**Shabbos Stories for**

**Chanukah 5777 – Part 2**

Volume 8, Issue 17 2 Teveth 5777/ December 31, 2016

**Printed L’illuy nishmas Nechama bas R’ Noach, a”h**

For a free subscription, please forward your request to [***keren18@juno.com***](mailto:keren18@juno.com)

**A Slice of Life**

**"Hizzoner" and**

**Two Menoras**

**By Rabbi Yosef Landa**

I was listening to the radio the day Ed Koch passed away, when I heard a recording of the former New York City Mayor answering a reporter's question about how he would like his epitaph to read.



**The late Mayor Ed Koch of New York City**

**with a Menorah in the background.**

In his inimitable style Koch responded without missing a beat. "He was fiercely proud of his Jewish faith and he fiercely loved the City of New York," he said. I was totally impressed. Here was a wonderful manifestation of the "pintele yid," that inexhaustible Jewish essence which is at the core of every Jew. It was noteworthy, I thought, how Koch had mentioned his pride in his Jewish identity first, ahead even of his love for New York.

I recalled how over 30 years ago while serving as Mayor, Koch helped some of my fellow Jews in St. Louis - may G-d bless them and keep them - to learn an important lesson. Koch probably never knew what he accomplished that day, and I never had the opportunity to thank him for it. So I'll share the story here as my belated expression of gratitude to "Hizzoner" the Mayor.

Young, idealistic and inexperienced, my wife, Shiffy, and I had just moved to St. Louis a few months earlier to establish Chabad in this mid-size Midwestern Jewish community of about 50,000. One of our earliest community-wide projects was to erect a fifteen-foot Chanuka menora on the plaza of the St. Louis County Government Center. The county executive happily approved the menora display and even joined us for the beautiful lighting ceremony. The TV and news reporters were present and provided ample media coverage. We received many wonderfully supportive comments from the public, Jews and non-Jews alike, telling us how the menorah was a tasteful and fitting expression of Jewish celebration and pride, and of the religious diversity which is this country's blessed hallmark.

Much to our surprise and dismay, the menora display also encountered fierce opposition, which emanated largely from the professional leadership - well meaning, I am sure -- of an array of local Jewish establishment organizations. Their argument was ostensibly that they considered the placement of the menora on public property to be in violation of the constitutional separation of church and state. It was evident, however, that there also was an underlying unease with the forthright, unabashed public display of Jewishness which the menorah represented, and which many Jews in this conservative city, in the middle of America, were unaccustomed to at the time.

These were well-intentioned people who were firmly attached to what they perceived to be the Jewish community's sacred opposition to such displays. Some saw us as foreigners, "imports from Brooklyn" (that's how one writer referred to us in an op-ed), who had come to town to overturn long-standing, hallowed community norms. The county executive, to his great credit, remained firm in his support of the menorah display, and the entire community was abuzz over this controversy. The local Anglo-Jewish newspaper made it front-page news and editorialized against us, and word of the discord within the Jewish community even reached the general media. It was not a pleasant situation, to say the least.

A lot has changed since then. We have become good friends with many of the people who initially opposed us, and Chabad now enjoys deep and fruitful relationships with individuals and organizations from throughout the community. The public Menora has become a commonplace and accepted feature in many cities across the country. Moreover, in a couple of landmark rulings the U. S. Supreme Court gave its nod to this sort of "holiday display" on public property. Eventually American Jewish organizations came around to recognize that there exists a constitutional argument in support of such displays as well, namely the protection of our religious freedom and of free speech. But our story happened well before that.

It was the last day of Chanuka that year, and the iconic, big city Mayor Ed Koch happened to be in St. Louis to address the annual meeting of the local Jewish Federation which was held over a Sunday brunch at an upscale St. Louis hotel. Several hundred supporters were in attendance, including many of the professional and lay leaders who were heading the opposition to the menorah. Koch gave his speech, which of course had nothing to do with the menorah, and then proceeded to take questions from the audience.

