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SIMCHAS TORAH with the Rebbe



The Zohar teaches us that there are seven *Ushpizin* who grace us with their presence on each of the seven days of Sukkos. The Frierdiker Rebbe added that we are also visited by the seven “*Chassidische ushpizin*,” the Baal Shem Tov, the Maagid, the Alter Rebbe and so on.

The Rebbe added that regarding the day of Shemini Atzeres, the day belongs to the Frierdiker Rebbe. “We don’t find the word ‘*ushpiza*’ used about this day. That’s because the [Frierdiker] Rebbe does not come merely as an *ushpiza*—a guest, but as a *baal-habayis*. For he is the *nossi hador*—and he is ultimately the *baal-habayis* over the whole generation!”¹

It follows that Simchas Torah is the day belonging to the Rebbe, *our nossi*. Indeed, Chassidim will recall how on this day the Rebbe’s face shined with extraordinary brightness. The *giluyim* on this day were exceptional, and they swept the Chassidim off to a higher world.

In honor of Simchas Torah, A Chassidisher Derher spoke with three Chassidim who shared their memories of unforgettable Simchas Torahs in the Rebbe’s presence: Rabbi **Yosef Gopin** shliach to West Hartford, CT, Rabbi **Chaim Shapiro** menahel of the yeshiva in Morristown, NJ, and Rabbi **Alter Tenenbaum** shliach to Irvine, CA.

מוקדש
לחיזוק ההתקשרות לכ"ק אדמו"ר
נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' שמואל אהרן וזוגתו מרת חנה
ובניהם
שניאור זלמן, מנחם מענדל,
דוד, אליהו, שיחיו
נובק



MOTZOEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5748, LEVI FREIDIN via JEM 16849

MOTZOEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5750, YOSSI MELAMED via JEM 123502

Building Up

Rabbi Tenenbaum: Every day in the Rebbe's presence was an experience; *mincha*, *maariv*, or any other opportunity was always special. The feeling grew stronger on special occasions; Shabbos, *farbrengens*, *yomei d'pagra*, there was always something to learn and to experience.

This all came to a head in the month of Tishrei, the head of the year. Spending Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos in the Rebbe's presence was an experience like no other. Each Yom Tov took on new meaning.

Guests from around the world would come to spend this festive month with the Rebbe, and as the month went on, the crowds began to swell. Simchas Torah was the crescendo; this was the Yom Tov that nobody wanted to miss.

Rabbi Shapiro: From the year 5741, the Rebbe would say a *sicha* every night of Sukkos, dwelling on the *ushpizin* of the day; each night, the Rebbe would encourage the *simcha* to grow, and the momentum would build up towards Simchas Torah.

As stated, Chassidim have associated the day of Simchas Torah with the Rebbe himself. In truth, the *giluyim* that we saw from the Rebbe on Simchas Torah were unparalleled; nothing compared. On every level, this was “the” Rebbe's day.

Hoshana Rabbah

Rabbi Tenenbaum: Erev Simchas Torah—Hoshana Rabbah—was a special day in its own right. At night, the Rebbe would say a *sicha*, and at one o'clock in the morning, the Rebbe would enter the shul for Tehillim.

In the morning, *shacharis* took a couple of hours, and later in the day, the Rebbe would give out *lekach* to women, children, and any men who didn't receive on Erev Yom Kippur.

Meanwhile, the *gabbaim* would frantically try to clear the shul to clean up and set up for *hakafos*; they would turn the lights on and off, shouting at people to leave—it was always an amusing sight.

The *gabbaim* would clear out the shul, and begin to set up. All of the benches were removed, and in the middle of 770 they would create a “*ches*”—a square enclosure where the *hakafos* would take



HOSHANA RABBAH 5750, LEVI FREIDIN via JEM 153046



place, surrounded by metal tables to ensure that the crush of people wouldn't overrun it.

At the front of 770, the Rebbe's place was brought a bit closer to the *aron kodesh*, leaving a narrow space near the south wall for the elder Chassidim to stand, away from the crush of people.

Rabbi Shapiro: In the later years, the Rebbe's place was raised to double the height, and an additional *bimah* was placed inside the *ches*, so that the entire crowd, even from the back of 770, would be able to see the *hakafos*.

Connecting the Rebbe's *bimah* and the *ches* was a *shvil*, a pathway protected by tables, for the Rebbe to reach the middle of the shul during his *hakafos*.

