**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Mikeitz -Chanukah 5774**

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**It Once Happened**

**Reb Zushe and the**

**First Night of Chanuka**

The followers of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch, awaited his entrance into the synagogue for the lighting of the Chanuka menora on the first night of Chanuka. For the past few years, Reb Zushe, one of the Maggid's greatest disciples, had been honored with lighting the shamash candle. Reb Zushe would then hand it to the Maggid who lit his menora from it. But Reb Zushe was nowhere to be seen and the chasidim wondered if his absence was the reason the Maggid had not yet lit the menora.

**The Hours Quickly Ticked Away**

Minutes, then hours ticked by, as the chasidim waited for their Rebbe to emerge. Finally, at about midnight, the Maggid emerged from his room and walked towards the menora. As if to himself, the Maggid said quietly, "Reb Zushe will not be with us tonight. We will light the menora now."

The Maggid honored another of his chasidim with the privilege of kindling the shamash for him, the blessings were chanted and the one, solitary wick was lit. Then all of the holy assemblage joined together in singing the traditional Chanuka hymns.

The next morning, just as the Maggid and his chasidim were finishing the services, Reb Zushe walked in. Weary from traveling, Reb Zushe shuffled over to his customary place and dropped down on the bench. His friends came over and gave him a hearty welcome. One of them reported, "The Rebbe waited a long time for you last night. What happened?"

"After we light the Chanuka menora tonight," promised Reb Zushe, "and with the Rebbe's permission, I will tell you what happened."

All of the chasidim gathered around the Maggid's menora on the second night of Chanuka. After the Maggid lit the menora they eagerly listened to Reb Zushe's story:

**Scheduled to Return to Mezritch**

**In Time for Chanuka**

"As you all know, immediately after the High Holidays, it is my custom to travel throughout the small villages and hamlets near Mezritch. I go from town to town, speaking with the adults and teaching the children about the wonders of our heritage. I also speak to them about how G-d loves each and every single Jew and that they are all important to Him. I tell them about our Rebbe and explain some of the Rebbe's teachings.

"Each year, I plan my schedule so that I can return to Mezritch in time for Chanuka. Yesterday, I was on my way back to Mezritch when a terrible snowstorm started. I pushed on through the storm, though many times I felt I could not continue. Knowing that I would soon be back in Mezritch near the Rebbe was what kept me going.

"The storm worsened and I soon realized that I would have to stop and rest a bit before continuing, if I wanted to make it to Mezritch at all. And so, I stopped at the home of Yankel in a village not too far from Mezritch. By this time it was already quite late in the afternoon. I pounded and pounded on the door until finally, someone called out, 'Who is it?'

"'It is I, Reb Zushe,' I said loudly.

**Yankel’s Wife Looked**

**Absolutely Terrified**

"Yankel's wife opened the door. She looked absolutely terrified as she bid me inside. I noticed that the children, too, looked frightened.

"The poor woman burst out, 'Yankel left the house early this morning to gather firewood. He promised he would come back early, for even then he saw we were in for a terrible storm. It is late already and still he has not returned,' she wailed.

"For a split second I hesitated. If I went into the forest now, who knew if I would come out alive? But I knew I had no choice. I put on my coat and scarf once again and set out toward the forest.

"I passed a few rows of trees when I saw the upright form of a man covered with snow. Only his face was visible in that white blur. I saw right away that it was Yankel, and I thought for sure that he had frozen to death. But when I came very close, I noticed to my surprise, that he was still breathing. I brushed Yankel off and tried to warm him up.

"Somehow I managed to drag and carry Yankel back to his house where his wife and children greeted us with cries of joy. With my last ounce of strength I deposited Yankel on the bench near the stove and fell to the floor myself. Miraculously, Yankel's wife was able to "thaw" him out. She brought us a bottle of strong mashke which we drank eagerly to warm our insides. At about midnight we felt sufficiently strong enough to stand up and light the Chanuka menora. As we said the prayer, 'who made miracles for our ancestors, in those days at this time," we knew without a doubt that G-d had made a miracle for us now, too.

**As Soon as the Sun Rose**

"As soon as the sun rose in the morning I set out for Mezritch and arrived when you saw me this morning."

Reb Zushe finished his story. The Maggid looked deeply into Reb Zushe's face. "Know, Zushe, that in Heaven they waited--as it were--to light the Divine Chanuka menora until you lit the menora together with Yankel. In the merit of your saving a Jewish soul from death, the Heavens awaited you."

Reprinted from the archives (Issue #246 – Parshas Vayeshev 5753/December 18, 1992 of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

**Who's Who**

**Yehuda HaMaccabi**

Judah the Maccabee (Yehuda HaMaccabi) was one of the five sons of Mattathias the Priest (Mattisiyahu the Kohen) from the city of Modiin in Israel. Judah was called "Maccabee," a word composed of the initial letters of the four Hebrew words "Mi Kamocha Ba'eilim Ado-shem - Who is like You, O G-d."

