

Shoes for Yom Tov! Meat for Yom Tov! Joy for Yom Tov!

Forty Two Thousand Children Rejoice at Massive Mesamche Lev Shoe Distribution

By: Frimet Blum

Excitement ran high on Kikar HaShabbos in Yerushalayim, as tens of thousands of Jews from across Eretz Yisroel streamed to Mesamche Lev's massive Pesach distribution tent to receive new shoes, matzos, wine, meat, fish, and other Pesach necessities. The distribution was colossal, and offered participants and passerby a glimpse of what *kibbutz galuyos* might look like.

Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Chassidim, Litvaks, Yerushalmim, Yemenites, Ethiopians, American olim, and others converged on the tent in good spirits to accept Mesamche Lev's magnificent offerings in honor of the upcoming *chag*. Recipients received a beautiful new pair of shoes for each child; and a considerable amount of food, including matzos, wine, meat, fish, and grocery coupons.

The distribution caused great joy amongst the poor.

"You see my children?" one Yemenite woman said, gesturing to the six little ones surrounding her shopping cart. "They haven't tasted meat in months. But on the *chag*, we will eat meat! We will have fish! We will wear new shoes! I can't tell you what this means to us." Her sentiments were echoed over and over again by the many, many people who sought out the organizers so that they could thank them for their assistance.

The amount of assistance distributed at the week-long event is mind boggling. Mesamche Lev gave away 42,000 pairs of shoes, 60,000 pounds of *matzah*, 250,000 pounds of meat, poultry, and fish, and over a half million dollars in grocery coupons and cash. The distribution reached over 12,000 families, totaling over 100,000 men, women, and children; and including 477 widows and 2400 orphans. The Pesach project cost the organization over \$2 million dollars, wholesale. The retail value of the distribution was close to \$5 million.

This year's distribution

was particularly significant because the organizers initially thought that they wouldn't be able to make it, due to the worsening economy. But the recession notwithstanding, they continued their thirty nine year tradition of helping the poor in this massive way. In addition, Mesamche Lev responded to a tremendous need, and expanded its operations to help families in New York.

The success of this year's venture is largely due to generous Jews who put their money in *tzedakah* - the only secure investment in these volatile times. The organization was also able to procure large loans, and stretch dollars in other ways.

Mesamche Lev distributes high quality shoes, because we believe that the poor deserve the best. This year, we were able to get current shoes from the best companies. They're the same shoes that retail in New York for \$75 to \$79. This fact was not lost on the recipients.

"You could tell it people's faces," one volunteer said. "Their eyes lit up when they saw the shoes." One little boy held up his precious oblong box, and shouted in glee to his

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neighbor, who was standing further down the line, "Yesh li naalayim chadashim! Naalayim yofim! - I have new shoes. Nice shoes." His mother couldn't keep her tears back. "It's the first time he got new shoes that come in a box," she said. "We usually buy sandals from an Arab street vendor. He wore sandals all winter." If the thought of wearing sandals in the snow seems harsh, that was not the worst case



Kol Ditzrich Yaisay Vyaichol. Matzohs as far as the eye can see.

Mesamche Lev encountered. Judging by the shoes people left behind, the new shoes fill a desperate need.

"Look at this," a volunteer said, holding up a once-white canvas sneaker with a three inch hole in the toe. "And this" - a shoe with a flapping, ripped sole. "And this" - a worn out ancient baby's shoe with missing laces. "People actually wore these here." One has to wonder at the degree of poverty that forces people to wear such poor excuses for shoes. And one has to imagine the joy that infuses families that suddenly have new shoes for every child and adult.

"We are treated like honored paying clients"

But there's more to Mesamche Lev than great shoes and Pesach food. The way they do things takes away the pain of accepting charity. The organization, the service, the selection; everything is done with people's dignity in mind. The Yom Tov distribution was the culmination of months of concerted effort.

Several months ago, recipient families, who were referred to Mesamche Lev by *rabbanim*, received an application in the mail requesting information about their needs. The application included a section asking families to list the shoe sizes and preference for Shabbos or weekday shoes, for every child in the family. Another section asked for the family's meat and fish preferences.

Families were then mailed



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Dear members of our community,

We appeal to you on behalf of a very unique tzedaka organization in Eretz Yisroel which serves needy people from all communities and kehillos.

Mesamche Lev organizes a number of crucial charity programs. One of its major operations is the distribution of tens of thousands of dollars worth of clothing to widows, orphans and poor families that are blessed with many children and those who support this fund share in the tremendous *zechus* of bringing relief and joy into thousands of impoverished homes. Among the beneficiaries of this organization are many Torah scholars who devote themselves to learning Torah amidst great need.

Every year before the holidays, Mesamche Lev distributes thousands of pairs of shoes for needy children and adults. Fortunate are those who share in this venture by sponsoring the shoe distribution, thereby literally putting thousands of impoverished people on their feet.

All Gedolei Yisroel in Israel warmly endorse this wonderful organization. We personally know the askanim of Mesamche Lev who devote themselves to the needs of the poor, and we can vouch for their upstanding character and integrity. All of their programs are conducted according to the guidance of prominent Gedolei Yisroel who are closely involved with this wonderful organization.

We urge you to support Mesamche Lev and share in the tremendous *zechus* of gladdening the hearts of the truly desperate. In this merit, may you be blessed by Hashem in every way, and may you always be on the giving end in the best of health.

