



The Rebbe and the Judge

Justice Chaim Cohen served on Israel's Supreme Court for 21 years. When he came to see the Rebbe on the night of Simchas Torah 5736, it wasn't clear how the Rebbe would react.

Every Simchas Torah, a delegation from the Israeli Consulate at the UN and other Israeli officials joined the celebration of *Hakafos* at 770. The Rebbe always showered them with attention, but some thought that Chaim Cohen deserved different treatment.

Born into a frum family in pre-war Germany, Chaim had studied in prestigious yeshivos in Europe and Eretz Yisroel. As he got older, however, he began rebelling against his religious upbringing. After the Holocaust he became a fierce opponent of Yiddishkeit. Some people even called him the "Elisha Ben Avuya of our generation"; a reference to the great Tanna who became an *Apikores*.

As a known anti-religious figure, especially as a vocal opponent of the Rebbe's stance on "*Mihu Yehudi*," many in 770 were uncomfortable - to say the least - with Chaim's conspicuous presence at *Hakafos*.

The Rebbe took a different approach. The Rebbe spent a long while speaking with Chaim, asking if he recalled studying Maseches Sanhedrin in his youth, since he was now a judge.

Chaim was honored with reciting a *possuk*, and when the

delegation was honored to lead a *hakafa*, the Rebbe specifically called him to the front of the line. When Chaim was given Moshiach's Sefer Torah to hold, someone suggested that perhaps it was too heavy for him. The Rebbe commented, "A Yid is ready to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah!"¹

As the members of the delegation began dancing, the Rebbe cast his gaze directly at Chaim, encouraging the singing for a very long time.²

Chaim was very profoundly moved by the encounter, as evidenced by the following incident:

Reb Yoel Kahn related that Chaim Cohen had a friend who lived in New York, who was also friends with a Lubavitcher Chossid. The Lubavitcher once asked Chaim's friend to come with him to see the Rebbe, but the man refused. "I saw what kind of impact a visit with the Rebbe had on my friend Chaim," he explained. "After seeing the Rebbe, something inside him changed. He took a much softer approach to matters of Yiddishkeit and altered his opinions on many issues. I'm not prepared to have that happen to me..." **T**

1. In the newspaper article reporting this event, the writer states that the Rebbe asked Mr. Cohen if he is "ready to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah," and he replied that he is. K. Naftali, Maariv 1 Oct., 1975

2. Chadashot Beis Chayeinu, Tishrei 5736