



DANCING AND CRYING

TISHREI IN THE PRESENCE OF
HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK



לעילוי נשמת
ר' יצחק ליב
בן ר' חיים אהרן ע"ה
בלאק
נלב"ע ערב חגה"ס י"ד תשרי ה'תשע"ח
תנ"צ'ב'ה'

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Hakafos in Yekaterinoslav, at the home of the rav, Harav Levi Yitzchok, was a momentous and unforgettable event for anyone who was *zoche* to attend. Years later, children from Yekaterinoslav would account their childhood visits to “the rav’s” house as a highlight of their warm, old-country memories, moments of genuine happiness and warmth in the cold and trying years of Czarist and then Communist Russia.

What stands out in these auspicious moments of the month of Tishrei in the presence of Harav Levi Yitzchok and Rebbetzin Chana was not just the extreme devotion, reverence, and joy that was exhibited throughout these special occasions. Nor was it just their acceptance of, and commitment to, the thousands of local Yidden and refugees from all over, spanning all stripes and backgrounds. Rather, it is the courage and determination that they displayed in the unique and demanding circumstances that beset them and the Jewish community, under the Bolshevik hammer in Yekaterinoslav and in the dank Russian prison cell, and following that, out in the central-Asian wasteland, exiled from their home and distanced from their flock.

A hint of this sentiment can be seen in a letter that Rebbetzin Chana received from two not-entirely-frum *chazanim* (see below, Tishrei 5695*) who spent the month of Tishrei in Yekaterinoslav in 5695*. They described their impression of *hakafos* by Harav Levi Yitzchok: “This is the first time in our lives we’ve witnessed a phenomenon like the rav of Yekaterinoslav, who even as he rejoiced on Yom Tov with extraordinarily joyous dancing was weeping with indescribable tears. Yet the tears impelled him to dance even more energetically!”

This unyielding spirit that Harav Levi Yitzchok lived by, served as an inspiration to everyone that

encountered him, both in his home town and on the road, and stirred many wandering and troubled Jews towards *teshuvah*.

Yekaterinoslav

The Yomim Tovim of Tishrei, serving as the head of the year in gravity, awe, and elation were quintessential moments in Harav Levi Yitzchok’s leadership and personal *hanhaga*.¹

Rebbetzin Chana described the respect and sympathy shown to her by the city’s Yidden after she returned from visiting Harav Levi Yitzchok in prison, noting that they fenced off Harav Levi Yitzchok’s seat in shul out of reverence, and continued to pay his salary. The greatest respect, though, is seen specifically in the impression Harav Levi Yitzchok left on the *kehillah*, as Rebbetzin Chana writes in her *zichronos*:

“During the years before his arrest, there had been some machlokes between him and some congregants concerning the nusach of the tefillos, tekias shofar on Rosh Hashanah even during the silent Musaf, holding hakafos on the nights of both Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, and the like. Now, however, there were no differing opinions, and everything was conducted as if my husband was still present. Even his greatest erstwhile opponents now proclaimed that the rav’s wishes, whatever they were, should be followed.

“Later, when I related all this to my husband, he was deeply gratified and pleased with this report.

“Now the congregation and the chazan sang all the Yom Tov tunes that my husband would use for the prayers, and on Simchas Torah sang the niggunim he used to sing.”

Harav Levi Yitzchok’s imprint on the Yidden that he led can be found in numerous memoirs of Yekaterinoslav natives, who wrote longingly of their experiences with Harav Levi Yitzchok



RABBI PINCHOS GELMAN WHO FOR MANY YEARS SHARED THE POSITION OF RAV IN YEKATERINOSLAV WITH HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK.

and his family. The “rav’s house” is remembered as the beating heart of Yiddishkeit and Yidden in the city.

And undoubtedly, there is no period more fondly reminisced than the Yomim Tovim of Tishrei in his holy presence.

The Proletarian Minyan

In Rebbetzin Chana’s memoirs, she describes the happenings of Tishrei 5695*. This Tishrei was several years after the Communists took over, and at this point, the weight of the Soviet suppression of Yiddishkeit, both in feeling and in practice, was heavily felt by the Yidden in the city. The effects of the Bolshevik revolution impacted the *kehillah* from within just as from without.

Rebbetzin Chana describes the shul that remained open through this turbulent period, where Harav Levi Yitzchok davened during this specific *tekufah*:

“There were only two small shuls left in Dnepropetrovsk [the city’s new name], one at the edge of town and the other at the center. The latter had not been confiscated by the government because

its founders and congregants were working-class craftsmen.

"My husband, the rav, attended this shul. The gabbai was a tailor, the treasurer was a shoemaker, and most of the congregants practiced similar trades. These officials presided over their small 'kingdom,' which was then well within their capability.

"When the rav began attending the shul, he attracted new congregants from a more diverse background, and the administration soon found it too difficult to continue managing the shul. They had to remain at their posts, however, to ensure that the shul retained its strictly 'proletarian' character. Various amusing anecdotes could be told about how they operated the shul, but they aren't important enough to record.

