

TORAH THOUGHTS – REMEMBERING RAOUL WALLENBERG

Raoul Wallenberg was born 107 years ago this week. The young Swede rescued tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews, issuing them official looking documents of Swedish citizenship.

The Nazis occupied Hungary in 1944, and in the space of two months shipped 440,000 Jews to Auschwitz and to other camps. Yet most of the Jews in the capital, Budapest, were still there. Wallenberg, who arrived that summer, made it his mission to save them.

Wallenberg was incredibly persuasive and charismatic. As a representative of Sweden, a nation recognized by both Hungary and Germany, he had the power to negotiate. Here are just a few of his daring acts and accomplishments.

1. He bought and rented more than 30 buildings in Budapest including hospitals and a soup kitchen – he hung Swedish flags from their front doors and declared that they were protected by Swedish diplomatic immunity. At least 15,000 Jews moved in for protection and hundreds more worked for him.
2. Wallenberg intercepted a train bound for Auschwitz. He climbed up on the roof of the train, carrying a bundle of passports and started to hand them over to hands eagerly stretched out through open doors. He ignored the Nazi and Hungarian guards who were firing warning shots and ordered anyone who held a protective pass to get off the train, saving them from “a voyage of horror and death.”
3. As the Soviets closed in on Budapest, Wallenberg’s final achievement was to persuade the Nazis to stop the planned annihilation of the main Jewish ghetto in Budapest, which was home to 70,000 people. The German general in charge received a letter from Wallenberg – in it he promised the general would be held personally responsible for the ghetto’s destruction and would be hanged as a war criminal once the war was over. The massacre was stopped.

Sadly, Wallenberg was detained by Soviet troops in 1945 and never seen publicly again. His final fate is unknown.

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation keeps his memory alive, and his exploits inspire people still. To learn more about this amazing man, go to <http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/>

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont