



## BEHIND THE PICTURE

# “DID YOU LEARN TANYA YET?”

*On snapping photos of the Rebbe*

29 ELUL 5743

Pictures Courtesy of Jewish Educational Media

Though the amount of pictures of the Rebbe are well into the hundreds of thousands, covering nearly every nuance of the Rebbe's *nesius* (save for Shabbos and Yom Tov, of course) it may come as a surprise to some that for a period of time the Rebbe did not allow for pictures of him to be taken<sup>1</sup>, making them very hard to come by. Eventually, however, not only did the Rebbe permit it, but at one point a particular picture was formally chosen to serve for official purposes. Ultimately with the advent of video recordings of the farbrengens and their live broadcasts on national television, the Rebbe's holy image became quite well known.

There were occasions that the Rebbe posed for a photograph and sometimes even insisted that the cameramen say *lchaim* together with all the chassidim. And then there were times that the Rebbe advised chassidim who were standing in the crowd to learn Torah rather than snap photographs.

In this series of pictures, shot on 29 Elul 5743—Erev Rosh Hashana—we see the Rebbe on his way into 770 for shacharis. While climbing the last few steps before the doorway, the Rebbe stopped and turned to a group of chassidim standing on his right-hand side. At the front of the group is a man with a camera hanging

from his shoulder, snapping photos. The Rebbe asked the man if he had already learnt Tanya that day.

### PRECEDENTS

Incidents like this occurred a number of times before as well. On one of the evenings of Chol Hamoed Sukkos 5738, shortly before maariv, during the singing that generally preceded the *tefillos* (especially during the month of Tishrei) the Rebbe—who had been clapping vigorously to the tune of the niggun—stopped abruptly and he turned unusually serious, gazing sharply at two people standing a relative distance away,

who were taking pictures of the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked in Yiddish: “Have you learnt Chitas yet today?” When they showed signs of not understanding what was being asked, someone translated the question. One of the men answered that he generally does indeed learn Chitas, but that day he hadn’t yet. The other fellow answered in the negative as well. The Rebbe then continued and asked, “What is more important; taking pictures in a shul or learning Tanya?”<sup>2</sup> [See also 4 Nissan 5741, for a related episode.]

### נתן מלחמו לדל

Another similar story occurred on Chai Elul 5739 during the farbrengen.

After the first *sicha*, the Rebbe called upon Reb Yoel Kahn, who stood directly below the Rebbe’s dais, and asked him to find out whether a man who stood nearby and was photographing the Rebbe, had learnt Tanya that day, and added, “He can continue, I just want to know if he learnt Tanya today”. Upon hearing the question, the man immediately stopped shooting.

After the second *sicha*, the Rebbe asked Reb Yoel if he had passed on the message. When he answered that the man had not, the Rebbe retrieved a booklet of Iggeres Hateshiva from his own siddur, and instructed Reb Yoel that the man should learn a few lines from it, after which he may continue taking pictures!

When the job was completed, the Rebbe smiled to Reb Yoel and said, “Don’t take offense that I make use of a Kohen.”

### PENIMIYUS!

At a farbrengen on Chof Cheshvan 5744 marking the Rebbe Rashab’s birthday, while discussing similar behaviors, the Rebbe dwelled on the topic of picture taking and explained a common error in this regard.

“There are those who think that *chassidus* demands of them to take pictures nonstop, of [the Rebbe] walking, standing, doing particular motions, and this is all they do time and again!



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The Rebbe went on to tell of an incident when he had asked the photographer if he had learnt Tanya that day. “It was already late in the day, mincha time,” the Rebbe said. “He completely failed to understand the connection. What does taking pictures, the most important of all endeavors, have to do at all with studying Tanya?!”

Then the Rebbe gave an interesting exception to the rule. “Some people need to do it as a source of *parnassa*. Other select individuals utilize it for *hafotzas hamaayanos*, i.e. they use the pictures and videos for spreading Chassidus. But other than that, one must know that the Rebbe Rashab demands *penimiyus* (i.e. learning *chassidus* and activities which engage a person more in depth)!”<sup>3</sup>

## INTENSE LONGING

Beyond the inferences of these particular incidents, the Rebbe often instructed *chassidim* to keep in their pocket a picture of the [Friediker] Rebbe, and to gaze upon it from time to time, especially in a moment of intense need. Yet, as he taught us in *Hayom Yom*<sup>4</sup>, “The intense longing for *hiskashrus* can be satisfied only by learning *maamarim* of *chassidus*, which the Rebbe delivers orally and written; simply seeing him is not enough.”

If that is true in normal conditions, surely then in these trying times when it is specifically seeing the Rebbe which we cannot do, we must devote our all to learning the Torah that he taught and in which the Rebbe’s very essence is invested. **D**

1. See Derher issue 6(66), pages 33, 35 *et al.*

2. *Yoman* entries of the time record that later that evening, one of the two individuals wrote to the Rebbe asking forgiveness for the incident, and the Rebbe replied “אזכיר עה צ”

3. *Hisvaduyos* 5744 vol. 1 p. 485

4. 9 Adar II



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