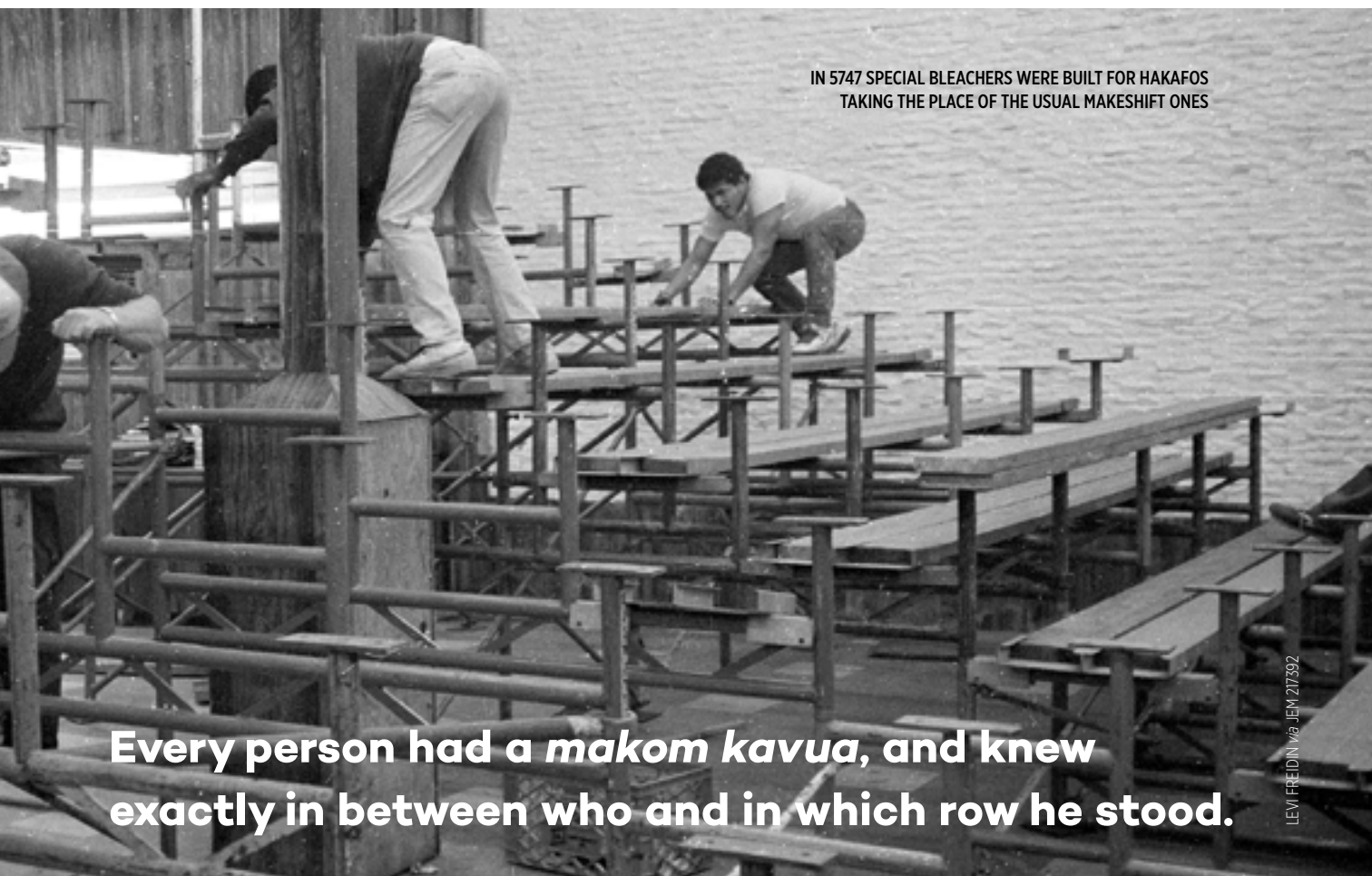
The walls of 770 were lined with bleachers built of tables and benches. Certain spots on the bleachers were reserved for people from specific locations—France, England and so on. California stood on the bleachers on the right side of the *ches*, and Miami was to the left. Many *anash* communities

would struggle with a *minyan* on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, as so many traveled to be with the Rebbe.

The floor space looked empty, but every inch was accounted for. Every person had a *makom kavua*, and knew exactly in between who and in which row he stood.

Simchas Torah was the most packed day of the year in 770. During the Rebbe's *tekios* on Rosh Hashanah, the area in front of the *bima* was full, but now every inch of 770 was taken. Extra air-conditioning units were brought in, and the noise they emitted made it very difficult to hear the proceedings.

The building of 770 remained locked until about half an hour before *licht bentchen*. Once the doors opened, people flooded inside and grabbed their places to ensure they would be able to have a good view of the Rebbe. As 770 filled up, excitement filled the air. Here and there you heard a *Simchas*



IN 5747 SPECIAL BLEACHERS WERE BUILT FOR HAKAFOS TAKING THE PLACE OF THE USUAL MAKESHIFT ONES

Every person had a *makom kavua*, and knew exactly in between who and in which row he stood.

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Torah'diker niggun, and there was a palpable anticipation for the Rebbe's entrance to *maariv*.

Maariv

At the designated time, the Rebbe would join the crowd for maariv.

Rabbi Shapiro: Upon entering the shul for *maariv* on Shemini Atzeres, the Rebbe would be greeted to the sound of a resounding *niggun*, usually the tune of *kesivah vachasima tovah*.²

By this time, the atmosphere of *hakafos* was already in the air. When the Rebbe reached his platform, he would lay down the *siddur*, turn around to the crowd and begin to dance, clap, and encourage the singing with both arms. It was with this spirited song that you felt that Simchas Torah had really begun.

The *chazzan* would then proceed with *maariv*, which was lead with the *nusach* of *Yamim Noraim*. The Rebbe would encourage the various tunes very strongly.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: After *maariv* concluded, before *Aleinu*, the Rebbe would leave the shul, and those who wished had a chance to make *kiddush* in the sukkah.