"They declared their great deference and absolute respect for the rav. He had not been well-known to them until then, but when they got to know him, they agreed that he seemed to be 'a very fine Jew' who apparently wasn't close with the 'bourgeoisie,' and therefore could be fully trusted."

Rebbetzin Chana proceeds to explain how there were still chazananim around who were able to lead the tefillos on the Yomim Noraim, and what had brought them to Dnepropetrovsk and to Harav Levi Yitzchok:

"Virtually no practicing chazananim were left in the Soviet Union by then. Yet some Jews with a flair for Jewish music were familiar with the traditional nusach tunes of the Yom Tov tefillos and served as chazananim during the month of Tishrei. As employees of the government, they were entitled to one month's vacation a year. Accordingly, they scheduled their vacation for the month of Tishrei. They generally wouldn't remain in their home towns but traveled to other cities seeking an appointment to lead the tefillos in a shul.

"Expressed in these chazananim's prayers was their full year of pent-up,

deep-seated feelings.

"Two such chazananim came from Moscow to Yekaterinoslav for the Yomim Noraim and Sukkos. One was an opera singer, one of the theater's best performers. He dressed and looked like a typical stage performer.

"Accompanying him was another man who was more like a traditional shliach tzibbur. A bookkeeper at a government concern, he was a talented singer, and was also Torah-literate. He descended from the rav of Slavita.

"The performer, if I remember correctly, was a descendant of Reb Avraham 'the Malach,' who is buried in Fastov, near Kiev. His surname was Lieber, which he said was also his grandfather's family name.

"As a performer, his face was cosmetically made up and didn't sport even a mustache. But he would tell stories he heard from his grandfather and chasidische stories in general, with the 'broken heart' of a veteran Chossid.

"Both chazananim related that they had wanted to spend this month, which is filled with prayers, and its attendant inspiring atmosphere, in a traditional Jewish environment. While in Moscow, they heard of the rav's comportment in face of that era's difficulties and they decided to travel to Yekaterinoslav for

that month.

"Upon arriving, they visited my husband to seek his advice on how to secure paid positions as chazananim while at the same time using their talents to arouse and reinforce Jewish feelings—which the regime was trying to extinguish. 'That,' they explained, 'is why we have come to you, the rav.'

"Indeed, they were hired to lead the prayers of the Yomim Noraim and Sukkos in the shul where my husband davened.

"My writing abilities are far insufficient to describe our shul's inspiring atmosphere and the outpouring of the soul expressed there on those holy days under the influence of the rav and these two chazananim."

As this was the shul of the proletariat working class and they were under Soviet rule, many Yidden unfortunately went to work on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Unfazed, Harav Levi Yitzchok set up the minyan in a way that everybody would be able to attend and take part in the tefillos:

"Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur fell on weekdays when the congregants were required to report for work. My husband arranged an early 'first minyan' which completed its services by 8:00 a.m., after which its participants went straight to



A RECENT PHOTO OF JEWS GATHERED INSIDE THE SHUL IN DNEPROPETROVSK WHERE THE REBBE'S FATHER WAS RAV AND DAVENED. THE SHUL WAS CONFISCATED BY THE COMMUNISTS IN 5695* AND WAS RESTORED TO ITS ORIGINAL LOOK AFTER IT WAS RETURNED TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

work.

“On Yom Kippur, however, they didn’t go home after work but returned to shul in time for Ne’ilah. For this tefilah, the shul was overcrowded, with many forced to stand outside. Everyone was exhausted from the fast and from having walked long distances. The physical strain was in addition to the spiritual agony from their awareness of the exalted day on which they had had to work, besides the heartbreakingly emotional prayers of the chazanim—all this was indescribable.

“The mispaleleim expressed heartfelt thanks to my husband for making it possible for them to participate in congregational prayers on the Yomim Noraim, despite the early hour.

“Copious tears poured down my husband’s face as they spoke to him about this. Deriving intense satisfaction from their spiritual inspiration, he would comment with joy, ‘Oh, how special Yidden are!’

“We were afraid to discuss such subjects very much. But my husband was pleased to have accomplished all this.”

Harav Levi Yitzchok, who wouldn’t allow his community to not follow halacha, arranged with the chazanim that the tefillos would conclude only after the fast was over, ensuring that nobody would be *nichshal* in breaking the fast. Harav Levi Yitzchok stood up for this even against the blatant discontent from many of his *mispaleleim*:

“Beginning after midday on Yom Kippur, my husband would diplomatically arrange the length of time the remaining services would take so that they should not end too early, for that would enable the congregants to leave for home and break their fast before it was over. Among the congregants were various types [from more frum to less so, and many wanted to break their fast as early as possible]. Other shuls in town finished much earlier, and to ensure that the same shouldn’t happen here, my husband arranged with the chazan

to stretch out the previous tefillos so that no time was left for singing during Neilah.

