

# REB YOSEF ASHER'S TUNE

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

## Simchas Torah

Anyone who has ever participated in the hakafos of the Bobover Chassidim on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah has likely noticed that while the niggunim (tunes) sung for the first six hakafos may vary, the seventh and final hakafah is invariably conducted to the accompaniment of the same, unusual niggun. I'd love to describe this unique and unforgettable niggun, but the print medium somehow defies adequate description of a tune. [Perhaps, though, there is a way - more about that later.] What is the history behind this special niggun? Once, the Bobover Rebbe Shlita (may he have a complete recovery from his illness, together with all the sick of Israel) told the following amazing story:

Reb Yosef Asher Brinner of Lemberg z"l was one of the close disciples of the first Bobover Rebbe, R' Shlomo zt"l. He was renowned among the chassidim for his devout worship of Hashem and his exceptional and elevated character. In his older years, he fulfilled a lifelong dream by moving to Eretz Yisrael. Even so, from time-to-time he would make the arduous journey from Israel back to Europe in order to spend time in the presence of his Rebbe.

On one of his trips back, he brought with him a niggun - an ancient tune sung by the elder chassidim of Yerushalayim - and taught it to the Bobover Chassidim. The niggun became popular among the chassidim, and from then on one could on occasion hear what became fondly known as "R' Yosef Asher's niggun" in the courts of Bobov.

Once - Simchas Torah before the seventh hakafah - the Rebbe turned to the chassidim in charge of the tunes for the hakafos and told them, "Sing R' Yosef Asher's niggun!" (This was some time after R' Yosef Asher had already passed on.) Although the Rebbe always danced the hakafos with great energy and enthusiasm, it was evident to the chassidim that the seventh hakafah that night was something special - the Rebbe danced with all his might before Hashem, displaying tremendous passion and intensity.

The following morning, Reb Avraham gabbai was one of the first to enter the beis ha-midrash. Excitedly, he called over the few chassidim who were there: "You're not going to believe what I dreamed last night after the hakafos: Reb Yosef Asher came to me and told me that he must get in

to see the Rebbe immediately. The attendants, however, told him that the Rebbe was extremely busy then, and it was not possible to interrupt him.

"Not to be deterred, Reb Yosef Asher began searching, and somehow managed to find a hidden entrance into the Rebbe's library which was unlocked. He went in to the Rebbe and spoke with him privately. When he came out, he said to me:

"R' Avraham - I am deeply grateful to the Rebbe for singing my niggun last night at the hakafos. It was a great kindness to my neshama!"

Just as Reb Avraham gabbai finished relating his dream, Reb Yisrael Yitzchak entered the beis ha-midrash. "You're not going to believe what I dreamed last night," he told the chassidim who had just finished listening to Reb Avraham gabbai's dream. "Reb Yosef Asher Brinner came running towards me with great speed. As he approached, he said to me: 'R' Yisrael Yitzchak, I owe a tremendous yasher-koach ("thank-you") to the Rebbe! You have no idea to what extent my soul was elevated in the Heavenly realms as a result of the Rebbe singing my niggun during the hakafos last night!"

Soon after, a third chassid entered the beis ha-midrash; he too had seen Reb Yosef Asher in his dream last night, and heard from him the great ascent his soul had received in Heaven as a result of the singing of his niggun. From then on, the singing of Reb Yosef Asher's ancient Yerushalmi niggun for the final hakafah became a time-honoured custom in the courts of Bobov.

Oh, by the way, about the niggun - if you'd really like to hear it, you're welcome to join us for our hakafos on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah!

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