



BEHIND THE PICTURE

HANOCHAS EVEN HAPINAH

17 Elul 5748

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In response to the Rebbe's call during Elul, 5748¹ to build, and purchase new facilities and enlarge already existing Jewish institutions, members of Agudas Chasidei Chabad felt that the time was right to expand the buildings of 784-788 Eastern Parkway adjacent to 770, thereby

extending and renovating the Rebbe's Shul. The project was mainly funded by the renowned philanthropist Mr. David Chase.²

As the Rebbe's house on President St. became the de-facto nerve center of

Lubavitch in the year 5748 following the passing of the Rebbetzin, *tefillos* along with nearly everything else, were held there.

Rumors were circulating about a campaign for the expansion of 770, but

for the most part details of the initiative were widely unknown.

All that changed following mincha and a dollars distribution in the Rebbe's house on 17 Elul, when Mr. Chase approached the Rebbe and spoke about the plans for the expansion of 770; he proudly declared that a ground-breaking celebration was scheduled for later that same afternoon, and concluded by kindly requesting that the Rebbe participate. To everyone's surprise, the Rebbe conceded, however on his part, the Rebbe made a 'deal'³ with Mr. Chase; demanding that he, in turn, agree to deliver a few words at the event in his *mamme-lashon*, Yiddish. A delighted Mr. Chase readily accepted and, before leaving said "See you at 5:00!"

With slightly more than an hour to go, preparations quickly rose to their peak and a platform was soon erected for the Rebbe to stand on, right at the edge of the work site with a *shtender* and microphone; a makeshift banner, bearing the words "גדול יהי כבוד הבית הזה. לשנה לשנה" "גדול יהי כבוד הבית הזה. לשנה לשנה" was hung over the building behind.

Nearby, below the stage, some seating space was reserved for the elderly chassidim who would be in attendance, and live music was playing as well.

Bleachers were erected for the ever-swelling crowd who had come to behold this outstanding sight. Given the rare nature of the event, chassidim didn't know what to expect and a suspenseful excitement reigned.

At five o'clock precisely, the Rebbe's car appeared and parked at its usual place, upon exiting the car, the Rebbe walked directly towards the platform.

Interestingly, the Rebbe attended the ceremony wearing a silk *kapota*, which is traditionally reserved for Shabbos and Yom-tov.⁴

Over a brief *sicha*, the Rebbe expounded upon the importance of the current celebration, dwelling upon the English words used to describe it – Ground-Breaking, explaining them to mean the



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bittul (break, nullify) which we ought to have, and not think that the building is the result of our own greatness, *chas vesholom*. Drawing parallels from the daily Chumash, which discussed building a *mizbe'ach*, and referring to the cornerstone which is traditionally set-in on such ceremonies, as the *even hashesiyah*, from which the whole world was nurtured. The Rebbe then turned to Mr. Chase to come through with his part of the commitment.

Chase began by saying – in English – that having witnessed the destruction of European Jewry and its shuls, never would he have even thought that one day he might himself be building a shul. In conclusion he said, "To all of you who listen to me, I can tell you in the truth that no one in my life had a greater and profound effect on me than our great rabbi whom we all love, Rabbi Schneerson. Rebbe, I know I promised you to speak in Yiddish, but what can

I do...I've nearly entirely forgotten this language; but one thing I'll say: Rebbe! *Ich hob dir lieb zayer zayer asach!* Next time we get together, I promise to speak a little more *mamme-loshon...*"

All the while the Rebbe's holy eyes were fixed on Chase, and when the latter concluded with this genuine expression of love, the Rebbe's face lit up with a broad smile, lasting quite a long time.

Shortly thereafter, the Rebbe descended the platform and walked towards the small cavity that had been dug earlier and was surrounded with a few shovels and a large stone. The Rebbe took hold of one shovel and moved some dust to the side. The Rebbe then bent down, and, refusing assistance, picked up the heavy rock and moved it into the cavity. After that, the

Rebbe again took the shovel and poured some dirt over the stone.

Members of *Mazkirus* and Rabbonim then followed suit, and symbolically shoveled some dirt unto the stone.

If it seemed that the wonders had just concluded, the Rebbe then walked towards a fence on the side of the yard and stopped. Quickly chasidim understood that the Rebbe was going to distribute dollars, and the shtender was brought for the Rebbe. At first the line formed incongruously and haphazardly, but soon order was restored and the crowd by the hundreds strode past to receive a dollar from the Rebbe.

The distribution continued for an hour and a quarter. Enthusiastically

encouraging the song of "*Samach T'samach*", the Rebbe left for home.

Ashrei ayin ro'asoh kol ayle! Fortunate is the eye that beheld the Nossi Hador personally laying the foundation for the *Teil Talpiyos* – ⁵ **שכל פיות פונים בו!**

1. Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, 7 Elul, 5748 (Sefer Hasichos vol. 2 p. 622)
2. See 'A Chassidisher Derher' Issue 19 (96) p. 28 and on, for a more exhaustive description of Mr. Chase's involvement with Lubavitch.
3. The Rebbe himself used this word!
4. See Hisvaaduyos 5748 Vol. 4 p. 304 for the Rebbe's explanation of his own doing so.
5. Mesechtas Brachos, daf 30, omud 1.



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