

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles < editor@ascentofsafed.com >
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ATTIC INSPIRATION

Poland in the winter of 1943:

The Jews who were not captured by the Nazis went into hiding. Among them was the Shinar family. They found refuge with a neighbor in a 6½ by 8½ft. attic bunker. In that closet-sized bunker, the Shinar family lived for 2½ years! Can you imagine? In the midst of that darkness, how could this family even think of observing Chanukah, the festival of lights? Even normal light was hard to find. There were only 2 tiny peepholes in the outside wall, which enabled them to distinguish night from day. Yet in those cramped quarters, they somehow managed to observe some kind of a Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

For 17-year-old **Yisrael Shinar**, the only thing he had in abundance was time. And so after the Autumn holidays of Rosh Hashana through Simchat Torah, he spent his waking hours trying to figure out some way to improvise some kind of Chanukah. During their first Chanukah in the bunker they had marked the 8 days by drawing a *menorah*. Every day of Chanukah, they would pencil in one more flame. That was the best they could do.

But in the second year, Yisrael came up with an idea. Their host family had a son who was roughly his age. Yisrael dared to ask him if he could collect some of the wax left over from the candles in his home. The boy agreed, and for several weeks, he brought tiny bits of wax to the bunker when he came to deliver their meager food. Yisrael took these bits of wax and some thin strands of thread to make wicks, and lo, that year the family lit candles together to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Chanukah.

In January 1945, the family was liberated. The Shinars went to their old home and found a pharmacist living in it. They met soldiers of the Jewish Brigade who helped them get across Poland, across Czechoslovakia, through Germany, and finally to Palestine. But the story of those Chanukah candles never left him.

Fifty years later:

Yisrael Shinar went on to become the owner of the Menorah Candle Factory in Yisrael—the largest candle manufacturing company in the world. In the last 50 years [as of 2015], Shinar’s company has manufactured 3.6 *billion* candles! Millions of Jews now use Yisrael Shinar’s candles—which come in 8 different colors for the 8 days of Chanukah.

Can you imagine? Someone who started out making candles for Chanukah out of little pieces of wax and thread that he somehow made into wicks in a dark and tiny bunker became the world’s largest manufacturer of Chanukah candles? Is this not a Chanukah miracle?

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*The author* (see below: *Source*:) *concludes*:

And is it not a miracle that, even in that deepest darkness of that crowded closet where he and his family lived for more than 2 years, Yisrael Shinar believed in bringing more light into the world—not in cursing the darkness? And is it not a miracle that when he got out and made his way to Palestine, Yisrael chose not to wallow in self-pity, and not to brood or fester or seek revenge, but that instead he chose to rebuild his life and bring more light into the world?

May all of us learn from Yisrael Shinar to try to strive to increase the light in this world—especially during Chanukah. And may Al-mighty G-d who gave him the ability to hope and the courage to try, to bestow upon us too some of these qualities, so that we can retell the Chanukah story every year—by the lights we kindle in our own *menorahs*, by the lights we kindle in the hearts of others, and by the way we live. AMEN!

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by **Rabbi Mark Hillel Kunis** on December 2015 in ShaareiShamayim.com, who heard it from Rabbi Jack Reimer.

Connection: The 8-Day Festival of Lights.