



Recollections from Hanhalah

Growing up in Eretz Yisroel, what were your experiences in regards to *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe?

My father was the Rebbe's Shliach to Tzfas, so as children, we knew that our life's purpose and the reason we lived where we lived was to fulfil the Rebbe's shlichus. We truly experienced the meaning of living with the Rebbe — and the Rebbe being the center of our lives — although we had not yet seen the Rebbe *bigashmiyus*. We would enthusiastically listen to every detail when someone came back from a trip to the Rebbe and described what he had seen and heard. Whenever the Rebbe spoke about a new *mitvza*, we would hear about it from our parents or teachers, and would immediately act upon it. For example, I remember that when the Rebbe said that everyone should have a *mashpia* (on Purim 5747), we as well - even as little children - went and appointed for ourselves a *mashpia*. The *hiskashrus* of today's generation has much in common with ours at that time.

When was the first time you came to the Rebbe? Can you tell us about it?

My father would try each year to bring a different child to the Rebbe. I was *zoche* for my turn to be *l'kavod* 10 Shevat 5750, when I was 9 years old. I was young, and didn't really know what to expect, but I remember the tremendous excitement I felt knowing that I was finally going to see the Rebbe with my own eyes. All of my friends joined in the excitement — in our community, whenever someone went to the Rebbe, it was a cause for excitement for everyone.

What was it like to see the Rebbe for the first time?

My father positioned me at the doorway downstairs where the Rebbe would enter the Shul, so that I would be able to see the Rebbe as soon as he would walk in. As soon as I saw the Rebbe I immediately said *She'hechiyanu*, and, if I remember correctly, the Rebbe answered "Amen". what can I say ... How can I describe that moment ... Even as a child it was tremendously overwhelming ... I remember feeling to myself

"*az dos is dos*," this is what it's all about. There are really no words to describe that moment.

What was it like to be at your first Farbrengen? Were you able to understand?

I was young, and my Yiddish wasn't perfect, so it was difficult for me to understand, but the whole environment — and just looking at the Rebbe — took me over. On the one hand I felt a *tzima'on* to be able understand more — I was looking forward to the time when I would finally be able to stand at the *farbrengen* and understand what the Rebbe was saying. On the other hand, I felt a tremendous feeling of happiness to be together with all the Chassidim listening to the Rebbe at the *farbrengen*.

One special moment at the *farbrengen* was when the Rebbe asked that all the guests should say *lechaim*. I was given a *lechaim*, and it was a moment during which I felt a true personal connection, as the Rebbe was addressing me directly.

In those years, many children would sit near the Rebbe on the

floor. Is that where you sat?

No, I didn't sit with the children. I had some older cousins who were *bochurim* at the time, and I stood with them.

However, by *davening* I had a very special place. The *gabbai* of 770, Reb Yehoshua Pinson, was a relative of mine, and my father arranged with him that I would be permitted to stand near the Rebbe. I was *zoiche* to stand right by the Rebbe's *bima* during some of those *tefillos*.

That must have been very special. Can you describe the feeling?

I was literally standing right between the Rebbe and the *chazan*. When the Rebbe would look at the *chazan*, he would be looking at me as well. That was really special. This was another moment during which I felt that despite there being thousands of *chassidim*, I had my own personal connection with the Rebbe.

This is something that is important for *Bochurim* to know today. Lubavitch is so big, and the Rebbe is so great, but each one of us has a very personal connection as well. This was truly the reality then, just as it is now. Each of us had moments during which we knew that the Rebbe was looking at us — individually.

Are there any other special *zichronos* that stand out from this trip?

Yes. My father was very involved with the Lubavitcher *mosdos* in Eretz Yisroel. In honor of Yud Shevat, a special album of the activities of Lubavitch was prepared, and my father had the *zechus* — together with his good friend Reb Yossel Gutnik — to present the album to the Rebbe. They also prepared a compilation of congratulatory letters from various Israeli officials: the



Rabbi Kaplan and his father receive a dollar from the Rebbe, 16 Shevat 5750

Prime Minister, the President, and so on.

