



לזכות החתן הרה"ת ר' לוי שי' שם טוב
והכלה מרת שטערנא שרה תחיל' שיימן
לרגל חתונתם בשעטומ"צ ביום ה' אדר ב' ה'תשע"ו הבעל"ט
מוקדש ע"י חברי המערכת

The Legendary Purim

PURIM 5718



While it is obviously impossible to adequately describe such a monumental farbrengen, we have attempted to convey, as much as possible, a bit of the feeling of that time. This account is based on the hanacha in Toras Menachem, an interview with Rabbi Sholom Ber Chaikin, and the yoman of Reb Heske Gansburg. Direct quotes from the yoman are indented. Note that to gain the best appreciation for the farbrengen it is advisable to listen to the recording.

When Leibel Motchkin approached the Rebbe during the farbrengen and requested a *bracha* for his mother's health, the Rebbe turned to Rabbi Hodakov and said smilingly: "Announce that tonight the hospital is closed, and so is the economy department, and the social sciences, there won't even be *brachos* for spiritual health." The Rebbe then filled Leibel Mochkin's cup with *mashke*.

To another person who asked for a *bracha*, the Rebbe said: "You're supposed to be ידע עד דלא ידע now,

so how do you know what to ask for?! Say *l'chaim* on a bigger cup, and there will be good news."

This was the spirit of the farbrengen of Purim 5718. For those who were *zoche* to be there, this farbrengen remains one of their most memorable moments with the Rebbe. For a period of time afterwards, anyone who showed up in 770 was told, "If only you would have come a little earlier, you would have been at the farbrengen of Purim..." For many years, *bochurim* passed around the audio



THE ALBANY TERRACE HALL.

cassettes (this was before recordings of farbrengens were widespread like they are today), and stories were told. Thus, the farbrengen of Purim 5718 became synonymous with moments of big *giluyim* and tremendous *simcha* by the Rebbe.

The length of the farbrengen is telling. The Rebbe came in at 8:30 PM, and the farbrengen ended after 5:30 AM; more than nine hours!

In those years most farbrengens took place in the upstairs zal of 770, which is not a very big room. For occasions that a broader crowd came, such as Yud-Tes Kislev or Purim, a hall was rented. This farbrengen was in a hall called Albany Terrace, located on the corner of Albany Ave. and Rutland Rd.

At the start of the farbrengen the Rebbe was in great spirits, and he told us to sing freiliche neggunim. We, the choir which stood at the right side of the bima, did as best as we could. It seems that the singing was a little better than previously, but it could still use a lot of improvement.

A “PURIM TORAH”

The Rebbe started the farbrengen with a *sicha* about חייב איניש לבסומי—explaining the Gemara that says one must drink on Purim until he doesn't know the difference between ארוך המן and ברוך מדרכי.

“This is different than the other mitzvos of Purim. Once you heard Megillah, you did the mitzva and you can't do it again. Once you gave *matanos laevyonim*, you have fulfilled the mitzva; while no one is stopping you from giving more, the mitzva was already done. The mitzva of חייב איניש לבסומי” however, is applicable all day, if at any time

of the day you weren't 'לא ידע', then on some level you didn't fully do the mitzva.”

The Rebbe then concluded the opening with saying: “Until now was a ‘Purim Torah.’ Now let's get to work with actually fulfilling חייב איניש לבסומי”

FORTY YEARS!

After the *niggun* the Rebbe repeated a story that he heard from the Friediker Rebbe more than twenty years earlier:

In the days of the Alter Rebbe there was a certain Chossid who was a very simple person. When he was a young man he heard a Torah from the Alter Rebbe on the phrase: “זכור ושמור בדיבור אחד”—meaning: in everything that you do, you must remember and guard the “*echad*,” Hashem.

This Chossid didn't even know *pirush hamilos* (translation of the words in the Siddur), yet with this line from the Alter Rebbe he davened every single day, for forty years! And not just *shacharis*; he would daven *mincha* and *maariv* at great length as well, with tremendous concentration and effort. This is a lesson for those who think they are not *shayech* to davening, either because they are not learned enough, or because they are not familiar with *pirush hamilos*.

The Rebbe said the maamar “חייב איניש לבסומי” which lasted longer than an hour. It was a deep maamar, explaining the concepts from Kabbalah and Chassidus that speak of the 50 amah tree [that Haman built to hang Mordechai], the concept of ‘eden,’ ‘nahar,’ ‘gan,’ ‘aalefcha chochma,’ ‘pnimius haratzon,’ and ‘chitzoniyus haratzon.’

