



# TOWERS

of

# LIGHT



## Public Menorah Lightings

From the time Chazal instituted the mitzvah of kindling the Menorah, the objective has been to publicize the nes of Chanukah to the outside, illuminating the world around us. The Menorah is expected to be placed in the open - על פתח ביתו מבחוץ.

Chassidus explains that the light of the Chanukah Menorah is even stronger than that of the Beis Hamikdash, possessing the unique power to overcome and ultimately transform the darkness of galus with Hashem's infinite light - והו'י יג'י חשכי.

But it would take more than two thousand years for this goal to be truly realized, when the Rebbe's mitvza Chanukah actually brought the light of the Menorah to the public domain.

IN PREPARING THIS ARTICLE WE WERE ASSISTED BY RABBI MENDEL ALPEROWITZ, RABBI YISROEL BROD, RABBI SHMUEL BUTMAN, RABBI SHLOMO CUNIN, RABBI CHAIM I. DRIZIN, RABBI MENDY HERSON, RABBI ELIEZER ZAKLIKOVSKY, RABBI YOSEF LANDA, RABBI SHOLOM B. SHUCHAT. WE WERE ALSO ASSISTED BY MATERIAL FROM CHABAD.ORG, AUTHORED BY RABBI MENACHEM POSNER.

In 5734 the Rebbe launched *mitvza* Chanukah.<sup>1</sup> The objective: that every Jewish person be given the opportunity to light a Menorah. The Rebbe explained that a Menorah is unique in that it brings light to everyone who sees it, including non-Jews, and emphasized that the Chanukah initiatives should be done with the fullest *shturem*. At least one Menorah should be kindled in each home, the Rebbe said, and children, too, should light one on their own.

As a result of the Rebbe's "mitvza Chanukah," Chanukah itself, and the way it is perceived by millions of Jews and non-Jews, has been totally transformed. Today there is hardly a person who is unfamiliar with Chanukah, and millions of people participate in thousands of public Menorah lightings across the globe.

One of the unique aspects of *mitvza* Chanukah is the public Menorah lightings. From the Kremlin, to Manhattan, to the White House lawn, public Menorahs are a symbol of Jewish pride the world over. In cities and towns on all corners of the globe, Jews gather every year to celebrate Chanukah with the lighting of a large Menorah towering above the celebrants.

These giant Menorah lightings have come to symbolize Lubavitch's fearless mode of *hafatza*, featured in magazines and newspapers worldwide, and memorialized in countless Chabad logos and signs. However, this global phenomenon didn't start all at once; it began with a few small Menorah lightings arranged by *shluchim* for their local communities, and they hardly could have imagined what it would turn into.

One of the first Menorah lightings was in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, in 5735 (תשל"ה), arranged by Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov. That first year, he lit a small, crudely built Menorah that he managed to



RABBI AVRAHAM SHEMTOV (R) IN FRONT OF THE INDEPENDENCE HALL IN PHILADELPHIA AT THE LIGHTING OF THE VERY FIRST PUBLIC MENORAH IN 5735. WITH HIM ARE BOCHURIM WHO HELPED BUILD IT FROM SCRATCH.

put together with a few *bochurim*. By the following year, a bigger event was prepared with a larger Menorah.