One year in the early 5730s—I was still a child at the time—leaving *maariv*, the Rebbe went down the pathway that led to the *ches* of *hakafos*, and upon reaching the tables at the end of the *ches*, the Rebbe saw that it was completely closed from all sides; there was no way to proceed. I remember watching as the Rebbe sat down on the table, swung his feet over, and continued on. It was such a Simchas Torah moment. The Rebbe never goes back, he never retreats.

Hakafos Entrance

At 9:00 p.m. the Rebbe would return to the packed shul for hakafos.

Rabbi Gopin: The first *hakafos* I was present at was Shemini Atzeres 5730. I had just arrived then as a *bochur* from Eretz Yisroel. A friend of mine gave me a place to stand; it was a high perch on the bleachers, where I had a clear view of everything.

That year the Rebbe began *hakafos* on a special note. After entering the shul and reaching his place, the Rebbe turned around and began singing “*Ki Anu Amecha*” (the slow, “*baal teshuvah*” version).³ It was a very unique moment; the *simcha* of Simchas Torah paired with the solemnity of the *niggun* created a very special atmosphere.

Another year, we sang “*Ata V’chartanu*” as the Rebbe entered the shul, and the Rebbe encouraged the singing in such a special way that the *bochurim* in 770 sang it throughout the next year.

Rabbi Shapiro: During the years that I was present (from 5741 and on), when the Rebbe returned to the shul for *hakafos*, the crowd would already be singing the same *niggun* as before *maariv*. Here too, the Rebbe would put down his *siddur* and begin vigorously encouraging the singing. The *lebedikeit* in the air is indescribable. You can watch videos of the Rebbe encouraging the *niggunim* at weekday farbrengens, but nothing compared to Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah.

Ata Hareisa and Niggunim

Rabbi Tenenbaum: After a few minutes of encouraging the singing, the Rebbe would turn back to his place, and 770 would immediately quiet down (as much as was physically possible).

At that moment you would hear the *gabbai* announce, “*Iz men mechabed, k’vod k’dushas, adoneinu moreinu v’rabeinu, mit’n ershten possuk Ata Hareisa.*”

The Rebbe would remain at his *shtender*, and we would hear the Rebbe’s voice, “*Ata hareisa lada’as, ki hashem hu ha’elokim, ein oid, milvado.*” The entire 770 would roar with the response, “*Ata hareisa...*”

This was always one of the special moments by the Rebbe. Chassidus says⁴ that Sukkos is the revelation of everything that occurred during Rosh Hashanah; here it felt as if it was the culmination of the *pesukim* that the Rebbe recited before *tekios* on Rosh Hashanah.⁵ On Rosh Hashanah we recited them with heartfelt seriousness, and now they came out with a resounding *simcha*.

Another special moment was when, at the end of all three rounds, the Rebbe would say the *possuk* “*V’haya zar’acha...ufaratzta*” three times.

Rabbi Shapiro: The Rebbe would be honored with the first and last *possuk* of *Ata Hareisa* (for the first and third round) and on Simchas Torah he would say *all* of the *pesukim* of the first round as well.


As customary, all the *pesukim* would be sold to the highest bidder. On Shemini Atzeres, the proceeds would go to Merkos L’inyonei Chinuch, and on Simchas Torah night and day they would go to Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim. This was an arrangement that existed since the times of the Friediker Rebbe.

Rabbi Gopin: The Rebbe usually didn’t get involved in who recited the *pesukim*, but sometimes he would instruct the *gabbai* to honor a specific person or group. I recall how in 5730, the Rebbe told the *gabbai* to give a *possuk* to Reb Bentzion Shemtov, but being that Reb Bentzion would always hide from the Rebbe, it took a while until they managed to locate him.

Each Ata Hareisa would be followed by a lively niggun.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: Let me give some background and explain how *hakafos* worked. The Rebbe would stand for most of the time at his regular place at the front of the shul. However, for the first and last *hakafah*, he would dance in the

You would hear the Gabbai announce, “*Iz men mechabed, k’vod k’dushas, adoneinu moreinu v’rabeinu, mit’n ershten possuk Ata Hareisa.*”



Chassidim would take the opportunity to wish the Rebbe, “*Derlebn iber a yor.*”

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middle of the shul where there was no *bima* (until the last few years).

So there were two choices for the best location. You could stand closer to the front and have a good view of the Rebbe’s place, but you would miss the Rebbe’s own *hakafos*. On the other hand, standing near the *ches* meant that you would be farther away during the bulk of the time.

Every *bochur* had his own *hergesh* and explanation. I chose to stand closer to the *ches* where I could see the Rebbe dancing with Rashag, and I was able to see the Rebbe at his place, albeit from a distance.

Rabbi Shapiro: After each round of *Ata Hareisa*, the Rebbe would turn around and begin a *niggun*; the first one was usually the famous *niggun simcha* the second was usually “*Al Hasela Hoch*” (without the words). In 5751 and 5752, the Rebbe started the tune of “*Zol shoin zein di geulah*” instead. The third would be *ufaratzta*, right after reciting the *possuk* of “*V’haya zar’acha...ufaratzta.*” I remember noticing that the Rebbe would say *uparatzta* with a *pei*.

