



Part I:
ROSH HASHANAH

בחצרות קדשנו

TISHREI MOMENTS
WITH THE REBBE





MEMORIES OF ROSH HASHONAH WITH THE REBBE

My First Experience

I spent Rosh Hashonah with the Rebbe each year from 5741 through 5747. After that, I went out on *Shlichus* and I came to New York only for Sukkos and Simchas Torah.

The first time I was *zoche* to spend Tishrei with the Rebbe in 5741, I was a 17-year-old Bochor learning in Brunoy.

From Pesach time already, we began saving up money to travel to New York for Tishrei. The flight cost approximately 170 pounds, a rather large sum of money in those days, especially for a bochor.

As the years went on, we would try to be in New York already for the Shabbos before Rosh Hashonah, while the atmosphere of Tishrei formulated. The Rebbe would farbreng on this Shabbos, it being a Shabbos Mevorchim (it was often also “Shabbos Slichos”), and a certain seriousness could be observed on the Rebbe’s face, something which was not noticeable during the rest of the year.

Tzemach Tzedek. The first time I remember seeing the Rebbe was at this Farbrengen. I had just landed in New York and I arrived at 770 in the midst of the farbrengen.

The Rebbe was looking around at the crowd and responding “Lechaim” to the Chassidim. When my eyes met the Rebbe’s eyes, the Rebbe stopped for a split second, looking in my direction. My memories from this Farbrengen are quite vivid.

Generally speaking, the first time one spent a Tishrei with the Rebbe, it was difficult to catch all the goings-on. It could have taken several more Tishreis to learn where to be and when, standing in the best positions to watch the Rebbe’s conduct. The second Tishrei would be a better experience than the first, and perhaps by the third Tishrei you knew what exactly to do. When I came in 5740, I got myself a place near the Rebbe for *Tekios*, but then I was slowly shoved out. I wasn’t able to see the Rebbe, although I could hear pretty well.

Erev Rosh Hashonah

Erev Rosh Hashonah with the Rebbe was quite a busy day. *Slichos* were recited at 7:00 in the morning, and in order to keep up with the busy schedule of the day, one needed to go to Mikva beforehand. Immediately following *Slichos* we recited *Hatoras Nedorim*; this way we would be in line for *Panim* straight after *Shacharis*. After davening a group of Rabbonim would assemble on the *bima* or next to it for the Rebbe to do his own *Hatoras Nedorim*.

After *Shacharis* and *Hatoras Nedorim*, the Rebbe would stand at the door of his room and receive *Panim*. There was always a long line stretching out from the side door of 770 down Eastern Parkway. This was a very serious time, as the Rebbe would stand with his lips moving softly and almost complete silence reigned in *Gan Eden Hatchton*.

After receiving all the *Panim*, the Rebbe went to the Ohel. It wasn’t easy to be at the Ohel while the Rebbe was there, as the Rebbe went with a police escort and would jump the red lights, so it was impossible to follow the Rebbe’s car and make it there at the right time. In one instance, however, in 5746, I was at the Ohel when the Rebbe arrived.



In those years the Rebbe would also farbreng on the night of Erev Rosh Hashonah, as it was the birthday of the

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I watched very carefully and noticed that as soon as the Rebbe entered, he started reciting *Maane Lashon*. After a few minutes, the Rebbe stopped and stood totally still. The Rebbe remained a long time reading all the *Panim*.

Rosh Hashonah

The night of Rosh Hashonah near the Rebbe was very quiet, and there was tension in the air as the Rebbe would come in and go up onto his *bima* and begin reciting *Tehillim*. (I should point out that this *bima* later became a permanent fixture in 770, from Tishrei 5750, but in earlier years it was built before Tishri and taken away afterwards.)

The davening itself was fairly short. After *Maariv*, the Rebbe wished “Gut Yom Tov” to the crowd, and exited the Shul. Everyone went home for *Seudas Yom Tov* knowing that an action-packed day awaited them the next morning...

Now, there were several “hot spots” in 770 that served as good positions to see the Rebbe during *Tekios*. The best place, in my opinion, was to be in front of the *bima*, where there was a direct front view of the Rebbe. You wouldn’t necessarily see exactly what the Rebbe was doing with the handkerchiefs and the *shofros*, but otherwise you witnessed almost everything, and you were also able to hear the Rebbe’s voice very clearly.