“One of the congregants, a craftsman who considered himself—and was so considered by others—a talmid chacham, became so incensed that my husband was keeping the congregation later than at other shuls, that he spoke out angrily against him. His audacity was somewhat mitigated by the fact that his outburst took place not at the front, eastern end of the shul [where the rav sat and the chazan led the tefillos], but near the exit. He pointed out that the rav was a descendant of a revolutionary against the government, who was imprisoned for sowing divisiveness, and now, like his ancestor, the rav was doing the same!

“All this was a great strain upon my husband. Even the finer congregants were unhappy with his extending the length of the davening, although they kept it to themselves. The more common elements, however, expressed their dissatisfaction openly. Yet my husband was truly gratified by what he was doing, although it was something he had to enforce, because—as he always said—he had accomplished that Jews should not do what was forbidden [breaking their fast when it was still Yom Kippur].”

The Rebbetzin goes on to describe Motzei Yom Kippur with Harav Levi Yitzchok. This is less of a look at his leadership, but more a peek into Harav Levi Yitzchok’s personal *hanhagah* and *avodah*.

“When my husband would return home after Yom Kippur, he couldn’t easily settle back into the everyday mundane existence. After coming home quite late in the evening, he drank only a glass of tea. Then he remained sitting, still garbed in his kittel and the gartel of his great-great-grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek, to lead a *farbrengen* until two or three o’clock in the morning.

“This was his regular *minhag* on Motzei Yom Kippur, both when Jewish



YESHAYAHU SHER

life had been less constricted and later when Judaism could be practiced almost solely within the confines of one’s own home.

“Some of our friends were aware of my husband’s custom and they would eat a quick evening meal with their families before coming to our home. My husband would deliver a *maamar* on subjects connected with the tefillos of Yom Kippur. In later years he spoke about the great qualities of Yidden, their *mesiras nefesh* to observe *Yiddishkeit*, and how they expressed their love towards other Yidden in that difficult era.

“Ten or fifteen people always attended this *farbrengen*, which included dancing as enthusiastically as on *Simchas Torah*.”

Hakafos at the Rav’s Home

Following the passion-filled Yomim Noraim that Harav Levi Yitzchok led for the many Yidden of the city, came the joyous days of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres, culminating in *hakafos* at the rav’s own home, which took place on the evening of Simchas Torah.

Yeshayahu Sher, a native son of Yekatrinoslav who later moved to Eretz Yisroel as a writer and educator, relates in his memoirs recollections

of the inspiring Simchas Torahs of his youth:

"I returned from hakafof in the Choral Shul and came right over to the rav's house. Before my eyes, I saw a great number of Chassidim twirling in circles of dance and song, an engulfing joy like this I have not known till today."

Among the many Chassidim he saw that night, Yeshayahu recalls seeing the Rebbe as a young man rejoicing with the Torah. This vision remained with him throughout his entire life:

"Before my eyes I observed the divine sight of Chassidim seeped with devotion and exhilaration, some dancing quite professionally on the tables and benches. Between the dancing Chassidim, I saw the rav's eldest son Menachem Mendel. The young and revered rav [see sidebar] was also dancing on the table, and he was singing joyous tunes from the Baal Hatanya and other Rebbes. (This Menachem Mendel is today's Lubavitcher Rebbe.) I walked out heading home inspired and excited, even though I myself was a son to a family of misnagdim."

Yeshayahu was just one of the multitudes of young and old, men and women, who stopped by Harav Levi Yitzchok's Simchas Torah *hakafof*. Yidden from all walks of life, bridging all political affiliations, found themselves drawn to Harav Levi Yitzchok. Chassidim and *misnagdim*, observant and not.

When Harav Levi Yitzchok was arrested in 5699* by a group of Soviet officials who audaciously took apart the home and rummaged through Harav Levi Yitzchok's possessions, Rebbetzin Chana recognized one of these insolent officials as a local Yid who only months earlier was a guest in their home and a participant in the Simchas Torah celebration.

While there may have been some guests who would not repay Harav Levi Yitzchok's hospitality in kind, a loyal friend was also formed one

Simchas Torah night. Dr. Landman served as a senior surgeon in a government hospital and took his vacation for the month of Tishrei. He traveled to Yekaterinoslav to celebrate in the famed rav's presence and to be uplifted by Harav Levi Yitzchok's Yom Tov and Simchas Torah, which he proceeded to do with great joy, igniting in his Yiddishe heart a flame of *kedusha* and gratitude.

Years later, in 5706*, Rebbetzin Chana was in the village of Kraskovo near Moscow, and since she was lacking legal registration and holding one of the most infamous last names in Russia, she was forced to find a new place to stay almost every night. Eventually, Rebbetzin Chana traveled to the nearby Malachovka, where Dr. Landman resided. The doctor received Rebbetzin Chana warmly and welcomed her into his home without fear, reminiscing his days in the presence of Harav Levi Yitzchok.