That's when one questioner took to the floor and asked Koch to explain how, as a Jewish mayor, he dealt with the issue of religious symbols on public property and, specifically, would the mayor be kind enough to share his own view about the placement of menorahs on public property.



**From right to left: Rabbi Yosef Landa, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, First Lady Mrs. Georganne Nixon and Rebbetzin Shiffy Landa at the 2013 Festival of Lights (5th Night of Chanukah) that was celebrated with a lighting of the Menorah and a Chanukah Party at the Governor’s Mansion in Jefferson City, Missouri.**

An audible gasp went up from the audience. Someone had dared to bring up the embarrassing, unmentionable topic of the menorah display in the presence of this important guest. Then there was utter silence as the straight-shooting Koch responded in his typical direct and outspoken manner. "I have no problem whatsoever with having a privately-funded menorah on public property", he said. "I think it's absolutely wonderful. I'm proud to say that we have one in New York City at Fifth Avenue and Central Park" he continued.

As if he hadn't said enough on the subject, the Mayor continued further. "Let me tell you what else we do in New York," he said. "The menorah is in Manhattan. The people who light the menorah are the Lubavitchers. They live in Brooklyn. So when they light the menorah in Manhattan late on Friday afternoon when it's getting close to Shabbos, we provide them with a helicopter and we fly them back to Brooklyn, so they can get home in time for Shabbos!"

Nothing more needed to be said. That was the end of the problem. While I'm sure most people in the audience didn't change their minds about the menorah display and the First Amendment just because of what Koch had said, he nonetheless succeeded to make everyone understand that good and decent people within the Jewish community can hold differing views on such matters.

While doing so, he not only quieted a controversy regarding church-state separation, but more importantly, he let my fellow Jews in St. Louis see a wonderful first-hand example of real, unapologetic Jewish pride. He reminded them that there's no reason in this great country for anyone to hide their Jewishness as if it were contrary or inimical to American life and culture. And for that I am most grateful. Thank you, Mayor Koch.

*Reprinted from last year’s Miketz 5775 edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY. ,Rabbi Landa is the director of Chabad of Greater St. Louis, in Missouri*

**When Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov Wished His Kehillah Blessings for**

**The New Year on December 31st**

It was late at night one New Year’s Eve, December 31, and the beis medrash of Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov was still filled with his chasidim who were sitting and learning. Close to midnight, the door to the private office of the Rav, which was adjacent to the beis medrash, opened, and the Rav shouted out to his Chasidim: תכתבו טובה לשנה ותחתמו, ‘May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year!’ He then returned to his office and closed the door behind him.

The chasidim were mystified. Didn’t the Rav know that this was the secular New Year and not the Jewish New Year? A short time later the same thing happened and the Berditchover Rebbe came out to bless them. And then this happened again for a third time.

The chasidim were totally baffled! As not just anyone could approach the Rav, the men asked an elderly chasid to approach him and ask for an explanation. The Rav told the elderly man the following: The previous Rosh Hashanah, the tefilos and shofar blowing of the city of Berditchov were especially beautiful and heartfelt and went directly to Heaven. Hashem was so taken by these tefilos that He immediately inscribed the entire city in the Book of Life and bestowed on each and every one of them a year of health and wealth.

When Yom Kippur came, Hashem was so taken by their fasting and crying. The people poured out their hearts into their prayers. Hashem was about to seal the inscription that He had written on Rosh Hashanah, when suddenly the Satan spoke up.

“True, the people have been praying fervently, but, this is only one day! How can You inscribe them favorably for an entire year based on their actions of only one day?"

Hashem therefore held back and the inscription was not sealed. Immediately after Yom Kippur, the people started to build their succos in preparation of the upcoming Yom Tov. The defending angel spoke up, “Hashem, see how Your people are involved in doing the mitzvah? Even the poor people are building their succah to the best of their abilities!”