To hold a place in front of the *bima* was no easy task. A large portion of the space in between the *bima* and the *aron hakodesh* was occupied with benches where people purchased seats, leaving the empty space in front of the *bima* fairly small. I remember how the Gabbai, Reb Shia Pinson, would go about before *Shacharis* dismissing all the bochurim from the benches. There were some pathways from the *bima* to the *aron hakodesh* in between the benches, and many bochurim were able to position themselves there. Hence, when the Rebbe would walk to his place and back, the people on the benches were pushed back excessively, as the bochurim jumped up to make place for the Rebbe.

Once you had a place to call your own, you often found the same people standing next to you each year. If they weren’t there, they would send a “*shliach*” to stand there in their stead, who would announce for whom he was filling in. The place didn’t necessarily exist in actuality... It could have existed in people’s minds... I knew that I was number five from the middle of the *bima*.

If you wanted to hold your place successfully, you were sure to be there as early as 7:30 AM to let your neighbors know. Coming later than 8:00 was not a good idea... You were always dressed in your worst hat and jacket, because the pushing was simply crazy.

By 9:00, you were totally stuck in your place, measuring who is in front of you and who is at your side. This was the position you would stay glued to for the next three to four hours or so.

The Rebbe’s Tekios

The Rebbe entered the shul to a *niggun*, as the crowd split to allow the Rebbe through to his *bima*. Standing still during *Shacharis* was no easy task either, as swaying ensued from side to side and the pushing intensified. Just turning around to see the Rebbe took a lot of work.



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As *Krias Hatorah* was about to start, the Gabbi, Reb Moshe Pinchas Katz, would make an announcement, asking the crowd to remain quiet and orderly. He would always end off by urging that “מ’זאל וויסן וואו מ’שטייט און פאר וועמען מ’שטייט” – “All should remember where they stand, and in front of whom they stand...”

When the Rebbe was called up for *Maftir*, he came down with his Siddur and the *shofros*. Reb Leibel Groner followed behind with the brown paper bags tied up with strings. We didn’t know what was in those bags, though everyone assumed that they held the *Panim* from Erev Rosh Hashonah.

Often, the Rebbe cried while reciting this *Haftorah*, as his holy face shone with extraordinary brightness. From my place, I could hear the Rebbe’s *Haftorah* very clearly. My



memories vary from year to year, but it was always in a very soft tone.

Then there was an electrifying rustle, changing the whole atmosphere around 770; *tekios* were approaching...

The bags were placed on the *bima*, and then the Rebbe made a whole *seder* with the *shofros*. The Rebbe would wrap them with the various handkerchiefs and move them around in a mystifying fashion, changing their positions and wrapping them this way or the other. At times, this could go on for quite a while. All the while, the Rebbe was wearing a handkerchief around his neck, and on the second day of Rosh Hashonah we could usually see that he was wearing a new shirt as well (for the *Shehecheyanu*).

Then the Rebbe drew his *Tallis* over his head and covered himself and the *shofros Panim* etc. completely. What went on under there, no one can know.

After a while, the Rebbe removed the *tallis* and began reciting "*Min hameitzar*" with a very special tune, piercing through the whole shul. This was something very special... We often took note of the way the Rebbe said the *pesukim*, stressing various words.

After reciting the *pesukim*, the Rebbe once again pulled the *tallis* over his head and leaned over the *bima*. The *tallis* would be spread wide all across the *bima*, covering the brown bags as well. The crowd would heave one way or another as everyone strained to see what was going on, all without a sound uttered.

Then the Rebbe stood straight holding the *Tallis* on both sides across his holy eyes and began the *brocha*, always with the same unique *nusach*, sometimes crying during the recital. An almighty "AMEN" boomed around the whole room in response. Once again, total silence prevailed as the Rebbe recited "*Shehecheyanu*" to the same tune.

Standing next to the Rebbe was the "*Makri*", Reb Mendel Tenenbaum, who pointed along in the Siddur. In between the *brochos* and the actual *tekios*, the Rebbe repositioned the *shofros* in various ways which no one understood.

There was a specific *shofar* which the Rebbe tended to use through most of the years, a small *shofar* which I believe belonged to the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe would spend a minute positioning the *shofar* in his mouth, always on the right side. Then he would look towards the *Makri* and begin blowing.

The *tekios* were never loud and blasting, always soft. They were quite long, but careful and ponderous. There were times when the Rebbe would reposition the *shofar* to make the *tekios* easier.

