

Lend a Hand—and Leave the Heavy Lifting to G-d

Category: Pekudei, Shemos, Vayakhel

How did one person accomplish so much for the Jewish people? Is it really humanly possible?

The Lost Children

Good Shabbos!

Several years ago, the Vatican opened a unique exhibit to the public.

The display wasn't of ancient artifacts but of items much more recent—and, for a lot of people, more meaningful than things from the very distant past.

You see, for the first time, the Vatican opened up its archive of materials from the period of the Holocaust. “We must not fear history,” the Vatican said in an official statement. Over the decades, the Vatican had been accused of not even lifting a finger to rescue Jews during those dark days.

Historians who specialize in the subject largely responded to the news by saying that they didn't believe they'd find anything that would change the historical record from what was already known until now—except for one thing: Whether the Vatican would open its files on the Jewish children who were handed over for adoption by non-Jewish families and monasteries during the Holocaust.

In the year 1946, then-Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Yitzchok Herzog traveled to Europe on a mission to restore to the Jewish Nation those children who had been handed over to churches and non-Jewish families to save their lives while their parents ended up getting murdered. And after extensive investigation and research, Rabbi Herzog estimated that there were about 10,000 such Jewish children in non-Jewish institutions and homes.

Rabbi Herzog's first stop was Rome, where he planned to meet with the pope, whom he was hoping would order all the institutions under him to return the

children. On March 10, 1946, that meeting took place. Rabbi Herzog first expressed thanks for the fact that the church had indeed saved so many kids during the Holocaust—but now, the Rabbi claimed, they needed to be returned to the Jewish fold. “After the Holocaust, every child means 1,000 children to us!” Rabbi Herzog emotionally declared.

But Rabbi Herzog was greeted with a stone-cold response. It was only after he raised his voice and blurted out a few sharp words that anyone stirred, but only a little bit. “We’ll put out a memo on the subject,” was all that was said. In reality, no message of any sort was sent out to members; rather, it was noted that the Vatican had gotten involved in removing Jewish children from the monasteries.

After that, Rabbi Herzog made his rounds all across Europe, seeking out Jewish children. He even visited Poland, where he organized a train to transport 500 Jewish orphans out of the country. Most of them had been located and assembled by his agents, who had paid \$50 for each child—an astronomical sum in those days.

Among those kids was a five-year-old boy and survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto. At the height of the legendary Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when the Ghetto was going up in flames, the boy’s mother put him in a sack and lowered him over the Ghetto wall. By coincidence, a Polish man walked by and heard the child crying; he took him home. After the war, the man was good enough to return him to the Jewish Nation. Another such child was a little girl who had grown up in a non-Jewish home—so much so that every morning when her fellow Jewish kids would gather to pray, she would stand next to them and, not knowing better, would cross herself!

But then Shabbos came. Rabbi Herzog approached the train crew and asked the conductor to stop the train for 24 hours, but the man refused. A fierce debate broke out, with some of the kids arguing that in their most trying times, they had still managed to keep Shabbos—and they sure weren’t about to violate Shabbos now! At the next train station, all the kids got off the train before Shabbos and spent the Day of Rest in various nearby hotels.

On Shabbos day, two sisters walked into Rabbi Herzog’s room. One was five and the other was ten. The younger one, who had grown up among non-Jews and only spoke Polish, cried that she wanted to go back to Poland. But her big sister

brought her to the rabbi and explained that this man had come especially from Israel to take them there. The rabbi spoke to her heart and convinced her to come along.

One Million Pounds of Meat

Now, before Rabbi Herzog moved to Israel to become the country's first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, he had served as the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Ireland for some 20 years. So while he was touring Europe, he took the time to hop over to Dublin to visit a personal friend, Éamon de Valera, the Prime Minister of Ireland at the time.

As a sign of friendship to the Chief Rabbi, the government of Ireland resolved to donate to the Jewish People an amount of cattle large enough to produce one million pounds of kosher meat after kosher slaughter. That meat would then be distributed to Jewish refugees across Europe. (See "The Rabbinate in Stormy Days: The Life and Teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac HaLevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel," pg. 128 et al.)