הרב יצחק רייזמן

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Gedolei Harabonim of the five towns endorsing Mesamche Lev



Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Grossman marveling about the distribution on the phone with Rabbi Zalman Ashkenazi.



Thousand of these coupons were distributed to poor families...



Harav Pinchos Breuer, former Rav of Agudah of Flatbush, comparing a child's new shoes to his old ones.



Fit to perfection. A happy child gets new shoes.

up their shoes and food. The appointments were staggered, so that although forty two thousand children were served, there was no crowding. Close to two hundred volunteers helped families choose and fit their shoes, and pick up their food "orders". Families paid a token 20 NIS (\$5.00) for the shoes, so that they felt that they were purchasing them.

"The volunteers were so patient and helpful. My twelve year old daughter was being picky, and a volunteer kept showing her more shoes. It was better than in a regular shoe store. We were treated like honored paying customers," said one woman.

Yom Tov in a Box

The shoe "sale" was only the first stage of the distribution. Days after it was over, Mesamche Lev's "clients" came back to the tent for the second stage of the *chaluah* - the Pesach food distribution. The people were amazed again. The entire tent was filled to the brim with *matzoh*. One tremendous section was filled with thousands of boxes of Komemiyus *matzoh*, an exceptionally *mevudat* *matzoh*; acceptable to even the most stringent families. Another section contained over four thousand cases of top quality wine, packaged with tremendous thought. Each case contained ten bottles of grape juice and two bottles of wine, so that families have wine for the requisite *Arba Kosos*, and the grape juice most families prefer, for the rest of Yom Tov.

"Clients" then proceeded to Mesamche Lev's "Ofos Basar V'dagin" shop; a nondescript storefront; to pick up their meat and fish. Amazingly, the meat and fish was prepackaged and numbered, so that when families presented their magnetic cards, they received the package prepared especially for them.

For many years, the "Ofos Basar V'dagin" shop was open only before Yom Tov, when card-carrying members of Mesamche Lev visited to pick up their free meat and fish. Recently, however, in response to the growing need, the store opened full time. It offers meat, poultry, and fish at cost price - a boon to Mesamche Lev's widows and poor families. Mesamche Lev "members" can also supplement their Yom Tov packages at cost price.

Like the shoe distribution, the food distribution was extremely organized, with families picking up their packages at their pre-arranged

appointment times. Although a massive amount of food changed hands, there was no confusion and crowding, and much less hassle than one would experience in a regular store before Yom Tov. Recipients were treated with absolute dignity. Several people sought out the organizers, to thank them.

"I haven't served meat since Sukkos," one woman said. "I can't believe I'm actually holding meat, and it's mine." Another woman told a volunteer that her house was totally empty. She held up the grocery coupons she had received. "You think this is paper?" she said. "This is life. Life!"

Yitzchok I., a widower with nine children, took time

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from his busy Erev Yom Tov schedule to pen his thanks.

"I have nine children. The oldest is twelve. My wife passed away after the birth of our triplets," he writes. "I cannot tell you what your assistance means to me. Thanks to Mesamche Lev, my children have beautiful new shoes, and we have everything we need for Yom Tov."

Mesamche Lev's distribution was a tremendous Kiddush Hashem. News about the tremendous distribution spread across the country, with people traveling in from Bnei Brak, Beitar, Ramot, Beis Shemesh, Rechovot, and beyond, to participate. Although Mesamche Lev was founded specifically to help the poor of Eretz Yisroel, this year, for the first time, it began to serve its home community in New York.

"I was getting calls from people who know me, people who supported Mesamche Lev for twenty, thirty years. They wanted to know if we could help them make Yom Tov. I felt it was *hora'as sha'ah*. They are *aniyei ircha*.

I couldn't say 'no'", says Rabbi Ashkenazi.

In response to the appeals for help, Mesamche Lev sold tens of thousands of pounds of *matzoh* to the poor in New York for \$10 a pound - half price. The organization also distributed tens of thousands of dollars in cash assistance to New York families.

"Most *poskim* agree that *aniyei Eretz Yisroel* are considered *aniyei ircha* - the poor of your city, who must be helped first," Rabbi Ashkenazi says. "But now donors can rest assured that they are literally helping *aniyei ircha*, and fulfilling their *kimcha d'Pischa* obligations in the best way possible, according to all opinions."

Mesamche Lev was founded in 1971 by Rabbi Zalman Ashkenazi, shlita. It serves thousands of poor Jews in Eretz Yisroel, including the sick, large families, bnei Torah, and baalei teshuvah. The organization is especially sensitive to the needs of widows and orphans, who receive monthly stipends and other assistance. Mesamche Lev provides for the needs of the poor, and helps them marry off their children, pay medical expenses, and feed their children. They also have special holiday distributions several times each year. The Pesach distribution is Mesamche Lev's largest project. This year, Mesamche Lev expanded its operations to include the poor in New York City.

The tzedakah is given with true ahavas Yisroel and mesiras nefesh. Mesamche Lev does not turn anyone away. It is a true sign of siyata dishmaya that they are able to continue their avodas hakodesh.

Mesamche Lev is recognized and endorsed by rabbonim and gedolei Yisroel from every sector of Orthodox Jewry. The rabbonim urge the community to support this holy organization's work. You can learn more, view pictures of the distribution, and make your kimcha d'Pischa contribution at mesamchelev.org. Or, mail your donation to Mesamche Lev; 1426 57 Street; Brooklyn NY 11219. For more information, please call 718-387-6944; or fax 718-387-6988.

Please visit our website www.mesamchelev.org