

To Be Among the Founding Fathers

By Debbie Levine

It was a real surprise. No one expected it. But then again, most miracles don't come with advanced notice.

"Everyone's heard about Israeli bureaucracy; it's notorious. So the closer we came to completing all the necessary prerequisites and approving all the necessary permits, the more we realized just how far away we really were from attaining our goal: construction of Kollel Chatzos' *beis medrash*." Rav Yehoshua Meir Deutsch, *shlita*, *Rosh Kollel* of Kollel Chatzos Nachalas Yehoshua, spoke in disbelief as he described the numerous obstacles he faced, from a building freeze to the authorities changing construction plans. All this before construction could even begin for the Kollel Chatzos *beis medrash* in Beitar Ilit, a Torah center that in addition to housing three *kollelim* — including the unique Kollel Chatzos — would provide the community with around-the-clock Torah activities.

"Then, as if by magic," he continued, "the obstacles just disappeared. Late one afternoon, without any warning, the contractor phoned to let us know that everything had been taken care of and that he would be coming to pour the foundations the following morning. I can't even begin to describe our excitement. Finally, after three and a half years of *davening* and yearning and running from one government office to the next, our dream of a Torah center was about to become a reality! And then I looked at the calendar."

It was 10 Cheshvan in the late afternoon. The following day, 11 Cheshvan, was Mamma Rochel's *yahrtzeit*.

"Mamma Rochel! Mamma Rochel's *yahrtzeit*! Do you understand the *siyyata diShmaya* here?" Rav Deutsch paused for a few moments. It was obvious that he was so overwhelmed with emotion that he could barely continue. "At Kollel Chatzos, we recite *Tikkun Rochel* every single night — it's part of *Tikkun Chatzos*. We sit on the floor and cry as we beseech Hashem to return His children to their Land and end the *Shechinah*'s suffering. Our town, Beitar Ilit, is just a few minutes drive from Mamma Rochel's



Here, in the new building, Torah will be studied around the clock.

grave site. Every week, our entire *kollel* travels there to beseech Hashem to heed Mamma Rochel's cries and put an end to this bitter *galus*. And then — suddenly — our dream of creating a Torah center in Beitar was actualized *davka* on her *yahrtzeit*. We felt as if she, herself, was intervening on our behalf."

To appreciate the true significance of this occasion, it's important to understand the uniqueness of Kollel Chatzos.

Rav Deutsch continues, "Our holy *sefarim* are replete with praise of those *anshei ge'urah* who fight their natural tendency to sleep, and arise at *chatzos* to recite *Tikkun Chatzos* and learn Torah. These hours are an *eis ratzon*, when the gates of Heaven are flung open and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, so to speak, comes down to Gan Eden to see what is happening in this world (*Zohar Vayikra*). Our holy *sefarim* speak about how, at that auspicious hour, the powers of evil, strict judgment and darkness that govern the night are revoked. Impurity disappears, and Hashem in all His Glory is revealed.

"In 5761 (2001) a group of five young Torah scholars from Beitar Ilit, a small town in the Judean Hills, decided to do something revolutionary, to follow our Sages' advice and arise at midnight to recite *Tikkun Chatzos* and study Torah. Slowly but surely, other young men, craving the spiritual elevation of learning Torah at such an auspicious time, joined them. Today, 10 years later, some 60 *avreichim* devote their nights to Torah learning at Kollel Chatzos. One scholar, a young man with a large family, who holds down a job during the day, once told me, 'When the entire world is sleeping, my mind is fresh. Without anything to distract me, it's *davka* then that I can completely devote myself to my studies.'

"Visitors to the *kollel* are always amazed at the electrifying atmosphere in the *beis medrash*," Rav Deutsch continues. "It's not every day that one sees people actually crying as they recite *Tikkun Chatzos* and mourn the destruction. Men from far-flung neighborhoods regularly join our inspirational *vasikin minyan*. But then again," Rav Deutsch's face crinkles into a smile as he continues, "our rigorous schedule is not for everyone. Every single one of

our scholars is really striving toward spiritual greatness, otherwise he wouldn't be able to continue coming, night after night after night."

But why do you need your own building? How have you been managing until now?

"We haven't. In the last 10 years our *kollel* has moved over a dozen times, from one dilapidated caravan to another. We've learned in buildings without sanitary facilities, without air-conditioning, and without heating. Yes, our scholars are dedicated to learning and striving to grow spiritually, but what can I tell you? They're also human beings. They, too, need a normal, comfortable place to learn.

"For the last three and a half years we've been actively working toward finding a permanent solution to our housing problem. While we worked on the physical plane, taking all the necessary steps to get the permits and draw up the architectural plans, we also tore open the Heavens with our prayers, begging Hashem to help us find a home where we could learn in peace. Often our Torah scholars would go up to the future building site to learn or *daven*, with the hope that in the *zechus* of their learning and prayers, they would hasten the moment when we would begin construction. And then, suddenly — as if by magic — it happened. We laid the cornerstone and began construction — and it all took place on Mamma Rochel's *yahrtzeit*."

