Oasis

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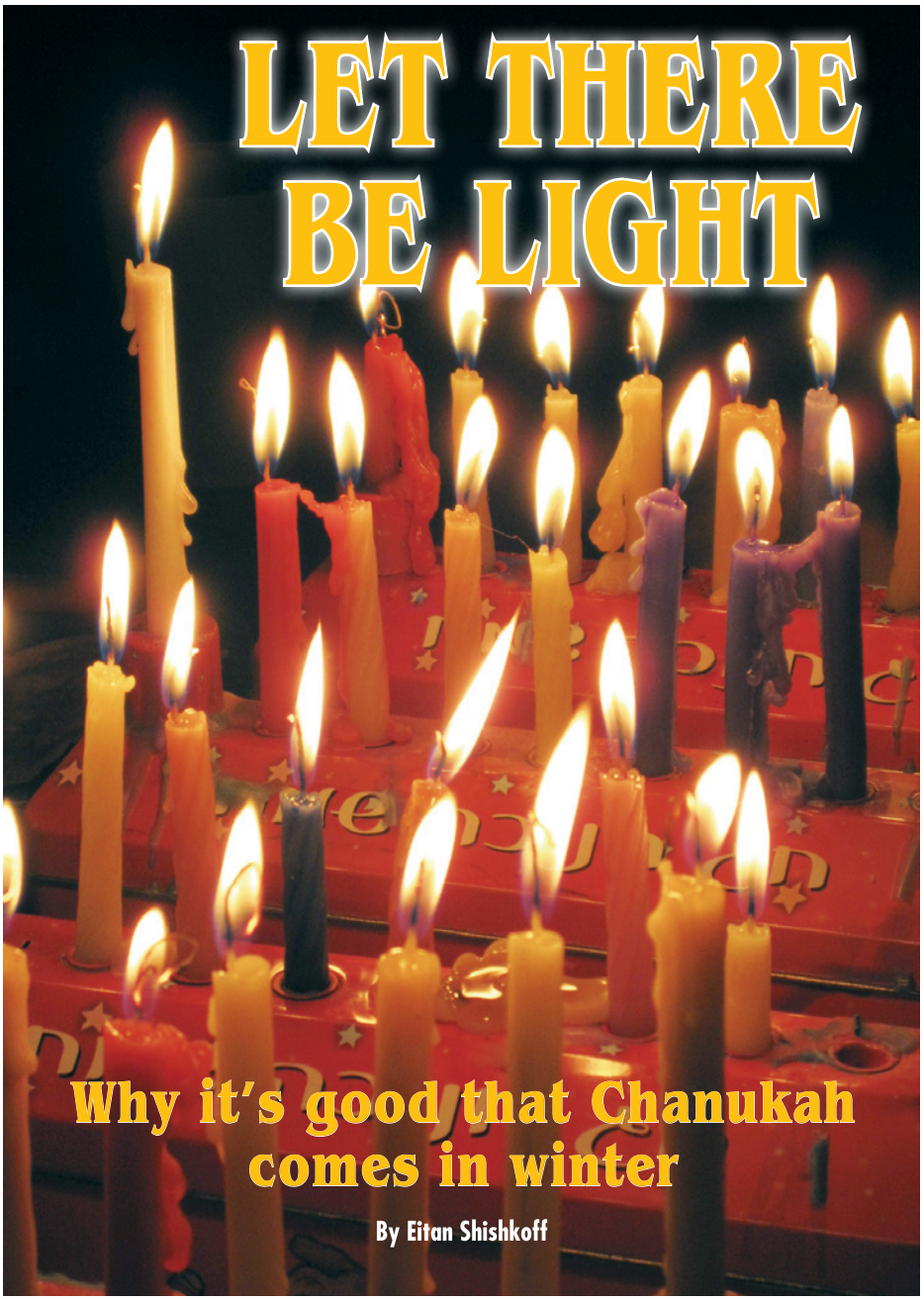
LET THERE BE LIGHT



Why it's good that Chanukah comes in winter

By Eitan Shishkoff

"Then God said 'Let there be light' and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness." (Genesis 1:3,4)

One look at the nebulae swirling in outer space and our mind expands from the majesty of light in the vast darkness. Light is good stuff. Even God said so. Einstein dug it too. Light is so essential that it's no wonder it showed up early in the creation schedule. I looked at a few Google references to learn what light is, but it's all very technical. We all know what it does. If we've been blessed with sight, we depend on light to make things visible in the physical realm. That sounds relevant in the spiritual realm too. **"In your light we see light."** (Psalm 36:9)

Last night I watched the moon reflecting the light of the sun. It was about 2/3 full and really bright against the night sky. Talking with a friend, drinking hot mocha on one of Israel's first cool fall evenings, the parallel with our lives was so clear to me. The moon has no light of its own. The sun, at an approximate distance of 93 million miles is the sole source of its light. But, that's also true of the earth. The sun is our source of light too. This sentence begs for a word play… is there anymore apt homonym pairing in the English language than Son/Sun?