After getting a feel of the impact of Harav Levi Yitzchok's *hakafof* from the perspective of different community members, it is essential to bring the brilliant retelling of the night's energy from Rebbetzin Chana herself, continuing her description of Tishrei 5695*:

"Our spacious apartment had been confiscated by the authorities in 1929 (5689). The small official community that still existed in our city at the time built us an apartment of three small rooms in a privately owned property, because we were not permitted to reside anywhere else."

"Notwithstanding our small apartment, any Yid in the entire city who wished to rejoice on Yom Tov came to our home. After dark, young people would stealthily arrive as well. Due to the cramped conditions and the fact that none of our visitors wanted anyone else to know he was visiting the rav, they all tried to hide from everyone else. They used to visit in small groups, and my

husband spent time with each person separately, so that during the time they spent with him they were able to forget which country they lived in and under whose regime."

"The above-mentioned chazanim were also present. As a result of the Yom Tov tefillos and the farbrengens, the performer's attitude had changed from his original ulterior motive of earning money to a genuine heartfelt expression, which impacted and stirred all the congregants. He declared that his positive transformation was thanks solely to the rav."

"Following the chazanim's departure, I received a letter from them. After thanking me for various things, they wrote: 'This is the first time in our lives we've witnessed a phenomenon like the rav of Yekaterinoslav, who even as he rejoiced on Yom Tov with extraordinarily joyous dancing was weeping with indescribable tears. Yet the tears impelled him to dance even more energetically!'"

Another unique perspective which would be interesting to explore, is that of a Tomim who spent Simchas Torah with Harav Levi Yitzchok.

Reb Meir Itkin was a student in Tomchei Temimim in the small *chassidishe* town Nevel. After a series of arrests had the *bochurim* dispersed to different towns and villages, a group of close to 20 *bochurim* arrived in Yekaterinoslav and set up a small yeshiva in an old shul in the outskirts of the city. The *bochurim* for the most part avoided the center of the city and made sure not to be seen with or near Harav Levi Yitzchok, out of fear of what the authorities might do to either of them.

There were a few exceptions though. On Hoshana Rabba 5690*, Reb Meir went to Harav Levi Yitzchok's home to make the *bracha* on his lulav and stayed in the center of town for Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. Reb Meir described that there was a big farbrengen with a multitude



MRS. VERDINA SHLONSKY LIVED AS A CHILD DOWN THE HALL FROM THE HOME OF HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK AND REBBETZIN CHANA. SHE PUBLISHED HER MEMORIES OF THE SCHNEERSON HOME IN THE 'MAARIV' NEWSPAPER AND TRANSCRIBED THE NOTES TO TWO NIGGUNIM THAT STOOD OUT IN HER MEMORY (ONE OF WHICH IS THE FAMOUS HAKAFOS NIGGUN).

of people and Harav Levi Yitzchok cited the famous line “*Simchas Torah schadt nisht*—Simchas Torah doesn’t harm” [i.e. things that are said and done on Simchas Torah, even if they can cause a negative outcome if done at a regular time, when said on Simchas Torah, they don’t cause harm].

Harav Levi Yitzchok spoke at length to the crowd, and addressed the *bochurim* specifically for close to half an hour, expounding on deep concepts in Kabbalah. Reb Meir recalled one point that Harav Levi Yitzchok made, connecting the two meanings of the word “*prachim*,” flowers, and young men (aged 13 to 20, like *pirchei kehunah*), explaining that a person can truly sprout and grow in the teenage years, after they are already *mechuyav* in mitzvos on the one hand, but before they are really *chayav* in *onshin*.

The divine *simcha* found in all these

descriptions, the boundless joy and the spirited dancing were all set to the tune of the high-spirited “Harav Levi Yitzchok’s *Hakafos Niggun*,” a *niggun* that while traced back to the Alter Rebbe, was sung and popularized by Harav Levi Yitzchok. The Rebbe had a special *chavivus* for this *niggun*, and “Harav Levi Yitzchok’s *Niggun*” became a staple by the Rebbe and Chassidim, not only on Simchas Torah but at countless farbrengens, and in the later years, at almost every farbrengen.

Words of encouragement to the Temimim and words of inspiration to the entire community; an open home for anyone searching for a bit of Chassidishe warmth and personal attention given to each and every visitor; all set to the outstanding rhythm of *simcha* displayed in “Harav Levi Yitzchok’s *Niggun*”; these portrayals provide a glimpse into the uniqueness of Simchas Torah with Harav Levi Yitzchok.

Yom Kippur In Captivity

Harav Levi Yitzchok’s work in Dnepropetrovsk that ultimately led to his arrest, and the ensuing harassment by the authorities that climaxed in his arrest and deportation to the distant and isolated villages of Kazakhstan, have been described at length in “*The Rav of Yekaterinoslav*” [A Chassidisher Derher, Menachem Av 5776].

