

Dear Chevre,

Greetings on *Zot Hanukkah*, the eighth day!

I'd like to send along the story we read at services last Shabbat as food for thought –

This quiet story illuminates our *middot* of trust, faith, and humility. And it reminds us: that the light of our tradition is always there to guide us, no matter how lost we may feel!

May your day be filled with blessing and light!

B'ahava,

R' Shula

A long time ago, before Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer became known as the Baal Shem Tov, he and his wife Chana lived in the Carpathian Mountains. During the week, Rabbi Israel wandered by himself in the dense forests there. He loved nature and studied everything he saw, the deer and the fawn, the birds and squirrels, and all the animals that were in the forest.

All week, during all kinds of weather, in summer or winter, he would walk and meditate among the trees. And on Friday, just before sundown, he would return home for the Sabbath.

During the week in which Hanukkah was to be celebrated, Rabbi Israel said to his wife, "With G-d's help, I will return home on the eve of Hanukkah to light the first candle. But if I am too late for some reason and haven't arrived before sundown, don't wait for me, but light the candle by yourself and put the Hanukkah menorah in the window."

On the afternoon of the eve of Hanukkah, just as Rabbi Israel was about to return home, it started to snow, and a strong wind arose. Soon a

blizzard was raging. Rabbi Israel buttoned up his coat, leaned on his heavy staff, and tried to make his way through the storm. Darkness was falling, and for the first time in his life, Rabbi Israel was lost. He could not find the narrow path in the forest that led to his home.

He walked and walked but somehow always returned to the same place. Yet because of his trust in G-d, he did not lose faith. He was only upset that he would not be able to light the candles on the first night of Hanukkah.

Soon Rabbi Israel became exhausted. He sat down to rest on a large stone, and because he was so tired, he fell asleep. While he slept, an image appeared in his dream of a tall old man carrying a candle in his hand. "Who are you?" the sleeping rabbi asked. The old man replied, "I am Mattathias, the father of the Macabees, and I have brought this candle for you." At that instant Rabbi Israel awoke, and he was able to make out the dim shape of a person walking before him through the swirling snow. That person held a menorah in his hand, with one candle burning, a menorah that looked very much like Rabbi Israel's own.

Rabbi Israel picked up his staff and started following the light of the flame. For what seemed hours, he never let it out of his sight. At last he saw that he was not far from the place where he walked on the Sabbath. As he came closer, he recognized the fields and trees and saw that he was approaching his own village. Then he saw his own house. And there was his Hanukkah menorah in the window, its first candle lit with a clear and bright flame.

Rabbi Israel's wife stood outside the house, wrapped in her heavy winter shawl, deeply worried about him. It was already past midnight, and she was afraid that something had happened to him in that terrible storm.

When Rabbi Israel appeared on the path, she ran to him and embraced him. "Thank G-d you have come home alive!" she said. There were tears of happiness in her eyes. "When it was becoming dark," she said, "and you hadn't returned, I lit the first candle of Hanukkah by myself. But no sooner did I light it than the candle and the menorah vanished from the window. I was terrified, for I was sure it was a sign you were in danger."

Then Rabbi Israel understood that Mattathias had taken the menorah from the window and used it to guide him back. He told his wife about his dream, and about the silent figure who had guided him through the forest. Before they entered the house, he pointed to the window and she saw that the menorah had been restored to its place. The flame of the candle glowed brightly in the night.

This is an old *Shivchey HaBesht*, recast as "The Enchanted Menorah", in *The Day the Rabbi Disappeared, Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic*, retold by Howard Schwartz