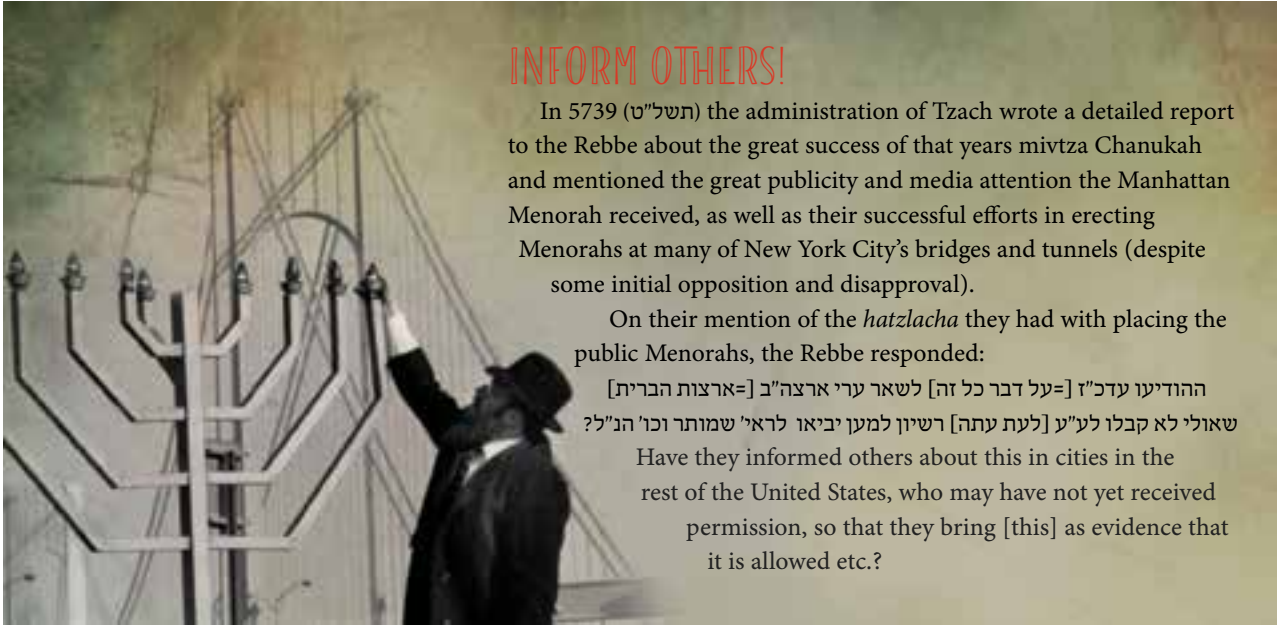
As Rabbi Shemtov was beginning to light up the East Coast, Rabbi Chaim Drizin of S. Francisco had a similar idea: to light a huge wooden Menorah, 22 ft. tall, in the city's Union Square. It was on the first night of Chanukah, 5736, when Chabad's first large public Menorah was kindled on the West Coast. S. Francisco was home to many Jews of German descent where Reform dominated and traditional Yiddishkeit was foreign to most, so Rabbi Drizin wasn't expecting much of a crowd for such a public celebration of the miracle of Chanukah. To his utter amazement, over one thousand people came to watch the Menorah being lit in S. Francisco's downtown.

## THE WORLD'S LARGEST MENORAH

Perhaps one of the most famous Menorahs in the world is the Menorah in Manhattan on Fifth Avenue, and it is definitely one of the tallest, towering at thirty-two feet. Rabbi Shmuel Butman relates: "It was shortly after the Rebbe's heart attack on Shemini Atzeres 5738 (תשל"ח), and I was thinking to myself, 'what can I do to give the Rebbe *nachas*?' After much deliberation, I had an idea: I would build the biggest Menorah in the world - and put it up right in the middle of Manhattan."

Although it was shortly after Shemini Atzeres and the Rebbe was still in his room, Rabbi Butman





## INFORM OTHERS!

In 5739 (תשל"ט) the administration of Tzach wrote a detailed report to the Rebbe about the great success of that years mitvza Chanukah and mentioned the great publicity and media attention the Manhattan Menorah received, as well as their successful efforts in erecting Menorahs at many of New York City's bridges and tunnels (despite some initial opposition and disapproval).

On their mention of the *hatzlacha* they had with placing the public Menorahs, the Rebbe responded:

ההודיעו עדכ"ז [=על דבר כל זה] לשאר ערי ארצה"ב [=ארצות הברית]  
 שאולי לא קבלו לע"ע [לעת עתה] רשיון למען יביאו לראי' שמוחר וכו' הנ"ל?  
 Have they informed others about this in cities in the  
 rest of the United States, who may have not yet received  
 permission, so that they bring [this] as evidence that  
 it is allowed etc.?

received many answers from the Rebbe encouraging this initiative.

Working with the local officials, Rabbi Butman obtained special permission to erect the Menorah at the extremely central location of Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. The Mayor of New York at the time was Ed Koch, and Rabbi Butman arranged that Koch himself would participate in the event and light the Menorah. Every year since, tens of thousands of people join the Menorah lighting in Manhattan, and it is renowned as the biggest Menorah in the world.

Interestingly, one occasion, the Rebbetzin made a special trip to Manhattan to see the Menorah.

The Rebbe always emphasized that the Menorah must be lit in its proper time, and in order to light the Menorah on Friday afternoon and still make it home on time for Shabbos, Rabbi Butman would take a helicopter from Manhattan to Crown Heights (a tradition that continues to this day).

However, the story of the Menorah in Manhattan doesn't stop there.

In 5747 (תשמ"ז), a few years after the Rebbe had explained that the accurate design of the branches of

the Menorah in the Bais Hamikdash were diagonal, and not circular, as depicted clearly by the Rambam, Rabbi Butman decided to build a new Menorah according to its original and accurate design. He recruited world famous artist Mr. Yaakov Agam to design it. Rabbi Butman had Mr. Agam prepare a three foot model which he brought to the Rebbe to get the Rebbe's input and approval, and it stayed on the Rebbe's desk for a full three days afterward!

