



BEHIND THE PICTURE

A TRADITION OF OLD

RABBI YOLLES'S CHOL HAMOED VISITS TO THE REBBE

Rabbi Ephraim Eliezer Yolles (5651-5749), scion of a prestigious dynasty of rabbonim and *admorim*, was the very prominent rov of the city of Philadelphia, and he served as honorary president of Agudas Harabonim.

Though not of Lubavitcher pedigree, he harbored great respect for Chabad, and developed a close connection with the Friediker Rebbe, and later with the Rebbe as well.

Although he visited 770 rather frequently to participate in the Rebbe's *farbrengens*, one special tradition that he deeply cherished and adhered to, was his annual visit to the Rebbe during chol hamoed Pesach. He fondly explained the reason for these visits with the words of the *Gemora*¹: "חייב אדם להקביל פני רבו ברגל" — "One is obligated to visit his teacher during the *regolim*."

Worthy of mention is that these visits occurred annually from the early years of the Rebbe's *nesius* until the very last Pesach before Rabbi Yolles's passing, in 5749.

He would usually come to 770 for shacharis on one of the chol hamoed mornings. Being a kohen, he often received an *aliya* (picture 1). After davening he would go over to the Rebbe (picture 2), and then follow the Rebbe to his room (in the later years, to *gan*

eden hatachton), where he would spend a considerable amount of time in *yechidus*, while the Rebbe was still wearing his tallis! Sometimes a number of his relatives would join him on this trip, and they would be present for a part or all of the *yechidus* as well.



The topics of those *yechiduyos*, some of which have been transcribed, ranged broadly; from ideas discussed at the recent farbrengens, to the reason for this very habit, which as mentioned above, was attributed to a *Gemora*. *Shlaymus ha'aretz* and other matters of international importance were also addressed. The Rebbe often advocated strongly for his written works to be published and even suggested a possible name for a *sefer*.

As Rabbi Yolles was a kohen, he was often asked to perform *pidyon haben*, either in his hometown and elsewhere. During these visits to the Rebbe in 770, he would deliver the money he received from all these *pidyon habens* to the Rebbe, saying that the concept of *pidyon haben* is deeply related to the *nossi hador*. Therefore, rather than keeping it he had an obligation to deliver the money to its rightful address.

At the end of the *yechidus*, Rabbi Yolles would exit the Rebbe's room walking backwards, out of respect, while the Rebbe escorted him until the hallway.

On 18 Nissan 5748², Rabbi Yolles made what turned out to be his final visit. The Rebbe began the conversation by exclaiming: "Today my father turns one-hundred-and-ten years old!"

A *yoman* penned by a *bochur* at the time records the following:

Tuesday, 18 Nissan.

In the morning, after shacharis, the Gaon, Rabbi Ephraim Eliezer Yolles arrived at 770. The venerable gaon was accompanied by his children and grandchildren. He waited for the Rebbe to return from shacharis downstairs, at the entrance to gan eden hatachton, and when the Rebbe arrived and saw him, he shook his hand with great warmth. The Rebbe, Rabbi Yolles, and his family then continued into gan eden hatachton [where they engaged in conversation]. After some time, Rabbi Yolles's family members came out, leaving him alone with the Rebbe. The visit lasted approximately half an hour.

When Rabbi Yolles was set to depart, the



Rebbe walked out into the hallway with him, while his two grandchildren helped him take a few step backwards, so as not to turn his back on the Rebbe. When Rabbi Yolles was standing in the hallway, a chair was brought for him, so that he may sit while his ride was readied. The Rebbe told him "Yero'eh cohen betziyon."³

The Rebbe then asked that those present sing a joyous niggun, since it is Yom Tov, and all the assembled began singing "Vesomachto Bechagecho," which the Rebbe encouraged greatly with both his holy hands while gazing upon Rabbi Yolles and everyone else.

When Rabbi Yolles's car was ready, the Rebbe escorted him until the door (Picture 3), and remained there until the car was no longer visible. After that, the Rebbe returned to his holy study.

Chassidim speculated that perhaps by escorting him all the way outside and remaining there until he was gone, the Rebbe was bidding Rabbi Yolles one final farewell.



Rabbi Ephraim Eliezer Yolles passed away on the following 26 Cheshvan 5749, at the ripe old age of 97. □

1. Rosh Hashanah, 16b
2. This day marks the birth of Rav Levi Yitzchok, father of the Rebbe, in 5638.
3. This is a phrase the Rebbe often said to visiting rabbonim, and on other occasions as well. In our case, there is a clear reference to Rabbi Yolles who was a *Kohen*. (In a letter to Reb Volf Greenglass, the Rebbe attributes this phrase as used by the Sefardic community, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 16 p. 109. See also *Sichos Kodesh* 5737, vol. 2 p 468 et al.)