But after describing Tishrei in Yekaterinoslav, we now take a look at the Yom Kippur of 5700* which Harav Levi Yitzchok spent in prison. This account of Harav Levi Yitzchok on Yom Kippur was told over by a *goyishe* cellmate to Rebbetzin Chana a few weeks after the events took place. This depiction allows us a small peek into Harav Levi Yitzchok’s *avodah* on this special day, with no *minyán*, no Yidden, and no *machzor*, just “*Yisrael*

u’Malka bilchudohi.”

In Rebbetzin Chana’s *zichronos*, she tells of various arrangements she made to ease Harav Levi Yitzchok’s suffering and assist him in celebrating the Yomim Tovim as best as possible:

“*Time passed in this way, until the month of Tishrei arrived. My husband’s turn to receive packages occurred on the day before Rosh Hashanah and on the day before Yom Kippur. This was comforting as I would be able to send him various foods—meat and fish—which would remind him somewhat of Yom Tov at home.*

“*In anticipation of Yom Kippur, I secretly requested from a Jewish doctor that worked there that he pay a visit to my husband. Indeed, late at night after Yom Kippur and havdalah he visited my husband’s cell, handed him a cigarette—quite a treat under the circumstances—and spent some time with him observing how he ate as he broke his fast.*”

Rebbetzin Chana goes on to describe the interesting messenger that arrived from Harav Levi Yitzchok, and his descriptions of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s Yom Kippur *avodah* and of course, his wellbeing:

“*One day, on an afternoon in the month of Cheshvan, a young man entered our home. He ascended the steps, walked into our apartment, and went straight to the dining room. He asked no one for directions; it was as if he knew the house well. The young man seated himself on a chair and introduced himself by asserting that if I breathe a word to anyone about his visit, we will both be in danger!*

“*Rachel, the girl who stayed in our home for many years, was present in the room when the man entered.*

“*—She was so devoted to us that she had pleaded with the NKVD agents that they arrest her and spare the rav, insisting that she will gladly, with all her heart, be imprisoned in his place for the entire term of his sentence.—*

“*When the young man noticed her,*

he said that her presence did not concern him, and proceeded to state that he wished to convey regards from 'Levik Zalmanovitch.' It is impossible to express in writing the feelings that I experienced at that moment...

"He continued: 'Your husband gave me an exact description of your home so that I would not need to ask anyone for directions, and would go unnoticed.

Levik Zalmanovitch was thirty-two days in solitary confinement and on the thirty-third day I was confined to that cell with him.'

"He was a Christian, and an engineer, who was released after six months of incarceration. Before his release, he promised my husband that as soon as he would return home and change out of his prison uniform, he

would bring regards from him. This he did, and immediately came to our home.

"He related that he had spent the month of Tishrei together with my husband. 'As long as I live, I will never forget his Yom Kippur. He wept and cried out aloud the entire day, reciting chapters of Psalms by heart until late at night. He didn't say a single word to me the entire day, and I didn't have the courage to

SELICHOS DURING WORLD WAR I

During World War I, Czar Nikolai II decreed that all Jews living in areas that were close to borders and were "suspect" of the possibility of collaborating with the German side, must uproot and move inland. The harsh decree didn't even leave time for the people to get their things in order, forcing them out of their homes within a 24-hour period. This mass banishment created a huge refugee crisis for the Jewish community across the Russian empire, with a sizable portion of these Jewish refugees exiled from their cities in Poland, Lithuania, and the Baltic states, settling in Yekaterinoslav.

Harav Levi Yitzchok and Rebbetzin Chana (with the help of their children) spearheaded a rescue and relief organization for the thousands. Harav Levi Yitzchok utilized his contacts and his influence with the powerful and the affluent, and Rebbetzin Chana oversaw the provision of food and shelter to the many displaced families.

One of the cruel and antisemitic decrees of the Czar was the order to take two "guarantors" from each community to ensure that none of the Jewish community members would engage in espionage for the German side, leaving no doubt as to what would happen to these "guarantors" if anyone would have the hint of a suspicion against any Jew of collaborating with the Germans.

These "guarantors" were picked up by the authorities and hoisted away to an unknown location. No one was able to contact them or even gain any information as of their whereabouts or wellbeing.

The scared and broken families of these "guarantors" who had just recently been banished from their homes, came crying to Harav Levi Yitzchok begging for help.

Harav Levi Yitzchok pulled every string, using his contacts with the Jewish well-fixed movers and shakers and the local authorities, finally being allowed to visit them. He was then granted permission to send them kosher food and a *sefer Torah*, and then finally arranged for them to be moved to one cell where they would be able to be together. At some point, Harav Levi Yitzchok succeeded in having them moved to a regular home where they were allowed regular visits and relative freedom, aside from two guards that remained on the premises.

The final release of these captive Yidden came after even more tireless work on Harav Levi Yitzchok's part, during the *yemei haselichos* of 5676*.