The Satan was not to be deterred. “Again, I object! True, they are building succos for You. But, look at the houses they live in, permanent structures of brick, stone and glass. But for You, Hashem, they merely build temporary shacks that can barely last the week!”

Again, Hashem held back from sealing the inscription. Simchas Torah came and the shuls were filled with dancing and joyful happiness. Again, the defending angel came to Hashem and spoke up. “Hashem, don’t You see how your children are rejoicing for Your Torah? Shouldn’t the inscription be sealed?”

Hashem was about to seal the inscription when again the Satan spoke up. “I object yet again! True, they are rejoicing with the Torah tonight. But, how can You inscribe them favorably based on their actions of one night? When Yom Tov is over, they will go back to their old ways! They are undeserving!”

Hashem once again held back from sealing the inscription. So it was that the inscription that was written on Rosh Hashanah remained unsealed through Yom Kippur, Succos, Hoshanah Rabbah, Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah.

Tonight, on New Year’s Eve, however, the defending angel spoke up. “Hashem, King of the Universe! Do You see how non-Jews celebrate the New Year? Shouting and drinking in the streets, and all manner of carrying on! Do you remember how your children celebrated their New Year? They did it with prayer, atonement and holiness.”

“This time the Satan had no response. Rav Levi Yitzchak concluded, “Therefore, after all this time the inscription was finally sealed! I felt it appropriate to bless everyone with a Shanah Tovah!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5775 email from Torah U’Tefillah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Celebrating New Year’s**

**Day or Not**

**By David Bibi**

This year (2014), January 1st coincides with the Tenth of Tevet, a day of fasting, mourning and introspection. On the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tevet, in the year 3336 from Creation, the armies of the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Thirty months later—on 9 Tammuz 3338—the city walls were breached, and on 9 Av of that year the Holy Temple was destroyed.

This morning in Synagogue, I mentioned that the Shulchan Aruch and the Tur suggest that if possible, a person should really fast three days, the 8th, 9th and

10th of Tevet. This fast is so strict that when it falls on Friday, while every other fast is pushed off, we must fast on Friday.

Some even suggest that if the Tenth of Tevet fell on Shabbat (it’s not possible using our current calendar) we would be required to fast on Shabbat. Given that this day falls on the day when our neighbors are out celebrating we decided to replace our class this morning with a discussion of New Year’s day and how a Jew should treat that day.

The class was based on a class given by my wife Chantelle’s rabbi, Lawrence Kelemen. He is, aside from my wife’s rabbi, a professor of education at Neve Yerushalayim College of Jewish Studies for Women in Jerusalem, where he also lectures in modern and medieval philosophy.

R’ Kelemen was awarded his undergraduate degree at U.C.L.A. and did graduate studies at Harvard. My daughter Aryana had the pleasure of having him as a teacher while she studied in Israel. He has many classes available on line to listen to at SimpleToRemember.com, including The Real Story of Christmas, We Are Never Alone: The Unbelievable Story of a Child’s Birth and A Rational Approach To The Divine Origin of Judaism. I published a version of this article more than a decade ago, but after the class, everyone wanted me to put the class into writing so they could share it with others so here we go. And on the one hand, I’m sorry if you cancel your New Year’s plans but on the other hand, when you finish reading this, how can you not?

In 46 B.C.E. the Roman emperor Julius Caesar first established January 1 as New Year's Day. Janus was the Roman god of doors and gates, and had two faces, one looking forward and one back. Caesar felt that the month named after this god ("January") would be the appropriate "door" to the year. Caesar celebrated the first January 1 New Year by ordering the violent routing of revolutionary Jewish forces in the Galilee.

Eyewitnesses say blood flowed in the streets. In later years, Roman pagans observed the New Year by engaging in drunken orgies -- a ritual they believed constituted a personal re-enacting of the chaotic world that existed before the cosmos was ordered by the gods. Do we really want to celebrate a pagan holiday?

