



# MY FIRST TIME SEEING THE REBBE

ELUL 5719

Compiled from the diary of Rabbi Naftali Roth, a bochur from Eretz  
Yisroel who traveled to the Rebbe for the first time.

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ע"י בנם  
ר' יקותיאל יהודה  
הזוגתו מרת פעסל לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
רוהר

טור 'לעבן מיטן רבי'ן הוקדש לזכרון ולעילוי נשמת  
ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל  
ואשתו מרת שרה ע"ה בת ר' יקותיאל ומרת לאה הי"ד  
תנ"צ'ב'ה

## Wednesday, 13 Elul

At 11:00 am, El-Al flight 205 landed at the big American airport, and with much gratitude to Hashem, I arrived in New York. A few *bochurim* were waiting at arrivals to pick me up. They greeted me warmly, took my suitcases, and we got into a taxi to Crown Heights.

During the thirty-minute drive, a whirlwind of emotions overtook me. I was filled with eager anticipation for what was yet to come. What did I do to deserve such a great merit?

As we approached 770, my excitement grew, and I struggled to contain myself, attempting to have my “mind control the heart.” Finally, around 12:00 pm, we arrived. The taxi stopped in front of the magnificent edifice of 770.

Despite my excitement, I did not have the chutzpah to enter the Rebbe’s Beis Midrash without first going to Mikvah.

Finally, after this important step, I entered the “chambers of the king” with due reverence. My friend pointed out the Rebbe’s antechamber to my left, from which an eternal light shines upon the entire world.

From there, we entered the *zal*, where all the seats were filled with *bochurim* learning Torah. I squeezed into a spot in the eastern corner of the room and began to learn.

At 2:15 pm, there was a short break for lunch, and the Rebbe’s chief secretary, Rabbi Hodakov, greeted me warmly.

As 3:00 approached, the hallway between the *zal* and the Rebbe’s room cleared out, and the front door to 770 remained closed in anticipation of the Rebbe’s arrival for Mincha. Half of the *zal* emptied to make space for the Rebbe, and his table in the northeastern corner of the room near the entrance was cleared of any *seforim*.

Utter silence filled the building for a few minutes as the clock ticked away the seconds. Suddenly, we heard the door to the Rebbe’s room close, prompting everyone to rise. A palpable sense of awe filled the room as the Rebbe walked towards the entrance of the *zal*. There, I saw the Rebbe for the first time.

As much as I’ve heard from those who have been by the Rebbe, and as much as I learned the Rebbe’s Torah, nothing compares to the indescribable experience of seeing the Rebbe in all of his glory right in front of me. It was a fulfillment of the words “והיו עיניך רואות את מוריק” – And your eyes will see your teacher” in real life.

The Rebbe entered the room holding a Siddur Torah Ohr, walked to his table, and put the siddur down. Rabbi Hodakov, who was standing nearby, closed the door. The Rebbe then adjusted his *gartel*, ensuring both sides were even, and glanced at everyone present, his face glowing



RABBI NAFTALI ROTH AS A BOCHUR.

like an angel from above.

The Rebbe opened his siddur and began davening quietly, leaning with his two hands on the table, facing south. For *Shemoneh Esrei*, the Rebbe picked up his siddur, turned east, and took the three steps back.

The Rebbe stood still and davened, not *ba'arichus*. When the Rebbe took three steps back at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the Chazzan began *Chazaras Hashatz*. The Rebbe took three steps forward at the word “*V’ne’eman*”, and remained standing until “*HaKeil Hakadosh*.”

The Rebbe sat down, his head resting on his arm, looking inside the siddur throughout *Chazaras Hashatz*. The Rebbe stood up and bowed during Modim, only sitting down for *Nefilas Apayim* in Tachanun. By “*Mah naaseh*,” the Rebbe stood up for the rest of davening, and I was able to hear a bit of the Rebbe’s holy voice for the first time.

After the final *kaddish*, the Rebbe took his siddur and opened the door, glancing at the clock as he returned to his room.

The Temimim, having spent time with the Rebbe, returned to their studies with increased vigor and enthusiasm for the rest of the afternoon. As the time for Maariv approached, a hush fell upon the room. Everyone stood up, half the room emptied out, the Rebbe’s table was cleared, and we heard the door to the Rebbe’s room close.

Not wasting a second, the Rebbe walked briskly towards the *zal*. Just like he did for Mincha, the Rebbe walked into the room holding his Siddur Torah Ohr and

put on his *gartel*, ensuring that both sides were even. The Rebbe then looked around the room at everybody present.

The Rebbe's face had an amazing glow and appeared different from Mincha to Maariv, something I can't adequately describe or put into words.

The Rebbe remained standing until after Barchu, then he sat down, resting his head on his right hand as he looked inside the siddur. It was wonderful to witness the Rebbe cover his eyes and say Shema, and my heart was bursting with joy at having merited this experience.

The Rebbe stood up at "Amein Yehei Shmei Rabah" before *Shemoneh Esrei*, faced east, and davened without any noticeable movement. The Rebbe completed *Shemoneh Esrei* relatively quickly and took three steps back, returning to his place at "Yehei Shmei Rabbah." The Rebbe then stood facing the crowd with his two arms leaning on the table until after the final *kaddish*.

After davening, the Rebbe opened the door, glanced at the clock, and returned to his room.

Subsequently, Rabbi Hodakov informed me that tomorrow night, I could enter the Rebbe's room for *yechidus*. Fear and trepidation overcame me, and intense emotions took hold as I began to prepare myself for *yechidus*, although no preparation in the world would be sufficient to properly enter the Kodesh Hakodoshim.