A Day of Rejoicing

Rav Deutsch continues describing the incredible events that took place on 11 Cheshvan. "I couldn't allow such a momentous occasion to pass without a proper ceremony, which was quite a challenge considering that I only found out about it on Monday afternoon!"

"The morning of Mamma Rochel's *yahrtzeit*," continues Rav Deutsch, "we all arrived at the *kollel* as usual to recite *Tikkun Chatzos* and study Torah until three o'clock in the morning, the hour we all travel to Kever Rochel. There, we literally tore open the heavens with our tears as we *davened* for *Am Yisrael* and for our supporters and their loved ones. Of course we recited all the names of our supporters and their loved ones as written in the *kollel's kvittel* and *davened* wholeheartedly for their welfare. Then we prayed

for the success of our new building. We were extremely emotional; the *kollel* had waited so long for a home of its own, and now, finally, it was becoming a reality!

"From Kever Rochel we returned to Beitar, where we immersed in the *mikveh* and *davened Shacharis* at the site of our future *beis medrash*. Many men from the surrounding buildings came to join our uplifting *davening*. Afterward, several prominent Rabbanim from Jerusalem, Bnei Brak and Beitar joined us for a festive *seudas mitzvah*."

At the *seudas mitzvah*, Rav Deutsch read the words of the *Zohar*, which state that upon laying the foundation for a shul, one must express his desire that it become a center of Torah, *kedushah* and *achdus*. Afterward, he publicly thanked the *kollel* members for having prayed at *chatzos* for the success of constructing the new building, and for having gone daily to the construction site to pray and learn with the hope that they will eventually merit to see the realization of their dream.

He then recalled the first donation that he received for the building fund, which was contributed over half a year ago from a person who had gotten into such a mess with the IRS that he was in danger of losing his entire livelihood. After donating \$5,000 to the building fund, the unheard of happened — the IRS closed the file against him!

Rav Deutsch could barely speak from emotion as he told the audience that that very morning after *Shacharis*, one of the members of the *kollel*, the head of a large family who had to struggle just to put bread on the table, presented him with a NIS 1,000 donation toward the new building. When Rav Deutsch asked him how he was able to contribute such a relatively large sum, he responded that for the last two years he had been putting money aside each month toward the *zechus* of helping to build the new shul.

The moment Rav Deutsch finished speaking, the band started playing and the entire audience — as well as many curious onlookers — burst into exuberant song and dance. It was only when the cement truck arrived and the workers wanted to begin pouring the foundations that the audience finally calmed down!

Just before beginning construction, Rav Deutsch placed copies of the founding charter and the *kollel's kvittel* inside the beam that will support the *aron kodesh*. As the cement truck poured the foundations, the entire *tzibbur* recited *Tehillim* for both the building and the *kollel's* — success. The moment the foundations were complete, the entire audience erupted in joyous dancing. "We felt as if Mamma Rochel was there, guiding us — and *shepping nachas* from us," Rav Deutsch said as he recalled the events of that day with tremendous emotion. "What could be greater than building a *mikdash me'at*, a center of Torah and *avodah*, where the light of Torah will always shine bright?! What could bring more

nachas ruach to the *Eibershter* than building a home for the *Shechinah*?"

The New Building

Rav Deutsch's dream is to build a three-story complex that will include a spacious *beis medrash*, a lobby, a *mikveh*, several smaller classrooms, an auditorium and a kitchen. "The building will be a beacon of light to the surrounding community, where the light of Torah will burn bright 24 hours a day. *Shiurei Torah*, outreach, women's classes and *minyanim* will be held there; the building will pulse with activity," he explains.

Construction is planned to take place in three stages. The first stage is construction of the building's first floor. Although compact in size, just 2,411 square feet (224 sq m), it will contain a spacious *beis medrash*, a roomy lobby, a classroom that will double as a women's section and a kitchen. The second stage will consist of a men's *mikveh*, while the third stage is completion of the entire building, *b'ezras Hashem*. Hopefully the first stage will be completed in the next few months so that the *kollel* can move into its permanent abode.

Now, however, it is of the utmost importance that the first stage be completed quickly. "The building freeze is over, but no one knows for how long," Rav Deutsch explains. "Everyone's trying to get as much construction done before the government once again puts a stop to all construction."

Dedication opportunities are still available. "The public has an opportunity to become full partners in our Torah learning," Rav Deutsch adds. "Every prayer, every word of Torah that is spoken in our new building will be an eternal *zechus* for those people who merited to contribute to our building fund."

For details and to contribute

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Kollel Chatzot
c/o Friedman Family
1540 40th Street
Brooklyn, N.Y., 11218

All donations are tax deductible in the U.S.

Rav Deutsch will be arriving in New York on Monday, Rosh Chodesh Kislev (Nov. 8, 2010).

There are many dedication opportunities available.

Dedicate one square meter of building area for just \$1,800!

The names of all our supporters will be prominently displayed on a special plaque in the *beis medrash*.

Yissaschar-Zevulun partnerships and night or week dedications are also available.



The *Rosh Kollel*, Harav Yehoshua Meir Deutsch, at the *hanachas even hapinah*.