

Yud Alef Nissan, the Rebbe's birthday, was one of the more exciting Yomim Tovim of the year by the Rebbe. It was not always that way from the beginning of the Rebbe's Nesius, but as the years moved on, it increasingly became a great and important Yom Tov.

It was a few weeks after Yud Alef Nissan Tof Shin Lamed, After the Rebbe had turned 68, and everyone began reciting Kapital 69. Some Bochorim (I am unaware of who they were) combined the last two Pesukim of this Kapital – Ki Elokim Yoshia Tzion – to the old Veltisher Jewish tune of Dayeinu. The version of this Niggun was sung during one of the meals of Shavuos with the Rebbe held in the Frierdiker Rebbe's apartment, and the Rebbe was really pleased. This Niggun became a massive hit by the Rebbe from that time and all the way through the years (later to be sung on the words Ach Tzadikim as well).

From that year and on, there was always the new song either fitted, or – from Mem Beis and on – composed, to Pesukim in the Rebbe's new Kapital. And it was definitely a highlight of Yud Alef Nissan.

There were many who wished to give the Rebbe gifts B'gashmiyus and especially B'ruchniyus. And, despite the close proximity to Pesach, many – especially from around the United States – would be looking for ways to come into New York to be with the Rebbe.

For fifteen consecutive years – from Lamed Alef till Mem Hei – the Rebbe Farbrenge on Yud Alef Nissan. From Lamed Ches till Mem Zayin – the Rebbe also Farbrenge on Yud Gimmel Nissan, which was often a continuation of the Yud Alef Nissan Farbrenge (Besides for Tof Shim Mem and Mem Daled, when Yud Gimmel Nissan was Motzei Shabbos, but the Rebbe did Farbrenge on Shabbos).

The Yud Alef Nissan Farbrenge always had a Yom Tov tone to them, for Pesach was in the air. That, combined with the Rebbe addressing Yud Alef Nissan itself in certain years, left everyone with a special and uplifting feeling. Typically, a point or two from the Yud Alef Nissan Farbrenge may have continued into the Yud Gimmel Nissan Farbrenge, and sometimes into the Acharon Shel Pesach Moshiach Seudah Farbrenge, and even further.

Yud Alef Nissan can never fall on Shabbos. In Mem Vov, it fell on Sunday and in Mem Zayin on Friday. In both those years, the Rebbe Farbrenge on Shabbos for Yud Alef Nissan, and in the weekday only for Yud Gimmel Nissan. After Chof Beis Shevat, the Rebbe stopped Farbrenge in the weekdays altogether. Yet, even in those three years, the buildup to Yud Alef Nissan was extremely strong, and the Rebbe responded in kind: On Yud Alef Nissan Mem Vov, "dollars" began, in Mem Zayin the Rebbe said two Maamorim on Shabbos, and Farbrenge on Motzei Shabbos, when the new city for Russian immigrants was introduced, and in Tismach, the Rebbe said several Sichos, delivered Matzah to the Shluchim who came from Washington, and so forth.

And then came Mem Tes and Yud Alef Nissan was on Sunday. On Shabbos, the Rebbe spoke about birthdays, and the Rebbe also said two whole Sichos about the new Kapital Shir Mizmor, among other sichos.

On Motzei Shabbos, immediately following Maariv and Havdoloh, there was the traditional yearly Brochoh to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe responded with a Brochoh, as was the norm each year.

There was nothing more for Yud Alef Nissan that year, not even a Sicha after Maariv. And it was somewhat of a disappointment, being the quietest Yud Alef Nissan in so many years.

Or so we thought...

The Brochoh the Rebbe had delivered on Motzei Shabbos for Yud Alef Nissan was Mugoh by the Rebbe. At the end of the Brochoh, it was written that one of the Rabbonim (it was Rabbi Hendel) blessed the Rebbe with Birchas Kohanim, and the Rebbe responded, Es Zol Zein A Freileche Voch – it should be a joyous week.

On the words “A Freileche Voch” (a happy week), the Rebbe added a really unusual footnote, and I quote: Simcha – Bitul Hahagboloh B’yom Alef B’yom Beis. Translated, this means that Simcha (implies) a nullification of the limitation of Sunday and Monday.

We would refer to these types of footnotes as “Himmeldik”, some “heavenly” entry by the Rebbe that was not understood on our level. What happens on Sunday or Monday? What Simcha is necessary? What are the limitations?