When Mr. Agam went by the Rebbe for dollars on the second day of Chanukah, the Rebbe thanked him for designing the Menorah according to the *shita* of the Rambam, and spoke with him warmly about his work.

## JOINED BY THE PRESIDENT

Another major development in the public Menorahs campaign was in 5740 (תשמ"ו), when Rabbi Avrohom



US PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER JOINS RABBI AVRAHAM SHEMTOV IN LIGHTING THE MENORAH ON THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN, CHANUKAH 5740.



Shemtov collaborated with Mr. Stuart Eizenstat, President Jimmy Carter's chief domestic-policy adviser, to arrange that a massive Menorah be built and erected on the White House Lawn. To add even more to the *pirumei nissa*, they invited President Jimmy Carter to join the event.

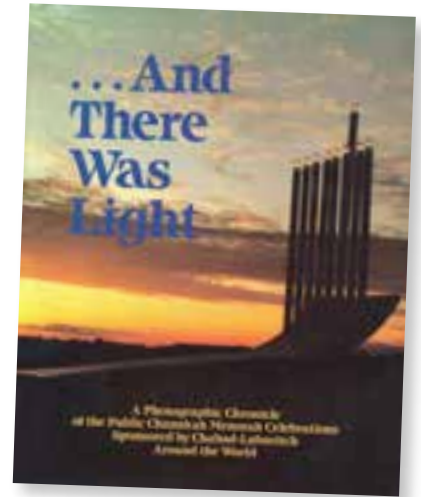
Many doubted that the president would actually show up because, at the time, due to the Iranian Hostage Crisis, Carter was in the midst of a self-imposed seclusion and had not left the White House for more than three months. Up until the last minute his participation wasn't confirmed. Yet, to the shock of all, the President

left the White House for the first time after 100 days to participate in the Menorah lighting ceremony. Carter spent much time at the event, where he addressed the assembled crowd and lit the shamash of a small Menorah. (The small Menorah had been given to Carter as a present.

The Rebbe subsequently wrote a warm letter of thanks to Carter, expressing "genuine gratification at your personal participation in the ceremony of lighting the Chanukah Candelabra in front of the White House."

The tradition of lighting the Menorah on the Ellipse near the White House lawn continues to this day and is watched by millions of people across the globe.

Almost every year, beginning in 5745 (תשמ"ה), a delegation from American Friends of Lubavitch travels to Washington and meets with the president in the Oval Office in honor of Chanukah. The Rebbe received great satisfaction when Rabbi Krinsky relayed that a picture of one of these



meetings had been released, in which one can see the Lubavitch delegation presenting a silver Menorah to President Reagan.

In the ensuing years, many shlichim have held their own similar events together with their state governors, mayors and local dignitaries.

At the Rebbe's behest, following Chanukah 5746 (תשמ"ז), a book was compiled chronicling Menorah-lightings arranged by shlichim across the globe, titled *Let There Be Light*.

FARBRENGEN YUD-TES KISLEV 5747.  
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זה, ומתוך שמחה וטוב לבב, ומתוך עידוד, אז זיי זאלן האבן הצלחה יעדערע בעניינו, און אט די וואס דער אויבערשטער האט זיי געגעבן בהשגחה פרטית א כח אויף זיין א מורה דרך, אדער האבן א השפעה אין א גאנצער סטייט, אדער אין א גאנצע שטאט, אדער אין א גאנצע שכונה, זאל ער דאס אויכעט טאן באופן דמוסיף והולך ואור,

און וויסן אז דורך דערויף ווערט כליא ריגלא דתרמודאי אויכעט כפשוטו, אז אויב מ'וויל האבן די אמת'ר עצה, אז ס'זאל ניט זיין קיין מורדים אין חוקי המדינה, איז ניטא קיין אנדער עצה, ניט עס וועט העלפן כל ענינים שבעולם, ניט קיין געלט, ניט קיין גוטע טיטשער'ס, וכיו"ב, די זאך וואס וועט דערצו העלפן איז דאס, אז דאס וועט זיין מיוסד אויף דער אמונה אין בורא עולם ומנהיגו, וואס ער איז אויכעט משגיח בהשגחה פרטית בכל עת ובכל מקום.  
(משיחת י"ט כסלו תשמ"ז)



The following year, in 5747 (תשמ"ז), on the third day of Chanukah, the Rebbe handed the album to Rabbi Krinsky and instructed that a sequel should be published with photographs of that year's activities. Throughout the following few days the Rebbe constantly urged Rabbi Krinsky to telephone all the shluchim and encourage them to hold events, bearing in mind that the photos will be published. Indeed, a sequel called "... And There Was Light" beautifully depicted how much more extensive the celebrations were during Chanukah of 5747 (תשמ"ז).<sup>2</sup>

## GE'ON YAAKOV

Casting a whole new light on the importance of the public Menorah lightings are the Rebbe's letters written in response to the opposition they faced.