After a few sichos there was a big commotion in the room, a result of the huge crowd. The

microphone was also not working properly, so it was difficult to quiet everyone down. It appears that this caused the Rebbe some distress, and he became more serious. He told us to sing the niggun “Hey Tzama.” It seems that he instructs to sing this niggun when things are not right. The Rebbe himself then started the niggun “Darkecha,” [a more solemn niggun] and even when we tried to start singing a fast niggun it didn’t help.

After the fourth sicha, we sang an old hartzige niggun. After the niggun the Rebbe smiled and said: Erev Purim is Taanis Esther, so it seems that the niggunim are being sung in the same way... Until now was a Taanis Esther niggun, maybe now they will sing a Purim niggun!

We started a fast freiliche niggun [what is now known as “Noda Beyehudah”] and the Rebbe was very happy. After that the Rebbe himself started a Simchas Torah niggun [also sung with “Zol shoin zayn di geulah”], and was in very good spirits, clapping, etc. From that point everything changed, and the Rebbe was noticeably in a very good mood.

Rabbi Sholom Ber Chaikin of Cleveland, Ohio, was present at the farbrengen. He relates:

“I remember at the beginning of the farbrengen, the Rebbe said that he wasn’t feeling well, and does not plan on farbrengen for a long time.

“After the *maamar*, Rabbi Kazarnovsky was very excited, and he exclaimed “מער ווי א שטונדע” —more than an hour!

“In general, the farbrengen started low key. The Rebbe did not look happy about something. Reb

Zalman Duchman tried to stand on a table and make a *seder*, and the Rebbe told him something, expressing his displeasure. But for some reason, about an hour after the *maamar*, the Rebbe’s mood seemed to change completely. Suddenly the Rebbe started a *freilicher niggun*, he began clapping and singing, and turned the whole farbrengen around.”

EATING LIKE A YID

The singing was a bit strenuous, and about half way through the next *sicha* the Rebbe said to sing a *niggun* as an interval between *sichos*. During the singing the Rebbe called out to someone: first fulfill עד ולא ידע, then we’ll talk! After the *niggun*, the Rebbe continued the *sicha* where he left off:

During the story of Purim, many non-Jews converted. The reason was, as the Megillah tells us: כי נפל פחד היהודים עליהם, because they were overcome with the fear of Jews. The Rama explains, that it means they were afraid not of the Yidden themselves, rather they were afraid of the same thing that the Jews were afraid of; the fear of Hashem.

The uniqueness of the Yidden of that generation is that they lived for an entire year with *mesiras nefesh*. If you were Jewish, you were under a threat of death. So just waking up in the morning as a Jew, or eating breakfast as a Jew, was *mesiras nefesh*.

A non-Jew will not be influenced just by a Jew’s davening or learning; it doesn’t mean much to him and he cannot really relate to it. But eating—that’s something he can relate to! The *bracha* before eating is also foreign to him; so he will come after the *bracha* and leave before bentching. But when it comes to the eating itself, if the Yid eats in the way a Yid is supposed to, it will have a major positive effect on him, until he will be able to fear Hashem in the same way that a Yid is supposed to.

עד ולא ידע!

At most farbrengens, the Rebbe would say *l’chaim* on wine from his *becher*. On some special occasions, like Purim, the Rebbe would say *l’chaim* on *mashke*. At this farbrengen, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Mentlik, who was tasked with filling the Rebbe’s cup, to pour him some Benedictine.

During the course of the farbrengen, the Rebbe told many people to say *l’chaim*, many of them on full cups. The Rebbe also said more *l’chaim* than usual.



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To one person the Rebbe said: “Don’t worry if your tie is in the wrong place, say *l’chaim* on a big cup ‘עד דלא ידע’, just like you were *zoche* to be on Simchas Torah. And influence your *mechutan* too, he’s in a *moiredike* והגבלה במדידה והגבלה.”

To another person: “Say *l’chaim*, and decide to become a Chossid! Even though your הרע יצר is telling you that this will negatively affect your *parnassa*, just become a Chossid!”

To another person the Rebbe gave a *bracha* for health, and added: “But you must be עד דלא ידע until you forget about health.”

The Rebbe turned to another person and told him to say *l’chaim* on a big cup, and beginning tomorrow he should learn Chassidus every day ‘אליבא דנפש’.

When the bottle of Benedictine was finished, the Rebbe asked that someone should bring another bottle. Reb Binyomin Levitin brought one from his house, but the elder Chassidim thought that it could affect the Rebbe’s health, and they tried to stop Reb Binyomin from passing it to Rabbi Mentlik.