And then came Tuesday, Yud Gimmel Nissan, and one of the most incredible “breakthrough” moments with the Rebbe occurred. This moment could be easily placed on the Top Ten list of moments with the Rebbe.

But first, a Hakdomoh.

It is well known that the *modus operandi*, the way things worked with the Lubavitcher Rabbeim, was the Maamar. The delivering of the Maamar belonged only to the Rabbeim. With our Rebbe, once the first Maamar osi L’gani was delivered on Yud Shevat Yud Alef, it was clear that the Rebbe had officially accepted the leadership of Lubavitch.

And the Maamar was not merely the tool with which the Rabbeim “showed” how they were now in charge. The Maamar, in and of itself, was taken incredibly seriously by each of the Rabbeim. This was their revelation to the world. And not simply “their” revelation, but as the famous story with the Reb Hillel Paritcher goes: The Shechina is speaking during the Maamar of the Rebbe! The delivery of the Maamar was comparable to the giving of the Torah at Sinai!

Dr. Ira Weiss famously tells that, while monitoring the Rebbe’s heart at the Yud Tes Kislev 5738 Farbrengen – the first time the Rebbe was present in the downstairs Shul of 770 since the night the Rebbe had a heart attack, Shemini Atzeres of that year – they noticed a stormy, even turbulent pattern, during the Sichos, but when it came to the Maamar, the Rebbe’s heart remained calm and comfortable.

For the most part, though, unlike the other Rabbeim, the Rebbe did not generally deliver Maamorim on their own. The Rebbe kept the Maamorim as part of the overall Farbrengen experience.

Another element regarding the delivery of the Rebbe’s Maamorim: Two types of Maamar presentations existed: 1) The ‘Maamar with the song’, and 2) The ‘Maamar in the format of a Sichah’.

For the ‘Maamar with the song’, the Rebbe would close his holy eyes, and use a specific sing-song tune that we also use when saying a Maamar. Only towards the end of the Maamar, would the Rebbe suddenly change the tune back to the Sichah tune, signaling the final piece.

The ‘Maamar with the song’ was normally preceded by a song of preparation as well. The Rebbe would signal, either to Rabbi Shmuel Zalmanov – in the early years – or to Reb Yoel Kahn since Tof Shin Chof Daled – and they would begin to sing a Niggun. Reb Yoel always began the “Rostover Niggun”, which today we refer to as simply “The Maamar Niggun”.

As soon as the Niggun would begin, the Rebbe's entire demeanor would change. An incredible deep seriousness would fill the Rebbe's presence. Whereas the Rebbe could have been smiling, encouraging the singing, answering L'chaim in one minute, as soon as the Niggun began, the Rebbe would sort of become involved – it seems – in deep introspection. The Rebbe was making unique Hachonos, arrangements, to the Maamar about to be delivered. The Rebbe's face would often change color – sometimes red, or sometimes white, and sometimes a combination. The Rebbe's lips could be seen moving during many of the times the Niggun was sung. The Rebbe would often straighten the hairs of his beard, tighten the tie, and would be “fidgety”. At some point, the Rebbe would be looking downwards, sometimes with eyes already closed, and remain in this position until the end of the Niggun, at times softly encouraging the tune with the movement of his holy head.

Either prior to the tune, or sometimes at the beginning of it, the Rebbe – like the previous Rabbeim before – would tie a Tichel (handkerchief) onto his right holy hand. The Rebbe did not do this publicly. Rather, it was done while holding his holy hands under the table. One could discern the Rebbe engaging in some activity under the table if one paid close attention. As soon as the Maamar was complete, the Rebbe would remove the Tichel while still holding his holy hands under the table.

During the Niggun before the Maamar, the oilom would rise. Some rose towards the beginning of the Niggun, others after the first stanza, and the older Chassidim sitting behind the Rebbe would all be standing by the time the third stanza would begin. Thus, the Rebbe would be the only one sitting.

The Rebbe's Maamar with a Niggun was a sight to behold. As the Niggun itself transported the Rebbe to a different realm, people just being there and witnessing this sight would be transported into a different mode. The appearance of the Rebbe, and the Rebbe being “framed” by all those standing in the crowd, brought an atmosphere of Shomayim, in addition to the holy atmosphere already created by the Rebbe's presence and holy words being shared.