Harav Levi Yitzchok had these newly-released Yidden over for the first night of *selichos* in the shul across the street from his home. The joy and the gratitude of these few dozen Yidden that were released through Harav Levi Yitzchok's strenuous *hishtadlus* was indescribable.

The words "*Lechayim tovim mimcha nishaer*," were repeated a number of times by the emotional and animated "guarantors," and they pointed to their rescuer, Harav Levi Yitzchok, alluding to Harav Levi Yitzchok's assistance in granting them back their lives.



A JEWISH REFUGEE DURING WORLD WAR I.

initiate a conversation.’

“Later, when we were already in exile, my husband told me that not having a siddur or machzor on that Yom Kippur, he recited what he remembered by heart—which was enough to keep him occupied for the entire day.”

Kazakhstan

The account of Harav Levi Yitzchok’s last years in exile, the many tzaros that he suffered, and the stories of Rebbetzin Chana and the small number of Chassidim that assisted him, can be found in great detail in the aforementioned article. Here, we bring a heartening description of Harav Levi Yitzchok and Rebbetzin Chana’s last two Tishreis in Chi’ili, Kazakhstan, in the years 5703* and 5704*, the latter being Harav Levi Yitzchok’s final Tishrei in this world.

Rebbetzin Chana begins relating the happenings of Tishrei 5704*, contrasting them with those of the previous year, 5703*:

“The Yomim Tovim [Yomim Noraim of 5704*] approached. The previous year [5703*] we had davened on the Yomim Noraim locked inside our room, hidden away so that no one should see us.

“This year, however, the evacuated Jews had rented a room located far from the village center, to hold a minyan there. A Torah scroll had been sent to us from Kzyl-Orda, the regional capital, and a considerable crowd assembled—men and women, young and old, all kinds of Jews.

“My husband gave instructions on how everything should be conducted, and was regularly consulted on various details. He could not oversee all this openly, lest it jeopardize the entire project and place him in particular danger. But he paid no heed to this risk, and it all proceeded without mishap.”

Rebbetzin Chana describes the special unexpected assembly of diverse Yidden that ended up spending Yom

Kippur with Harav Levi Yitzchok the previous year:

“I recall how, on the previous Yom Kippur [5703*], only three of us had davened at our home, the third being the Jewish deportee who stayed with us every Yom Tov. I had brought a single machzor from home. I cannot possibly describe our feelings during those tefillos.

“In the middle of our davening, we noticed a young man trying to look through our window (although it was so well draped by a curtain that nothing was visible outside). We were frightened he might be a spy, and our guest was afraid to let him in. But my husband, zichrono livracha, unlocked the door and invited him in.

“It was a young Jewish deportee from Lithuania. He had no idea what had happened to his parents. He had been drafted here by the authorities for forced labor. A week earlier, while riding with his horse and wagon, he noticed my husband, and ‘saw something special on his face.’ He immediately decided to find out where he lived, so that he could ‘weep next to him on Yom Kippur.’ Over the past week, he had found out our address.

“The young man knew many of the Yom Kippur prayers by heart. He had been afraid to request the whole day off, so he worked until 11:00 a.m., riding around with his horse and wagon, and by 12:00 noon arrived at our address, after changing out of his workday clothes.

“Half an hour later, a frightened Jewish woman showed up. She had fled from Nikolayev with her husband, and living now just four kilometers from our village, had learned that we were living there.

“Her husband had declared that if G-d can so mistreat Jews, he had no desire to pray. But his wife insisted she now wanted to pray more than ever before in her life. She was fasting and had walked the four-kilometer distance, but was afraid to ask for our address,

because visiting a rabbi, especially a deportee, required utmost caution.

“Observing this gathering of Jews praying under such circumstances, each with a bitterly broken heart, I don’t know what else could evoke similar anguish.”

For Sukkos, Harav Levi Yitzchok outwitted the landlord, and managed to set up a sukkah:

“For a sukkah, we paid to build an ante-room to our room—ostensibly for the purpose of preventing cold winter air from blowing straight through our door. When our landlady demanded that we finish the room with a roof, we told her that presently we couldn’t afford it but would do so before the onset of the winter cold.”

Rebbetzin Chana continues describing Simchas Torah of the year 5703*, recounting the deep and emotional hakafof that Harav Levi Yitzchok celebrated alone with Rebbetzin Chana in their small room. Not having a Sefer Torah, Harav Levi Yitzchok conducted the hakafof with a Tanya and a volume of Mishnayos that Rebbetzin Chana managed to get from the Sefardic chacham in Alma Ata.

“We didn’t yet have a Torah in our possession. Our guest who ate his Yom Tov meals with us had found work as a night-watchman and had to spend his nights in the fields guarding the produce, so now he could come only during the day. Thus, only I was present with my husband in our room at night.