On his deathbed, Mattathias enjoined his sons to follow the advice of their oldest brother, Shimon in general matters and Judah in waging war. Judah was considered one of the greatest warriors in Jewish history.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organizationin Brooklyn, NY.*

**The Menorah That**

**Lit Up My Life**

**By Laura P. Schulman**

Two years ago I was in Baltimore on business, and happened to pass by the public menorah [orchestrated by the Chabad shaliach] in front of Johns Hopkins University just as the first light was being lit. My eyes welled with tears. Although I was raised a secular Jew, my family has always celebrated Chanukah.

**Felt Cold and Lonely**

To be away from my family that first night of the holiday felt cold and lonely. Now, seeing the lights of the first night’s flames of that big menorah, my heart lit up also, and I felt the warmth of my people all around me.

The next day I was walking by the waterfront, and a young man in a black hat ran up to me and politely asked, “Excuse me, are you Jewish?” Somewhat surprised that anyone would care, I answered in the affirmative.

“Do you know that it’s the second night of Chanukah tonight?” he asked earnestly.

I nodded.

“Do you have a menorah?” he inquired, looking a bit anxious.

“No,” I replied.

“Do you want one?” he asked hopefully.

**Almost Shouting with Joy**

“Do you have one?” I asked, almost shouting with joy.

“Yes, I’ll get you one!” he replied, almost as excited as I.

He ran off, and returned moments later with an entire menorah kit in a box: little brass candleholder, box full of the right number of candles, and complete instructions. Also a DVD full of Chanukah stories, how-tos, even recipes. I politely declined the offer of a doughnut (fried foods are traditional on Chanukah, but I have to pace myself), and raced off to my hotel room to examine the contents of the box and watch the DVD.

**Childhood Memories of Chanukah**

Childhood memories of Chanukah lights, my father telling stories of the Maccabees, the miracle of how one day’s worth of oil somehow lasted for eight days . . . it all came flooding back. I knew I had been given a gift that Chanukah in Baltimore: the gift of the return of Judaism to my life, and of my life to Judaism.

All this because of a menorah on the steps of a public institution. And all because I “happened” to be passing by that day, and the flame of the menorah ignited the spark that had been sleeping in my Jewish heart for nearly 50 years.

When I returned to Seattle the following week, I called a rabbi for the first time in my life. I told him what the menorah in Baltimore had stirred in me. Over the next two years, with his wise and gentle guidance, I found my way as a fully observant Jew. The spark that was rekindled by a public menorah is now a steady burning flame.

**Grateful to Live in a Country**

**That Offers Religious Freedoms**

How grateful I am to live in a country that is founded on the right to worship as we choose, in the manner in which we choose. I thank our founding fathers who crafted the Constitution of the United States of America, which recognizes our freedom to express and practice our religion. And I thank those who have the courage, in these sometimes dark times, to defend those rights.

We never know how many hearts and lives are touched and, yes, even transformed by the sight of the miraculous Chanukah lights, shining into the darkest reaches and reminding us of miracles long ago and not so long ago.

All those selfless souls whose courage and staunch commitment fuel the kindling of light the world over deserve our heartfelt gratitude. I know they have mine.

*Reprinted from Chabad.Org The article was originally printed* The Jewish Press

**The Inspiration of Chanuka**

**From: Josh in Melbourne**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I just wanted to ask you a few questions about Chanuka. Why is Chanuka so important? What is the main feature of Chanuka? What do you think would happen if the Greeks were successful in the battle against the Maccabees? Why were the Maccabees chosen to fight the Greeks? Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.*

Dear Josh,

Chanuka is so important because it means the victory of Torah over Greek philosophy. Unlike previous pagan ideas so revolting to Jews, Greek

paganism was bound up with beauty, art and philosophy.

Therefore, it captured the imagination of many Jews. Many Jews became “Greekified,” or “Hellenists.”

This may surprise you, but the Greeks did win. You see, there was a battle and there was a war. The Maccabees won the battle and were able to hold on for a while but eventually they succumbed to Pompeii’s conquest 80 years later.

But the miracle of the oil inspired us to realize that G-d is with us no matter what. Without that inspiration the Jewish People might not have been able to survive future periods of even greater persecution.

Why the Maccabees? Because their father Mattityahu possessed faith in G-d which gave him the courage to stand up against power and corruption. The name “Maccabee” comes from the Hebrew acronym “*Mi Camocha B’eilim* *Hashem*” — who amongst the mighty is like You, G-d?”

