

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

נדפס ע"י משפחתו שיחיו

Simchas Torah  
moments *with*  
*the Rebbe*

# Up Close And Personal

LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 201615 (7 TISHREI 5742)





By: Mendel Slavaticki  
and Mendel Zaklikovsky

# ma

Few moments in the Rebbe's presence can compare to hakafof. The feelings of those present of the Rebbe transporting them to an otherworldly sphere, elevating them to his reality, all this in an aura of pure and heavenly joy, can go on and on for pages.

While uplifting myriads of Chassidim packed into 770 as one collective entity, a singular singing mass of body and soul, the Rebbe also reached out to the individual participant, allowing every Chassid to feel a personal connection and inspiring each individual to transcend their limited existence.

Those who merited to partake in hakafof recall that the Rebbe would lock eyes with each person present as he danced with the Torah. Amid the large crowds, thunderous singing and general tumult, every person had their place.

In that spirit, we present a small selection of short vignettes portraying personal interactions between the Rebbe and Chassidim during these precious moments.

For a broader overview of hakafof with the Rebbe, see "Uniting. Uplifting. Transcending. - Simchas Torah with the Rebbe," Derher Tishrei 5778.



# Learn From The Children!

During the month of Tishrei 5747\*, Chassidim took the old *niggun* with the words “*Kemofeis hayisi lerabim*” and sang the words “*Tehei zu shnas Moshiach – didan notzach*” to that tune.

During the fifth *hakafah* on Leil Simchas Torah, as Chassidim spiritedly sang this *niggun*, the Rebbe turned to Reb Meir Harlig and began clapping in his direction, signaling for him to dance. Reb Meir immediately began dancing, though somewhat halfheartedly. A few moments later, the Rebbe again turned to Reb Meir and exclaimed “Learn from him!” referring to his young son standing beside him dancing with excitement. The Rebbe then looked at the child and told him to teach his father to learn from his example.

Afterwards, the Rebbe turned back to the crowd with a broad smile on his face and began clapping his holy hands, copying the way Rabbi Harlig had been clapping. The Rebbe slowly brought his hands to and fro in an exaggerated manner, and finished by putting his holy hands together, and bringing them up to his cheek, the universal sign for someone sleeping! With a gesture ‘waving away’ the idea of being *farshlofen*, he started clapping faster and faster until the crowd couldn’t keep up.

## “Where is Yosef Hartman?”

*From the diary of Rabbi Yosef Hartman, Shemini Atzeres night 5723\*:*

“Before the second *hakafah* I suddenly saw the Rebbe turn around from his *shtender*, look at the *bochurim* surrounding him, and then ask Rabbi Groner: ‘Where is Yosef Hartman?’

“I heard the Rebbe’s words and froze in my place, a shiver going down my spine. I thought that maybe I had misheard, but then I heard the Rebbe repeat the question.

“Rabbi Groner began looking for me in the crowd. *B’hashgacha protis* I was standing right next to him beside the *aron kodesh*. The people blocking me moved to the side so the Rebbe could see me. The Rebbe looked at me with his pure and penetrating gaze, smiled at me with his famous “million-dollar smile” and swung his arm in my direction signaling for me to be *b’simcha*. The *bochurim* moved aside to let me stand in the front row, but the Rebbe signaled for me to remain in my place and be happy.

Every time I recall the Rebbe uttering my name during this sacred time, I am moved once again by the sheer power of that memory.

# *An Uplifting Gaze*

During *hakafos* on Simchas Torah 5734\*, before walking to the *bima* for his *hakafah*, the Rebbe stopped and began scanning the crowd in search of a specific *bochur*.

As the seconds ticked by and the *bochur* was yet to be located, people began going down from the bleachers to let the Rebbe see who was behind them. Only when the *bochur* was found, did the Rebbe continue to his *hakafa*. Understandably, during *hakafos*, the other *bochurim* made sure that this *bochur* had a place up front where the Rebbe could see him.

Later they found out that this *bochur's* mother asked the Rebbe to be *mekarev* her son by *hakafos*, since he had recently begun slipping in his *avodas Hashem*.





# Everyone From Eretz Yisroel

During *hakafos* on the night of Shemini Atzeres 5752\*, the guests from Eretz Yisroel were honored with the third *hakafah*. As they began making their way to the *bima*, the Rebbe turned to his left and motioned for Rabbi Yitzchak Yehuda Yeruslavsky to go up to the *hakafah*. The Rebbe then turned to Mr. Ovadia Eli, Israel's Minister of Defense at the time, and motioned for him too to go up to the *bima*.