Regarding the ‘Maamar in the format of a Sichah’, the Rebbe would tie the handkerchief during whatever Niggun was sung (but not the Maamar Niggun), and the Rebbe, with open eyes, would begin the Maamar with the same sing-song as the Sichah. There was no special Niggun of the reciting of the Maamar, and there was no special Niggun prior to the Maamar. It sounded and looked as though the Rebbe was delivering another Sichah.

And no one stood up during this form of a Maamar, with the exception of the Rashag (the Rebbe's brother-in-law), who insisted on standing for the Maamar despite the ‘lower’ tone of the Maamar in the format of a Sichah.

Until Tof Shin Mem Vov, whenever it came to a “big” Farbrengens, the Rebbe always said the Maamar with the Niggun. This would include Yud Tes Kislev, Yud Shevat, Purim, Yud Alef Nissan, Yud Beis Tammuz, and all the Yomim Tovim. There were no exceptions to that. In addition, in certain years, the Rebbe chose to deliver a Maamar with a Niggun Davka on Shabbos Mevorchim (such as Mem Beis). In the year of Lamed Tes, the Rebbe delivered 39 Maamorim, and every single one of them was a Maamar with a Niggun.

While these issues are in the world of the Rebbe, beyond the comprehension of Chassidim, it is safe to say that – for the most part – the Maamorim at the Shabbos Farbrengens (which were not a Yud Tes Kislev or a Yud Shevat, or a “special” Shabbos) were generally Maamorim like a Sichah. This became

especially common from the year Tof Shin Chof Hei and on, since the Rebbe Farbrenge on every Shabbos, after Rebbetzin Chanah, the Rebbe's mother, passed away. From around that time, the Maamar at a 'regular' Shabbos Farbrenge was, for the most part, one that was in the format of a Sichah.

It seems that the Maamorim in the format of a Sichah were left for 'regular' occasions, and the ones with a Niggun were for 'special' occasions

There were exceptions to this, but in general, this is how it seems was the conduct of the Rebbe with the Maamorim.

Then came the issue with the Seforim in the summer of Mem Hei, which went to trial on Yud Tes Kislev Mem Vov. At the Farbrenge of Yud Tes Kislev that year, when it was expected of the Rebbe to deliver a Maamar with a Niggun, the Rebbe, instead, said the Maamar as part of a previous Sichah, with the tune of a Sichah, but eyes closed. That just shocked the Oilom. On Yud Shevat Mem Vov, the Rebbe said the Maamar as a Sichah, eyes open, like any regular Sichah. This rattled the Oilom even more. This was, to Chassidim, the biggest indication that the Rebbe was in a state of imprisonment, a state of Golus. That the Maamar of Yud Shvat should be delivered without the 'bells and whistles' meant that the Rebbe was being restricted and limited in this ultra-serious area of the Rebbe's responsibilities and duties. And Chassidim realized ever more how severe this whole matter really was.

From then on, the Rebbe did not say another Maamar with a Niggun at any Farbrenge, even after Didan Notzach on Hei Teves, or the next year, when the Sforim returned on Beis Kislev. On Shabbos Vayigash Mem Zayin, the Shabbos following Didan Notzach, I recall something very interesting. Normally during the Niggunim between the Sichos, Reb Yoel Kahn, the Rebbe's chief Chozer, would sit down and place head in his hands to review the Sichos. Any of the Chozrim would do Chazoroh then as well. That Shabbos, Reb Yoel kept his head up, looking at the Rebbe for a hopeful signal to sing the song for a Maamar...

And then came Chof Beis Shevat. After that, the Rebbe slowly began to change the whole system of Farbrenge. No more weekday Farbrenge, and the familiar structure and setup that the Rebbe had in place for the Shabbos Farbrenge was gradually changed. The Rebbe slowly phased out the Rashi Sichos (in Mem Tes), the Sichos on the Rambam (also Mem Tes), and even the Alter Rebbe's Niggun (last time the Rebbe asked for that Niggun to be sung was Shabbos Shmos Mem Tes).