“The time of hakafof arrived. It is most difficult for an ordinary person like me to describe my husband’s emotional experience, as was evident on his face. He started reciting the customary pesukim preceding the actual hakafof—‘Ata Horeisa Lodaas Ki Hashem Hu Haelokim, Ein Od Milvado’—using the same tune he used back at home [in Dnepropetrovsk], when he celebrated hakafof in shul together with many hundreds of Jews. The following night, he used to celebrate hakafof in our home



REBBETZIN CHANA AT A WEDDING. CIRCA EARLY 5720'S

with several dozen of those close to him. Whether at shul or at our home, it was not just [his] dancing—it seemed like the very paving stones danced along to his joy.

"Here, too, he enveloped himself with such joy. He recited every verse, and after every circuit he sang and danced, alone, to the niggun known in our hometown as 'the Rav's Niggun.' He circled around in the narrow space in our room between his bed and the table, reciting the verses of the hakafof:

"Zach V'Yashar, Hoshiah Na... Tov U'meitiv Aneinu Be'ynom Kareinu.'

"He wanted this to be pure joy, and his deep emotion was manifest in the words he recited:

"Yodea Machshavos, Hoshiah Na... Loveish Tzedakos, Aneinu Be'ynom Kareinu.'

"This was a most difficult experience for me to endure. Sitting on a wooden stool in the corner, I observed the immensity and intensity of my husband's love of the Torah as he danced away all the seven hakafof.

"Following hakafof on Simchas Torah morning, he recited 'Sisu v'simchu b'Simchas Torah' with similar enthusiasm."

Nearly a year went by with a few developments, resulting in the Tishrei of 5704* being markedly different than the previous years, most noticeably in the fact that Harav Levi Yitzchok was once again able to lead the Yidden around him in the tefillos and hakafof, making this Tishrei an elevating period despite the difficult circumstances:

"This year [5704*], however, there were quite a number of evacuated Jews in our village, forming a small community.

"In Russia, during the month of Tishrei, even non-observant Jews become religiously oriented. Accordingly, people started to visit my husband, recognizing him as a central figure for religious affairs. Each had personal questions and requests. They included Jews from Bessarabia, Poland and many other places. Most were women, because the

Soviet occupational army in Bessarabia had deported entire Jewish families and, on their journey into exile, had separated women from their husbands, so now they were asking for help in locating their husbands. Everyone's heart was utterly broken by their experiences.

"An exception was some evacuees from Moscow and similar cities, who were gratified that they had been spared from the danger of the war zone and had even managed to bring some of their possessions—which they immediately traded on the market. But they, too, found the cramped conditions, the primitive state of the homes, and the poor climate very difficult to tolerate.

"Many of the younger evacuees found employment in various concerns. But they were regarded with envy and lived in constant state of anxiety.

"From all these Jews, a large group assembled for tefillos of the Yomim Noraim. None were qualified to serve as a chazan, baal koreh, or baal tokeia. They were simple Jews and not Torah observant. We had received a sefer Torah, and I had brought a shofar from home. Since there was no one else, my husband performed all these functions himself. He performed it all with such deep emotion—'kol atzmosai tomarna'—for he hadn't had the benefit of such prayer for five years—the entire congregation in a refined state of spirituality, accompanied by copious weeping; it was absolutely awesome.

"The walk from the apartment where the prayers took place to our own room was quite a distance. We had to cross two 'valleys,' walking downhill and then uphill. On Motzei Yom Kippur, after kiddush levanah, when my husband walked into our room, I could barely recognize him—his face had so changed. But he was very happy at having successfully completed all the tefillos of the Yomim Noraim.

"For the first two days of Sukkos, tefillos could not be held at that apartment. For the final days, however, the

rental arrangements were renewed. It is impossible to describe that Simchas Torah's great joy—real dancing! Participating in the dancing and singing were Jews who back at home, had never done this. Many declared that spending Yom Tov together with my husband in shul enabled them to forget all their troubles,

as they felt only his inspirational effect upon them.

"Several participants even held special 'kiddush' celebrations in their quarters, inviting others to partake of food and drink. This didn't happen in any of the surrounding towns; only in our village, because of my husband's

presence there. People declared that they would never forget him.

"Witnessing my husband's rejoicing, one could think he had never experienced any misfortune. But his face already betrayed his poor health. On the other hand, his spirit remained quite resolute."

TISHREI WITH THE REBBE – MOMENTS FROM THE REBBE'S EARLY YEARS

While a dive into the Tishreis of the Rebbe's youth and later as a *bochur* and a *yungerman* is really a discussion for itself, we will highlight a few Tishrei moments that the Rebbe experienced with or in connection to his parents.

The Rebbe's first Tishreis were spent in his birth town of Nikolayev, and even after the family moved to Yekaterinoslav, Rebbetzin Chana would continue to visit her parents for parts of Tishrei in Nikolayev, where her father served as *rav*, and of course, the Rebbe and his brother came along as well.

