

Chanukah Comes Early to White House

THE FRIEDLANDER GROUP

President Barack Obama hosted his final Chanukah White House celebration joined by community members from across the United States.

As the secular holidays coincide with the onset of Chanukah, a time when the president is on vacation in Hawaii, the traditional White House receptions were moved up by over a week to accommodate the president's schedule.

Following what has become a tradition in the Obama White House, there are two receptions; one in the afternoon followed by one in the evening to allowing for a diverse array of Jewish personalities from many communities to participate. The president jokingly remarked, "This is our second Chanukah party today, but in the spirit of the holiday, the White House kitchen has not run out of oil."

At the afternoon ceremony, the Obamas honored Mr. Elie Wiesel, z"l, the Holocaust survivor, author and Nobel Peace Prize winner who passed away earlier this year.

"It's important for our community to internalize that the White House Chanukah Reception is not merely a party to socialize but an important milestone for the Jewish community when the leader of the free world identifies with the historical aspirations of our people," said Mr. Ezra Friedlander, CEO of The Friedlander Group, who participated.

"When the president speaks, the world listens, and this year's remarks, addressing issues pertaining to highlighting the protection of religious freedom, were especially significant in light of recent attempts to ban religious rituals domestically and abroad."

President Obama's remarks addressed this topic as follows: "The first chapter of the Chanukah story was written 22 centuries ago, when rulers banned religious rituals and persecuted Jews who dared to observe their faith. Which is why today we are asked not only to light the *menorah*,



L-R: Mr. Joseph B. Stamm; Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew; Mr. Ezra Friedlander.



L-R: Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein; Rabbi Abraham Shemtov; Mr. Ron Dermer, Israeli ambassador to the U.S.; Mr. Shlomo Werdiger.

but to proudly display it — to publicize the mitzvah.

"Everybody in America can understand the spirit of this tradition. Proudly practicing our religion, whatever it might be — and defending the rights of others to do the same — that's our common creed. That's what families from coast to coast confirm when they place their *menorah* in the window — not to share the candles' glow with just your family, but also with your community and with your neighbors."

The president concluded by honoring the memory of Mr. Elie Wiesel. "The story of Chanukah, the story of the Jewish people, the story of perseverance — these are one and the same. Elie Wiesel taught us that lesson probably better than just about anybody. In one of his memories of the Holocaust, Elie watched a fellow prisoner trade his daily ration of bread for some simple materials with which to piece together a makeshift *menorah*. And he wrote that he couldn't believe the sacrifices this man was making to observe the holidays. A stunned Elie asked him, 'Chanukah in Auschwitz?' And the man replied, 'Especially in Auschwitz.'"



L-R: Rabbi Doniel Ginsberg; Mr. Jarrod Bernstein, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications at CarePoint Health and former Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement; Mr. Ezra Friedlander; Mr. Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications for President Barack Obama; Mr. Joseph B. Stamm.

The Darkei Chesed Organization: Clothing for Children in Eretz Yisrael

ESTIE GOLDBERG

The Darkei Chesed Organization was founded in 2008 for the purpose of distributing new, good-quality clothing to school-going children from very poor homes. The distribution is made twice a year — before Pesach and before Rosh Hashanah. This year a special pre-Chanukah *chalukah* of sweaters and other winter clothing was added.

In eight years, the number of children helped has risen from 200 to almost 40,000 — a huge increase!

The Tragic Reality of Today

Unfortunately, even those families who are happy to live very frugally for the sake of raising their children to a life of Torah and *mitzvos* have been forced into an untenable situation. With the extremely severe government cuts in monthly family subsidies (by some 75%!!), these families and their children find themselves teetering on the edge of the abyss. They cannot find the means to survive and to give their children a happy childhood, as much as they may try.

The impact this is having on these children is cause for concern in the

Mr. Howard Schultz, famed CEO of Starbucks, described being part of a group of American dignitaries visiting Israel who were granted an audience with Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l. They gathered in his home, which was across the street from the yeshivah, and waited patiently for him to come.

As he entered, Rav Nosson Tzvi's physical difficulties that resulted from Parkinson's disease were obvious to all, and sent shockwaves through the group. All of the men instinctively looked downward, so as not to stare at the *Rosh Yeshivah* while he battled just to take a step. As he finally settled in his seat and the guests took their places around the table, the *Rosh Yeshivah* broke the awkward silence by banging on the table and saying, "Gentlemen, look at me! You're busy people, and I don't want to waste your time. I have a question for you. What was the enduring lesson of the Holocaust?"

Some answered, "Never again," and some fumbled with other answers. Then Rav Nosson Tzvi told the men what was on his mind.

"The Holocaust teaches us the essence of the human spir-

it. The Nazis tore families apart and tried to break the spirit of humanity. They transported the Jews in cattle cars to the camps, where fathers and sons were separated from mothers and daughters, often not seeing them again. Then they were herded off to the barracks, where they slept bunched together on hard wooden boards. Only one blanket was provided for six people.

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"The Jews now had to decide: What were they going to do? Was each person going to keep the blanket for himself, or was he going to give it to the other guy? And that's where we saw the human spirit shine through. Each person took the blanket and gave it to the next person.

"So now go back to America, and spread your blanket over others."*

We are asking of you to donate as much as you can, to warm up others while doing a favor to yourself, with the message of Rav Nosson Tzvi in mind. We see the human spirit shining through in each donation.

*Reprinted with permission of the author, Rabbi Moshe Rockove, from the book "The Power to Give In."

classrooms of many *chadarim*, *yeshivos ketanos* and girls' schools — from elementary through high schools.

Giving Dignity and Hope

In the eight years since Darkei Chesed was established it has changed the lives of thousands of children (ages 5-16) and their families. Each child receives his or her own set of new clothes, at a minimal

cost to preserve the dignity of the parents. Long-lasting, good-quality clothing is shipped from abroad at low cost, direct from the factories. In the past year, 280,000 items were delivered.

Parents apply to the fund, and each case is vetted by *gabba'im* in charge of *tzedakah* funds. The *chalukah* takes place at 14 centers throughout the country. Six other communities have applied

to be considered for *chalukah* next year.

With increased support from the Jewish public and philanthropists, the Darkei Chesed project can bring about a dynamic and meaningful change to children living in poverty in Eretz Yisrael.

Please send your kind donation to Darkei Chesed, 6039 North Central Park Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60659 or call 1-888-DARKEI 5.