## **MIRACLE ON 69TH STREET**

by Ellin Ronee Pollachek

the past two summers I've had the good fortune to rent a home in upstate New York. The house, while incredibly charming, is quite old, and what I've discovered about old homes is that, like people, the older they are, the more upkeep they need. So it wasn't unusual that when I pulled the cord to the living room light, it didn't go on. Being an apartment dwelter most of my life and having a superintendent around to do everything from changing washers to fixing leaks, I've never had to learn to be handy. Lucky for me, the man I ended up marrying was not only a homeowner, but was also a Ger (convert). To me, Jews never seem particularly handy.

During the week, my husband worked in the city. And so it was that the next time he came upstate for Shabbat, I pointed out the problem.

"Obviously it needs more than a bulb. If it was just a bulb, the other nine lights would have gone on," was how I figured it.

"Not so," he said, contemplating the fixture. "It could just be a bulb."

"How so?" I asked, trying to follow his logic, while at the same time, trying to figure out if we had enough food in the house for *Shabbat*.

"Remember the old Christmas lights?" That stopped me in my tracks.

Sure, I remembered Christmas lights, I've seen them my whole life. When I was small we'd go riding through the suburbs to look at the Christmas trees. I was never particularly taken with the ornately decorated ones; what I loved most were the trees outside the homes, the

s sensuously draped in a panorama of lights -- ulue lights. All blue. I remembered promising myself that when I grew up I'd have a blue Christmas tree.

I had forgotten about those car rides and promises, until Bill asked the question he did.

"Don't you remember?" he continued. "When one would go out, they'd all go out!"

I looked at him incredulously. "We never had Christmas lights."

"Come on," he said in that tone of voice which is really saying you're talking to  $\underline{me}$ .

"Come on what?"

"Everyone had Christmas lights!"

I was beginning to get annoyed. After all, while I was raised in a home where Passover was observed by adding Matzo to the bread drawer, and Yom Kippur was observed by staying home from school and watching mom light a *yahrzeit* (memorial) candle for people I never met, and I openly admit to leaving cookies and milk for Santa, we didn't have a Christmas tree! My mother said Jews didn't have Christmas trees, and that was that. We didn't have a tree, which meant we didn't have lights either. So not having a Christmas tree is part of my Yiddishkeit. To some people, it's the holidays — to others it's a seder. To still others it's bagels and lox. To me, it's that we didn't have a Christmas tree.

"We never had Christmas lights."

"Weil, my first wife had a Christmas tree, and she was from Scarsdale."

"La dee dah!! She was also married to a goy! So what?" That was a reminder -- in case he forgot.

"Well," he said, ignoring the jab. "The old Christmas lights worked so that when one went out, they all went out. Maybe this light works like that. It's very old. Maybe when one bulb goes, they all go."



"When one light goes out it affects all the others."

With that he stepped on a chair and began examining the light, only to realize that I was right. It wasn't the bulb, it was the wiring. The living room fixture, like others in the house, needed rewiring.

So what does this have to do with Chanukah? Well, despite my non-observant home, we were, none-the-less, Jews. In my house that meant we didn't have milk at the same time that we had meat. It also meant we were raised on chopped liver and *gribbaniz* (roasted chicken fat). It also meant that we didn't believe in Jesus, and, despite the fact that we received our gifts on Christmas, we didn't have a Christmas tree. My reconnection to Judaism through Orthodoxy simply solidified my cultural ties, whereas my husband not only had to change his religion, he had to change his cultural underpinnings.

This distinction really underscores the very basis of the war between the Maccabees and the Greeks. The Maccabees were not fighting religious oppression. In fact, the Greeks never told the Jews they couldn't worship their God. After all the Greeks, with so many

gods of their own, understood worship. What the Greeks couldn't understand and refused to allow the Jews -- was a cultural distinction. The Greek fixation on beauty, on the perfection of the human body over the perfection of the soul and on homosexual culture (sound familiar?), was what the Greeks were selling and what the Jews were refusing to buy. That's what the war was about. It's what it still is about.