The uniqueness was that the Rebbe himself began these *niggunim*, unlike most *niggunim* during *hakafos*. This was a sight I didn’t want to miss for anything, so I would always position myself right near the Rebbe’s place. Just as before “*Ata Hareisa*,” the Rebbe would turn around and clap and dance with unbelievable energy. Sometimes the Rebbe would clap at a pace we simply couldn’t keep up with, or move his arms round and round, they looked like they were spinning. With each round again, the entire 770 would thunder with the sound of the *niggun*.

Rabbi Gopin: At my first *hakafos*, as I said earlier, I stood on the bleachers in the back of 770 (which wasn’t so large at the time). Although I saw everything, I felt like a spectator, and I felt that in order to really experience *Simchas Torah* I needed to be closer to the Rebbe. The next year, I positioned myself at the front, at the Rebbe’s feet, literally. There, I was able to watch the Rebbe dance with his hands and feet, with his whole being. Those *hakafos* were a whole different experience.



When the Rebbe would go to his *hakafos* in the middle of the shul, we would jump onto the Rebbe's *bima*, and thus be able to see those *hakafos* as well.

Down the Shvil

The time for hakafos had arrived and the sifrei Torah were now taken out of the aron.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: The Rebbe would receive the small *sefer Torah*⁶ and begin making his way to the middle of the shul.

This was always a very special moment. The Rebbe would slowly make his way through a *shvil* lined with metal tables and heavy chains, and, especially older, Chassidim would take the opportunity to wish the Rebbe, “*Derlebn iber a yor—* next year once more.” The Rebbe would look at each person, and answer, “*Gam atem—you too.*”

Rabbi Shapiro: The Rebbe's face was shining and those standing nearby felt a sort of closeness with the Rebbe at that moment. People would ask the Rebbe for *brachos*; it was well known that

this moment was an *eis ratzon* to ask for anything you need, and in general, everyone wanted the opportunity to kiss the Rebbe's *sefer Torah*. The *shtuperei*, the pushing around the *shvil* was very intense.

It was such a close feeling that I remember even young children wishing the Rebbe “*Derlebn iber a yor;*” and the Rebbe responded with a “*Gam atem!*” just as he responded to the *eltere* Chassidim.

The Rebbe's Hakafa

Throughout the years, the first hakafa was known as “the Rebbe's hakafa.”

Rabbi Tenenbaum: The Rebbe would arrive at the *ches* followed by the other *sifrei Torah* (carried by *mazkirus* and a few others), and he would begin reading the *pesukim* of the *hakafos*. Upon concluding, he would hand the *siddur* to Reb Leibel Bistritzky, and proceed with the *hakafa*.

After circling the *bima*, the other people holding *sifrei Torah* would move to the side and the Rebbe



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would place his hand on Rashag's shoulder. Now the real *hakafa* would begin. In that one split second, 770 was transformed.

Rabbi Gopin: When the *niggun* began, the *simcha* took on new proportions. You could feel that something just changed. The entire shul was *derhoiben*, uplifted, in a way that cannot be described in words. The feeling was from a different world.

I came from Kfar Chabad, where *hakafos* were always an exciting event, possibly even the highlight of the year. Yet nothing could have prepared me for

the Rebbe's *hakafos*. The Rebbe's face shone with an otherworldly glow; his face radiated *simcha*.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: Although the Rebbe danced with Rashag, he would look around and connect with every person there. The Rebbe would even look under the tables of the *ches* (where there were usually children) and to all directions and corners of 770 to see every single person, twenty, thirty rows back. Everyone felt included.

If you didn't make eye contact the first time, you could wait for the Rebbe to circle around once more. With his eyes, the Rebbe drew every single

person into the dancing, and every single person felt uplifted.

K'vakoras ro'eh edro, the Rebbe, like a shepherd, looked after each and every one of us.

The crush around the Rebbe's place was unbearable. People would come armed with pillows and cushions so they wouldn't be crushed from the mass of people converging towards the *ches* around the Rebbe's *hakafos*.

Rabbi Gopin: In truth, this amazing *tziyur* of what went on during the Rebbe's *hakafa* is simply indescribable!

One Shemini Atzeres night, I noticed the Rebbe looking at a certain individual standing on the bleachers. It was an Israeli *bochur* who was a bit troubled and couldn't "find himself" spiritually. During every round, the Rebbe looked at him directly.

The following night, the *bochur* made sure to stand close, near the *ches*; members of the *vaad hamesader* wanted to throw him out, but he stubbornly held on tight and refused to budge. When the Rebbe came to the middle, the Rebbe acknowledged him with a nod of his head, and over time, the *bochur* stabilized in his Yiddishkeit.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: As Rashag grew older, dancing at *hakafos* became very difficult for him, yet he made incredible effort to be present and keep the *hakafa* going for as long as he possibly could. Nevertheless, the Rebbe kept the *hakafa* short so as not to strain him; not longer than two-three minutes.

One year, in 5741, Rashag was ill, and he wasn't at *hakafos*. We all wondered what the Rebbe would do. How would *hakafos* look? This had never happened before.

When the Rebbe arrived at the *ches*, he recited the *pesukim*, and then proceeded to dance on his own. It was an unbelievable sight. The Rebbe held the *sefer Torah* by the two *atzei chayim*, and rhythmically danced with it to the song, lifting it and lightly pointing it out towards the Chassidim.