The Rebbe continued to scan the crowd for guests from Eretz Yisroel, gesturing for them to take part in the *hakafah*, until the crowd realized the Rebbe's intent and all the Israeli guests began streaming to the *bima* from all corners of the shul.

Due to their large numbers, the *hakafah* spanned over a quarter of an hour as the guests kept switching places, allowing room for others on the *bima*.

## “He is Already Healthy”

On the night of Shemini Atzeres 5747\*, as the Rebbe was returning to his place after the first *hakafah*, a tumult began in 770. Rabbi Berel Levy suddenly felt weak and Reb Chaim Blachman from Hatzalah along with Dr. Weiss ran towards him to provide medical assistance. The Rebbe saw what was happening and signaled to them twice that they should check his heartbeat. After some time, the Rebbe made a motion with his hand, as if dismissing the ordeal, and turned back around to his *shtender*.

One of Rabbi Levy's children (Rabbi Don Yoel) approached the Rebbe to ask a *bracha* for his father. The Rebbe answered with a smile, while making a dismissive motion with his hand: “He is already healthy, you should give a *hechsher* on this.”

Rabbi Levy's son followed by saying “the Rebbe should be healthy” to which the Rebbe answered: “You should give a *hechsher* on this.” (Rabbi Don Yoel Levy ran the O.K. *kashrus* organization along with his father). Rabbi Don Yoel responded that he gives a *hechsher* and that there should be *didan notzach* (according to another account: “that Moshiach should come now”), and the Rebbe answered “amen.”

In the interim his father regained his strength, approached the Rebbe and gave a *bracha*, to which the Rebbe also responded “amen.”

Meanwhile the Rebbe called for Reb Chaim Blachman from Hatzalah and told him to ask a *rav* whether he is allowed to wear his earpiece (connected to the Hatzalah intercom) on Yom Tov.





## *Let Them Be Seen!*

On the night of Shemini Atzeres 5741\* after the recital of “*Atah horaisa*,” the Rebbe instructed those selling the *pesukim* to bend down, in order not to block the crowd and allow the Rebbe to see the whole shul.

During *hakafos* on both nights, the Rebbe motioned towards the *hakafos bima* at the elder Chassidim holding the *sifrei Torah* to move aside, allowing him to see every person in the crowd.

## *Stay Young*

During the seventh *hakafah* on the night of Shemini Atzeres 5735\*, the Rebbe motioned toward Reb Reuven Dunin who was standing among the elder Chassidim. Reb Reuven didn't understand why the Rebbe was motioning and what he should do.

As the Rebbe walked back from his *hakafah*, Reb Reuven approached the Rebbe and kissed the Rebbe's Sefer Torah. The Rebbe asked him: “What are you doing here? This is a senior home!” (referring to his spot among the elder Chassidim).



## *Attention to Detail*

It was Shemini Atzeres night 5743\*, and Reb Zalmon Jaffe was returning from the seventh *hakafah*. As he passed the Rebbe's place, the Rebbe held onto Reb Zalmon's sweat-drenched jacket and asked: "Did your jacket rip already?"

Reb Zalmon couldn't hear the Rebbe over the loud din of the crowd, and the Rebbe repeated the question. When Reb Zalmon finally heard the question, he answered that his jacket still didn't rip, although he did lose his *yarmulka*.

The Rebbe lifted both hands and exclaimed: "Ah! This should be the worst thing that will happen to you."



# Personalized Brachos

During *hakafos* on Simchas Torah day 5745\*, the Rebbe *bentched* someone from the crowd that he should be a Chossid, *yarei Shamayim* and a *lamdan*. To another, the Rebbe turned and asked if he had already learned the day's *shiur* of *shloshah prakim Rambam*.

# Teach Him

On Shemini Atzeres night 5748\*, Crown Heights activists were honored with the second *hakafah*, and the crowd began the famous *niggun* "*Yiddelach shreit ad mosai*." Amid the singing, the Rebbe motioned for Reb Chanina Sperlin to go over to Rabbi Nissan Mindel and teach him the words of the song.







## *“Also A Spectator?”*

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson relates:*

“When I was a young boy, the children used to sit on the floor next to the *bima* on Simchas Torah day, mere feet away from the Rebbe dancing *hakafos*. My older brother Simon and I used to sit there every year, and dance *hakafos* with the Rebbe.

“The year that Simon became Bar Mitzvah, he felt too old and mature to join me near the Rebbe’s *bima*, and instead found himself a place on the bleachers like all the *bochurim*. As the Rebbe approached the *bima* for his *hakafah*, the Rebbe noticed my father Reb Gershon Ber Jacobson and said, ‘Your son is here [by the *bima*] every year and dances with us, where is he this year?’

