SAVE ONE LIFE, SAVE THE ENTIRE WORLD (INCLUDING YOURSELF)

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What is the most "popular" mitzvah?

Tikkun Olam, repairing the world.

And, why?

Because of what we learn in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a): "Whoever saves a single life is considered by scripture to have saved the whole world.' Because we are created in God's image.

This means everyone – not just Jews. (see article)

Like, for example, Alan Kurdi's lifeless three-year-old body lying in the surf of a Turkish beach. Do you remember that image? Like you, it visits me in my dreams (nightmares).

It is the refugee crisis that we no longer notice. Replaced with other images: children separated from their parents at the US Southern Border. Anti-immigrant sentiments are growing in around the globe. Nativism and toxic forms of nationalism are on the rise. There has been a renewed antisemitism. We have witnessed the largest increase in attacks against Jews in American (and Canadian) history. We feel powerless.

But, we are not. We can save one life – and in so doing, we can save the entire world.

Eight times in the past two years, my congregation, Temple Sholom of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada has done precisely that. We are trying to do it again. We need your help.

Our temple have taken responsibility for a young Syrian-Kurdish couple, Esther and Zara, who fled Aleppo with almost nothing. They are currently living in Iraqi Kurdistan. They are preparing to immigrate to Vancouver, BC Canada, and we will resettle them in our beautiful city.

Their situation is dire. Zara has lost his job, and its meager wages. Esther, who has worked as an English interpreter, is similarly underemployed.

I came to know Esther from her urgent letters and text messages when our congregation began to sponsor Syrian refugees. As press reports began to go viral I received dozens of direct messages from desperate families asking our congregation to save their lives. I imagined Raoul Wallenberg receiving similar pleas. I asked myself: WWRD? What would Raoul do?

I knew.

The task was overwhelming. We were already helping two families. The resources that our synagogue could devote to this were depleted. I directed inquiries to the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS) in Toronto and other immigrant aid agencies in Canada.

But, Esther was persistent in her emails, Facebook posts and pleas. I got to know her as a human being, not a "refugee." She wanted to start a family. She understood and appreciated Israel and the Jewish people. She identified with our story and our experiences.

I tried to look away, but I could not. Our congregation had done its part, hadn't it?

But, that Talmudic text kept grabbing at me. "Save one life, save the entire world."

The program that allowed the Canadian Government and private individuals to sponsor nearly 50,000 Syrian refugees has ended. The quotas have returned to "pre-crisis" levels. Our immigration lawyers said it would be nearly impossible to get an asylum slot. It could take five or more years through normal immigration wait times.

We reached out to our partners at the Anglican Archdiocese who had acted as our Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) for our previous families. A miracle occurred. A slot for Esther and Zara opened up. We filed the paperwork. Esther and Zara have received conditional approval for immigration to Canada.

There is one catch – and this is where you come in. We must raise $50,000 by July 1, 2019 to be held in trust, so that we can assure the Canadian Government that we have the financial resources to cover settlement expenses for their first twelve months in Canada.

Our congregation has raised $15,000 from private pledges. We need to raise the remaining $35,000 in the next six weeks.

Temple Sholom has setup a US non-profit to help with this effort (www.thesholomfund.org) and we have partnered with one of Esther's former NGO clients, Virgil Falloonwho has created a GoFundMe page to raise money as well.

You will be saving not only the lives of Esther and Zara. You will be saving your own moral lives. It might even change your way of dealing with your own families, of parenting your children, and of seeing the world.

Please help, make a lifesaving donation today, save one life, save the entire world – in a time when the world most certainly needs saving.