The next day, the Rebbe told Reb Leibel Groner that he had noticed the argument between Rabbi Mentlik and the elder Chassidim if he should give

the Rebbe more *l’chaim* or not, and he wants to know what the reasons were that each side was giving. After Rabbi Groner repeated the argument, the Rebbe said that those who wanted to give *l’chaim* were right.

At one point the Rebbe said with a smile: “Chonye Morosow would say, that on Purim, after he took *mashke*, he can say whatever he wants, and no one will be angry, because he could always later excuse himself and say that he was שיכור. I am not holding there yet—maybe I would be already by עד דלא ידע but people here are stopping me; everyone is sitting around והגבלה במדידה. One is making sure that his tie is in the proper place, another is thinking if his socks properly match his tie; like the *minhag* in America that the feet and neck have to be equal, like a בהמה...”

18 YEARS OF TOMCHEI TEMIMIM

One of the major themes of this farbrengen was the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim. The day that the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in America, Tes Adar Sheini 5700, he announced his plans to open Tomchei Temimim in America. The first group of *bochurim* started learning that very day, and the



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yeshiva was formally established a week later, on Shushan Purim.

“It says that the Shechina was in *golus* ten times. Tomchei Temimim also went through a few *goluyos* until it came to this part of the world, exactly 18 years ago, on Shushan Purim.”

The Rebbe then spoke about those who think that there should be changes made to the yeshiva:

“Recently there has been a new form of treatment for mental illness: to explain to the patient what exactly his problem is; either ‘nervousness,’ or ‘mentally ill,’ or ‘emotionally disturbed.’ (If there is someone who speaks a better English, he can find a few more terms... but the idea is the same). That way, he can understand what his problem is, and that it is possible to be cured. The same thing goes for those who want to change Tomchei Temimim—they need to be told that if they think something is missing, they are the ones with the problem.”

Some of the original *talmidim*, from 18 years earlier, were at the farbrengen. The Rebbe addressed them directly:

“When something new is established, it is felt much more powerfully. So those that were there

then when the yeshiva was founded must know that the passion felt at that time is still here today, and every day it must feel like a new thing.”

After the *sicha* the Rebbe started calling out their names: Zev Shildkraut, Avrohom Barnetsky, Mendel Feldman, Mordechai Altein, Yitzchok Kolodny, and Yehoshua Goldman.² The Rebbe gave each of them *l’chaim*, and told them to dance in a circle, “but not on the table.” The Rebbe also motioned to Rabbi Mentlik, the rosh yeshiva, to join the circle, and he jumped right into the middle. Reb Shneur Garelik, the rov of Kfar Chabad, who was visiting from Eretz Yisroel, was one of the original *bochurim* in Tomchei Temimim in Lubavitch, and he also joined the circle, as well as Reb Yisroel Jacobson.

The energy in the hall was tremendous, with the singing and dancing and clapping, when suddenly the Rebbe jumped up and started dancing as well! The whole crowd immediately jumped to their feet, and it felt as if the whole room was shaking. During the dancing the Rebbe turned to Reb Shneur Garelik, and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

After this the Rebbe spoke about the famous *sicha* of the Rebbe Rashab on the Gemara “כל היוצא ללחמת בית דוד כותב גט כריתות לאשתו”—anyone that

went out to war for the House of Dovid, would first divorce his wife. The Rebbe Rashab said that this refers to the *bochurim* of Tomchei Temimim, who have to ‘divorce’ anything connected to this world in order not to be distracted.

“The students of Tomchei Temimim, throughout all its years, are the ones who will finally be victorious in the war of Dovid. They must know that this war is only something that kings do for entertainment [i.e. this is not a real battle where we are not certain which side will win], and they know for sure that they will win. But Hashem wanted it to seem as if there is a real battle, yet the truth is that they will certainly be victorious.”

In the next *sicha* the Rebbe continued to speak about *מלחמת בית דוד*, that they must know how to fight in every situation. So too, those who want to win the fight today, must be able to affect people from every group, and to do so they must be educated in the way of *Toras Chabad*.

In those years, it was not uncommon for some Lubavitcher parents to send their sons to non-Chabad yeshivas. The Rebbe addressed this phenomenon:

“Since Moshiach is coming very soon, it won’t look right for a father to sit together with the *temimim*, and his son he will have to send to the “other side,” because he was educated differently than the father. So what should he do? Since Moshiach is about to arrive, he should *chap arein* and register his son in Tomchei Temimim.”