Early Catholics did not accept this pagan date as the New Year at first. When the calendar system of Anno Domini was first introduced by Dionysius Exiguus in 525 of the common era, he assigned the beginning of the new year to March 25. This date is called Annunciation day in the church because it is they

claim, the day of the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Mary that she would conceive and become the mother of Yeshu.

So while the pagans celebrated January 1 as the beginning of the year, Christians celebrated March 25 as their beginning of the year. After William the

Conqueror was crowned at Westminster Abbey on December 25th in 1066, he announced that the New Year would take place on January 1st after the Roman custom and to forever commemorate his monarchy. The Christians weren’t very pleased and about a century later, the year 1154 ended on the 31st of December, but the start of 1155 was delayed to 25-March. And things continued this way for the next 500 years.

The Julian calendar as set up by Julius Caesar counted 365 ¼ days per year and the rule was to add one extra day every four years to allow for that extra quarter. But the year is actually 365 days, 5 hours 48 minutes and 46 seconds as the Rabbis knew more than a thousand years prior. And those missing 12 minutes year after year add up.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII ( one of the greatest anti-Semites of all time) abandoned the traditional Julian calendar and established the Gregorian calendar which differs from the Julian in three ways: (1) No century year is a leap year unless it is exactly divisible by 400 (e.g., 1600, 2000, etc.); (2) Years divisible by 4000 are common (not leap) years; and (3) once again the New Year would begin with the date set by the early pagans, the first day of the month of Janus - January

1. The Pagan New Year would become the Christian New Year.

And how should one celebrate a Christian New Year? On New Year’s Day, Pope Gregory XIII decreed that all Roman Jews, under pain of death, must listen

attentively to the compulsory Catholic conversion sermon given in Roman synagogues after Friday night services. On Year Year’s Day 1578 Gregory signed into law a tax forcing Jews to pay for the support of a "House of Conversion" to convert Jews to Christianity. On New Year’s 1581 Gregory ordered his troops to confiscate all sacred literature from the Roman Jewish community. This included copies of the Talmud, Jewish law books and Torah scrolls.

Thousands of Jews were murdered in the campaign. New Year’s sounds more like a day of mourning as it is this year than a day of celebration. Throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods,

January 1 - supposedly the day on which Jesus' circumcision initiated the reign of Christianity and the death of Judaism - was reserved for anti-Jewish activities: synagogue and book burnings, public tortures, and simple murder.

As such Israelis felt they shouldn’t celebrate New Year’s day, but still needed an excuse to party on New Year’s eve. So in Israel, these celebrations are

called “Sylvester.”

Tis was the name of the “Saint” and Roman Pope who reigned during the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.). The year before the Council of Nicaea convened, Sylvester convinced Constantine to prohibit Jews from living in Jerusalem. At the

Council of Nicaea, Sylvester arranged for the passage of a host of viciously anti-Semitic legislation.

All Catholic “Saints” are awarded a day on which Christians celebrate and pay tribute to that Saint’s memory. December 31 is Saint Sylvester Day – hence celebrations on the night of December 31 are dedicated to Sylvester’s memory. Amazing, Israeli’s celebrating the day of an Anti-Semite and the one who prohibited Jews from Jerusalem.

For Jews, The day is more an anniversary of mourning then one where we could possibly engage in reckless and drunken merriment. Paraphrasing Rabbi Kelemen, many who are excitedly preparing for their New Year celebrations would prefer not knowing about the holiday’s real significance (and most never even heard of the Tenth of Tevet.) If they do know the history, they often object that their celebration has nothing to do with the holiday’s monstrous history and meaning. “We are just having fun.”