Over a sleepless night and into the following day, I thought about my past and contemplated ways to improve in the future. I counted down the minutes until Thursday night, writing down my thoughts and what I wanted to tell the Rebbe.

Before my first *yechidus*, I had the merit of seeing the Rebbe three more times that day: for Krias HaTorah, Mincha, and Maariv.

## Thursday, 14 Elul

The Rebbe comes to the *zal* for *Kriah* on Mondays and Thursdays. As the time approached, the hallway between the Rebbe's room and the *zal* emptied. At 10:05 am, the Rebbe walked out of his room, glanced into the Merkos office, and entered the Beis Midrash when the minyan was up to *Kriah*.

There was a Tehillim and Chumash on the Rebbe's table. The Rebbe put on his *gartel* and opened the Chumash.

I was called up for an *aliya* to *bentch Gomet*. It is difficult to describe what it feels like to stand in the spotlight with the Rebbe's eyes on you. The Rebbe was called up for *Shlishi*, and the *brachos* were the first time I heard the Rebbe's holy voice so clearly.

The Rebbe lifted the Torah slightly as he said "*Borchu*," and again three times during the *bracha*. The Rebbe then read along quietly with the *Baal Koreh*. After the *aliya*, the Rebbe closed the Torah, turned to his right, and said the *bracha*, lifting the Torah three more times.

The Rebbe remained standing until after *Hagba*. As he returned to his seat, the Rebbe passed the *Aron Kodesh* and touched the *paroches*. The Rebbe said Tehillim at his place until the Torah was returned to the *Aron*. Then he looked at the clock, touched the Mezuzah with his left hand, and returned to his room.

The rest of the day passed in a blur as the hours and minutes slowly ticked by, drawing closer to 8:00 pm, the time of my first *yechidus*.

## Shabbos Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech, 23 Elul

The Rebbe was called up for Maftir. It was a wonderful sight to see the Rebbe reading the Haftorah intently, seriously and slowly, in a low voice that pierces the heart. In middle of the Haftorah, the Rebbe burst out crying and continued reading while trying to hold back tears.

About an hour after davening, the Rebbe came out for the farbrengen, walking briskly through the crowd. The Rebbe sat down in his place, and the farbrengen began with several *niggunim*. Then the Rebbe leaned forward



slightly and began the first *sicha*.

After the first *sicha*, people said *Lchaim* to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe responded. The Rebbe looked around the crowded room, saying *Lchaim V'livracha* to each one. His lips moved quietly, "*Lchaim V'livracha*."

The son of Reb Berel Gansburg approached the Rebbe to say *Lchaim*, the Rebbe extended his hand in "Sholom Aleichem" and his face lit up as he smiled.

In general, the *bittul* shown to the Rebbe is immense; when the Rebbe passes, everyone trembles. During davening, when the *bochurim* look at the Rebbe for a while, the Rebbe looks back, and also at farbrengens.

Later, the Rebbe said the *maamar* for over an hour. At the end of the *maamar* and also during the *sicha* that followed, the Rebbe cried a lot.

During the farbrengen, Sheva Brachos were also held for two *chassanim*. After the farbrengen, there was *chaz-zara* on the *maamar* until close to *shkiah*, and then those involved quickly ate Seudas Shabbos. On Shabbos and on Monday, the Rebbe said *kaddish* with the accompanying Mishnayos and *Kaddish d'Rabbanan*.

## Tuesday, 26 Elul, 3rd Day of Selichos

Today, the Rebbe went to the Ohel.

## Thursday 28 Elul, Eve of Erev Rosh Hashanah

Tonight, after Maariv, Rabbi Hodakov summoned a group of *bochurim* to the Rebbe's room. A few *rabbonim* also accompanied us: Rabbis Binyomin Gorodetzky, Shmuel Levitin, Yisroel Jacobson, and Sholom Morozov.

We entered the Rebbe's room, and he looked around at everyone present. Then the Rebbe closed his eyes and began by saying that much time had already elapsed since the start of the "*Ufaratzta*" campaign, yet nothing had really been done about it. "I have already done all that I can. I have spoken about it, screamed about it, once, even ten times."

The Rebbe continued, explaining that like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur is connected to the previous year. Additionally, Yom Kippur serves as the day of atonement for that year's failings.

To bring down the missing *hashpa'aos* from the past Shemitta and leap year of 5719, which could have been achieved through *Ufaratzta*, a group of at least two or three people should say Tehillim or daven around the clock until after Yom Kippur. This will fill the breach,



THE REBBE IS MESADER KIDDUSHIN, 21 ELUL 5719.

leading to a *ksiva v'chasima tova* for a year of revealed good.

Throughout the *sicha*, the Rebbe's eyes remained closed. Toward the end, the Rebbe began to cry softly. With tears streaming down his face, the Rebbe occasionally rested his head in his hands, wiping his eyes with a cloth.

After giving the *bracha*, the Rebbe cried even more strongly, and rested his head in his hands. Everyone left the room deeply moved and shaken. Rabbi Hodakov promptly repeated the Rebbe's words to everyone present and established a committee to ensure the Rebbe's directives were fulfilled.

## Friday, Erev Rosh Hashanah

Today, the Rebbe joined the minyan for Shacharis.

After davening, we all prepared to submit a *pan* to the Rebbe.

When the time arrived, the Rebbe opened the door to his room, and the first group entered to each deliver their pan. About fifteen minutes later, the Rebbe's door reopened for the second group. Following this, the *Pan Klali* was presented to the Rebbe.