Instead of making quick circles, the Rebbe remained in one place, slowly turning from side to side and "dancing with" each side of 770. The Rebbe danced with his hands, feet, with his whole being; it was an amazing, uplifting sight.

This *hakafa* lasted much longer than usual; without rushing, the Rebbe looked out in every direction, and "gave" the Torah to every single person present. This *hakafa* was truly different from any previous year.

Rabbi Shapiro: After that year, Rashag again participated in all of the *hakafos*, until 5748. From that year onward, the Rebbe once again danced on his own just as he had in 5741. Once again, the *hakafa* lasted much longer than usual; in 5748, it lasted 15-20 minutes.

As mentioned earlier, in the last few years, a high *bima* was erected within the *ches* and the Rebbe would go up after concluding the *pesukim*. Then, nobody was left out; everyone was able to see and participate.

Middle Hakafos

Then, following the hakafa, the Rebbe would return to the front of the shul.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: During the middle *hakafos*, the Rebbe would turn around to the crowd and encourage the singing with his arms. Each *hakafa* was full of *simcha*; the Rebbe danced up and down, swinging his hands in all directions and clapping to the *niggunim*. The Rebbe would keep everyone going with a *moirediker shturem*.

In general, the Rebbe would often encourage the *ziknei hachassidim*. As mentioned earlier, they would stand in a narrow area that would be opened only on Simchas Torah between the Rebbe's place and the south wall, where they had their own benches and bleachers. The Rebbe would turn to them often and encourage them to dance stronger and stronger (although they were elderly, many of them were actually younger than the Rebbe himself.)

There were times when the Rebbe would single out special groups to receive a *hakafa*; for example, in 5732 the Rebbe honored all of the new Russian immigrants, and in 5737 the Rebbe gave a *hakafa* to the guests from Chevron. However, these were exceptions, as usually the Rebbe was not involved in distributing the *hakafos*.

Rabbi Gopin: From his place at the front, the Rebbe would look around the entire room; he would pay attention to every corner and look at

every single person. Everyone danced with the same enthusiasm and inspiration, being totally transformed by the Rebbe's *simcha*.

Rabbi Shapiro: From my place at the front of the shul, you couldn't hear the regular *hakafa* proceedings. The honorees would begin a *niggun*, and then the Rebbe would turn around to the crowd and once again encourage the singing.

The Rebbe would dance very lively, and he would often urge and encourage specific people. For example, I remember the Rebbe motioning to Reb Yisroel Duchman, intimating that he looked sleepy. The Rebbe put his hand to his face and shook his face back and forth, as if he's sleeping.

After 5738, Dr. Ira Weiss would receive special attention quite often. The Rebbe would stretch out his arm while holding his pulse and smiling, as if to reassure him that his health was alright.

One time, there was a prominent person from the Jewish Theological Seminary at *hakafos*, and he was positioned right near the Rebbe's place. The Rebbe gave him a lot of attention; at one point, he asked the Rebbe why there was such a *balagan*, and the Rebbe replied that it was always like that in Lubavitch during *hakafos*.

On Simchas Torah night, some people would say *l'chaim* to the Rebbe as well.

With the Children

In 5741, the Rebbe announced the founding of Tzivos Hashem⁷ during Sukkos, and throughout Yom Tov, he had given the children special attention. On Shemini Atzeres, this all came to a head. At the fifth *hakafa*, the Rebbe announced that all children should come into the middle of the shul, and he would conduct the *hakafa* together with them.

Children began streaming from all sides of 770 to the *ches*. The Rebbe came with his *sefer Torah* and began dancing among the children, and often lowered the *sefer Torah* to give us the opportunity to kiss it. The Rebbe's face radiated; he was beaming and smiling, it was an amazing sight.

For the younger children (including myself), it was a very intense experience. We were crushed by the older kids, and many of us felt quite lost; a number of children were crying. But still, it was an

amazing *hakafa* and the Rebbe repeated it the next night as well.

During *Aleinu*, back at the front of the shul, the Rebbe motioned to us but I didn't understand what he wanted. The Rebbe turned to Rabbi Groner and asked that all children join him on the *bima* for the rest of davening, and that is what we did.

The Seventh Hakafa

Before the seventh hakafa, the gabbai would once again announce that they are honoring the Rebbe and the Rebbe would be given the sefer Torah.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: The seventh *hakafa* was similar to the first. The Rebbe would make his way to the middle where he would dance with Rashag, and in the later years, himself.

At his *hakafos*, the Rebbe would sing the famous *hakafos niggun*. (In the later years the Rebbe started Harav Levi Yitzchok's *hakafos niggun* instead. –ed)

Once again, 770 would be electrified; the singing and dancing grew stronger and stronger, and the Rebbe would face each direction and “dance” with every single person present. If the spirit of the middle *hakafos* was a bit less than earlier on, now the uplifting feeling returned in full force.

Rabbi Shapiro: The most memorable *hakafos* in my recollection is Shemini Atzeres 5748. The Rebbe was extraordinarily *b'simcha*, and his *hakafos* lasted very long. As he returned to his place at the conclusion of the seventh *hakafa*, we suddenly learned that it wasn't over yet. The Rebbe turned around holding the *sefer Torah*, and began three separate *niggunim*, in essence adding a full eighth *hakafa*. The Rebbe was jumping and dancing with tremendous enthusiasm as we all tried to keep up.