The Rebbe concluded:

“Since we are now talking in a manner of *עד דלא ידע*, in the spirit of *לא ידע* it would be proper that everyone should register in Tomchei Temimim—as the Megillah says “מנער ועד זקן טף ונשים ביום אחד”—right away, tomorrow, on Shushan Purim. And as *temimim* we will greet Moshiach Tzidkeinu!”

The Rebbe turned to a few of the people in the room that needed this extra push, and told them each to say *lchaim* on a full cup. Then he said with a smile: “Why do you look so surprised? A Jew wants to say *lchaim*, and everyone looks at him as if he’s doing something shocking.”

DON'T BE SO 'RIGHT'

In the next *sicha*, the Rebbe spoke very strongly about the need to be more active in *הפצת המעייונות*.

“My father-in-law, the [Friediker] Rebbe once said at a Purim farbrengen, that the problem is that people are too right.”

The Rebbe explained this to mean that people will always have an excuse for their inactivity. These people could be right, they may have a valid excuse, but what did they gain from being right? The work is still not done!

“What I mean is simple: on Sunday, at the end of the day, can you write down on paper, black on white, what you did today *ממש*? Twenty-four hours have passed. You should be able to show what you accomplished in the first hour, the second hour, etc.”

The Rebbe went on to once again discuss Tomchei Temimim, and the need to keep it pure from outside influences.

“This is especially vital when discussing education for youth, when any impression they receive will affect their children, from father to son, generation after generation, forever!

“This is not beyond our reach. It is the responsibility of the administrators, *mashgichim*, *mashpi'im*, the roshei yeshivas, the *talmidim*; their wives, mothers, sons, and daughters, and all Chassidim, to bring the Torah of the Baal Shem Tov, the *מעיינות*, to the *חוצה*—until *דעה את ה'*—מלאה הארץ דעה את ה'—until *כמים לים מכסים*, and Moshiach will come!

“And then there will be no need to farbrengen until 4 AM, in a crowded room where you can’t sleep even if you want to. Because by then it will be universally known that “טעמו וראו כי טוב הוי”!

At this point, the Rebbe related the story of the Alter Rebbe:

“The Alter Rebbe once arrived in a town considered to be a “stronghold” of the opponents of Chassidus. He went up to the bima and called out in his famous tune:

“טעמו וראו כי טוב הוי” - פארזוכט וועט איר זעהן אז דער אויבערשטער איז גוט!”

[When repeating this quote, the Rebbe used the sing-song tune used by the Alter Rebbe.]

“As a result of this “announcement” - tens of scholarly *yungeleit* ran after the Alter Rebbe and became Chassidim, spreading the Torah of the Baal Shem Tov even further.

During the *niggunim* that followed, the Rebbe spoke to many people, and told many more to say *lchaim*.

“Maybe I can influence ... to do what I want instead of what he wants, at least in regard to one

thing. Even if he thinks that according to Shulchan Aruch he should do the opposite, he should still trust me that what I am instructing him to do is according to Shulchan Aruch.” The Rebbe then said with a smile: “It’s impossible to talk to him, he’s stuck in חיצוניות and I deal with פנימיות, he should stop thinking about חיצוניות! Let him say *l’chaim*, forget about himself, and do what he is supposed to.”

To another person the Rebbe said: “You are involved in *mussar*, but you should become a Chossid. Stop thinking about סדר מרע and start thinking about עשה טוב; then everything will be fine.”

When Pinchas Feldman, today of Sydney, Australia, was a young child, he was sent to New York to learn in Lubavitcher Yeshiva. It was not easy for a child that young to be away from home, and his parents asked the Rebbe if they can bring him back to Baltimore, even though there was no Lubavitcher yeshiva there at the time. The Rebbe gave permission to send him to a non-Lubavitcher yeshiva.

In 5718, Pinchas was already 15 years old. During the farbrengen the Rebbe turned to his father and said: “Don’t be *nispael* from what I told you about sending your son to a different yeshiva, you should start sending him to Tomchei Temimim. This will be your *mesiras nefesh*, and then you will have *nachas* from him.”

The Rebbe told someone who had traveled to be at the farbrengen: “You spent \$800 to be here, and you’re walking around in your *balebatishe* clothes, as if you’re still home.”

There was an individual there named Sholom, but he was mostly known by his English name. The



Rebbe said to him: “Hashem should help that you should be known as Sholom, even by your wife, and Hashem will help that you will have שלום, physically and spiritually, and you will be blessed with רעה חייא וקיימא.”

