

Thousands Throng the Roads to Mesamche Lev's Sukkos Distribution

BY FRIMET BLUM

It was a scene that made many think of *aliyah l'regel*. Tens of thousands of Jews, babies, and small children in tow, converged in Yerushalayim's streets. *Esrogim* stands lined the sidewalks, *sukkos* filled every available space, and the spirit of the upcoming Yom Tov filled the air. The travelers rejoiced, their excitement mounting as they neared their destination — Bnos Yerushalayim Hall, the site of Mesamche Lev's Sukkos distribution, which took place last week.

The hall was transformed into a massive butcher store, with giant refrigerators containing tremendous amounts of meat and poultry. The atmosphere inside was electric, with families from across the length and breadth of Eretz Yisrael coming to pick up their Yom Tov meat. Many redeemed coupons they had received in the mail.

The distribution provided assistance to 8,000 families, including 397 widows, close to 3,000 orphans, 1,000 Torah scholars and their families, and thousands of desperately poor families.

The distribution was sponsored by generous donors from the United States, the U.K., and other countries who wished to take part in this massive effort to bring *simchas Yom Tov* to their brethren in Eretz Yisrael. Many donors purchased coupons sponsoring meat for one or more families, fulfilling their obligation to provide *tzorchei Yom Tov* to the poor.

One donor, who learned in Eretz Yisrael for several years, described the poverty he witnessed firsthand.

"It's not like anything in the United States," he said. "In Eretz Yisrael, a poor child literally goes hungry. There are no food stamps or school lunches. I once visited a distant cousin for a Shabbos meal, and they had one chicken bottom for five kids. They each got a sliver, and I could see that they wanted more. But that was



At one of Mesamche Lev's distribution centers.



Volunteers fill packages for Mesamche Lev.

it. There was nothing left in the pot."

Then he described the experience that turned him into an ardent Mesamche Lev supporter.

"One of my friends recruited me to help out at the distribution. I don't know what I expected, but this was beyond anything I could have imagined. There were so many people; they just kept coming and coming and coming. But there was no tumult. No one had to sacrifice his dignity. And they walked out with so much. Every family there was going to have a complete Yom Tov.

"I had one question — did my cousins know about this? Were they going to have more than a sliver of chicken on Yom Tov? I got my answer when I saw them

in the distance. They were there. They knew the address that every needy person in Israel goes to. They are a Mesamche Lev family."

Mesamche Lev's families have been looking forward to the Sukkos distribution for months. For most, the thought of receiving meat is very exciting; the only time they eat meat is when they receive it from Mesamche Lev. Some haven't tasted meat since the organization's previous distribution. They consider even poultry a delicacy and enjoy just a taste of it on Shabbos — when there is money to pay for it.

The Mesamche Lev distribution ensured that there would be enough meat and poultry to satisfy every member of the recipi-

Reaching Out to Rechasim

This year for the first time, Mesamche Lev expanded its operations to Rechasim, a small town in northern Eretz Yisrael with 1,800 families, many of them poor.

On the sign welcoming its visitors, Rechasim introduces itself as "*Ir HaTorah*" since a large percentage of its residents dedicate themselves entirely to Torah study. In spiritual terms, Rechasim is rich indeed; but materially, it is one of the poorest cities in Israel. Families subsist on next to nothing, living with a *mesirus nefesh* for Torah that is rare in our time.

In response to the great need in the city, Mesamche Lev held a

special event in which they distributed 8,000 pairs of children's shoes. Many excited children who came to the event received the first new pair of shoes they ever had.

It may be hard for Americans to understand, but the fact is that when a family struggles to put bread on the table, shoes don't even make it on the list of things to buy. Instead, children wear any pair in the house, even if they are too big, too small, or worn out.

The shoes left behind at the distribution were pathetic. Some had huge holes in the soles or were so scuffed it was impossible to determine what

color they had once been. Many children had worn cheap sandals and Crocs that might have sufficed in the summer but that would be poor substitutes for shoes in the wet and cold of winter. Their new shoes will bring them not only *simchas Yom Tov* but also joy and comfort for many, many months to come.

The families in Rechasim, including thousands of *bonei Torah*, also participated in the main Yom Tov distribution in Yerushalayim, where they received meat, poultry, grocery coupons, and checks, along with their brethren from around the country.



4 kg.
COUPON

MEAT ROSH HASHANA
SUCCOS
5773/2012
DISTRIBUTION
חלוקת בשר לימים טובים תשע"ג

Name of Recipient שם המקבל

4 kg Meat Coupon
• 4 ק"ג בשר בקר •

Store Signature

I wish to dedicate my contribution in honor/memory of:

A coupon enabling the holder to receive meat for Yom Tov.



At a Mesamche Lev distribution center.

ent families for the entire Sukkos.

In addition to meat and poultry, all of the widows and many other families received grocery coupons and checks so that they can buy everything they need for Yom Tov.

Rabbi Dovid Weber, an administrator at Mesamche Lev's Israeli office, explains, "Before Yom Tov, everyone is caught up in the frenzy of preparations, but they're left out. They see the tumult in the streets, they hear the neighbors talk about cooking for Yom Tov, they see the children skipping in and out of stores, and they feel like there's a glass wall between them and the rest of the Jewish world. They don't have food to cook, and they can't go shopping for new clothing because they don't have money."

Mesamche Lev breaks the glass wall and enables these families to enjoy the excitement of preparing for Yom Tov.

The barrier is toughest for widows and orphans. They live with grief and loneliness, deprivation and hunger, feeling that

the joy in the streets can't possibly pierce their hearts.

But then Mesamche Lev comes along and makes sure they have everything they need for Yom Tov. Suddenly there's meat, there's food, there's money for new clothes — and the pain isn't so bad anymore. There's a spirit of joy and plenty in the heart and home.

Mesamche Lev has been alleviating the pain of widows and orphans for over 40 years. Rabbi Zalman Ashkenazi, z"l, the founder of the organization, dedicated himself to their plight, devising creative programs to make their lives more bearable. He worked to meet their Yom Tov needs and relieved them of the great burden of marrying off their children. Under his leadership, Mesamche Lev mushroomed into the giant *chessed* empire it is today.

Before Yom Tov and every day of the year, Mesamche Lev perpetuates the legacy of its remarkable founder and achieves its noble mission: to fight poverty with dignity and to bring *simchah* to the downtrodden.