

The Daily Portion

- Sivan Rahav Meir

All because of one speech

Translation by Yehoshua Siskin

A single moment can sometimes influence our entire lives. A fascinating moment of this kind was revealed during a meeting between Israel's President, Mr. Yitzchak Herzog and Rabbi Berel Wein during Pesach.

Herzog came to the home of the 88-year-old rabbi who made aliya after many years as a writer, lecturer and American Jewish leader. Rabbi Wein has led many congregations as a Rabbi, as well as Rosh Yeshiva, producing hundreds of students in Rabbinical leadership roles across the globe. Rabbi Wein told the following story to the President, who is named after his grandfather, Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, who served as the Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of Mandate Palestine and Israel from 1936-1959:

"I was a twelve-year-old child in 1946 when my father woke me early one morning and said: 'We are going to the airport. Rabbi Herzog is arriving in Chicago!' The entire city waited in anticipation of the eminent rabbi's arrival.

"The rabbi came to our school and

told us about his recent encounter: 'I just returned from Rome after meeting with the Pope. I presented him with a list of thousands of Jewish children who were sent to Catholic monasteries by their parents in order to save them from the Germans. I told the Pope: 'I am giving you this list as a representative of the Jewish People. I am requesting that you return these children to us.' The Pope did not agree to this request. He explained that each child who enters a Catholic institution is baptized into Christianity and must remain a Christian forever.

"Rabbi Herzog finished quoting the Pope, paused for a moment, and then burst into tears. I never saw anyone cry like that. He bent his head over the podium, and all two thousand years of our exile and persecution poured out of him. All the young Americans stood in stunned amazement.

"But then the rabbi stood up straight, looked at us intently and said: 'I cannot do anything more for these children. But you, what do you intend to do for the Jewish nation? What do you intend to do to rehabilitate our people?'

"We then all approached to shake his hand, and he repeated this message to each of us personally. He looked at

me, still a boy, and said to me: 'Did you hear what I said? Do not forget what I said.'

"The words I heard that day changed my life. They changed the lives of many who were there. Many among that group of children established educational institutions and large Jewish organizations and many also made aliyah. Over the years, the young Americans in that lecture hall educated tens of thousands to be active members of the Jewish nation. And it was all because of one speech, and because of one person's tears."

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