

Avraham Ticho's Collection Of Chanukah Menorahs

A Man Who Cherished Light

By Simon Griver

Anna and Avraham Ticho

(WZPS) — Dr. Avraham Ticho was a man who literally brought light into the lives of others, for as an ophthalmologist his knowledge of eye diseases enabled him to save the sight of thousands of his patients.

Fascinated as he was by sight and light, it is perhaps not surprising that during his lifetime he was motivated to amass almost 150 Chanukah menorahs - one of the largest individual collections in the world. Chanukah is after all the Festival of Light - a time to rejoice in this greatest of gifts, which harks back not only to the miracle of the Temple when one day's supply of oil lasted eight days, but to the third sentence of Genesis when the universe was illuminated by the divine command, 'Let there be light.'

The Chanukah menorah symbolizes this historical Jewish reverence of light, whilst in modern times the seven branched menorah has become a national symbol of the Zionist enterprise and the Jewish attempt to become a light unto the nations from its ancestral homeland.

Thus Dr. Ticho's passion for Chanukah menorahs was no mere hobby but a realization of his deep love of Judaism. His collection spanned five centuries of Jewish Diaspora endeavor from India and the Middle East, to Russia, North Africa and Western Europe. The entire collection was bequeathed to the Israel Museum and has been included in their overall collection of 500 Chanukah menorahs. But Ticho's menorahs have not lost their separate identity. While 10 are on display in the Israel Museum's central collection, a representative sample of 30 of his menorahs are exhibited in Ticho House.

Indeed, if the name Ticho has a familiar ring about it, this is because his wife Anna Ticho was the famous Jerusalem landscape artist. Dr. Ticho died in 1960 while his wife lived until 1980. On her death Anna Ticho left their home to the Jerusalem Municipality and after extensive refurbishing their house, built in 1860, was opened to the public, along with dozens of Anna's drawings and Abraham's menorahs, in May 1984.

The Tichos were born in Moravia (today Czechoslovakia). Avraham completed his studies in Vienna where he specialized in ophthalmology at the Rudolph Hospital. In 1912 he was sent by the Frankfurt based organization 'Lem'an Zion' to open an eye clinic in Jerusalem. Anna, his cousin and assistant, accompanied him and the two were married that year. From 1919 Avraham headed the Ophthalmology Department at Rothschild Hospital (later Hadassah Hospital). Anna drew the barren hills and dramatic landscapes that surrounded her, and together the Tichos were active in the city's cultural life.

The Collection

It is not known exactly when Abraham began to collect Chanukah menorahs, but it is known that most of them were purchased for modest sums from new immigrants arriving in Israel from all parts of the world. "Collecting things is like a disease," observes Irit Salomon, curator of Ticho House. "Once a person starts then they feel compelled to make their collection as complete as possible."

The oldest lamp in the collection is a menorah from fifteenth century Italy. It is made of brass and has an austere, practical design, with a definite Moorish Spanish influence. Later Italian lamps

reflect the spirit of the Renaissance with heretical human statues often included. The more orthodox Chanukah lamps of Central and Eastern Europe did not make their appearance before the 18th century. Designs and craftsmanship such as some 19th century German examples in pewter, often equalled the contemporary work of Christian artisans.

Lamp designs were often affected by architecture. One Italian menorah is in the image of a tower, while North African lamps frequently are adorned with the cupola motifs that are popular as window frames. There is a general consensus that good taste in menorahs degenerated after the middle of the last century and one of the best examples of a gaudy, over-ornateness that is prevalent in more modern times is a silver Russian lamp that includes a clock and silver flowers and birds. This particular lamp was sold to Avraham Ticho by a Russian lady needing to raise money for her daughter's trousseau and dowry.

All the menorahs in the collection, with the exception of several twentieth century lamps, were lit by oil. No doubt Avraham Ticho regretted the standardization in designs brought about by the modern era of the wax candle and the candlestick style menorah which accompanied it. But then the Chanukah menorah is really about sentiment rather than aesthetics. Most Jews when asked to describe their concept of the ideal Chanukah lamp would probably conjure up in their minds a picture of that magical menorah in their childhood that lit up their infancy.

And Dr. Ticho's collection, one of the most comprehensive collections of an item which is the most popular piece of Judaica for collectors of antiquities, bears witness to centuries of Jewish children across three continents who were enchanted by those flickering lights of Chanukah.

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