He [Rabbi Kelemen] tells us to imagine that between 1933-45, the Nazi

regime celebrated Adolf Hitler’s birthday – April 20 – as a holiday. Imagine that they named the day, “Hitlerday,” and observed the day with feasting, drunkenness, gift-giving, and various pagan practices. Imagine that on that day, Jews were historically subject to perverse tortures and abuse, and that this continued for centuries.

Now, imagine that your great-great-greatgrandchildren were about to celebrate Hitlerday. April 20th arrived. They had long forgotten about Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen. They had never heard of gas chambers or death marches. They had purchased champagne and caviar, and were about to begin the party, when someone reminded them of the day’s real history and their ancestors’ agony.

Imagine that they initially objected, “We aren’t celebrating the Holocaust; we’re just having a little Hitlerday party.” If you could travel forward in time and meet them; if you could say a few words to them, what would you advise them to do on Hitlerday?

When I wrote this way back when I concluded ….. So now that I have completely ruined your New Year’s eve plans let me end with a thought from my club going days. (I guess all of life’s experiences have lessons). Those of us who would party in Studio and Xenon every night would know that on New Year’s

Eve, one takes the night off. New Year’s Eve was known as the night 'the regular people' came out and we considered ourselves anything but regular.

As Jews, we should remember that we are special, so this year before you run out to party, consider the origins of the day especially for us. The first Jewish

New Year’s day was the day that G-d created man. The first January 1st was the day Caesar ordered the murdering of Jews. As Jews we celebrate Rosh Hashana with family and in prayer. We have our New Year’s day! Maybe we can leave January 1st to everyone else. Why not leave it to the regular people? And remind yourself that you really are more than just regular. You are very special!

*Reprint from the 2014 email from Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**Story #941**

**A Timely Invitation**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=ABC&msgNum=00010DW0:001MQ0dv00001ked&count=1449764676&randid=931767020&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=931767020)

A Jew in Montreal submitted to L'Chaim Weekly the following report that occurred during Chanukah 5768 Dec. 2007).

Soon after his Bar Mitzva, my younger brother decided to renounce all practice of Jewish traditions. In the years that followed, he was totally disinterested and disengaged from any customs or rituals of the Jewish holidays and his identity as a Jew was utterly non-existent.

After my brother got married, he and his family moved to the St. Dorothy, Laval, neighborhood of Montreal, a couple of streets away from my parents' home.

For a number of years, Christian missionaries had been regularly visiting my brother's home. Most of us know the importance of simply closing the door on these people the very first time they appear at our homes. Wanting to be courteous, my brother innocently gave them a listening ear each time they appeared. The missionaries' visits became frequent and regular. Eventually, they invited him to join them for an evening at their house of worship, "...for you to better understand the Word, and for your daughter to interact with other children...," they told him. My brother had every intention of accepting their personal invitation.

The same evening that my brother was receiving this invitation from the missionaries, a totally different scene was taking place in my parents' home. A Chabad rabbi, Rabbi Zalman Stiefel of the Young Israel of Chomedey, Laval, had organized a Chanuka party at the home of a family with whom he had become friendly in the St. Dorothy neighborhood. Not knowing who would attend the party, one week before Chanuka Rabbi Stiefel decided to personally visit 10 homes that had a*mezuza* on the front door post and invite these Jewish neighbors to the Chanuka party. One of his first stops was my parents' home, as they live directly across the street from where the Chanuka party was taking place.

My parents were delighted with the invitation and happily accepted. My mother then asked the Rabbi if he would do them a favor. "Would you mind going to our son's home? There is no *mezuza* on his front door. Here is the address. Can you please invite him to the Chanuka party as well? He lives a few blocks away. He is estranged from Judaism, but perhaps a personal invitation...," she ended hopefully.

Now, back to my brother's house. He was having an animated discussion with his wife, his brother-in-law, and his brother-in-law's fiancé about the upcoming missionary event. "I married a Jew and you're staying a Jew!" my sister-in-law was telling my brother. "You're not going to this event!" she told him strongly.