Although the Maccabee’s military victory didn’t last, the miraculous events of the war and the oil inscribed the message of faith and loyalty indelibly into the Jewish soul.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**Love of the Land**

**Modi’in – the City**

**Of the Maccabees**

Modi’in is the historical name of the mountain stronghold of the Maccabeans whose victory over the vastly superior forces of the Hellenist Greek oppressors is celebrated on Chanuka.

In his historical account of that epic struggle between pagan idolatry and Hebrew faith, Josephus describes how the wicked Antiochus ordered his officers to wipe out any trace of Judaism. They did indeed slay anyone who remained faithful to Torah observance, except for those who fled to the mountain area of Modi’in together with Matitiyahu, the son of Yochanan.

It was from this Modi’in that Matitiyahu and his five sons led their small band of faithful Jews in a seemingly hopeless war of “the mighty against the weak, the many against the few, the impure against the pure, the wicked against the righteous, the sinners against those who adhered to the Torah” — a war ending in a miraculous victory, climaxed by the miracle of the oil in the Menorah which burned for eight days.

Since the Six-Day War, the Modi’in area has been intensely developed and is the home of the fast-growing city of Modi’in I’lit, a thriving Torah-observant community, midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

Hanukkah is NOT Thanksgiving

Why Hanukkah is the Most

Anti-American Holiday of All.

**By Emuna Braverman**

I have to confess that I don’t understand the whole [Hanukkah/Thanksgiving](http://www.aish.com/sp/ph/Thanksgivukkah.html) dilemma. Perhaps it’s because I grew up in Canada where Thanksgiving is a holiday of recent creation, added to the calendar in imitation of the Americans. It never caught on, perhaps due to its lack of historical antecedents. I led a deprived childhood, missing out on roast turkey, cranberry sauce and yams with marshmallows. So I don’t really get all the fuss, not the mention the fantastical numerical calculations about the infrequency of this occurrence.

As you may have been noticed, it is not unusual for [Hanukkah](http://www.aish.com/h/c/mm/sf/The-Black-Miracle-A-HanukkahThanksgiving-Poetry-Slam.html) to go head to head with another, more widely celebrated holiday. And, unfortunately, it often gets lost in the shuffle. It gets trivialized or downplayed or treated as a simple children’s celebration.

And that’s unfortunate because it’s a profound holiday with many important messages.

I like to think of Hanukkah as the holiday of Jewish pride – we place our menorahs in our windows to publicize the miracle, to proclaim to the world that the Almighty takes care of His people – and to express our gratitude.

**The Most Anti-American Holiday of All**

It is, ironically, the most anti-American holiday of all (don’t jump on me yet; I like living in this country and am very appreciative). Why? Because America is all about assimilation, about fitting in; this is a country that prides itself on being a melting pot.

Sociologists have even developed a model for the stages of assimilation – including some Malcolm X-style anger and national pride in the middle – with the ultimate goal and resolution being a seamless participation in American life, a quiet loosening of the ties to other countries, other values, other customs (unless it’s something quaint to be trotted out in a yearly festival of costumes and food but otherwise invested with no daily significance).

There is even a course like this taught in grad school. In my class, everyone had to map their personal or family’s trajectory, starting with their immigration to the United States. But the model just didn’t work for me. I didn’t assimilate. I chose to live differently, separately. My people’s laws and customs infuse my daily existence, with each holiday offering deeper meaning and significance. I couldn’t contort my belief system, my national heritage and identity, to fit the sociological paradigm. So I got a B in the course!

**It Just Fueled My Jewish Pride**

But that just fueled my Jewish pride. Maybe it’s the rebel in me but I was happy to be different, to make my own choices, to stand apart from the crowd. But maybe it’s not just me. The Torah mentions over and over again that we are a stiff-necked people. That’s why the Greek’s initial strategy didn’t work. They tried to forbid the learning of Torah but that just got us annoyed. Even people who weren’t learning previously wanted to participate!

Thanksgiving is a nice holiday. It’s about gratitude and family – and lots of pie! There’s nothing not to like about it (except that over-stuffed feeling).

But Hanukkah is about transcendence, about elevating our lives, about focusing on our relationship with G-d, about using the material to accomplish the spiritual. The Greeks may have been known for the Olympics but the truth is it’s no competition at all; [Hanukkah](http://www.aish.com/h/c/) wins it hands down.

I’m grateful to live in America but it’s a privilege to be a part of the Jewish people and to have a covenant with God – and to proclaim our pleasure through our blazing Hanukkah lights – the lights of hope, the lights of wisdom, the lights of intellect, the lights of Torah. No turkey-shaped menorah for me…

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*

**Story #835**

**The Light in the Window**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000tt00:001I%5emvx00001zvm&count=1385424805&randid=1662107364&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1662107364)

During World War II there was a group of fighting partisans who had broken out of the Nazi camps in Poland. The group comprised a few Jews and some former Polish army officers. They organized a resistance force that used to harass the Germans.