The second thing that comes to mind is a *Midrash* which states that when the Jews were in Egypt, there were 50 levels of impurity to which they could fall before they were beyond redemption. The Jews had reached the 49th level -- we had given up everything but our Hebrew names, our Hebrew language and our distinctive clothes. There's another *Midrash* that says we held onto a fourth mitzvah -- either *Brit Milah* 

(circumcision) or *Mikvah* (holy bath). With the exception of these three or four things, Jews were essentially Egyptians. It is also not common knowledge amongst most of us, that while Moses took many Jews out of Egypt many more remained behind. Those who stayed preferred being slaves to a familiar slave master, rather than free in an unknown, untried land. They preferred the old, comfortable ways to the new, more dangerous way.

Like the lights in this very old house, many of us need some rewiring. While my husband was wrong about the source of the light's problem, he was not far from the truth of the source of the Jewish problem. It is not only the responsibility of the *uninformed* to become *informed*; it is also the responsibility of the informed to do the informing. And so like the old-type Christmas lights, Jews believe that when one of our lights goes out, when a soul leaves the fold, when a Jew has lost her way, each of us is affected -- we all become a bit more dim.

Chanukah is neither a Jewish Christmas, nor is it the preferable of the two holidays because one receives eight day of gifts instead of one. Chanukah is a celebration of the miracle of light; the miracle of having one day's oil lasting for eight. It is also the miracle of the few conquering the many: the light of the Maccabees surviving the physicality of the Greeks. It is also a miracle that, with my mouth, my husband still loves me! But then again Judaism is filled with miracles. Stick around and find out.

Ellin Ronee Pollachek teaches Literature at Hostos Community College and has published two novels.

## CONGRATIII ATIONS AND

### **CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV**

#### **ENGAGEMENTS**

Sharon Mars and Moty Beyen Karen Miller and Baruch Kahn Jody Spiegel and Stephen Lerner

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Ruchie and Rabbi Kenneth Brander, on the birth of a boy, Yoseph Dov

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D'vorah and Rabbi Brian Thau, on the birth of a girl, Rachel Leah Hadas

#### CONDOLENCES

Allen Bankhalter, on the loss of his father, Manny Bankhalter

Steven Basice, on the loss of his mother, Ann Basice

Roslyn Bierman, on the loss of her sister, Ann Kleiner Avi London, on the loss of his father, Shabtai London

#### CONGRATULATIONS

To Richard Bernstein, upon the publication of his acclaimed new book <u>Dictatorship of Virtue:</u>

<u>Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's</u>

Future

Andre Gregory, for his critically acclaimed production and movie of <u>Vanya on 42nd Street</u>
Paul Kaufman, upon his 90th birthday

