

חג המרד - חג הנס - חג המכבים

CHAG HAMERED - CHAG HANESS - CHAG HAMACCABIM The festival of revolution - The celebration of the Miracle - The Maccabi holiday

Dear Friends,

Chanukah is, of all Jewish Festivities, the Maccabi celebration *per excellence*. We remember how bravely Matitahu HaCohen and his five sons (Shim'on, Yochanan, Yehudah, Yonathan and El'azar) fought the Seleucid (Graeco-Syrian) rulers of Eretz Israel who tried to force their polytheistic Hellenistic culture upon the Jews. In his fierce fight, Yehudah is called "Hamaccabi". There are three explanations to the name that brings so much pride to our Movement:

1. **Maccabi** is an acronym for the famous verse "Mi Camocha Ba'elim Hashem" ("Who is equal to Thee among all forces, Oh Lord", Exodus 15:11). We recognize the Almighty's protection over us.
2. **Maccabi** also stands for Matitahu Cohen Ben Yochanan, the leader of the revolution against the Seleucids, who inspires us with his example of struggle against assimilation.
3. **Maccabi** is also *makevet*, hammer. Yehuda was known for his way to smite his enemies as with a mighty hammer. The spirit of resistance and self-confidence that was indispensable in the creation of the State of Israel is based in this ideal.

According to these interpretations of the Maccabi name, we can understand the multiple meanings this festivity has for the Jewish People and, in particular, for the members of our Movement. In Chanukah, the Maccabi Festivity, we can relate to four different and transcendent miracles that forever affect our destiny as a People:

1. **The miracle of the light:** no doubt, this is the best known miracle of all four. When Yehuda haMaccabee liberated the Beit Hamikdash (the Holy Temple), he found that everything in it was defiled, except for a small olive oil vessel

2. for the Temple's Menorah - which was sealed by the High Priest. Although the amount of oil it contained was only enough to last for one day, it miraculously lasted for eight days - the exact time needed to prepare new oil to keep the Temple Menorah lit. The Almighty brought His light to His House and to the House and hearts of the Children of Israel (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b).
3. **The miracle of the military victory:** we read in our Siddurim (our prayer books): "You (G-d) delivered the strong (the Greeks) into the hands of the weak (the Jews), the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous..." The military victory was a miracle felt by every member of the Jewish People at that time, and resembles some of the victories the small and young State of Israel has achieved over those who attack it.
4. **The miracle of the Jewish identity:** in a shorter period of time, all other peoples who were conquered by the Hellenists lost their own culture and accepted the conquerors'. The Jewish people, though quite tempted by the hedonism of the Greeks, stayed faithful to their -our!!!- own heritage, defending it and deepening their commitment to the civilization they created.
5. **The miracle of faith:** to dedicate the purified Temple (*chanucat hamizbeach*, as described in the Book of Hasmoneans 1:4), the Jews had to kindle the menorah. The undefiled oil found was enough, as said above, for only one day. They needed eight more days to produce the new oil. It was not logical to kindle the menorah for a day, and to wait for seven more days to kindle it again. The reasonable thing was to wait for a week, then use the oil found, and add to that the new oil produced during that period. The Jews of that time, however, believed that if the Almighty helped them so much to win an otherwise impossible victory in war, then He would keep the oil burning until they could produce the new oil. It was the miracle of faith - their faith in transcendence, hope and redemption.



May the light of these miracles bless us all in these days, so full of darkness, hatred and violence. May we keep that light burning in our hearts and souls, renewing our commitment to our Jewish heritage. May we deserve to be called *Maccabim* like those who brought so much pride, strength and resolution to our People.