The Rebbe's blowing had something special to it, something very beautiful. To watch the Rebbe during *tekios* was not merely hearing the Rebbe blow a nice sound. One stood there and watched the *heilige ponim* of the Rebbe shine, with the *shofar* to his lips, being *mamlich* the *Aibershter*... It was something extraordinary and absolutely unforgettable. We felt like we were on a completely different planet! All the pushing and shoving and *shvitzing* were completely forgotten about; everyone was so intent on watching the Rebbe's *tekios* and uplifted by them.

In between the three sets of *tekios*, the Rebbe put his *tallis* over his head, covering himself for a short while. The *shvorim* were slow and carefully blown, with a very short sound added on at the end. The *teruos* were also slow, and very often contained many extra sounds. I remember one year how the Rebbe blew over forty sounds for one *teruah*!

All throughout, a certain "divine" feeling was prevailed in the air. We could sense that the Rebbe was in a totally different world and orchestrating things about which we have no inkling... It seemed as if no one else was there on the *bima* as the Rebbe stood and cried during and in between the *tekios*. Oy! To see this all over again...

The two days of Rosh Hashonah would often vary. Although on the first day the *tekios* may have gone quite smooth, on the second day the *tekios* could have been full of *bechiyos*.

Tekios Ending

Soon after the Rebbe finished blowing the *shofar*, he called out the *possuk* of "*Ashrei ho'm*". By the time the Rebbe reached the finishing words of "*torum karneinu*" the crowds went loose, because now there was no longer reason to stand in front of the *bima*, as the awesome scene of *tekios* came to a close. The Rebbe then handed a *shofar* to Reb Mendel Tenenbaum (for *tekios m'umad* during *Mussaf*), turned around, and made his way down from the left-hand side of the *bima*.

As soon as the Rebbe started walking up the *shvil*, I would use the opportunity to zoom up closely behind, to be near the Rebbe during *Mussaf*.

After the Rebbe got back up to the top of his *bima*, he would turn all the way around, looking across the entire shul (observing the *minhag* of "*hachzoras ponim*" – allowing the crowd to catch a glimpse of the face of the *tokeia*). The

Rebbe's face was very serious as he looked around. As a side note, I recall that the look on the Rebbe's face varied at different points during the *tefillos*. When the Rebbe exited the shul after davening, there was a very soft and gentle look on the Rebbe's face, but after *tekios* he was quite serious.

During *Shmoneh Esrei* of *Mussaf* people watched to see when he paused, so they could signal the Gabbai, who would then give a bang on the *bima* for *tekios m'umad*.

During *Birkas Kohanim* the Rebbe came down from his *bima* to the left-hand corner where a special *shtender* stood for the Rebbe, and the Kohanim (as many as possible) would climb up on to the *bima*. When they come down, the Rebbe nodded to as many of them as possible, acknowledging their *brochos*. After davening, the Rebbe left the Shul to a *niggun*.

Many of us spent most of the day off on Mivtzoim. Later in the day, the Rebbe came out to the *chotzer* for *Tashlich*.

The second night and day of Rosh Hashana were fairly similar to the first, only that the Rebbe recited Kaddish on the second day (for Rebbetzin Sheina), so he would come to the *bima* for *Maftir* just before the end of *Shvi'i* to say Kaddish near the Sefer Torah.

Farbrengen

The afternoon farbrengen on the second day of Rosh Hashanah was the first ease in the tension that reigned over the past forty-eight hours. These farbrengens had a very *ruchniyus'dike* touch to them, and they were never too long.

All the Rabbeim's *niggunim* were sung, as the Rebbe appeared to be in a strong *d'veikus*. At its conclusion, the Rebbe *bentched* and distributed *Kos shel Brocha*. I would usually go by for that *Kos shel Brocha*, rather than the distribution following Simchas Torah.

Scanning through the memories of my years with the Rebbe during Tishrei, I recall that each year we observed varying expressions from the Rebbe. I remember, for instance, how the year 5741, being a *Hakhel* year, saw a very strong *freilichkeit*. Even as the Rebbe entered the shul on an ordinary day for a davening, he would often turn around and make strong movements with his hands to a *freilicher niggun* (the *niggun* that would later carry the words of "*Ksiva vachasima tova...*")

At the conclusion of my first Tishrei with the Rebbe, I merited having my own *yechidus* with the Rebbe: quite an incredible experience, but perhaps we'll leave that for another time. **D**