Beginners Shabbat Luncheons - \$15 Jan 7, Feb 4, Mar 4

Beginners Shmooze
Mondays 8:15 PM - Free

# Saturday, November 19th (VAYISHLACH) Daf Yomi Saturday, November 19th (VATISHLACH) 8:00 a.m. Daf Yomi 8:00 a.m. Shabbat Morning Services 8:45 a.m. Talmud and Bible Classes 3:30 p.m. Mincha 4:15 p.m. Daily Mincha & Maariv 4:25 p.m. Maariv only Monday - Wednesday 6:20 p.m. Saturday, November 26th (VAYESNEV) Daf Yom: 5:00 a.m. Shabbat Worning Services 5:45 a.m. Talmud and Bible Classes 3:25 p.m. Mincha 4:10 p.m. Daily Mincha 6 Meariv 4:25 p.m. Maariv only Monday - Thursday 6:20 p.m. Friday, December 2nd 4:05 p.m. Kindle Chanukah Candles. 4:05 p.m. Kindle Shabbat Candles. 4:11 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:15 p.m. Synagogue Chanukah Dinner 4:25 p.m. | Saturday, December 3rd (MEKETZ) Rosh Chodesh Tevet/Chanukah Hanhkomah Minyan | 7:40 a.m. Daf Yomi | 8:00 a.m. Shabbat Morning Services | 8:45 a.m. Talmud and Bible Classes | 3:25 p.m. Mincha | 4:10 p.m. Daily Mincha & Msariv | 4:25 p.m. Maariv Only Monday - Thuraday | 6:20 p.m. Light Seven Chanukah Candles Sunday December 4th Chanukah & Rosh Chodesh Morning Services......7:00 & 8:30 a.m. Monday December 5th Eighth Day of Chanukah Morning Services.......7:00 & 7:40 a.m. Saturday, December 10th (VAYIGASH) Saturday, December 10th (VAYIGASH) 8:00 a Daf Yomi 8:05 a Simbhat Morning Services 8:45 a Simbhat Morning Services 3:25 p Mincha and Bible Classes 1:25 p Mincha Macriv 4:25 p Daily Mincha & Macriv 4:25 p Maariv only Monday - Thursday 6:20 p Friday, December 16th Kindle Shabbat Candles. 4:12 p.m. Minche and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:15 p.m. Saturday, December 17th (VAYECHI) | Saturday, December 17th (WATCH) | S.00 a.m. | | Daf Yomi | Services | 8.45 a.m. | | Shabbar Morning Services | 8.45 a.m. | | Talmmd and Bible Classes | 3.25 p.m. | | Mincha | 4.10 p.m. | | Daily Mincha & Meariv | 4.25 p.m. | | Maariv only Monday - Thursday | 6.20 p.m. |

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES
Friday, Dacember 23rd Xindle Shabbat Candles
Saturday, December 24th (SHEMOT)         8.00 a.m.           Daf Yoma.         8.00 a.m.           Shabbat Morning Services         8.45 a.m.           Talmud and Bible Classes         3125 p.m.           Minchs         4.25 p.m.           Daily Minchs & Heariv         4.25 p.m.           Maariv only Tuesday - Thursday         6.20 p.m.
Monday, December 26th Morning Services
Priday, December 30th Kindle Shabbat Candles
Saturday, December 31st (VAERA)   8:00 a.m.
Monday, January 2nd Rosh Chodesh Shevat Morning Services
Friday, January 6th Kindla Shabbat Candles . 4:26 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat . 4:30 p.m.
Saturday, January 7th (BO)     8:00 a.m.       Daf Yomin     8:00 a.m.       Shabbar Morning Services     8:45 a.m.       Talumd and Bible Classes     3:40 p.m.       Mincha     4:25 p.m.       Daily Mincha & Maariv     4:25 p.m.       Meariv only Monday - Thursday     6:20 p.m.
Priday, January 13th Kindle Shabbat Candles
Saturday, January 14th (BISHALACH)   .6:00 a.m.   Shabbar Morning Services   .6:45 a.m.   Talmud and Eible Classes   .3:45 p.m.   Minchs   .4:30 p.m.   Daily Mincha & Maariv   .4:45 p.m.   Maariv only Monday - Thursday   .6:20 p.m.   .6:
Monday, January 16th Tu B'Shavat Morning Services
Friday, January 20th Kindle Shabbat Candles
Saturday, January 21st (YITHRO)     .8:00 a.m.       Dsf Yomi     .8:45 a.m.       Shabbat Morning Services     .8:45 a.m.       Talmud and Bible Classes     .3:55 p.m.       Mincha     .4:40 p.m.       Daily Mincha     4:50 p.m.       Maariv only Monday     .6:20 p.m.
Friday, January 27th Kindle Shabbat Candles. 4:49 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 4:50 p.m.
Saturday January 28th (MISHPATIM)   8:00 a.m.
Tuesday, January 3ist and Wednesday, February 1st Rosh Chodesh Adar I Morning Sevices

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Saturday, February 25th (VAYAKHEL - PARSHAT SHEKALIM)	_
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