Although today it is an ubiquitous symbol of Chanukah, public Menorahs were initially met with some opposition; often by secular

Jewish organizations who were not comfortable with the public display of Jewish pride.

The argument these groups often cited against public Menorahs was the flawed understanding that placing a religious symbol on public grounds constituted a violation of the First Amendment. Another argument they sometimes cited was that expressing Judaism in the public domain could lead to non-Jews to express their religion in public, and thereby imposing it on others as well.

But underlying these arguments was a more fundamental issue. Many Jews were simply embarrassed by such a public unabashed display of Yiddishkeit.

The Rebbe emphasized that this itself was one of the key messages in the public Menorah lightings, to evoke "a sense of pride in [their] Yiddishkeit and the realization that there is no reason really in this free country to hide one's Jewishness," that Yiddishkeit is nothing to be embarrassed of.



LUBAVITCH YOUTH ORGANIZATION ARCHIVES

WORLD FAMOUS ARTIST YAAKOV AGAM PRESENTS THE REBBE WITH A MODEL OF THE MENORAH HE DESIGNED FOR THE MANHATTAN LIGHTING, BASED ON THE RAMBAM'S SHITA OF THE SHAPE OF THE MENORAH IN THE BEIS HAMIKDOSH, 26 KISLEV 5747.

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

In 5741 (תשמ"א), Rabbi Yisroel Brod, then a shliach in Bergen County, N.J., arranged that a large Menorah be set in front of the Bergen

*In this sicha, the Rebbe thanks the President for marking Chanukah in the White House and speaks of the need to litigate erecting Menorahs in the public:*

וואו נאר ס'דא א איד און ער וויל אנצינדן א מנורה, ואדרבה, מ'וועט עם מסייע זיין אז דאס זאל זיין אין אן אופן פון פירסומי ניסא... און ויהי רצון אז די הכנות לזה זאל זיין בהצלחה רבה ומופלגה, ובפרט נאך אז זיי וועלן זיך אנהויבן אויך בנוגע די עמי הארץ, פון דעם בית מרכזי פון דער מדינה, וואס דארטן גופא וועט דאס זיין פירסומי של עשרה מישראל וכו', ומתוך סבר פנים יפות, ומתוך מנוחה, שמחה וטוב לבב, און ס'איז א זיכערע זאך, אז הקב"ה גיט שכרו ובמדתו של הקב"ה וואס זי איז כמה פעמים ככה, אויכעט דער ענין פון ליכטיקייט און געזונטקייט און יכולת, אויף נאכמערער מוסיף זיין בכל עניני טוב וקדושה, ואשרי חלקם של כל אלו, סיי אידן, סיי ניט אידן, וואס זיי וועלן עם מסייע זיין בכל

וואס דאס איז דאך דער יסוד פון דער מדינה אויף מציל זיין צדיקים מיד רשעים, אע"פ וואס די זיינען גבורים בגשמיות און די זיינען חלשים בגשמיות, ועד כדי כך ובמכ"ש וק"ו, אז דער אויבערשטער בחסדו הכי גדול מאכט לייכטער די נסיונות און גיט אריין גבורה כפשוטה, און הצלחה כפשוטה בגשמיות, אויכעט בחומריות, צו כל פעולה של צדק ויושר, איז דאך א זיכערע זאך, אז ער וועט נאכמערער מוסיף זיין בכל ענינים אלו, כולל אויכעט די הכרזה גלויה, אז ער אליין באווייזט א ביישפיל בביתו אויף אנגעמנדיק דארט די מנורה, און צוזאמען מיט אט די וואס שטעלן עם צו די מנורה בסבר פנים יפות, ע"מ אז ממנו יראו וכן יעשו, בכל קצוי מדינה זו, וממדינה זו יראו וכן יעשו בכל המדינות, אז מ'וועט לאזן

אז בפשטות, זאל ער מתוך גוף בריא נאכמערער מוסיף זיין אין הפצת הטוב והצדק והיושר, אנהובנדיק, פון מכריז זיין בגלוי, אז וואו נאר א איד וויל אוועקשטעלן א מנורה, און פארבינדן דאס און אנצינדן דאס, און באופן דמוסיף והולך ואור מדי לילה בלילה, אין די אלע שמונה לילות בזמן המתאים, איז מען עם מסייע, ואדרבה, אויב מ'טוט דאס אין א מקום של פירסומי ניסא, איז דאס נאכמערער פארבונדן מיט דעם רוח און מיט דעם יסוד פון אט די אלע וואס האבן אנגעהויבן זייער זיין במדינה זו דורך דאנקן דעם אויבערשטן, וואס דאס איז דאך אויכעט דער ענין בפנימיות ובפשטות פון הדלקת נרות המנורה, איז דאך דאס אדאנק דעם אויבערשטן אויף וואס ער האט מציל געווען צדיקים מיד רשעים,



RABBI MOSHE HERSON STANDS WITH SUPPORTERS PRIOR TO THE LIGHTING OF THE MENORAH AT THE NEW JERSEY STATE CAPITAL.

