

Impressions An American in Yerushalayim

By Dov Fuchs

Dov Fuchs, a kollel student and rebbi in Yerushalayim, shares the joys and challenges of his young family as it adjusts to a culture that is different from what they grew up with.

A Room Filled With Shoes

A trip to Europe can be a life-changing experience. Many of the students in our yeshivah have reconnected with their heritage, and themselves, while touring the blood-soaked continent. For some, the inspiration comes from visiting the *mekomos hakedoshim* that shown a room filled with shoes. He wished to remind them of the sin of the *shevatim* who sold their brother Yosef and used the money to buy shoes. It was their sacred duty, he informed them, to rectify that sin by paying with their lives. And thus, a room filled with shoes attested to once hosted bastions of Torah and *Chassidus*. For others, the haunting silence of Auschwitz and other camps awakens something inside them. For one boy, however, it was the shoes. Not the gas chambers, not the crematoria, but the shoes. A room filled with thousands, maybe millions of shoes that were snatched from holy Yidden who perished there stirred him. There were shoes the barbaric atrocities that plagued our holy nation. In the past few weeks, a massive tent has been erected near our neighborhood. It hosts a huge *chessed* project that distributes thousands upon thousands of pairs of shoes to people in Yerushalayim in honor of Pesach. One can only imagine the great expense in buying new footwear for a large family. Adhere, these blessed families receive of every shape and size. From the *zeeseh* little footwear of infants the shoes for free. The magnitude of the *chessed*, however, does not and toddlers to the boots and shoes of adults. They were piled high on display in the Auschwitz museum, and it broke his heart before opening it. Here, he pondered, they are all empty, but at one time, someone wore them. And they are gone. Each pair of empty shoes helped him internalize the enormity of the loss. He then traveled to Budapest and was shaken by yet another memorial that consisted of shoes. All along the banks of the Danube River one end with what they will have on their feet. The entire project is coordinated in such an honorable fashion. No one is made to feel they are *nebach* on the receiving end. Each person is treated with the greatest respect and dignity. It is pleasure to behold. I could not resist the temptation to go in and witness this massive *chessed* for myself. Just hearing about it was such a *kiddush Hashem*, and I felt the desire to connect with sees thousands of pairs of shoes cemented to the ground. They are atestament to the masses of Yidden who were forced to stand at the shores of this very waterbed, where they were mowed down by machinegun, tainting the waters a bloody red while leaving their lifeless bodies to sink to the depths. This monument also touched his *neshamah*. It was the shoes. it on a deeper level. The first thing that caught my eye was the massive quantity of shoes! There appeared to be an endless number of styles and sizes to benefit all the different ages and genders. And in my heart, I remembered that boy from yeshiva recalling for me the inspiration and awakening that he had from seeing a similar sight: a room filled with shoes. In truth, though we do not believe in bad omens, large numbers of shoes do not seem to bode well for us in history. The *piyut* of the *Asara Harugei Malchus*, the 10 Martyrs, which is recited on Yom Kippur and Tishah B'Av, recalls how the 10 great *Tanna'im* who were called before the cruel Roman ruler were also I wonder, I hope and pray that somehow the enormousness of this great *chessed* for *Klal Yisrael* can, in some way, fill the void left by the martyred *Kedoshim* by adding such phenomenal *kiddush Hashem* and *ahavas Yisrael* to the world. Perhaps this can somehow fill their shoes.

Our Response The Soul of a Shoe

I was pleased to see Dov Fuchs' Erev Pesach article, *A Room Filled with Shoes*, in the *An American in Yerushalayim* feature. As president of Mesamche Lev, which coordinates the massive shoe distribution he describes, his words were most heartening. Interestingly, he is not the first to contrast the piles of shoes in Auschwitz with the stacks of shoes in Mesamche Lev's tent. Rabbi Zecharya Wallerstein drew the same conclusion when he spoke about Mesamche Lev at Ohr Naava's Aseres Yemei Teshuva event.

Rabbi Wallerstein asked, "Why did the Nazis want our shoes? Because we sold Yosef Hatzaddik for shoes. I thought to myself, 'How are we going to correct this?' There is an organization called Mesamche Lev that gives out shoes to people who can't afford them. They already gave 300,000 pairs of shoes. There are 700,000 pairs of shoes missing!"

I want to thank Dov Fuchs for his kind words about the distribution, and invite the public to join us in putting shoes on more children's feet. Donations for shoes, food, and orphans can be sent to Mesamche Lev, 1364 53rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11219; or at mesamchelev.org.

Rabbi Tzvi Friedman