And the Rebbe phased out the Maamorim as well. The last Maamor the Rebbe said in the "expected" format was on Sunday night Yud Beis Tammuz, Tismach, during a Sichah after Maariv. The next Shabbos, Bolok, there was no Maamar. The Rebbe did say a Maamar on Shabbosim Re'eh and Nitzavim Tismach (which were Shabbos Mevorchim), and on Erev Rosh Hashonoh after Mincha. But during the rest of the Shabbos Farbrenge – and there was a Farbrenge every Shabbos – the Rebbe did not deliver a Maamar.

The Rebbe then said a Maamar on Rosh Hashanah and on Shabbos Vayeilech-Suvah, Vov Tishrei, Mem Tes.

The Rebbe did not say another Maamar, in any form, since that Shabbos.

By the time Leil Bedikas Chometz, Mem Tes, had arrived, the Rebbe had not said a Maamar with a Niggun for around three-and-a-half years (since Shabbos B'reishis Mem Vov), and had not even said a Maamar in the format of a Sichah for over half a year.

And then came that Tuesday night, the night of Yud Gimmel Nissan, Leil Erev Pesach, Leil Bdikas Chometz.

The Rebbe had gone to the Ohel, as was his yearly custom, on Yud Gimmel Nissan. After returning, the Rebbe came down for Mincha and Maariv. And the Shul was deserted. No one knew, of course, when the Rebbe would be returning from the Ohel, so no one could know the precise time for Mincha and Maariv. Also, throngs had left for the Yom Tov, particular the Bochorim that would be learning and "hanging out" in 770. Personally, this was my only year being in Crown Heights for the first days of Pesach, and I decided to join the Rebbe for Mincha and Maariv. I thank Hashem each year when I think about this evening and what transpired.

Towards the end of Maariv, Reb Meir Harlig, who was the Chazan for Maariv that night, standing, obviously, on the Rebbe's left side, noticed during completing Mishnayos, that the Rebbe was tying a Tichel onto his holy right hand. Meir shared with me that he was rubbing his eyes, knowing that the only time we were aware of the Rebbe tying a Tichel onto his holy hand would be for a Maamar, and the Rebbe had not said a Maamar in over half a year.

When he realized that this was really happening, Meir signaled to Reb Leibel Groner, standing to the Rebbe's right, that the Rebbe had placed a Tichel on his right hand, and a Maamar seemed to be happening.

The Rebbe moved from the Davening Shtender to the Shtender at which the Rebbe would talk, facing the crowd. The Rebbe's Tichel could clearly be seen for those paying attention, as the Rebbe was walking those few steps. It can also be seen on the video. The Rebbe placed the Siddur on top of his holy hand, covering, to a point, the hand with the Tichel.

The final Kaddish was over, and the Rebbe turned to R. Leibel Groner and said: "Zogen dem Niggun" – sing the song". Since RL"G knew of the Tichel, he knew which 'Niggun' this was to be, so he turned to the crowd standing close and said "The Maamar Niggun".

As the Niggun began, utter disbelief gripped everyone there. The Maamar Niggun? What's going on here? It felt like a dream! The Rebbe was doing all the things that were the norms before a Maamar. The Rebbe was looking down; the Rebbe's lips were moving; the Rebbe's complexion was different. This was really happening! I turned to the guy next to me, and said do you see what's happening here? He responded, Yes, it's the Niggun Lechatchilah Aribar for Yud Gimmel Nissan.... (It wasn't that song, and Yud Gimmel Nissan is the Yahrtzeit of the Tzemach Tzedek, not of the Rebbe Maharash and L'chatchilah Aribar...).

People milling around in the back of the Shul began streaming towards the front in utter incredulity...

This is how absolutely amazed everyone was.

This Niggun had not been sung for over three-and-a-half years before a Maamar...

As the Niggun was ending, everyone held their breaths to see what was going to happen next.

The Rebbe, indeed, began a Maamar – Matzah Zu – which took a few short minutes. In Crown Heights, there is a siren that announces Shabbos. This siren was activated when the Rebbe would Farbreng or be saying a Sicha. If it was happening immediately, the siren would go off twice in succession. Only once, to my knowledge, did it go off three times: On this night, the night of “Matzah Zu”. I heard that people were streaming up towards 770, realizing that something urgent was happening.

There were MANY more people in 770 when it was time for the Rebbe to give out dollars, much more than before.