THE REBBE'S LENGTHY LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE JCC IN TEANECK, NJ ABOUT THE PUBLIC MENORAH DISPLAY.

County Court House in Hackensack, N.J.

“It was beautiful,” recalls Rabbi Brod. “It was an ideal location. Every night we would get hoisted up by a cherry picker to light the Menorah. We had people from the Federation there, and everyone had a wonderful time.”

“I was so naïve; I had no idea that people would have an issue with it,” he relates. “So I was shocked when during the following summer, I got a call from a high up in the Jewish Federation of Teaneck asking that we refrain from setting up such a Menorah in Teaneck, where I was based.”

They explained that they had their own way of doing things, and were not interested in a public Menorah. When they heard that he was intending on putting one up anyway, they decided to write a letter to the Rebbe to express their opinion. The Rebbe replied to

them by writing two letters on the topic in which the Rebbe strongly defended the concept of public Menorah lightings. In the following paragraphs we will bring excerpts from the Rebbe's letters.

It should be noted, that the Rebbe wrote and sent the second, lengthy letter at the end of Chanukah, and apparently wasn't written with the intent of convincing them to put up a Menorah, since the Town Council had already rejected it that year regardless. Rather, as the Rebbe wrote in the beginning of the letter, “it touches upon a fundamental principle which has its ramifications beyond the immediate issue.”

Concerning the legality of placing a religious symbol on public grounds, the Rebbe cited precedence from the Menorahs in major cities, as well as the Menorah on the White House lawn. “That it was also constitutional,

legal, and proper goes without saying since the President of the U.S. personally participated in it”... “In New York City, the Attorney General of the State of New York personally participated in the ceremony<sup>3</sup>, and elsewhere public officials and dignitaries were on hand at this public event...”

The Rebbe explained that failing to express Judaism in public life could backfire with negative results. “If the minority voluntarily gives up certain privileges which it once enjoyed, not to mention if it voluntarily forgoes a certain right which the same minority enjoys elsewhere [like lighting a Menorah on public property] - it is bound to be regarded as a sign of weakness and an admission that it is not really entitled to it at all.” And if Jews refrained from putting a Menorah in public, it could hardly deter the general *goyishe* population from expressing their religion in public.

In an addendum, the Rebbe added, “It is difficult to imagine that after what had happened in Hitler Germany,” where Jews were murdered despite their complete assimilation in German culture, “some Jews would still entertain the idea that by making themselves as inconspicuous as possible, concealing their Jewishness, they would gain favor with their gentile neighbors.”

**THAT IT WAS ALSO CONSTITUTIONAL, LEGAL, AND PROPER GOES WITHOUT SAYING SINCE THE PRESIDENT OF THE U.S. PERSONALLY PARTICIPATED IN IT” ... “IN NEW YORK CITY, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK PERSONALLY PARTICIPATED IN THE CEREMONY**



RABBI YOSEF LANDA LIGHTS THE LARGE MENORAH NEAR THE S. LOUIS GOVERNMENT CENTER.

Regarding the importance of displaying a Menorah, the Rebbe wrote, “Now to come to the essential point. Why is it so important for Jews to have a Chanukah Menorah displayed publicly? Experience has shown that the Chanukah Menorah displayed publicly during the eight days of Chanukah has been an inspiration to many, many Jews, and evoked in them a spirit of identity with their Jewish people and the Jewish way of life. To many others it has brought a sense of pride in their Yiddishkeit and the realization that there is no reason really in this free country to hide one’s Jewishness, as if it were contrary or inimical to American life and culture. On the contrary, it is fully in keeping with the American national slogan ‘e pluribus unum’<sup>4</sup> and the fact that American culture has been enriched by the thriving ethnic cultures which contributed very much, each in its own way, to American life both materially and spiritually.”

“Certainly, Jews are not in the proselytizing business. The Chanukah Menorah is not intended to, and can in no way, bring us converts to Judaism.