“My father pointed in the direction of the packed bleachers and told the Rebbe that Simon was there with all the *bochurim*. The Rebbe waved his holy hand and replied, ‘He also became a spectator?’”



# Nothing Unnoticed

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson relates:*

During the Rebbe's *hakafos*, there was always someone from the Vaad Hamesader on his *bima*, to maintain order and keep the crowds at bay.

I have a distinct memory of one year, when the Rebbe had reached the *bima* and began dancing the *hakafah*, an especially athletic French guest vaulted himself right into the thick of the dancing directly beneath the Rebbe's feet. He must have thought that since the Rebbe had already reached the *bima* and begun the *hakafah*, no one would dare shove him away and create a scene.

The Vaad Hamesader member, however, wouldn't let such behavior go unpunished in 770. He planted himself right in front of this guest, blocking his view of the Rebbe. The entire episode happened so quickly – merely a few seconds – that almost no one from the crowd noticed what had happened.

As was the Rebbe's custom, as he circled the *bima*, he looked eyes with all around. When the Rebbe turned in the direction of this person from the Vaad Hamesader, he held his gaze on him and kept it there. This person thought that the Rebbe was signaling for him to dance more enthusiastically and began jumping and clapping his hands. The Rebbe however would not look away, until this person realized what the Rebbe wanted and moved off the French guest.

# Draw Us Close

*Rabbi Reuven Matusof relates:*

My father, Reb Shlomo Matusof, one of the first shluchim to Morocco,<sup>1</sup> came to spend Simchas Torah 5735\* with the Rebbe. Those who knew my father will recall that he was not one who felt like he needed *kiruvim* from the Rebbe. As a Chossid, he did all he could to give the Rebbe *nachas ruach* and that was his entire objective. However, due to the fierce pushing during *hakafos*, he endured much discomfort and felt as if he was going to faint.

Suddenly, as he was holding on to his last ounce of strength, the Rebbe walked to the edge of the *bima*, leaned over towards him and looked in his direction, and began clapping and waving his hands in an exceptional manner to the tune of *Ufaratzta*. I never saw anything like it throughout all the years I spent by the Rebbe, it was absolutely amazing!

Of course my father regained his *kochos* and completely forgot about all the pushing around him.