The Maamar discusses the two Matzahs mentioned in the Torah regarding Yetzias Mitzrayim: 1) The matzah they prepared and ate before Chatzos, which when written in plural (Matzos), is always lacking a Vov. 2) Matzos from after Chatzos, which the word Matzah is with the Vov. These indicate the great revelation of Hashem after Chatzos. From that time, though, even the Matzah we eat before Chatzos, contain the level of revelation of after Chatzos, and especially that it is a Mitzvah to eat them now.

Nonetheless, in the Haggadah we still say Matzah Zu is because the dough didn't have enough time to rise, as a reminder of that time and the great revelation then. In addition, it's also a reminder of what's about to come L'osid Lovo.

The Rebbe mentioned that the end will be with the giving of Tzedakah. Immediately following the Maamar, the Rebbe descended the Bimah, and began to distribute dollars.

Chassidim realizing what had just transpired broke out into a Simchas Torah Niggun. Within a few short minutes, a Rikud was formed, which kept on growing from minute to minute. Songs like Didan Notzach, Napoleon's March, and similar were being sung for the 20 or so minutes it took for the Rebbe to distribute the dollars.

To my knowledge, this was the only time Chassidim danced in a circle, continuing to dance while the Rebbe was still distributing dollars. Watching the video, one can still hear and feel the great Simcha that everyone was feeling. This was a Simchas Torah atmosphere.

It was immediately realized that, after all these years of limitations and restriction, something had opened and come through. And the joy was overwhelming.

The Rebbe's face was Mammosh aglow! Geloichten... The Rebbe seemed pleased, and filled with happiness. It was almost like a smile was on the Rebbe's holy face. When I noticed that, I personally went over for a dollar, basking in this amazing Giluy Oir.

After the Rebbe left the Shul, Reb Yoel, who was present at the time, spent the entire night in his office, working to write this Maamar to be given to the Rebbe first thing in the morning for editing. The Rebbe was, indeed, Magiah the Maamar, writing on its title regarding the Tzemach Tzedek for Yud Gimmel Nissan and the Rambam for Yud Daled Nissan.

When I asked Reb Yoel if he had any thoughts about the date of this Maamar and the sudden, “out of the blue”, revelation, he said: Vos Erev Pesach? This is about Yud Alef Nissan, as was Yud Gimmel Nissan each year.

The Rebbe would Farbreng on Yud Alef Nissan each year, as mentioned previously. From Lamed Ches and on, the Rebbe also Farbrenged each year on Yud Gimmel Nissan. Those Yud Gimmel Nissan

Fabrengens were seen as a Hemshech to Yud Alef Nissan, and often were a much more intimate style of Farbengen. Often, the Rebbe would continue thoughts from the Yud Alef Nissan Farbengen, the Rebbe seemed to tell more stories during this Farbengen, and many times featured really lively Niggunim (like Keili Atoh in Lamed Tes, Al Achas in Mem Gimmel, and Yemin Hashem in Mem Hei), and so forth.

This Maamar brought to mind those unusual words in the last footnote on the Brochah of Motzei Shabbos, Yud Alef Nissan – mentioned previously – about the Bitul Hahagboloh Byom Rishon Byom Sheini – the breaking of barriers of Sunday and Monday. While we have little to no idea about that, we all know that the on the next day, Tuesday evening, one of the greatest ‘breakthroughs’ occurred in front of the eyes of amazed and overjoyed Chassidim.

[The Rebbe said two more Maamorim that year: At the Farbengen of Acharon Shel Pesach – in the format of a Sichah, and on the night of Erev Shavuos after Maariv, with the Maamar sing-song, but without the Niggun before the Maamar. These two Maamorim could not be compared to what transpired on Erev Pesach].

Thirty years later, as we celebrate the Rebbe’s 117th birthday, and all this means to us, we are faced with the biggest hagboloh since the founding of Chabad. Just thinking about twenty-five years since Gimmel Tammuz looming and staring us in the face is enough to make us feel the massive unending Hagboloh.

When this Hagboloh is over, it will certainly be similar to what this scene had: The Rebbe will appear back to us and speak whatever it is that needs to be said ‘just like that’.

Imagine the Rikud in 770 on Har Habayis that will take place when this dark Hagboloh of Golus will be lifted. It can happen just like that. Matzah Zu reminds us of how this type of thing can and really does happen.

May it happen immediately now, Teikef Umiyad Mamosh.

Yossi Lew,

Peachtree City, Georgia.