequently, Mayim Shelonu was drawn the evening before. This would take place between Rosh Chodesh and Daled Nissan.

For the most part, the Rebbe did not take part in the second Mayim Shelonu as he would usually go to the Ohel on

Yud Gimmel Nissan and would not return until well after Shkiya, at which time it was already too late (as mentioned).

However, as can be expected, the Chassidim desperately wanted the Rebbe to be there so despite everything they waited.

However, as can be expected, the Chassidim desperately wanted the Rebbe to be there so despite everything they waited.

In 5726, the Rebbe came back from the Ohel at 6:15, a few minutes after Shkiya. When the Rebbe went into 770, Rabbi Chadakov told him that they had been waiting for the Rebbe before doing Mayim Shelonu. The Rebbe told him, "They are waiting for Mayim Shelonu; there is nothing to wait for. It is already after Shkiya."

The Rebbe washed his hands [from having gone to the Ohel] and quickly went outside for Mayim Shelonu. Only once this was done did the Rebbe change out of his non-leather Ohel shoes and go to daven Mincha.

In 5728, they decided to wait for the Rebbe to return, which turned out to be well after Shkiya. Stepping out of the car, the Rebbe noticed the groups of people mingling nearby. Summing up their intention, the Rebbe asked, "Did they draw mayim Shelonu yet? For me there is nothing to wait for."

Once in his room, the Rebbe told R' Leibel Groner, "Did I not say that they shouldn't wait?"

The entire procedure took approximately two minutes from beginning to end. The Rebbe did everything precisely without wasting a moment and, looking at the pictures, one can see the intense commitment written on the Rebbe's face as he did the Mitzva. ■

1. See Shulchan Oruch Siman Tof Nun Hei.

2. Igros Kodesh Friediker Rebbe vol 14

3. Reshimos Hayoman pg. 178

4. As told by Reb Meir Harlig and printed in the Derher magazine, Nissan 5773. See there for many other stories in regard to Chalukas Hamatzos.