We Are the Moon, He Is the Son

The Son is our source of light. **"I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."** (John 8:12) This is a definitive declaration by Yeshua. I agree with Him. I can say, without hesitation, that until He came into my life, I was in darkness. I had no effective understanding of life's meaning,

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its structure or its purpose. As a blind man, I groped for the next step, not knowing where it would lead.

We are like the moon. We have no light of our own, only what we can reflect of the Source of light who: **"called us out of darkness into His marvelous light."** (1Peter 2:9) Once we turn, away from obsessing with ourselves, to behold Him, we are illuminated by His eternal light. **"But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."** (2Corinthians 3:18)

So, what's this got to do with Chanukah? Called the Festival of Lights, Chanukah recalls the triumph of light over darkness in the 2nd century BCE, when Israel was oppressed by a Greek-Syrian cartel that sought to rid Israel of all Jewish religion and culture. The good guys, Israeli fighters led by a family called the Maccabees, were finally able (against ridiculous odds), to recapture the Temple in Jerusalem and re-light the lampstand, so often mentioned in Torah as a prime piece of holy equipment. Its seven branches could be said to reflect the seven-fold Spirit of God mentioned by Isaiah (See, Isaiah 11:2) and by John in the early chapters of Revelation.

From Compromise to Courage

The temple rededication happened in winter, the coldest, darkest time of the year. Days are short. The sun leaves early, arrives late. It was also a dark time in Israel's history. The Maccabees' Chanukah victory brought Israel out of a dark time of oppression from the outside and compromise on the inside. Sound familiar? Today's Israel is a similar combination of external threat and internal corruption. A common word used to characterize the Chanukah warriors is courage. Courage is stepping into the light and bearing it through the dismaying circumstances we find ourselves in.

"You are the light of the world…Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14,16)

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord…" (Proverbs 20:27)

The first step towards courage is to be bathed in God's light. **"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Yeshua HaMashiach, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."** (1John 1:7) What does it mean to walk in the light? Light exposes that which is hidden by darkness. When I walk in the light I'm exposed for others to see. I can't hide behind the posturing that attempts to cover up who I really am. Walking in the light is being real. It's being open before God and man. Walking in the light is also freedom, since I no longer have to pretend, hide or fake my way through. It's being more like a child, which is why Yeshua said, **"Unless you turn and become as little children you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** (Matthew 18:3-4)

Lighting the Menorah in Our Temple

Chanukah is the word for dedication in Hebrew. We use it in everyday speech when referring to a house warming. It's called chanukat-bayit. The parallel is charming and helpful. The driving core behind celebrating Chanukah is re-dedication. The Macabees re-dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, as the house of worship, the place where the God of Israel accepted sacrifices for the cleansing of hearts. This is more than a fun festival of candles and dreidels and potato pancakes and jelly donuts (sufganiot in Israel). It is an opportunity to identify our body—our life—as the home of God's Spirit. We are His temple and He wants to light a bright candlestick (chanukiah/menorah) in us for all to see.

It's dark out there in the world these days. There's a lot of terror and tragedy. Greed, lust and hatred forge wicked chains that hold multitudes in bondage and send many into an even bleaker eternity. When we add the natural disasters: earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, it becomes darker still. Despite the gloom we remember this good news: **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men…that was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world"** (John 1:4,9).

I love light. I love the reality of sight. One of life's greatest satisfactions is to behold visual beauty. I love going to the sea and just looking out at its vastness, its blueness, and its waves. My wife is a gifted painter. It amazes and pleases me deeply to see the works she creates out of color and form. One of her paintings shows a young couple under the wedding chupah. The groom's prayer shawl is draped over his bride and the white of the tallit is illuminated as if light is coming from behind. Light is coming through the painting. Are we like that? Is our life a work of art in the hands of the Light-Maker? Is His light shining through us? He wants to display us, imperfect as we are, to say, "Look, I am shining through this one. This person is my home, my temple. They are not hiding. You can trust them to find the Light in this world's darkness."