The Rebbe turned to a father and son from a Lubavitch family who were standing nearby, and said to the father that he should allow his son to learn in Tomchei Temimim. The Rebbe repeated what he had said before, that when Moshiach will come the father will be with the *temimim*, but the son will still be with the *misnagdim*. The Rebbe then turned to the son and said, “You must start learning in Tomchei Temimim, even without asking your father.” Then, turning to the father: “It would be better if you also agreed. Why should your son have to disobey you? (Just like a son must not listen to his father if he tells him to be מחלל שבת...).”

The father stood silently and didn’t answer, so the people around him started pressuring him to answer. The Rebbe told them not to pressure him: “For now just make sure that he is עד דלא ידע, that way after Purim when he is back to ידע, he will do what is proper for a Chossid Chabad.”

The Rebbe then spoke two *sichos* focusing on the important role of the Jewish woman, and how the main miracle of Purim was brought about through a woman, and today too women can play an important role in bringing Moshiach.

Before the end of the farbrengen the Rebbe made an appeal.

“There is a *minhag* started by the Rebbe Rashab, that on Purim people give tzedaka that goes to a special fund where the money can be used for various tzedaka causes at the Rebbe’s discretion, without the donors having any say.”

Then the Rebbe sang the *niggun* Shalosh Tenuos, and the Alter Rebbe’s *niggun*. During the Alter Rebbe’s *niggun*, the Rebbe said to sing the last part only once.

The Rebbe then announced that everyone should make a *bracha acharona*, then he began singing כי בשמחה and left the hall. By this time it was already 5:30 A.M.!

“NAME AFTER THE SHVER”

There was a Chossid in Montreal named Nossou Fellig who had only daughters. By one farbrengen in 5716, he approached the Rebbe and asked for a *bracha* for a son. The Rebbe answered that he

should name the son after the ‘*shver*,’ meaning the Frieddiker Rebbe. He thought that the Rebbe meant his own father-in-law, who was alive. So he blurted out “אבער דער שווער לעבט” —my *shver* is still alive.

He immediately realized his mistake and was totally broken hearted. For two years he was constantly talking about how the Rebbe gave him a *bracha* for a son, and he ruined it with his careless remark.

At this farbrengen, Purim 5718, he again approached the Rebbe to ask for a *bracha* for a son. The Rebbe turned to Rabbi Kramer, the administrator of Tomchei Temimim in Montreal, and asked him how much it costs for a plaque in the ‘Governor’s Table’—the highest level of the building dedication. Rabbi Kramer answered that it was \$100, a substantial sum at that time. The Rebbe told Reb Nosson to give ten times that, and he will have a son.

After Purim Reb Nosson was in *yechidus*, and he asked the Rebbe if he was serious about giving 10 times the building dedication. Maybe the Rebbe only said it because it was Purim, and the Rebbe was in a good mood. The Rebbe replied, “Never in my life have I said something as a joke.”

Reb Nosson gave the large sum and not long after Purim, the groundbreaking was held for the yeshiva in Montreal. Nine months after the groundbreaking Mrs. Fellig gave birth to a boy.

Rabbi Chaikin relates:

“Purim was on Thursday night. That Shabbos was the *ufruf* for my sister’s *chosson*, Reb Baruch Brickman. Often, in those years the Rebbe used to farbreng when there was an *ufruf*, but he had just farbrenged on Thursday night for nine hours, so my father didn’t feel comfortable asking the Rebbe to farbreng again, so soon after.

“While my father was deliberating, it was announced that the Rebbe would farbreng after davening in honor of the *ufruf*. It seems that Reb Shmuel Zalmanov asked the Rebbe in the name of my father, without informing him. That way if the Rebbe wouldn’t want, he can always say that it wasn’t his idea, it was Chaikin’s...”

On Shabbos after davening, Rabbi Hodakov called Reb Yoel Kahn and Reb Avremel Shemtov [then a bochur] and told them that



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the Rebbe wants them to come to his room. They remained in the Rebbe’s room for about 20 minutes.

The Rebbe asked them if they remember the sichos, and if they can repeat the sichos from after the maamar. (It appears that while the Rebbe spoke at the farbrengen from that point on, the words flowed in a manner of שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו; hence the Rebbe asked them to repeat what had happened. This is not something new; I heard it used to happen by previous Rebbes as well).

They repeated for the Rebbe some of the sichos, and in general what happened by the farbrengen. When they mentioned that the Alter Rebbe’s niggun was sung, and the last part they sang only once, the Rebbe asked, why? They said because that’s what the Rebbe said. The Rebbe answered “I said to do that? Nu.” (Meaning he was pleased). ❶

1. Reb Heske was in charge of a group of *bochurim* and *yungeleit* who would start and lead the *niggunim* at farbrengens.
2. These are the names recorded in the yoman. The Rebbe may have mentioned more.