The project was undertaken by the Joint Distribution Committee, a.k.a. the Joint, the famous Jewish humanitarian organization. So the Joint first needed to find shochtim, or kosher butchers, who'd agree to travel to Ireland in the first place for several months so as to slaughter and kosherize millions of kilos of cattle meat. The Joint approached several rabbis in Paris, but none of them was ready to organize the necessary number of shochtim and mashgichim (inspectors).

At that time, there was also a large contingent of Chabad Chasidim from Russia housed in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Germany. So the Joint approached Rabbi Binyomin Gorodetzky, Chabad's point man for the Joint, who assured them that he'd be able to organize a delegation of shochtim and mashgichim to travel to Ireland.

Right after Pesach of 1947, plans for organizing that group got underway. But due to documentation and entry visa problems, the contingent only got underway in late 1948, when about 30 Chabad shochtim and mashgichim traveled to Ireland. Once there, they spent the next several months producing one million pounds of kosher meat that was distributed to Jews in DP camps all across Europe. But another reason for the project's delay was that they needed to procure enough

tins in which to pack the meat securely. The Joint managed to put together several tons of tin cans in the United States, then sent them off to Ireland so the meat could be packed and sealed.

And that brings us to this week's Torah portion.

Raising the Mishkan

In the Parshah of Pekudei, which is the second half of the double Parshah that we read this week, we are informed that the Jewish Nation concluded building the Mishkan. "And all the work of the Mishkan... was completed," and then, "they brought the Mishkan to Moshe." Rashi comments that the Jews were not capable of putting up the Mishkan, and only Moshe—with G-d's help—succeeded in erecting it.

The Rebbe asks: But didn't they physically bring the Mishkan to Moshe? In other words, if they were capable of literally dragging it over to Moshe (although in pieces), why does Rashi say that they couldn't put it up "due to the weight of the beams"? If they could drag it, surely they could also lift it! If they could not put up the Mishkan, then what was the logic in dragging it over to Moshe? How exactly was Moshe Rabbeinu supposed to solve that problem himself? At most, they should have sent a messenger to Moshe to ask him what to do; why all the inconvenience?

What's more, over the course of 40 years in the desert, the Mishkan was reassembled anew at each place they camped. Furthermore, during the seven days of dedication, they put up and dismantled the Mishkan every day! What does the verse mean when it says, "they could not put it up"?

The answer, says the Rebbe, is that the Jewish Nation learned from Moshe Rabbeinu that each action involving the Mishkan required one single individual to do it, not a group of any size together.

As the verse (Shmos 34:4) states, "Then all the wise men... came, each one from his work, which they had been doing." To erect the Mishkan, (Shmos 26:30), Moshe commands, "And you shall erect the Mishkan according to its proper manner, as you will have been shown on the mountain"—with the word "you" there in the singular, not the plural. And from that, they understood that the

building of the Mishkan needed to be executed by one human being “at the first time,” at the dedication of the Mishkan, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

So, those responsible for the construction of the Mishkan tried to do it, but did not succeed. They figured that the reason it didn't work was because they had been involved in the Sin of the Golden Calf, so they were not worthy to put up the Mishkan. Moshe Rabbeinu, on the other hand, who had not been involved in the Golden Calf at all, could in fact do it. And so they brought it to Moshe.

But even Moshe was not capable of lifting the pieces. So Moshe turns to G-d and says, “How is this humanly possible?” And G-d responds to him, “Busy yourself with your hands and it will seem as if you are putting them up, but it will stand erect and rise by itself” (Likutei Sichos Vol. 11, pg. 181 et al; Toras Menachem Vol. 59, pg. 295, et al)—Moshe, you just put forth a hand, and the Mishkan will stand up by itself.

The Lesson

So, when we hear stories like those of Rabbi Herzog, who traveled in person to Europe when he was almost 60 years old, running from one country to another so as to personally rescue nearly 1,000 Jewish children, and to influence an entire government to donate one million (!) pounds of kosher meat to Jewish refugees, we wonder how one single human being could be capable of doing all that.

The answer to that question, my friends, is right here in our Parshah.

When a Jew goes to rescue Jewish children, each of which being a Mishkan, a sanctuary of G-d, G-d says to him, “Busy yourself with your hands and it will seem as if you are building it”— you just stick your finger in the cold water and the rest will happen by itself; the “Mishkan” will rise on its own.

Because when you are dealing with matters pertaining to the Jewish Nation, you only need to “be busy” with it—and G-d will do the rest.

Good Shabbos!