"…Then God said 'LET THERE BE LIGHT.'" ✡

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Tents of Mercy אוהלי רחמים

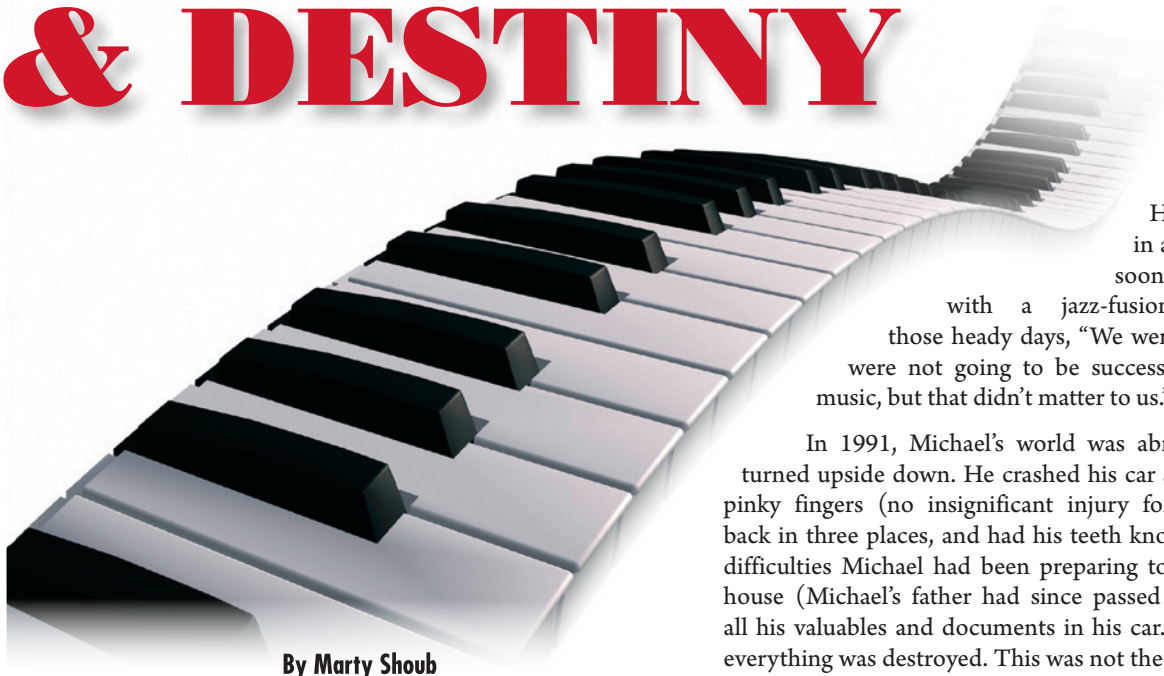
Our Vision:

Tents of Mercy - to participate in today's historic exodus by assisting Israel's returning exiles.

No spectators in the Kingdom - to be a worshiping, sharing community based in homes, equipping each one for service.

Come back Yeshua - to welcome Yeshua home to Israel, by restoring the Jewish roots of New Covenant faith.

MUSIC, FREEDOM & DESTINY



By Marty Shoub

Every congregation needs a great piano player. Tents of Mercy has an almost embarrassing glut of riches in this department. Since our founding, "the Maestro", Leonid Gelbit (See, "A Notable Soul", August, 2009) has been our mainstay on the keyboards. But for the last three years we have had the good fortune to add another amazingly talented keyboardist to our ranks, Michael G.

Michael comes by his musical acumen honestly. Michael's maternal great grandmother was a famous singer in her native Belgium. His paternal grandfather was also a famous violinist in his native Poland. Not to be outdone, Michael's father was a professional composer in the Soviet Union. Michael was enrolled in piano lessons at age four. Michael, "I didn't have any alternative but to learn music. I had to go to music school." At fourteen years old, Michael had grown tired of the demanding expectations of formal musical training. To the dismay of his parents, Michael informed them that he no longer wished to pursue the piano and gave up playing altogether.

After a year off, Michael began to play again, but only as a pastime. One day while casually playing the piano, the creative spirit within him welled up in a new passion and joy for music. Michael knew what he wanted to do, "I told my mother, 'I want to be a musician.' I realized this was something I wanted to do for myself not just to meet my parent's expectations. I didn't realize it at the time but it was God at work in me - He was the one who put this passion in me." Michael poured himself into music, "I played every day, 8-10 hours a day. My parents worried...this time because I played too much!

Michael continued his formal music training, completing an undergraduate degree in music and then another five years post graduate studies. During his college days Michael's musical tastes broadened beyond his formal classical training. He developed an interest in avant-garde jazz and was soon traveling the country with a jazz-fusion band. Michael recalled those heady days, "We were in our own frame, we were not going to be successful playing this sort of music, but that didn't matter to us."