But it can, and does, bring many Jews back to their Jewish roots. I personally know of scores of such Jewish returnees, and I have good reason to believe that in recent years, hundreds, even thousands, of Jews experience a kindling of their inner Jewish spark by the public kindling of the Chanukah Menorah in their particular city and in the Nation’s capital etc. as publicised by the media.”

These powerful letters were used by many shluchim throughout the years to formulate the Lubavitch position on public Menorahs.<sup>5</sup>

Getting back to the Menorah in Teaneck: Although Rabbi Brod’s bid for a public Menorah in Teaneck was rejected by the local council, he successfully arranged that Menorahs be lit in many other locations in New Jersey, including the State Capital in Trenton.

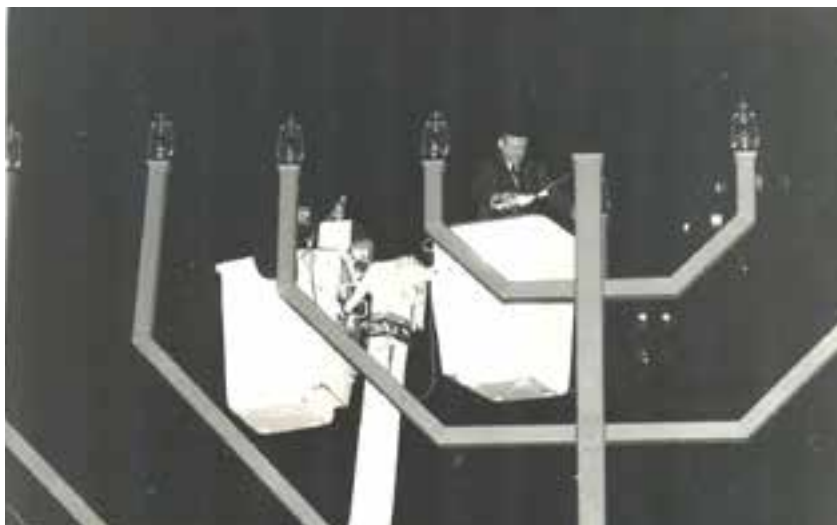
The following summer, Rabbi Brod met with Rabbi Moshe Herson to discuss the plans for the upcoming Chanukah. There were two options: Either they could continue pursuing the Menorah in Teaneck (despite the opposition at the local town hall), or perhaps it would be better to concentrate their efforts on having a Menorah put up in Trenton.

Rabbi Herson wrote to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe disregarded the option about Teaneck and agreed that they move forward with their efforts in Trenton, also instructing how to proceed with placing Menorahs in other cities: לאחר שיגששו באופן המתאים ויבררו שיש סכויים להצלחה. After they feel them out in a discerning fashion, and determine that there is a chance of success”.

At the time, they understood the *maane* as follows: every time a fight was lost over a public Menorah, it strengthened the opposing side. The Rebbe was telling them to be careful and attempt to put up Menorahs only in places where they knew they had a fair chance of success.

Afterwards, Rabbi Brod arranged for Menorahs to be displayed in other locations around New Jersey, and by 5744 (תשד"ג) his empire of Menorahs expanded to 15 stately structures standing proudly in front of town halls all across Bergen County (three municipalities - Fort Lee, Oakland and Hillside - put up their own).

Over the ensuing years, many other shluchim had to deal with similar controversies within their communities regarding public Menorahs. In Teaneck, due to the



NEW YORK CITY MAYOR ED KOCH JOINS RABBI SHMUEL BUTMAN IN LIGHTING THE WORLD’S LARGEST MENORAH IN MANHATTAN.



## REMINDFUL OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In Sivan, 5749, Rabbi Krinsky reported to the Rebbe that a verdict was expected from the Supreme Court regarding the right to display menorahs on public property, and the estimation was that the anticipated ruling would be positive.

He asked the Rebbe if he should prepare a statement for the press, and the Rebbe noted that it should be done in a manner שלא בלויכוחים וכיו"ב – אריינגעשלעפט ווערן לויכוחים וכיו"ב [further] disputes.

On the actual statement prepared, the Rebbe noted his comments and corrections:

The Rebbe crossed a line through “the framers of the Constitution of the United States never intended to separate government from religion” and left only “the founders of this country believed in G-d”.

Where it said, “They came here to escape the religious persecution of governments that coerced its citizens to abide by an established religion to the exclusion of all others” the Rebbe replaced it with “a religion accepted by the government”.

