



BEHIND THE PICTURE

TWO SURPRISES

Chanukah Gelt – 5737

Pictures courtesy of Jewish Educational Media

In the pictures here, we behold a scene that has become so synonymous with the Rebbe, the distribution of money for *tzedaka*, that it would be difficult to imagine that in the time it occurred it was quite rare. Everyone knows of “Sunday dollars”, or of the nickels and dimes to children on the way to the *tefillos*; this distribution however is all but ordinary. In previous years the Rebbe hardly ever distributed Chanukah gelt to anyone¹, and even on those rare occasions, it was with restrictions.

In truth this extraordinary *chalukah* took place on two occasions, mere days apart from one another. The first time was during a traditional Chanukah rally on the third night of Chanukah, 27 Kislev 5737, for children participating in NCFJE’s “Released Time” program.

Following the program, which began with Mincha and continued with lighting the Menorah, singing Haneros Halalu, a dvar Torah and the recital of the 12 pesukim, the Rebbe surprisingly communicated that he will distribute Chanukah Gelt to all the kids assembled.

The Rebbe then went to the back door of 770 and gave out a coin to each child,

and after all the children had filed by, the Rebbe gave their counselors as well.

THE OTHER STORY

Five days later, the Rebbe held another *chalukah* – this time distributing Chanukah gelt to everyone.

Whilst nobody can profess to know the reason for any of the Rebbe’s holy *hanhogos*, many chassidim who were present at the time, assert that this *chalukah* may have been related to something that was taking place beyond the walls of Lubavitch, but that would



In preparing this article we were assisted by Rabbi Menachem Gerlitzky, Col. Rabbi Yaakov Goldstein, Rabbi Yosef Kessler, Rabbi Yosef Kalmanson, Rabbi Reuven Witkes, and the yoman of Rabbi Lipa Brennan.



the institutions in Crown Heights and beyond; Tomchei Tmimim Hamerkozis, Beis Rivka, Machon Chana, and as far as Morristown, New Jersey pulled up to the hearing in the Municipal building of Brooklyn.

The New York Times reported on the scene as: “More than 50 Hasidic Jews lined up to pray for a victory. As the prayers were offered, the 850 seats of the auditorium were filled mostly by other Hasidim...”

They sat through twelve hours (!) of dissertations and speeches - from 2pm until 2am. Most of the bochorim hardly understood what went on. Participants remember seeing elder Chassidim, including Reb Avrohom Drizin (“Mayor”) - who didn’t understand a word of English - sitting through all the proceedings. Yet Lubavitchers of all ages, including little children, were all there in accordance the Rebbe’s *hora’a*.

The final day of hearings was on Zos Chanukah, and the Jewish community attended for another six hours of speeches and deliberations. Finally, the meeting was concluded with a victory for Lubavitch.

(Rabbi Menachem Gerlitzky relates: Due to the Rebbe’s *hora’a* through *mazkirus* that the victory be toned down, when the board decided in favor of the Jewish community, all the hundreds of Lubavitchers in the room hardly reacted. There was no big applause or cheering, as one would expect after such a difficultly-won victory. The opposition was completely confused and unsure - did they win? Did the Jewish side win? - and because of that, a big commotion was avoided.)

All the chassidim who had gone to the meeting joyfully returned to 770 just in time to join the Rebbe for mincha and kindling the Menorah. After Mincha, the Rebbe suddenly told Rabbi Hodakov that he would distribute Chanukah gelt. A mere five days since the ‘Released Time Program’ rally, the Rebbe again distributed Chanukah Gelt, and this time,

have great impact on them –quite literally.

This was the redrawing of “district lines”, a procedure where the government divides the smaller areas of larger cities, allowing the people of each particular area to be better represented in the political arena, meeting their specific and unique needs.

When this process was taking place in 5737, the Lubavitch community pushed strongly to split Crown Heights into two distinct districts. Originally, Crown Heights was part of one huge district, with several other neighborhoods, and therefore, only a small percentage of the population in the district was Jewish - which meant that the Jewish vote was weak. By splitting it into two smaller districts, the Jewish population would all be in one smaller district, and Lubavitch would gain a much stronger voice in the city. (Beginning from 5729, the Rebbe spoke very much about strengthening the Jewish community of Crown Heights, which had begun to deteriorate this gesture of the government could be used as a great opportunity in line with this goal.)

However, the initiative was met by strong opposition, so the city set a hearing in

front of the “Board of Estimate” to decide the issue.

A *hora’a* came out from *mazkirus*, that everyone - men women and children, should go to the hearing in display of support, and that even the schools should interrupt their schedule to go. Yomanim from that time record rumors circulating that the Rebbe had asked that this take precedence over everything else, even Mivtza Chanukah!

When communal activists wrote to the Rebbe that the bochorim would not agree to come to the hearing so as not to miss davening mincha with the Rebbe, the Rebbe assured them that he would daven later on that account.

A sign was posted in 770 with guidelines from *mazkirus*: 1) the busses going to the hearing in-house the Municipal building of Brooklyn should not leave from 770, but from different places in Crown Heights; 2) the positive verdict should not be met with any public celebration and should be “toned-down”.

On the day of the hearing, time came to a standstill.

Busloads of Lubavitchers, from the elder chasidim all the way down to bochorim and schoolchildren, both boys and girls (separately), including many of

it was open to all, not only children.

The yomanim from that time record:

Immediately after Mincha on 2 Teves 5737, Zos Chanukah, Rabbi Hodakov announced: “As per the Rebbe’s directive we hereby announce three things: Firstly, although a Magbis- appeal wasn’t officially made at the Yud Tes Kislev farbrengen (as is the norm), it is self-understood that anyone can bring their contribution and leave it with the secretariat, and those who wish can give their name along with their mother’s [for the Rebbe to bring to the Ohel]. The next point is that now the Rebbe will distribute Chanukah gelt, the third thing is that after all the men have received, the Rebbe will give women as well.”

Following the announcement, the Rebbe went to the back door of shul and gave out Chanukah gelt while wishing each one “*A freilicher Chanukah, un a gliklicher yor*”.

Another rather unique aspect of this was the fact that the Rebbe gave out dollar-bills, as opposed to coins.

Rabbi Yosef Kalmanson of New Haven, Connecticut relates that a very festive air prevailed in 770 at the time, and the Rebbe was very “*ufgeleigt*”.

The outcome of this victory was indeed quite beneficial for the Crown Heights Jewish community, with a member of the community, Rabbi Yaakov Goldstein serving as chairman of the board for the new district.

It should be noted as well, that the then Mayor of New York City, Mr. Abraham Beame, had voted in favor of this resolution and took a strong position in favor of Lubavitch. Mr. Beame had attended a farbrengen of the Rebbe on Yud Shvat 5735, and had since developed a very warm relationship with Chabad. **D**

1. In the earlier years, the Rebbe distributed Chanukah gelt each year only for the yeshiva bochurim. In 5734, the Rebbe said that anyone who had gone on mivtzaim could receive Chanukah Gelt, but only with a written note from *Tzach*, Lubavitch Youth Organization, that attested to his participation.