My brother's brother-in-law picked up the phone and jokingly threatened, "I'm going to call your father and tell him to come over here to make sure that you don't go to this event." He then picked up the phone and pretended as if he was having a conversation with my father, explaining what was going on and insisting that my father come over to prevent him from going to the missionary event.

My brother was becoming more and more upset as everyone in the house seemed to be turning on him.

My brother began to shout, "The missionaries show an interest in me. They come to my door and visit me in my home. They spend time with me. They came to personally invite me to this event. When has a rabbi ever shown an interest in me? When has a rabbi ever knocked on my door and personally invited me to any kind of event?

My brother paused for a moment from his emotional outburst and at that instant, the doorbell rang.

Half-jokingly, my brother's brother-in-law said, "It's probably your father..."

The shock and disbelief on everyone's face was apparent when they opened the door and saw a young smiling rabbi standing there. Rabbi Stiefel was holding a *menora* and Chanuka candles in his hand.

It took a few seconds for everyone to collect themselves and think to ask the rabbi to come in out of the cold. "I'd like to invite you to a Chanuka party that is taking place a few blocks away," Rabbi Stiefel began.

Try to imagine the scene. My brother was busy trying to hold back his excited dog with one hand as he attempted to explain to the rabbi how shocked he was to have the rabbi visit his home to deliver the message of Chanuka.

This one encounter was sufficient to change my brother's thinking completely.

The next week, Rabbi Zalman and Aida Stiefel and their five children, together with the party's host and family waited to see who would turn up for the party. Low and behold in a wonderful display of Divine Providence, the only family to show up at the Chanuka party was my brother together with his daughter and our parents. Together they lit the *menora*, sang some Chanuka songs, enjoyed potato *latkes* and jelly donuts, all of which created wonderful memories for everyone.

That evening, my brother attended his first Jewish celebration as an adult. A few days later my brother attended the much larger *menora* lighting celebration at the synagogue.

More recently, he was invited with his family to join for a Shabbat meal at the Stiefel home, an invitation he graciously accepted and enjoyed.

I know that my brother and our whole family have been touched by this Chanuka miracle. G-d is great and omnipresent in our lives. I hope and pray that we all experience miracles "in these days at this time."

***Source*:** Reprinted with slight variations by Yerachmiel Tilles from /*/lchaimweekly.org*, issue #1051.

Reprinted from the Chanukah 5776 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed. [www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)

**It Once Happened**

**The First Night of Chanukah In the Court of the Kotzker Rebbe**

It was dark outside. Nobody was out on the street. But in one building you would not have known it was night. It was the study hall of the Kotzker Chasidim in the heart of the forest. The Chasidim were sharing Torah thoughts. They sang Chasidic melodies and their faces were aglow with joy.



**The Kotzker Rebbe**

Chanuka was approaching and the next day they would kindle the first light of Chanuka. As they did every year, the Chasidim traveled to their Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgensztern, zt”l, 1788-1859) to celebrate the holiday in a special atmosphere of holiness. Dawn broke and the Chasidim were still going strong, as though they had slept through the night.

"Chasidim," called out one of the elders of the group. "The sun is rising; let us go to the Rebbe." They quickly got ready for the morning prayers which were recited in an especially joyous atmosphere. After that, they set out on the way with song and dance. "G-d willing, we will arrive by this evening when the Rebbe lights the menora," rejoiced one of the Chasidim.

The wind howled. The Chasidim wrapped their coats even more tightly and continued battling the strong wind. Just a few hours remained until they would reach the Rebbe's holy court. But the sky darkened, the wind picked up strength, and snow began to fall, making walking difficult.

"Chasidim, be strong, surely this is the Satan who wants to delay us from being with the Rebbe on Chanuka. Let us muster our strength and with G-d's help we will get there safely," called out Hershel encouragingly.