While Shemini Atzeres *hakafos* usually lasted until about 10:30 (they began at nine o'clock), that year it lasted until 12:30 a.m. I remember someone that had been present at *hakafos* since 5713 saying that he never experienced a *hakafos* like that in his life.

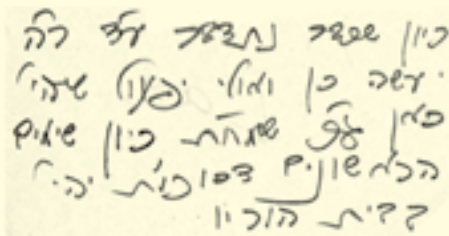
Aleinu L'shabeiach

Rabbi Shapiro: When the Rebbe returned to his place at the conclusion of *hakafos*, the crowd would



MOTZOEI SIMCHAS TORAH 5750, LEVI FREIDIN via JEM 153219

Stay Here for Simchas Torah



TEXT OF THE REBBE'S RESPONSE IN HIS HOLY HANDWRITING TO A BOCHUR WHO WROTE THAT FOR ROSH HASHONAH AND YOM KIPPUR HE WILL REMAIN IN YESHIVA, NEAR THE REBBE, AND FOR SUKKOS HE PLANS TO BE AT HOME:

“כיון שכבר נתדבר ע”ד [על-דבר] ר”ה [ראש-השנה] יעשה כן ואולי יפעול שיהי’ כאן ג”כ שמח”ת [גם כן שמחת-תורה]. כיון שימים הראשונים דסוכות יהי’ בבית הוריו.”

“SINCE YOU ALREADY HAVE COME TO A CONCLUSION REGARDING ROSH HASHANAH, YOU SHOULD DO SO [AS YOU HAVE DECIDED]. PERHAPS YOU CAN ACCORD TO BE HERE FOR SIMCHAS TORAH AS WELL, SINCE FOR THE FIRST DAYS OF SUKKOS YOU WILL BE AT YOUR PARENTS’ HOME.”

sing *Aleinu* and *Al Tira* in camp style, still on a high from *hakafos*.

I recall how once before *Aleinu*, the Rebbe told Chazan Moshe Teleshevsky to sing the “*Yehi Ratzon*” preceding *Sheyibaneh Beis Hamikdosh*. He told the Rebbe that there was too much noise, but the Rebbe motioned with his hands, as if to say, “It doesn’t matter, do it anyway.”

In 5742, as the Rebbe was leaving *hakafos*, he stopped at the bottom of the steps and announced, “*Daloy golus*, enough golus,” three times.

Rabbi Gopin: *Hakafos* were over, and the Rebbe would leave to the song of *V’samachta*. The elation at that moment cannot be described in words. The feeling that the Rebbe’s *hakafos* left us with was one that didn’t allow you to leave. When the Rebbe left the room, nobody moved; everyone continued singing and dancing, and we felt that the Rebbe brought us into a higher world. This wasn’t a feeling that only the *bochurim* felt; even regular *baalei batim* and older folks felt this way. The dancing would continue through the rest of the night.

If you weren’t dancing, you were participating in a *farbrengen*. I remember Reb Mendel Futerfas *farbrenging* throughout the night. The atmosphere was from a different planet.

Each year was a different Simchas Torah. No two *hakafos* were the same; each year had a special *koch* and uniqueness.

The thought that the Rebbe had invested so much effort and revealed so much for his Chassidim simply put us in a different world.

Simchas Torah Night

Mincha on Shemini Atzeres would take place earlier than usual as most of the Chassidim would then leave on tahalucha.

Rabbi Tenenbaum: On the night of Simchas Torah, the *hakafos* were preceded by *tahalucha*⁸ and the Rebbe’s *farbrengen*, which occurred simultaneously. Every *bochur* knew that his place was at the *tahalucha*, but nevertheless it was a very painful concept, a real *mesiras nefesh* (which the Rebbe acknowledged as well).

Maariv would be held in the *zal* upstairs due to the very small crowd, and the *farbrengen* would begin at nine o’clock, lasting until around twelve. Some *bochurim* would go to nearby shuls to return quickly, but the Rebbe called them “smart boys”⁹ (not in the positive sense). Most of us were only present at the last hour or so of the *farbrengen*.

These *farbrengens* were very special, held in the spirit of Simchas Torah leading up to *hakafos*. The Rebbe would say deep and *geshmacke sichos*, often explaining the deeper meaning of the *pesukim* of *Ata Hareisa*.

Rabbi Shapiro: In 5752, the Rebbe stood up to dance while we sang “*Zol shoyn zein di geulah*,” for over ten minutes!¹⁰

When the Rebbe would explain *Ata Hareisa*, he would read them out of the enlarged copies that he used during *hakafos* (in the later years). Although in general the Rebbe didn’t often cry openly in the later years, I clearly remember a Simchas Torah night *farbrengen* when the Rebbe reached the *possuk* of “*Vayehi binsoa ha’aron*,” and he stopped, and began to cry.

