

## THE STORY OF THE GREAT PARK MIKVAH

Nine years had passed since the relocation of our shul from the inner city. The magnificent new building which houses the almost 100 year old furniture and fittings had facilitated a rejuvenation and rapid growth of the Great Park community in the Houghton Estate suburb of Johannesburg.

The community had gone through many changes and challenges of growth. And now, a dynamic young core of ladies were leading the cause to build a mikvah.

The first mikvah meeting was finally scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2009. It was the earliest date that our mikvah community and the architect could get together. We looked at the date: it was Yud Aleph Nissan 5769. We embraced the *hashgocho protis* of the date of our first meeting, as a significant connection to the Rebbe and to the fulfilment of his mission to intensify Yiddishkeit in our corner of the world.

We shared the Hayom Yom of 10 Nissan, the day preceding the meeting:

*"On the subject of the campaign to popularize the observance of Taharat Hamishpacha in your community, ponder this deeply: let us imagine that G-d were to give you the opportunity to save a Jewish community from extinction (G-d forbid); you would certainly be willing to risk your life for this and you would thank and praise Him for His great kindness in offering you an opportunity of such enormous merit. The same then holds true to an even greater degree with regard to the campaign for Taharat Hamishpacha; it is an endeavour which literally saves lives."*

The timing of the start of our journey was filled with potency and meaning.

I was unable to attend the meeting as I was in Durban on a Torah Academy school trip. In the early hours of Sunday morning, I received a call from our son who had arrived home for Pesach. He had spent the night organizing the many letters that my father, Reb Yisroel Hazdan Z"l, had received from the Rebbe.

He came across correspondence from the Rebbe regarding a proposed mikvah in a small town of Bethlehem, South Africa, where my father had been appointed as the Rabbi. The letter included the Rebbe's personal donation of \$18 to the Bethlehem Mikvah Project.

Although the community had agreed to my father's precondition that they build a mikvah, they had subsequently reversed the decision. There had been mounting opposition to the Bethlehem Mikvah. The South African Jewish newspaper included a letter lambasting the ridiculous proposal to build a "useless and antiquated institution probably patronised by one or two isolated fanatics".

The Bethlehem community wrote to Chief Rabbi of South Africa, Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, as well as to the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Isaac Hertzog, to establish whether a mikvah was in fact a necessary requirement for their Jewish community. Both chief rabbis wrote powerful letters of support and motivation for the Bethlehem mikvah.

During the phone call from my son, it was the content of a subsequent letter from the Rebbe that my son passionately wanted to discuss. The Rebbe wrote "the 18 dollars that I sent as participation

in building a mikvah are to remain in your hands, since I hope that in time a mikvah will be organized in Bethlehem, or at least somewhere else. Then the aforementioned sum will be included in the expenses” wrote the Rebbe.

“When did you ever see a situation where the Rebbe give his participation towards a project and then addresses the possibility that it might not happen?” my son asked.

Shortly after the community’s decision to abort the mikvah project, my father left his position in Bethlehem.

The words of the Rebbe: “... in Bethlehem or at least somewhere else” seemed to have relevance to our new Great-Park mikvah project. The 18 dollars had been received but had not been used to build the mikvah in Bethlehem. A generation later it was coming to fruition at Great-Park in Johannesburg.

Having returned to Johannesburg on Sunday afternoon our family sat at the dinner table and reread the Rebbe’s letter - “... or at least somewhere else.” We read the words over and over.

I look down to the bottom of the letter. The Rebbe concluded with the words: “Wishing a chag kosher v’sameach”. We looked at each other in amazement. Pesach was to begin that Wednesday night.

I looked up at the date on which the Rebbe wrote the letter in 5714/1954. It was written on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Nissan 5714. It was written on the morrow of the very day that our Great-Park mikvah project was born – 55 years earlier.

As the Great-Park mikvah was nearing completion, we began discussing a name. Wendy Zinman, one of the driving forces of the Great-Park mikvah, approached me at the end of a Shabbat kiddush. She spoke with gentle strength – her voice soft but resolute.

“We embarked on this project just after the Jewish world reeled from the horrific events in Mumbai. In the face of tragic loss of life, we were determined to intensify, to grow, to add holiness and sacncity to our community through the building of our mikvah. Gavi and Rivky lost their lives whilst adding holiness to Am Yisroel. Would it not be appropriate that our mikvah – dedicated to adding holiness to Am Yisroel - be named in their honour and to perpetuate their selfless dedication?”

In *Kuntrus Umayan* the Rebbe Rashab explains what it means to be “alive”. True life must be eternal. We are only truly alive when we connect to that which is eternal. Atem hadveikim baHashem Elokechem - Chayim kulchem hayom.”

A mikvah is designed so that a pool of regular water touches a pool of specially gathered pure living water and is thereby transformed. It becomes an extension of the living ‘pure water’ by virtue of the connection.

Such is the case with every mitzvah that we perform. In one moment of connection to Hashem’s Eternal Truth, we transform a limited human being into an extension of the Omnipotent; a finite moment into eternity.

Over the past three years our mikvah was conceived and born, despite various challenges. In addition to meeting the highest halachik requirements, it has been built to specifications that allow

it to compete with the finest, most luxurious spas. It has an extra-large foyer which will be used to teach groups of women and senior high school girls about the significance of family purity and to introduce them to a most magnificent mikvah.

Our community is blessed with a new mikvah. It has threaded connections through time and through space. It has touched and accessed the eternal bonds of Am Yisroel.

When you are in Johannesburg, please visit Ma'ayan Ganim Rivka vGavriel. Until then please visit us on [www.greatpark.co.za](http://www.greatpark.co.za).