Where it said that “They hoped to establish on these shores a life where people would enjoy religious freedom, and worship G-d freely, each in accordance with his or her beliefs”, the Rebbe crossed a line through those last few words and noted:

נצרות היא ע"ז [=עבודה זרה] - היפך של ז"מ דב"ן [שבע-מצוות דבני-נח] משא"כ איסלם (1)

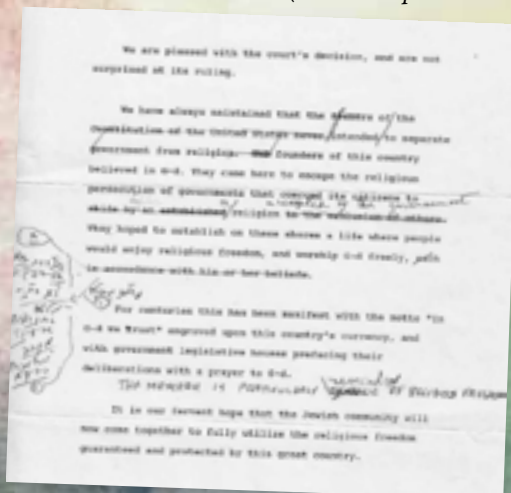
- אלא שהנוצרים שבימינו מעשה אבותיהם בידיהם (2)

“[The Rebbe instructed to delete the line that each can serve G-d in accordance with his or her beliefs, reasoning that] Christianity is [rendered as] *avoda zora*, contrary to the observance of *sheva mitzvos b'nei noach*; as opposed to Islam”.

It is only that the Christians of today are merely practicing what their fathers have taught them.

Where it said that the menorah is particularly “symbolic” of religious freedom, the Rebbe replaced it with “remindful”.

(Teshura Lipsker-Friedman, 5773)



opposition of the community, the Township council decided not to put up a Menorah until the court ruled that doing so did not violate the constitution.

This occurred in the landmark case of *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union* in 5749 (תשמ"ט), when the Supreme Court issued a 6:3 ruling that the city of Pittsburgh was permitted to place a huge Menorah lent to them by Chabad on government property. (See sidebar with the Rebbe's edits on a press release prepared by Lubavitch News Service at the time).

## NO NEED TO BE ASHAMED

In 5742 (תשמ"ב), Rabbi Yosef Landa, who was sent on shlichus to St. Louis the year before, decided to build a Menorah on the large plaza adjacent to the St. Louis County Government Center. Working with a local fabricator, he built a beautiful 15-foot structure.

He got a permit from the county, but as he was standing in the plaza about to erect the Menorah, an official came down from the Government Center, telling him that although they had previously agreed on the Menorah, the county wanted to check first with their lawyers - and he was prohibited to put it up until they did.

Rabbi Landa was shocked. They had been about to put up the Menorah, and now this. He immediately called *mazkirus* and asked for a *brocha* from the Rebbe that everything should work out. Within an hour he received the news that the Menorah could go up as planned.

A County executive attended the lighting ceremony, and Rabbi Landa was gratified with the positive feedback he received. However, towards the end of Chanukah, he began hearing grumblings from



some of the members of the Jewish community. Someone wrote a letter to the editor of one of the local Jewish newspapers claiming that the public display of a Menorah violated the separation between religion and state, and he responded with a letter to the editor of his own.

As far as he was concerned, the entire episode, both the event and the controversy that followed it, was a minor one.

Soon after Chanukah, Rabbi Landa traveled to New York for a wedding. When he came to 770, he was

surprised to hear that Rabbi Groner was looking for him. Not sure what to expect, Rabbi Landa was amazed when he was told that the Rebbe had written a *maane* for him, מה ה' סוף דבר, במיזורי? What ended up happening in Missouri? [This was a tremendous *kiruv*, especially for a young shliach.]

Of course, he immediately sat down and wrote a detailed report to the Rebbe of all that had happened, and also mentioned the complaints of the community.

Shortly afterwards, Rabbi Landa received a lengthy response from the

Rebbe with a general *horov* that had implications for other Shluchim as well:

יתדברו השלוחים שי' במצב כהנ"ל ביניהם  
 (בהשתתפות היודע המצב בוואשינגטון הררא")  
 ש"ט (שם-טוב) - למנוע סתירות מזל"ז [מזה  
 לזה] ואדרבה לסייע זל"ז [זה לזה] וכו'

“The shluchim *shyichyu* who are in a similar situation to the above should coordinate among themselves (with the participation of the one who knows the situation in Washington; Rabbi Avraham Shemtov) in order to avoid contradictions [in their position about public Menorahs] from another, and on the contrary, to help one another etc.”<sup>6</sup>

In response to what Rabbi Landa had written in his report regarding his communication with the newspapers, the Rebbe wrote:

אשרי חלקו וגודלו זכותו שקידש ש"ש [שם  
 שמים] וכו', ולא התבייש מפני המלעיגים,  
 והפיץ יהדות בפועל בתוך רבבות מאחבני"  
 [מאחינו בני ישראל] שליט"א וכו'

“Fortunate is his lot and great is his merit that he was *mikadesh shem shamayim* etc., and wasn't embarrassed from the scoffers, and actually spread Yiddishkeit among tens of thousands of Yidden *shlita*.”