“*Vayehi binsoa ha’aron vayomer Moshe*,” the Rebbe said. “*A Yid zol vis’n zein, az vu a Yid geit, geit mit em der aron*—Every Jew should know that wherever he goes, the *aron* goes along with him.”¹¹

That powerful image has remained with me until today.

Rabbi Gopin: In 5730, Reb Heishke Gansburg's wife passed away on the second day of Sukkos, leaving him with five orphans. He was a *baal menagen* and he would begin the *niggunim* at the Rebbe's farbrengen, but at the beginning of this farbrengen he wasn't present.

He arrived towards the end, and after the *sicha*, he began to sing "Iy vadye..." which means "We will not be deterred, whether by fire or water." The Rebbe jumped up and pushed his chair back, and danced with a *moirediker chayus*. The atmosphere was electrifying.

At the end of the farbrengen, the Rebbe would tell the *gabbai* to announce the *sefer*, and he would often comment and correct him, all in the Simchas Torah style.

Then, as soon as the Rebbe left, the shul would be emptied and they would begin reorganizing the room for *hakafos* once again.

The *hakafos* would begin at one thirty (in the later years, at one o'clock) in the morning, and usually, they were more *lebedik* than the *hakafos* of


Shemini Atzeres. The Rebbe was in a more serious mode on Shemini Atzeres, whereas on Simchas Torah he was extremely *b'simcha*.

Rabbi Shapiro: One unique feature of that night was the delegation from the Israeli consulate. They didn't keep the second day of Yom Tov, so they would drive to 770 and the Rebbe would speak to them, sometimes before *Ata Hareisa*, often for quite a long time. Standing together with them would always be Reb Gershon Ber Jacobson and several others.

Daytime Hakafos

Hakafos on Simchas Torah night would usually end at about 3 in the morning, leaving only a few hours until another uplifting hakafos...

Rabbi Tenenbaum: The day-time *hakafos* had a special feel to them, because much fewer people were present. This was certainly the case when the Rebbe entered the shul for *shacharis*; only a few hundred people would be present, and there was a very *heimishe* feeling. I remember times when



Every bochur knew that his place was at the *tahalucha*, but nevertheless it was a real *mesiras nefesh*.



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specifically those *hakafos* turned out to be the most *lebedik*. This time, the Rebbe would be dancing in his tallis, which often needed to be readjusted, and the sight was similar to that of Napoleon’s March on Motzoei Yom Kippur, a very special *tziyur*.

Aside from the fact that only one *hakafa* was held, the *hakafos* were the same as the night before. The Rebbe would recite the entire first round of *Ata Hareisa*, and in between each round he would turn around and begin a *lebediker niggun*.

Rabbi Shapiro: Before and throughout *hakafos*, people would be saying *l’chaim* to the Rebbe. The *chazzan* for *shacharis* was usually Reb Yisroel Duchman, and he would “open the festivities” with a grand *kiddush* on *mashke*, announcing his “*shehakol nihya bidvaro*” with a bang.

Once, Reb Yisroel was walking with the *sefer Torah* while quite inebriated, and the Rebbe called out, “*Mach pavolye, du haltzt doch a sefer Torah—*

walk slowly, you are holding a *sefer torah*.” He didn’t hear what the Rebbe said, so the Rebbe repeated himself with a wide smile.

When taking out the *sifrei Torah* for *kriah*, Reb Yisroel would hold the Torah facing the crowd and announce, “*Echad Elokeinu*,” then he would turn towards the Rebbe and declare with a flourish, “*Gadol adoneinu...*”

This was the type of thing that could only occur on Simchas Torah. The Rebbe would look around and talk to certain people; the atmosphere was one in which the Rebbe showed a closeness that we didn’t see throughout the year, and Chassidim reciprocated the feeling.

For the actual *hakafa*, the Rebbe would go to the middle of the shul with Rashag once again. In the later years when Rashag wasn’t present, the *hakafa* could last quite a while—ten or fifteen minutes straight. Also, when they would return the *sefer*



Torah to the aron and sing the customary “*Sisu V’simchu*,” the Rebbe would encourage the singing very strongly while continuously adjusting the talis.

At *krias haTorah* the Rebbe would always receive *chosson Bereishis*, together with the Frierdiker Rebbe. The custom was that the *gabbai* would say the Rebbe and Frierdiker Rebbe’s names in addition to the regular “*Ya’amod adonenu moreinu v’rabeinu*.” The fact that the Rebbe and Frierdiker Rebbe would be called for an *aliya* together always made it a very special and emotional time. You could hear a pin drop in 770 at that moment.

Rabbi Gopin: During *krias haTorah*, it is customary that every person receive an *aliya*. In the early years, I remember times when the Rebbe personally directed people to receive *aliyos*. (When the crowd grew too large, each person would remain in his place and have his neighbor call him up to the Torah instead.)

The atmosphere was very *heimish*, as mentioned before. I remember once, when *krias haTorah* was being disturbed by the *balagan*, the Rebbe called out “*Sha, shtiller...*” three times.

Daytime Farbrengen

Simchas Torah was not over. A few hours after davening, the Rebbe joined the Chassidim once again for a long farbrengen.

Rabbi Gopin: *Mincha* would again be held upstairs in the small *zal*, as the large shul was being arranged for the farbrengen, but even that was held in the Simchas Torah atmosphere.