In 1991, Michael's world was abruptly and dramatically turned upside down. He crashed his car and as a result lost both pinky fingers (no insignificant injury for a pianist), broke his back in three places, and had his teeth knocked out. To add to his difficulties Michael had been preparing to return to his mother's house (Michael's father had since passed away) and had packed all his valuables and documents in his car. In the ensuing car fire, everything was destroyed. This was not the worst of it. Michael also sustained a serious head injury which resulted in post-traumatic amnesia. He did not know who he was; he even had forgotten that he was a musician. His mother had no idea where he was or what had happened to him - Michael was completely alone.

Michael G.

As one could imagine, this was an extremely difficult period in his life. Even now, as he recounted the trauma of those days, Michael had to pause to collect himself and was reluctant to delve into the details of that painful time. During the course of his rehabilitation, the hospital arranged for Michael to move out to a small village where he could rest and recuperate. Slowly Michael's memory began to return to him; he remembered his music background and despite his credentials being destroyed in the car fire, was able to find employment as a music teacher in the village school. All this time Michael's mother had been looking for him. The police helped her track him down and after a four year hiatus, Michael and his mother were reunited.

Michael and Marc

Reuniting with family after such an ordeal should have been a great encouragement to Michael, but the trauma of the accident had left him depressed and discouraged. A chance meeting changed Michael's life again, but this time for good. Michael explained, "In 1998 I met a woman on the street, she didn't know me but she told me, 'you are Jewish, there is a connection between Yeshua and your people.' I laughed at her. To my mind this was fairly tales for children." This same woman invited Michael to her home to watch a film. Despite his skepticism he accepted her offer. "They were watching a film about Moses, I was intrigued. They had lots of Bible movies and I would continue to come back week after week to watch the films." Michael continued meeting with this small band of believers for about six months - there was a freedom about these people that attracted Michael. "I had longed for freedom my whole life, I started playing jazz because I had hoped it would bring me freedom. After my accident I had resigned to believing that there was no way I could be free - life was a struggle, the best I could do was just to survive."

Taking a chance on freedom, Michael reached out to Yeshua and repented of his sins. Michael had a genuine spiritual encounter but his depression continued to plague him, "I was still troubled, I would repent and find some freedom but then the depression would return." Michael was invited to attend a Bible college in Vladivostok. He had hoped his new surroundings and focused time in the scriptures would break his cycle of depression. Matters only got worse. Michael broke his leg and was hospitalized once again. However, this hospital stay was different than his previous one. In his lowest moment Yeshua met Michael in a life changing way.

"As I was lying in bed my room began to glow with a purple light. At the same time I smelled the most pleasant fragrance. I started to pray and began to speak in tongues. I had no knowledge about these things and thought I was going crazy. I couldn't speak about my experience to anyone but the depression was gone." After Michael was discharged he met with his friends and reluctantly told them his story. This little group had Baptist roots - they were not familiar with this sort of experience. Michael wondered if they would also think he was going crazy. To his surprise and delight they received his testimony with enthusiasm. What Michael didn't know was that his friends had had a similar encounter at the same time.

Michael still worried that his depression would return. The Bible college faculty had asked him to participate in leading worship but Michael was reluctant, "I told them, 'I am not sure I can help because I have problems.' They told me not to worry, that they would pray for me and I would be free. That night as I was praying I heard the Holy Spirit speak to my heart, 'You have repented, you are free, you do not have to be afraid anymore.'"

Michael's journey to freedom was also a journey back to his Jewish heritage: "As I got closer to God I got closer to my Jewish soul. My family was Jewish, but all this really meant was that we could not get the best jobs or go to the best schools. My father's name was Epstein, but when he married, in order to distance himself from his Jewish identity, he took my mother's Russian surname. My mother always told me to be proud I was Jewish but not to tell anybody - this was to be our family secret." Shortly after his graduation from Bible college, Michael heard the Holy Spirit speak to him again, "You are Jewish, one day you will return to your homeland." In 2008, Michael and his new wife and children made aliyah just as the Holy Spirit had promised.

In Israel, Michael met a fellow musician who shared his passion for worship, Marc Chopinsky (see, "Yes and Amen", Oct. 2011) "My relationship with Marc is very important to me, God put us together." The Tents of Mercy family also has a special place in Michael's life. "I love the people of Tents of Mercy. My relationships here are so different than the ones I had in the Soviet Union. People are so open - I love this." As is the experience of any new immigrant, Michael and his wife have their challenges adapting to life in Israel, but he is learning what Shaul learned, **"In whatever state I am to be content."** (Phil. 4:11)

Looking back, we can see the grace of God intersecting Michael's life at critical moments, from rediscovering his passion for music, to even his darkest hours, he was never alone. Step by step the Holy Spirit has led him. Michael is very optimistic about the future, we believe his confidence is well founded. ✡