They continued walking but for some reason, the road did not come to an end. According to their calculations, they should have arrived at the Rebbe's court already. A thick forest surrounded them and the Chasidim realized they were lost.

Suddenly, they heard someone shout, "Halt!"The Chasidim froze in their places. A few moments later, a band of Cossacks on horseback surrounded them.

"Ha," the evil ones chortled. "We have caught fat fish this time. Jews!" The Cossacks felt around in the Chasidim's pockets and knapsacks and took every penny they could find. They then brought them deeper into the forest to a place only the Cossacks knew about.

The Chasidim walked quietly, each one immersed in his thoughts, making a spiritual accounting, and praying for a Chanuka miracle.

The Chasidim were soon led to dark underground cells. "We will wait here until the commander comes and decides what to do with you," said a Cossacks as he whipped one of the Chasidim. Some time went by and the commander appeared. He declared that they be hung. The Chasidim began pouring out their hearts in the recital of Psalms and they rent the heavens with their tears.

At that very same time, in the court of the Rebbe, many Chasidim were waiting. The menora was ready and the first cup was filled with oil. The Chasidim waited for the Rebbe to come out of his room and light the menora.

One hour went by and then another and Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk was still in his room. The Chasidim there were surprised. "Every year, the Rebbe lights the menora as early as possible because the mitzva is so dear to him. Why is he waiting this year?"

The clock showed that it was close to midnight and the Chasidim were still waiting. Suddenly, the door opened and the Rebbe came out in a rush. Something looked amiss.

There was silence in the room as the Rebbe walked toward the menora. The Shamash was lit and the Rebbe said the first blessing loudly. Then the Rebbe said the next two blessings and held the Shamash to the first light, but oy, the wick did not ignite. The Rebbe tried again and again with no success. He sighed heavily and the Chasidim knew something had happened.

The Rebbe extinguished the Shamash, looked at the Chasidim, and quickly left the synagogue. The Chasidim looked at one another in shock. A commotion erupted until one of the Chasidim gave a bang and said, "It is not time for talking. Let us recite Psalms to avert the evil decree." Books of Psalms were quickly opened and the Chasidim read chapter after chapter with tears.

In the meantime, the Rebbe went to his room and changed his clothes. He put on a coarse leather jacket, big boots, a hairy coat and a leather hat that covered his face. He wrapped himself in a scarf and went out a back door into the blizzard.7

The Rebbe had a hard time walking through the deep snow, but this did not deter him from his mission. A few hours of exhausting walking passed until he reached his destination. He entered the forest and knew just where to go. He stopped at the entrance to the Cossack camp and stood there fearlessly. The Rebbe gazed at the Cossacks and they trembled. They quickly dropped their weapons and fled.

The Rebbe approached the hidden trapdoor, lifted it, and went down until he was facing the Chasidim.

"Rebbe!" they exclaimed in disbelief. "What is the Rebbe doing here? How did the Rebbe know we were in trouble?"

The Rebbe did not reply. He just motioned to them to get out and go with him to his synagogue so they could light the menora before daylight. "You did not wander far, the road to Kotzk is not long," the Rebbe said reassuringly. This time, the walk was easier and within a short time they were at the Rebbe's warm, inviting synagogue.

The Rebbe went over to the menora and lit the Shamash. This time, the first light lit immediately.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mikeitz 5777 edition of “L’Chaim Weekly,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Oganization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Chanukah Gems**

**Which Menorah Should**

**The Father Light?**

On Chanukah we celebrate by lighting the Menorah, which puts emphasis on publicizing the miracle that occurred with the oil. A question was once posed to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit”a.

A man told him that he had in his possession an old and ornate Chanukah Menorah made of silver. It was an inheritance that had been passed down in his family for generations. It was a work of art, and its value was many thousands of dollars. It was always an inspiration for him to light it each year, and it was also a beautiful sight to behold.

