

Misaskim's Chanukah Distribution Turns Darkness Into Light for 2,100 Yesomim

SANDY ELLER

The Festival of Lights became infinitely brighter for the nearly 2,100 *yesomim* and *almanos* who received Chanukah gift packages distributed by Misaskim containing *Chanukah gelt*, toys and a packet of dollar bills and coins bearing the blessings of the most prominent *Gedolim* of our generation.

Understanding that Yamim Tovim can be particularly difficult for those who have suffered the loss of a loved one, Misaskim began distributing Chanukah gifts several years ago with a relatively modest budget of \$36,000. The project has grown exponentially and this year Misaskim raised \$150,000 to benefit 476 families in California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Wisconsin, Montreal and Toronto.

In addition to arranging two toys for every family and \$50 for each child, Misaskim founder and director Yanky Meyer personally visited with 10 revered Rabbanim, asking each one to give his blessings to dollar bills that would be given to every recipient. Meyer traveled through the New York area and made a whirlwind 48-hour trip to Eretz Yisrael, bringing massive stacks of singles to, *shlita*, Harav Chaim Kanievsky, Harav Tuvia Weiss, Harav Don Segal, the Belzer Rebbe, Harav

Moshe Shternbuch, Harav Dovid Abuchatzzeira, Harav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Harav Mattisyahu Salomon and Harav Yechezkel Roth for their *brachos*, and with the Skulener Rebbe, *shlita*, following his custom of blessing only half dollars. Misaskim volunteers spent hours placing every dollar into a plastic sleeve, noting the name of the Rav and the *brachah* that had been given and then creating packets for each child that included \$9.50 in "*gebentshte gelt*."

The annual Chanukah distribution has grown to become a significant part of Misaskim's work and Mr. Yanky Meyer is buoyed by stories he has heard from recipients. Last year, a teacher reached out to Mr. Meyer on the second-to-last day of Chanukah at home, telling him how one of her students had lost her father and had told her how much she has hated Chanukah ever since.

"The teacher told us that the student had gotten our Chanukah package and she said that it felt like the *Ribbono shel Olam* was giving her a big hug and saying, 'Don't worry. I didn't forget about you.'"

In another instance a mother approached Mr. Meyer and told him that the entire family had pooled their Misaskim Chanukah *gelt* and, after adding some more money to the collection, used it to buy a piano.

"She told me, 'You don't know the *simchas hachaim* you brought into my



Dedicated Misaskim volunteers preparing Chanukah packages for *yesomim*.

house," said Mr. Meyer.

The feedback this year has been equally rewarding with one widower reporting, "My kids screeched with excitement. It's our first Chanukah without my wife and let me tell you they haven't been this excited in a long time."

A woman who lost her husband reached out to Mr. Meyer, telling him, "My boys felt so *chashuv* getting the *gebentshed* dollars! My 11-year-old said, 'At least we get this! Tatty owes us a present so I guess this is him sending.' I could have cried."

And yet another mother who contacted Misaskim reported that the Chanukah package showed up while an ACS (Administration for Children's Services) employee



The Skulener Rebbe, *shlita*, *bentching* Chanukah *gelt*. The Rebbe is one of ten *Gedolim* who *bentched* money for the *yesomim*.

was visiting her home, giving the family a passing grade on their inspection because it was clear that they were being well taken care of by the local community.

Misaskim knows too many orphans and is finding a way to infuse joy into a Chanukah that has been overshadowed by grief. The entire process involves considerable time, expense, and effort, but Mr. Meyer feels that every minute was well spent.

"Just to bring a smile to the faces of these kids and to bring them something that no one else is getting makes it all worthwhile," said Mr. Meyer. "There are still more *yesomim* out there who aren't on our list; if we knew who they were, we would bring them Chanukah packages too."

Annual National Association of Chevra Kadisha TEAM Shabbos

CHANA GREEN

In just one week, shuls and communities across the county will join together for the annual National Association of Chevra Kadisha TEAM Shabbos. Following last year's tremendous success, the fourth annual Traditional End-of-Life Awareness Movement (TEAM) Shabbos returns this *Shabbos Parashas Vayechi*, 14 Teves/December 22.