In 5733, the Rebbe walked in, jumped onto his chair, and began encouraging the *niggun* “*Al Haselah Hoch*.”¹² That was the general atmosphere of Simchas Torah; the Rebbe’s entire *hanhaga* was different, in a way that is difficult to describe in words.

After an exhilarating forty-eight hours in the Rebbe’s presence, Simchas Torah would conclude with a farbrengen. These were long, *geshmake* farbrengens; the Rebbe’s *sichos* were profound, and the *niggunim* would be conducted with a *Simchas Torah’ diker* atmosphere. This farbrengen was always a long one, lasting from before *shkia* until around one o’clock in the morning.

When Simchas Torah would occur on Erev Shabbos, the Rebbe would stop eating and saying *l’chaim* from *shkia* time, and when the farbrengen would conclude, we would proceed with Kabbalas Shabbos. The next day, the Rebbe would hold two farbrengens, one as the regular Shabbos Mevarchim farbrengen, and the second, close to *shkia* time, as a continuation to the Simchas Torah farbrengen. At this farbrengen’s conclusion, (following *birkas hamazon*, *maariv*, and *havdala*), the Rebbe would distribute *kos shel bracha*.

Keeping in mind that we also attended the regular *tefillos* and Tehillim for Shabbos Mevarchim, we would ultimately be in 770 for 20 hours straight (until the wee hours of the morning), aside from a short break or two to grab a bite. Over the three days, the Rebbe spent literally dozens of hours with Chassidim.

Rabbi Shapiro: After *bentching*, the Rebbe would daven *maariv*, recite *havdala*, and distribute *kos*

Over the three days, the Rebbe spent literally dozens of hours with Chassidim.

shel bracha. This wasn't the only occasion that the Rebbe held *kos shel bracha* distributions, but it was definitely the longest and most *lebedik*. The Rebbe would also give out bottles of *mashke* to certain individuals (until 5749 or 5750), and the *chaluka* would often last until three or four in the morning.

Shacharis the next morning would be only a few hours away. Reb Pinyeh Korf would ask us, "Were you by *shacharis* of Isru Chag?" That was a special achievement.

Rabbi Gopin: In conclusion, it would not be a stretch to say that over the forty eight hours of Simchas Torah, the Rebbe came down to our level and lifted us to a higher plane. This was, in essence, a period of *hamelech basadeh*, the king in the field, when every Chossid felt a closeness and connection that we didn't feel any other time of the year. The *chizuk* and *hashpa'a* that we received then was unparalleled.

The Rebbe's *hashpa'a* on Simchas Torah was a spiritual force, which brought an elation and a feeling that transcended time and space.

About Moshe Rabbeinu it is said: "*maasei Moshe nitzchiyim heim*—the work of Moshe is everlasting." The Rebbe, our *nossi* is *nitzchi*, and all of his *inyonim* are *nitzchiyim*.

It is clear that the Rebbe continues to celebrate *hakafos* with us. Simchas Torah is the Rebbe's *ushpiz*, and is our opportunity to reconnect and lift ourselves higher, just as we were then.

And it's our job not to keep the inspiration for ourselves; we bring the Rebbe's *ruach* to the *hakafos* wherever we are. In my Chabad House, the first and last *hakafos* are dedicated to the Rebbe; we sing the Rebbe's *hakafos niggunim*, and I attempt to share with them a bit of the Rebbe's Simchas Torah.

The Rebbe writes that the power of memory is such that by reawakening occurrences in one's mind, it can transport the person to the original place and



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time of the occurrence.¹³ Hearing and sharing these stories of Simchas Torah with the Rebbe have the power to uplift us above and beyond the confines of the *gashmiyus'dike* world, until we realize that today as well—we dance with the Rebbe on Simchas Torah. And the Rebbe, for his part, showers us with all the *brachos* and *hashpa'os* of his special day.

May we merit to dance with the Rebbe on this Simchas Torah—in the physical sense as well—*l'mata meiasara tefachim*, with the *geulah shleima teikef umiyad Mamosh!* **1**

1. Sichas Leil Hoshana Rabba 5752.
2. The words *kesivah vachasima tovah* were added to the tune in 5749. Until then, it was sung without words.
3. See Derher Tammuz 5776, p. 58.
4. See Likutei Torah Nitzavim 48b.
5. For more about Rosh Hashana by the Rebbe, see "*Rosh Hashana by the Rebbe*" Derher Tishrei 5777.
6. To read the fascinating story of the Rebbe's small *Sefer Torah*, see "*The Rebbe's Sefer Torah*" Derher Tishrei 5773.
7. See "*On the Front Lines*" Derher Adar 5777.
8. For more about *tahalucha*, see "*Tahalucha*" Derher Sivan 5776.
9. Shavuot 5744. Hisvaaduyot 5744 vol. 3 page 1932.
10. For a description of this Simchas Torah, see "*Leben Mitten Rebben*" Derher Tishrei 5775.
11. Leil Simchas Torah 5751, Hisvaaduyot 5751 vol. 1 page 183.
12. For a vivid description of this occurrence from Rabbi Meir Shneur, see Derher Tishrei 5776 p. 16.
13. Michtav Kloli 11 Nissan 5713.