The Rebbe's response amazed him. First of all, he didn't understand why he had merited such a powerful *maane* on what seemed to him as a minor event. Additionally, he didn't understand why the Rebbe put so much focus on his Menorah situation which also seemed to him to be inconsequential.

By the next year however, Rabbi Landa began to understand. As Chanukah was nearing and Rabbi Landa was planning to once again erect a public Menorah things suddenly took a turn for the worse. The Jewish establishment of the city, over forty organizations, joined forces to fight against him, a young shliach who had only arrived a few years earlier. They viciously campaigned



THE 22-FOOT MAHOGANY MENORAH IN S. FRANCISCO'S UNION SQUARE, PLACED BY RABBI CHAIM DRIZIN IN 5736.

against him, sending flurries of letters about him to all the local newspapers, and setting meetings with the county to convince them out of allowing the Menorah.

“The entire community was abuzz over this controversy,” Rabbi Landa says. “The local 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.”

“Their argument was ostensibly that they considered the placement of the Menorah on public property to be in violation of the constitutional

separation of religion and state. It was evident however, that there was also an underlying unease with the forthright, unabashed, public display of Jewishness which the Menorah represented.

“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.”

Understandably, the controversy was very hard on him. He finally understood why he had merited such a tremendously encouraging response from the Rebbe the year before, it had been a preparation to the controversy which engulfed him the year after.

When he was fending for himself in the newspapers and around the city, he used the letters the Rebbe had written to the community in Teaneck to help formulate his position.

Although so many people stood up against him, the decision eventually came down from the county that - “didan notzach!” - the Menorah would go up, albeit for only a few days!

After the decision, those who had fought it were very upset: They had been in town for so many years, they considered themselves the Jewish establishment, and now some young Rabbi shows up and changes the way things were done.

**WHEN ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF MAZKIRUS MENTIONED TO THE REBBE WHAT KOCH HAD SAID, THE REBBE SMILED BROADLY.**



But the story didn't end there. Rabbi Landa relates:

"It was the last day of Chanukah 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 professionals 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.

"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."

"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!"

Needless to say the controversy quieted down after that.

When one of the members of *mazkirus* mentioned to the Rebbe what Koch had said, the Rebbe smiled broadly.

The unending results of public Menorahs around the world will perhaps never be adequately assessed. The timeless flames of the Chanukah

Menorah speaking into the hearts and souls of millions of Jews, igniting a sometimes sleeping spark and reawakening the ever-present connection to the source, in a true manner of קירוב המאור אל הניצוץ.

Suffice it to say that the Rebbe himself attested to this very fact in the abovementioned letter, saying that "I personally know of scores of such Jewish returnees, and I have good reason to believe that in recent years, hundreds, even thousands, of Jews experience a kindling of their inner Jewish spark by the public kindling of the Chanukah Menorah..." **T**

1. See the *Leben Mitten* Rebbe'n column in this publication.
2. See *Teshurah* - Krinsky-Shmukler 5770 (תש"ע)
3. It is interesting to note that in 5739 (תשל"ט) Rabbi Shmuel Butman was specifically instructed to invite Mr. Robert Abrams, the newly elected Attorney General of New York, to the Menorah lighting in Manhattan.
4. *E pluribus unum* is Latin for "Out of many, one" (alternatively translated as "One out of many" or "One from many") — a phrase that is on the Seal of the United States.
5. It should be noted that although he Rebbe was at the forefront of efforts ensuring the Menorah would be successful in Teaneck, the Rebbe was unhappy about the unnecessary tension this caused within the community. When Rabbi Brod had initially told *mazkirus* that the Jewish Federation was against the Menorah, Rabbi Hodakov made it clear that the Rebbe did not want the issue of the public Menorah to be a cause for *machlokes* in the Teaneck Jewish community.
- Later on, when the opposition grew strong, the Rebbe reiterated that it is a shame the situation had to come to where it is, when they could have pursued the Menorah without causing *machlokes* to begin with. The Rebbe pointed out, that if the community would have been informed about the Menorah in Washington with the President himself taking part in the lighting ceremony, and the Menorah in New York City where the Attorney General took part, it is very doubtful that the opposition would have been the way it was.
6. Following this maane, the shluchim set up a meeting with Rabbi Shemtov at the first kinnus hashluchim in 5744 (תשד"ג).



A DELEGATION OF SHLUCHIM PRESENT US PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN WITH A MENORAH.