Batsheva Althaus, daughter of the famous Chossid Reb Elye Chaim Althaus from Nikolayev described the frequent visits of the Rebbe's family to Nikolayev, and shared a number of conversations she remembered from back then. Among the memories that stood out in her mind, was the sight of Rebbetzin Chana's eldest son, the Rebbe, as a young child, dancing with extreme passion and *chayus* "just like the older Chassidim and possibly even more."

It is interesting to note that this description of the Rebbe's lively dancing, seen here at such a young age, is mentioned time and again in people's memories of the Rebbe all throughout an array of times and places. Another such description is found in Rabbi Yitzchok Dubov's letter from 5720*, describing his first encounter with the Rebbe during Tishrei 5689* in Riga at the Frierdiker Rebbe's *hakafos*: "The Rebbe, who at the point, behaved as 'just' one of people, went out of his limitations on Simchas Torah and allowed no one to rest, proclaiming 'On Simchas Torah, we must dance the entire time, without any respite.' It felt as if a burning fire was

coming forth from this quiet young man (the Rebbe)." A similar description is found in the recollections of a childhood family friend, Yeshayahu Sher, cited in the main article, where he describes the Rebbe's dancing and the effect it had on him.

In Yeshayahu's retelling, he refers to the Rebbe as "*harav hatza'ir*" [the young rav]. Incidentally, this title hints to an interesting document found that is also dated back to the month of Tishrei. It's a memorandum from a meeting of the board of the Farbrichneh Shul in the industrial part of Yekaterinoslav, where they appointed the Rebbe, who was then only 17 years old, as the *rav* of their shul, to *pasken* questions of *issur v'heter* and learn with the congregants. While there is some lack of clarity how serious this *rabbanus* position was, and if this wasn't just some formal documentation, it still shows very much on how Harav Levi Yitzchok's *bechor*, the Rebbe, was viewed by the community.

Another important Sukkos moment in the Rebbe's life as a young *bochur*, took place in the year 5683*, when the Rebbe traveled to Rostov for Sukkos. There he met for the first time his Rebbe and future father-in-Law, the Frierdiker Rebbe, a fact that the Rebbe shared with Rabbi Hodakov at some point in 5716*.



THE ORIGINAL INTERVIEW WITH REBBETZIN CHANA AS PUBLISHED IN 'DI YIDDISHE HEIM', KISLEV 5724*.

It is amazing to read the account of Harav Levi Yitzchok's last Tishrei *b'alma dein*. Keeping in mind the many long months and years of suffering they had been through and the isolated situation they still found themselves in—and accounting for Harav Levi Yitzchok's already worsening health condition and the fact that this Tishrei took place in middle of the horrifying destruction of Jewish Europe in World War II—Harav Levi Yitzchok and Rebbetzin Chana's resilience and spirit, serving as a fountain of *kedusha* and *chayus* that spread to all the surrounding Yidden, is a story that is powerful and telling, both about that specific Tishrei, but even more so about what Harav Levi Yitzchok stood for and exemplified.

Last Tishrei Together

Amid the final preparations for the Rebbe to leave Russia together with the Frieddiker Rebbe, the Rebbe traveled from Leningrad—where he had spent Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with the Frieddiker Rebbe—to Dnepropetrovsk to spend Sukkos and Simchas Torah with his parents. This would turn out to be the last Yom Tov the Rebbe spent with his father, and the last time they would see each other.

Rebbetzin Chana described in an interview to “Di Yiddishe Heim,” the mixed feelings they all had that Yom Tov. No one aside from Harav Levi Yitzchok, Rebbetzin Chana, and the Rebbe, knew that the Rebbe would be leaving soon, and the sadness that lurked under the surface.

The Rebbe was extraordinarily happy and cheerful and infused everyone else with this joy both in the shul and in their home. The family danced and sang with extra *chayus*, masking their true feelings, trying to

THE REBBE'S
PASSPORT WHICH
WAS USED TO LEAVE
RUSSIA AT THE END
OF TISHREI 5688



achieve extra happiness no matter the situation.

Among the people that the Rebbe danced with was a wandering Kotzker Chossid who, oblivious to the situation, sang a *niggun* that he brought with him. The *niggun* with seemingly innocent words was like salt on their wounds, bringing to the forefront the emotions they were struggling to hide. “Yankel is going out to a long road, to a long road, without a penny in his pocket, Yankel returns home from the distant road, and his pockets are full!”

“The son (the Rebbe), danced for a while in one circle with this Kotzker Chossid but every time I caught a

glimpse of my son's face, I saw how painful it was for him to need to leave us... but they also said, so to speak, Mother, don't worry...”

On Isru Chag, Thursday, the Rebbe traveled with his mother from Dnepropetrovsk and arrived a few days later in Leningrad, from where the Rebbe followed the Frieddiker Rebbe, who had left just a few days earlier, crossing the border to Latvia on the following Tuesday, 29 Tishrei 5688*. ①

1. For more about the story of Harav Levi Yitzchok and his leadership, see *A Towering Giant*, Derher Menachem-Av 5782.