On one of their missions, they found an old, starving rabbi who had been left for dead by the Nazi murderers. One of the Catholic partisans took mercy on the man and nursed him back to health. The rabbi was of no real use to the partisans, so he was given the job of cooking and praying for the safety of the fighting men. Remarkably, this group of partisans suffered no casualties for the rest of the war.

**The Group Broke Up**

**When the War was Over**

When the war was over the group broke up. Some went back to Poland; others traveled to Latvia. Others became wandering people with no homeland. As the Russian government clamped down on the people, depriving them of their freedom, those of the group that were still in Russia decided to flee together.

A plan was made to leave the Russian territories by night. An informant helping these escaping partisans told them, "You must cross the river in the winter when it is frozen. When you reach the other side of the river you'll be entering no-man's land. There you will find a hut. This hut is used by a Russian soldier who is in charge of preventing border crossings by all unauthorized people.

**His Job was to Shoot Anything that Moved**

His job is to shoot anything that moves. However, at one o'clock in the morning he leaves his hut and walks a few miles to the next hut, where he meets another soldier. There the soldiers exchange reports and supplies. Then he returns to his watch. The complete trip takes him approximately two hours. During that time, you can warm yourselves in his hut but you must be out of there by the time he returns."

This group of brave men consisted only of the younger people. Most of the older people had given up hope, deciding to remain behind in the Russian territories. The only old man willing to travel with them was the rabbi. A heated argument broke out: "Let's leave him," said one. "After all, he can find food in one of the towns. We really do not need to be slowed down by a frail, old man. We have done our share."

But then, a religious Christian partisan exclaimed, "If we leave him, we are all doomed. I will not leave without him." So, reluctantly, they included the rabbi.

**A Cold and Miserable Night**

It was a cold and miserable night. A blizzard broke out. Sure enough, the leader was correct: the old man could not keep up with the rigorous climbing and running. The blizzard increased and more than once they had to stop to carry the old rabbi. As light as he was, he was now a big burden, slowing down the entire group. More than once, they argued if they should just leave him.

It was one o'clock in the morning when they arrived at the hut which, by now, was half buried in the snow. They could smell the fire and warmth coming from the hut. They waited and waited for the soldier to leave. It seemed like forever. It wasn't a moment too soon that the soldier left. Almost frozen to death, the fleeing group fell into the hut, each one trying to get his icy hands and frostbitten feet closer and closer to the fire.

The old rabbi moved away from the group. He opened a small bag and took out an old and rusty menorah. Then he took a small piece of string, rolled it into a wick and proceeded to fill the menorah with some oil from a small tin bottle that he somehow had managed to bring with him. The act taking place put everyone into a trance. Not a word was uttered nor a sound heard. Spellbound, everyone watched the rabbi.

In a barely audible voice, the rabbi recited the blessings for the lighting of the menorah, picked up the menorah, and placed it by the window of the hut. Then he lit the menorah and began to sing an old Jewish song traditionally sung after lighting the Chanuka candles: "Maoz Tzur/ Rock of Ages," which speaks of G-d's miracles for his people through the generations.

**Like an Erupting Volcano**

Like an erupting volcano, the leader was jolted out of his stupor and yelled, "Put out that light!" You will bring the Russian soldier back here. We will all be caught and shot."

The rabbi tried to explain that it was the first night of Chanuka and that he had kindled the light in order to keep the commandment of remembering the miracle of Chanuka. "No," said the rabbi. He would not extinguish the flame. "It must burn for half an hour. This is according to the ancient Hebrew law."

Suddenly the door of the hut flew open. A tall soldier holding a machine gun yelled at the startled group to put their hands up into the air. The Russian soldier approached the old rabbi, looked at the menorah, and said to him in Russian, "I, too, am a Jew. I have not seen a menorah in six years." He kissed the rabbi's beard and broke into tears.

The soldier proceeded to tell the group, "After I left the hut I suddenly remembered that I had left some reports in a drawer. As I was returning I saw a light coming from the hut. I couldn't believe my eyes - a menorah in no-man's land, in the middle of a blizzard, right in my hut."

**Proceeded to Offer Out Vodka**

The soldier told the group that they were safe and proceeded to take out a large bottle of vodka, giving each one a drink. He said, "It's good that I was on guard. Another guard would have killed all of you! Come, I will show you how to cross the border. Remember me, Rabbi. Pray that I have a Chanuka miracle and will be able to leave the army safely and be with my family."

The very shaken but relieved little group followed the soldier out across the border. Somehow they made their way to freedom and then they all went their separate ways. The old rabbi went to Israel. He told his story to fellow survivors. One of them, in turn, told it to me as a small boy.

[Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Rabbi Eli Hecht written for //LchaimWeekly.org, and then reprinted by Living Jewish (a Jerusalem weekly).]

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