After *Mincha*, my father and Reb Yossel stood in *Gan Eden Hatachton*, right outside the Rebbe's room, and I had the *zechus* to stand with them as well. When the Rebbe came back from *Mincha*, they presented the album and the letters to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe started to say a few words of *brachos*. It turned out to be more like a short *sicha*, as the Rebbe spoke for approximately five minutes. The Rebbe was *meyaches* to the letters that they had brought, and it was clear to them that these letters had brought the Rebbe much *nachas*.

I remember standing there and looking at the Rebbe's room — the door was open — and in my mind I was overwhelmed. I saw *sefarim* piled up everywhere, and I was contemplating what it means that this is the personal room of the *Nossi Hador*.

And then something occurred that affected me very powerfully then, and does until today. As soon as the Rebbe walked into his room and closed the door, my father literally

jumped on Reb Yossel Gutnik and gave him a huge hug. My father wasn't a very emotional man, but here he was just overcome with emotion by seeing the great *nachas ruach* he had given the Rebbe.

This struck me very powerfully. I realized that the greatest achievement in a *chossid's* life is when he knows that he has brought the Rebbe *nachas*, for it is then that he knows that he's fulfilling the purpose for which he was created; he knows he's on the right track. That *derher* guides me until today.

Wow! That's so special. Did you come to the Rebbe any other times before Gimmel Tammuz?

Yes. I came for Tishrei 5754, shortly before my Bar Mitzvah. This trip was a mixture of emotions as I'm sure you can imagine.

Did you get to see the Rebbe during Tishrei?

It was arranged a few times during Tishrei that groups of children and *bochurim* would walk past the Rebbe's room to say "*gut yom tov*" to the Rebbe. Being that I was just



Rabbi Kaplan davening by the Rebbe's place, 17 Shevat 5750

under *bar mitzva*, I managed to get into both groups, so I had the *zechus* to pass by the Rebbe quite a few times that month. I remember a very strong, serious look on the Rebbe's face, and it was clear to us that the Rebbe was receiving much *nachas ruach* from seeing us children. The Rebbe looked at each one of us until we left the room.

That must have been very special to personally wish the Rebbe “gut yom tov”.

I can tell you that those “*gut yom tovs*” from us children were unlike any “*gut yom tov*” we’ve ever said. We said those words and we really meant them.

The last time I went by that Tishrei — which ended up being the last time I was *zoche* to see the Rebbe — was very emotional for me, even at such a young age. During that particular time it was very noticeable to me that the Rebbe was in physical

pain. I walked by and wished the Rebbe “*gut yom tov*” as usual, and then exited the room. But as soon as I walked outside, my emotions overwhelmed me, and I started crying. I was crying because I saw the pain the Rebbe had, and I was crying because I merited — in this situation — to wish the Rebbe “*gut yom tov*”.

And then came Gimmel Tammuz

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Being a Bochur those first years after Gimmel Tammuz was very hard for us. We had a tremendous feeling of *lama nigora*. We were the first bochurim to grow up without being able to see the Rebbe.

However, because of this, we realized that we would need to put in effort to be able to experience that which bochurim always experienced. I remember the strong satisfaction I had the first time I

followed a full 40-minute *maamar* of the Rebbe. We prepared by learning the *farbrengen* in advance, and then we listened to the *farbrengen*. I remember feeling that we are still able to listen to a *farbrengen*, just as it was always done.

I guess you can somewhat relate to bochurim today, then.

I think that with just a little effort all of this can be experienced today as well. Before Gimmel Tammuz, experiencing the Rebbe came much more naturally. But nowadays, specifically because being a *chasid* demands effort, it becomes very real and *pnimiyusdik*. But in truth, no words can justify nor explain the situation in which we are. I hope very soon we’ll be back with the Rebbe again *begashmiyus*.

Amen! Thank you Rabbi Kaplan for sharing your zichronos with us.



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