This particular year, just prior to Chanukah, the man’s young son had come home from school with a prize he had won for Hasmadah, diligence in learning Torah— it was a small brass Menorah, and the son was very proud that he had earned it.

What should the father do? Should he continue using the beautiful Menorah, or, as a sign of encouragement to his son, should he use the small brass Menorah he had come home with?

At first thought, Rav Zilberstein reasoned that since Chanukah is a time in which it is important to emphasize Hiddur Mitzvah, beautifying the Mitzvah, the father should use the silver Menorah.

On the other hand, what greater symbol of Pirsumei Nisa, publicizing the miracle, can there be than using the prize his child had won, a Menorah earned for Hasmadah in Torah study? In today’s times especially, a child who gives up his time to devote himself to Torah study perfectly demonstrates our true victory over the Greeks, who tried to get us to stop learning Torah and destroy our relationship with Hashem. This was why we fought the Greeks, and this is why we won the battle.

Rav Zilberstein told the man that we have a responsibility to publicize this fact, and he advised him to light the small Menorah that his son brought home!

*Reprinted from the Chanukah 5777 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Stories compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The President’s**

**Last Chanukah Reception**



**President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama and Rabbi Steven Exler watch Elijah and Shira Wiesel [grandchildren of the late Elie Wiesel] light the menorah during a Hanukkah reception in the East Room of the White House, Dec. 14, 2016. (Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy)**

President Obama hosted his final Chanukah White House celebration, joined by community members from across the United States.

As the secular holidays coincide with the beginning of Chanukah, a time when the president is on vacation in Hawaii, the traditional White House receptions were moved up by over a week to accommodate the president’s schedule. As the president joked, “It so happens we’re a little early this year. But Michelle and I are going to be in Hawaii when Hanukkah begins, and we agreed that it’s never too soon to enjoy some *latkes* and jelly doughnuts.”

Following what has become a tradition in the Obama White House, there are two receptions, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, to allow for a diverse array of Jewish personalities from across the spectrum to participate. The president jokingly alluded to this in his evening remarks. “This is our second Hanukkah party today, but in the spirit of the holiday, the White House kitchen has not run out of oil.”

At the afternoon ceremony, the Obamas honored Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor, author, and Nobel Peace Prize winner who passed away earlier this year.

“It’s important for our community to internalize that the White House Chanukah Reception is not merely a party to socialize but an important milestone for the Jewish community when the leader of the free world identifies with the historical aspirations of our people,” said Ezra Friedlander, CEO of The Friedlander Group. “When the president speaks, the world listens, and this year’s remarks addressing issues pertaining to highlighting the protection of religious freedom was especially significant in light of recent attempts to ban religious rituals domestically and abroad.”

President Obama’s remarks addressed this topic:

“The first chapter of the Hanukkah story was written 22 centuries ago, when rulers banned religious rituals and persecuted Jews who dared to observe their faith. Which is why today we are asked not only to light the *menorah*, but to proudly display it—to publicize the *mitzvah*.

“Everybody in America can understand the spirit of this tradition. Proudly practicing our religion, whatever it might be—and defending the rights of others to do the same—that’s our common creed. That’s what families from coast to coast confirm when they place their *menorah* in the window—not to share the candles’ glow with just your family, but also with your community and with your neighbors.”

The president concluded by honoring the memory of Elie Wiesel: “The story of Hanukkah, the story of the Jewish people, the story of perseverance—these are one and the same. Elie Wiesel taught us that lesson probably better than just about anybody. In one of his memories of the Holocaust, Elie watched a fellow prisoner trade his daily ration of bread for some simple materials with which to piece together a makeshift *menorah*. And he wrote that he couldn’t believe the sacrifices this man was making to observe the holidays. A stunned Elie asked him, ‘Hanukkah in Auschwitz?’ And the man replied, ‘Especially in Auschwitz.’”

*Excerpted from the December 23, 2016 edition of the 5 Towns Jewish Times.*