---

1. See *Mosdos Oholei Yosef Yitzchok—Morocco*, Derher Adar 5783.



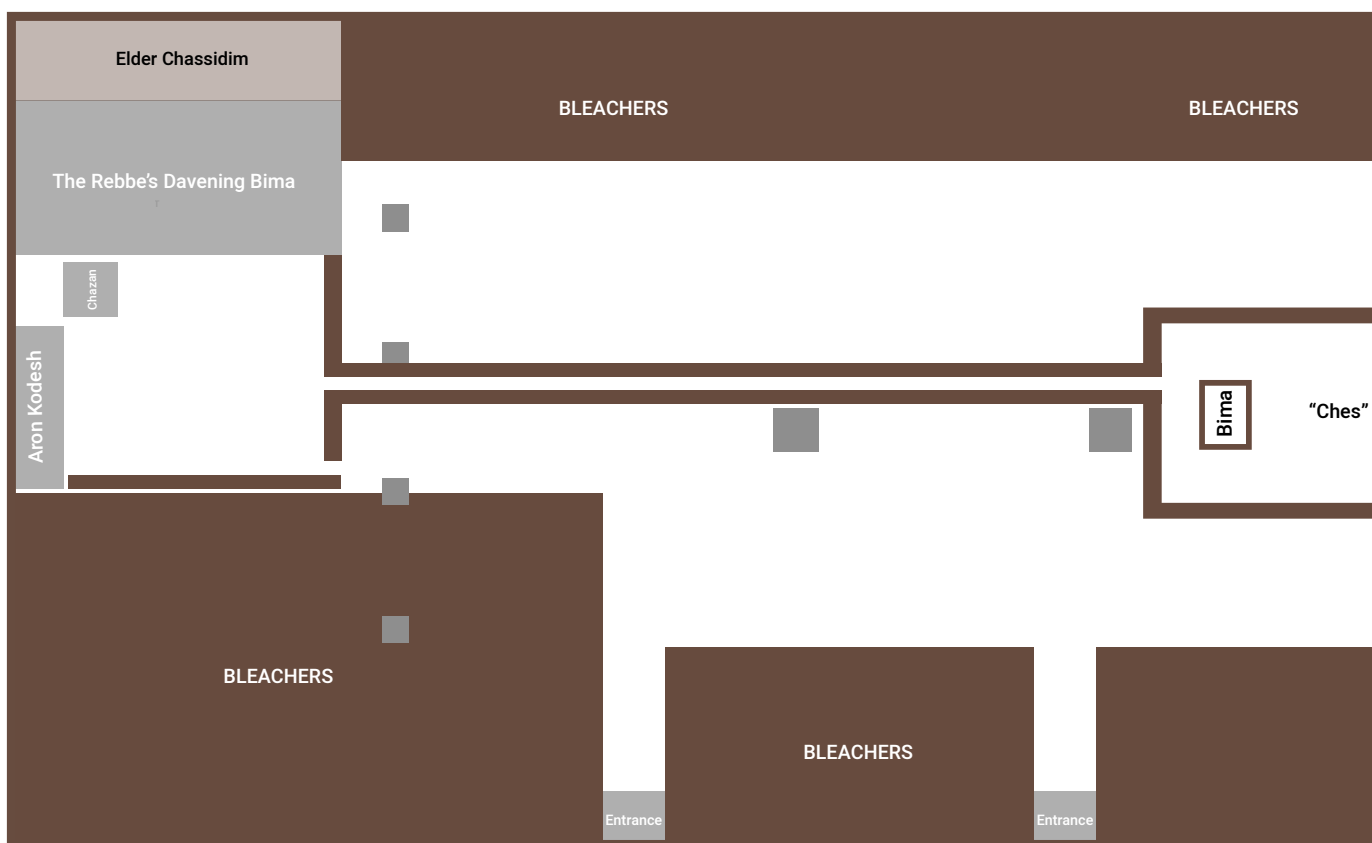
# Hakofos with the Rebbe

Approximate  
Depiction of  
the Shul Setup

To accommodate the massive crowds who streamed to 770 to celebrate Simchas Torah, and to enable as many people as possible to see and experience the proceedings, the main shul would be transformed from its regular year-round setup. Throughout the years, and especially as 770 expanded to its current size, the setup of *hakofos* changed and varied slightly.

We present a schematic of the general setup of 770 during *hakofos*, mainly illustrating the *hakofos* from after the third expansion of 770 in 5733, until 5751, when the *hakofos* setup was once more upgraded to accommodate the growing crowds.

- » The Rebbe would enter *hakofos* from the entrance in the rear of the main shul. A *shvil* was formed in the crowd for the Rebbe to reach his davening *bima*.
- » The Rebbe's davening *bima* was raised higher than the rest of the year, allowing Chassidim around the room to see the Rebbe.
- » A small area alongside the Rebbe's davening *bima* was reserved for elder Chassidim. During the Rebbe's actual (first and last) *hakofos* (which were held in the center of the shul) many of them would move onto the Rebbe's *bima* to see.





- » All the sides of 770 were covered in bleachers. Many sections of the bleachers were reserved for groups from different places. Until 5738, the bleachers reached up to the ceiling. Later, the bleachers in front of the shul were built shorter allowing air to cross over the top.
- » During the Ata Hareisas and most of the *hakofos*, the Rebbe stood on his davening *bima*.
- » For the first and last *hakafah*, the Rebbe would dance in the center of the shul. The Torah was brought and handed to the Rebbe while he stood on his davening *bima*, and then the Rebbe would proceed down a narrow *shvil* lined with metal tables and heavy chains, as the crushing crowds would push to have a chance to kiss the Rebbe's *sefer Torah*.
- » In the center of 770 was a square surrounded by metal tables, known as the "*ches*." Inside the "*ches*" was the *shulchan hakeriah* and an empty space where the Rebbe would dance *hakofos* (in later years the dancing area was on top of a heightened *bima*). For many years the entire inside area of the "*ches*" was on ground level, until the later years when it was gradually raised.
- » Upon reaching the "*ches*" the Rebbe would make a half-circle around the *shulchan hakeriah* while reading from his siddur the *pesukim* of the *hakafah*, and then the Rebbe would begin dancing (with Rashag, until 5747). The Rebbe would complete the circle around the *bima* on his way back from the *hakafah*.
- » Throughout his *hakofos*, as the Rebbe would hold his hand on the shoulder of Rashag and dance in circular motion, he would gaze at all of the participants. In years when Rashag was not present, and the Rebbe danced on his own, the Rebbe would dance heavily with the Torah as he slowly moved around in a circle motioning with the Torah toward every part of the shul, and to each person in every row.

*Special thanks to Rabbi Mendel Feller  
and Rabbi Eliezer Zaklikovsky for  
reviewing this material.*

