

THE STORY OF THE HAMILTON MIKVAH

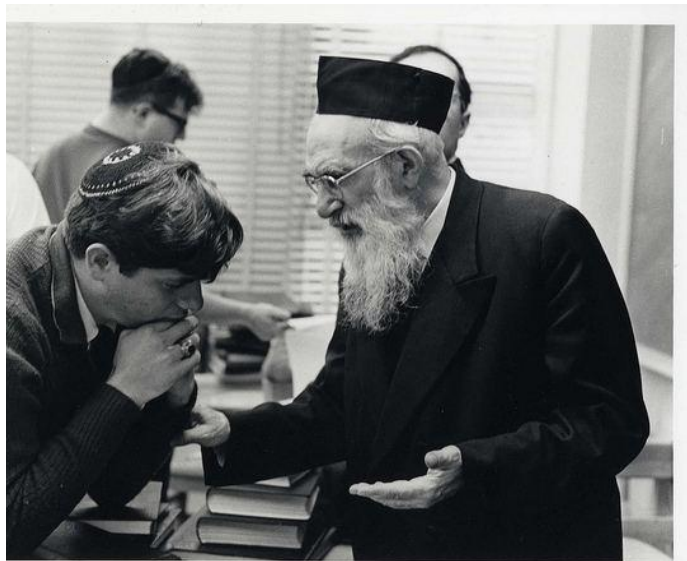
(From Living With Miracles: Memoirs of Rabbi Mordechai Green a'h)

The shul was a huge and demanding project in my early years in Hamilton. However, it was by no means the only project we worked on. Many other communal institutions demanded my attention and nurturing and were necessities for the continued growth of the community.

We desperately needed a local *mikvah*. In those days, the trip to Toronto, particularly in the winter, was a great inconvenience and sometimes even treacherous. The newer highways had not yet been fully completed, and Highway 6 was the main artery for much of the trip. We needed a solution. However, the shul was in the midst of being built, and money was scarce.

Many decades before my arrival, Hamilton had had a *mikvah* that was later sold during the tenure of Rabbi Shmuel Levine zt"l, the chief orthodox Rabbi of Hamilton. Mr. George Pollock informed me that when the *mikvah* was sold, the money was designated to be used for the construction of a new *mikvah* at some later date. However, the details of this arrangement were unclear. Mr. Pollock mentioned several names of other *ba'alei batim* (laymen) that were aware of the funds. However, upon investigation, no one else could verify this story.

In the summer of 1962, I went to New York to find teachers for the day school that we intended to establish. While visiting Yeshiva University, I met with Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz zt"l, the Suvalker Rav, one of my mentors from my



Rav Dovid Lifshitz counsels a student (c. 1965)

years at Yeshiva. I told him there was no *mikvah* in Hamilton, and that while I was in the midst of building a shul, it was complicated to raise money for a *mikvah*. In fact, financial difficulties aside, many people jeered at the very

idea of building a *mikvah*. Reb Dovid encouraged me and told me that when I returned to Hamilton, the money would be waiting.

Upon my return to Hamilton a few days later, I met Mr. Hershel Seigel, a man in his late seventies, sitting on the stairs in front of the shul. When he saw me leave my car, he quickly got up and rushed towards me. "I've been waiting for you, Rebbe," he said in Yiddish. "After *minyan*, please take me home. I must speak to you." There was a sense of great urgency in his voice. I of course agreed and accompanied him home.



Steps of Cannon Street Shul

When we entered his home and sat down together, he told me of a dream he had had the night before. A distinguished rabbinic-looking man with a long white beard had appeared before him and instructed him to give his money to the rabbi. The man provided no reason but had assured him that this deed would guarantee my family a long life. "Rebbe," Mr. Seigel now said, "I want to give you my money." He walked over to an old cabinet and removed a paper bag, from which he began to count out one and two-dollar bills. I was frightened. I thought that if this man could dream about giving me money, then he could also have a nightmare that I stole his money. I stopped him from counting out his money, and I said to him, "Before we do this, I need to bring two witnesses who will count the money with us. When we do that, every dollar that you give will go towards building our *mikvah*." Mr. Seigel's eyes lit up, and his wife, who was in the room, commented that it would be a great honour to be part of this.

I called Harold Bornstein and Max Hoffman, and they both came right over. Together, we counted out four thousand dollars. Max Hoffman deposited the money in a special account, and that became the beginning of our *mikvah* fund. The contribution was a great start, but obviously not sufficient to construct a *mikvah*. A few weeks later, I had to be in New York again, and once again I met Reb Dovid and told him the story. He was deeply moved

by it and told me not to worry. He again assured me that when I return, I'll have enough money to build the *mikvah*.

Upon my return to Hamilton, I went to shul for *mincha* services, and sure enough, Mr. Seigel was sitting on the stairs of the shul waiting, anticipating my return. The story repeated itself. We went back to his home together, only this time I brought Harold Bornstein and Max Hoffman with me immediately. Mr. Seigel shared how the Rabbi returned to him again in the dream and emphasized that he should donate all of his money not just some. Again he went to the old cabinet and took out another bag filled with dollar bills. This time, the sum was fifteen thousand dollars, sufficient money to start building. An architect who was the grandson of the late Rabbi Levine was hired to design and supervise the building.



Newly Built Mikvah (1962)



Harry Seigel Monument engraved in Hebrew -
"With his funds was established the Mikvah"

We were still short five thousand dollars. I went to Toronto and visited with Dr. Julius Kuhl, who was highly respected in the Jewish community. He had been instrumental in rescuing many Jews from extermination during the Holocaust. He was willing and able to help us out, and with his contribution in hand, we achieved our financial goal and were able to complete the construction of the Hamilton *mikvah*.