A project of the National Association of Chevra Kadisha (NASCK), the mission of TEAM Shabbos — to generate awareness, education, and direction regarding the value of life and critical end-of-life decisions — is resonating strongly throughout U.S. and Canada.

The momentum is growing as shuls and communities nationwide enthusiastically embrace the opportunity to bring the topic of end-of-life, a subject which is too often avoided, out into the open.

There are several ways shuls can participate in TEAM Shabbos. Utilize the week leading up to *Parashas Vayechi* to open the conversation about relevant issues through the Shabbos *drashah*, *shiurim*, newsletters and *divrei Torah*.

But TEAM Shabbos is not just about a shul *drashah*. TEAM Shabbos is encouraging community members to get involved and take action. Communities can also use this opportunity to collaborate with NASCK

in planning programs that delve into a vast array of end-of-life related topics. Individuals can be encouraged to purchase life-insurance, fill out a halachic living will, begin the process of writing a will in accordance with *halachah*, reach out to family members who may be considering choices other than a traditional burial for a loved-one or open an end-of-life conversation with their parents ... or children.

From New York to Toronto to Tennessee, the TEAM Shabbos initiative is creating a dramatic shift in the perspective about end-of-life care and preparation. Subjects that were once taboo and questions that have gone unanswered can now be addressed in a constructive way. By taking advantage of the teachable moment that TEAM Shabbos offers and with the commitment of Rabbis, shuls and active community members around the country, we can continue spreading our message about the importance of properly preparing ourselves and others for illness and end-of-life decisions.

Has your shul joined the TEAM? Encourage your Rav and shul to sign up today, and join hundreds of shuls across the nation to generate awareness about the Torah perspective on the value of life, here and hereafter.

To sign up or learn more, call 718-847-6280, email info@nasck.org, or visit teamshabbos.org/register.

'V'Hanaar Iti': Shuvu's Motto of Responsibility

SHLOMO GROSSMAN

Shuvu Chazon Avraham recently announced details for the Shuvu Mission 2019, set to take place in January. In the week since registration opened to the public, scores of people from across the U.S., U.K. and Israel have clamored to join this unique opportunity.

A four-day, three-night singular experience that will reshape your perspective on *Yiddishkeit* in a way you never thought possible, the Shuvu Mission offers a rare glimpse into the extraordinary impact that Shuvu is making on tens of thousands of Israelis on a daily basis.

This year's mission will be graced by Harav Reuven Feinstein, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshiva*, Yeshivas Staten Island. Included in the jam-packed itinerary are: private meetings with *Gedolei Yisroel*, *shlita*; gala dinners with some of Israel's biggest political/economic influencers; a Shuvu-wide bar mitzvah; an Old City *kumzitz* with musical superstars; and visits to *mekomos hakedoshim*.

First and foremost, however, are the inspirational visits to several of Shuvu's 74 schools across Israel, where one can see the realization of the prescient vision of Shuvu's founder, Harav Avraham Pam, *zt"l*.

Indeed, when asked why he poured every last ounce of his energy into Shuvu, Rav Pam echoed the sentiment found in *Parashas Vayigash*; "*Eich e'eleh el avi, vehanaar eineno iti?*" — How can I go up to *Shamayim* and the precious Jewish children are not with me?"

Giving just one child the opportunity to live a life of Torah and *mitzvos* can change the course of history. And all that child needs is one individual who will give him or her that chance.

The Shuvu Mission offers an opportunity to show your support for the movement that has literally saved tens of thousands of Israelis from the abyss of secularism — a reality that has shaped Israel's current spiritual landscape.

An opportunity to see what responsibility for every precious *Yiddishe neshamah* looks like.

An opportunity to say with confidence:

"*V'hanaar iti.*"

The Shuvu Mission will take place from January 12-17, 2019. To reserve your spot and take advantage of current special travel and lodging rates email info@shuvuusa.org, or call 718-692-3434. Visit: www.Shuvumission.com.

Can't join this year's mission? Sponsor a Shuvu Hero at www.shuvuheros.org.