



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

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כ"א כסלו תשע"ט

חנוכה – חג המכבים *Chanukah – The Maccabi Festival*

Dear friends,

Chanukah is of course **Chag HaMaccabim**, the Festival that celebrates the liberation of the Jews under the leadership of the Hasmonean family -- **Matitahu Cohen ben Yochanan** and his five sons **Shim'on, Yochanan, Yehudah, Yonathan** and **El'azar** -- from the yoke the Greeks inflicted on the Jewish People. Because of its ethos – ***the ethos of spiritual and physical strength, independence, pride in and commitment to our legacy***, their name – the Maccabees -- was chosen as the name of our Union, independently of the names our Clubs and institutions worldwide had and have, and as a means of illustrating the ideological link that connects Maccabi members worldwide.

Since the establishment of our first Club (in Turkey, 1895), Maccabi Clubs and affiliated Jewish Community Centers have selected various names over more than the 110 years of our history as a Jewish-Zionist Movement: **Hakoach, Hagibbor, Shimshon, Bar-Kochba, Hebraica...** and, of course, **Maccabi**. When our leaders searched for the one name for our Movement¹, they came to the conclusion that of all those very meaningful names there was only one that included their diversity, and at the same time embodied our Movement's most transcendent contents: **Maccabi**.

It was probably Menachem Ussishkin², one of the forefathers of Zionism, who expressed this in the most beautiful way. Ussishkin addressed the Maccabi Association in Odessa in 1917 to congratulate them for having chosen the name Maccabi for the Association – a name with deep significance and meaning:

"A child of Europe, a scholar of Roman Civilization, holds sacred and extols the adage: "A sound mind in a sound body". We, the children of Israel read -- as is well-known -- from right to left, hold sacred also the opposite of that saying: "A sound body -- for a sound mind". A "sound mind" – that is decisive; a "sound body" – that is the means. And you [the Maccabi leaders] have implemented that! You did not choose for yourselves the name "Samson", the symbol only of physical strength; you chose "Maccabee", symbolizing the power of the spirit. The Maccabees are renowned not for their physical prowess, but for

¹ In Carlsbad, Czechoslovakia, at the 12th Zionist Congress, 1921.

² Menachem Ussishkin (1863-1941) was one of the leading and founding fathers of Zionism. From 1923 until 1941 he was the powerful chairman of the Jewish National Fund, President of the 20th Zionist Congress, the permanent president of World Zionist Organization's Zionist Action Committee, and a member of the Jewish Agency Executive.



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their strategic brilliance. Many of these acts of bravery resound through the history of humankind's interaction with the Hebrews. The Maccabees are uniquely and hugely famous for the strength and daring of their belief."

Ussishkin continued, bringing a story from the Maccabee victory – a story of faith, commitment and total devotion to the continuity of our essence as a Jewish People:

"Here is Modi'in, a remote village in the Judean hills, a few poor and anxious Hebrews gathered before an idolatrous altar to hear the words of King Antiochus. The King's man, guarded by his escort of Assyrian soldiers, commands the Hebrews to make a sacrifice to Zeus, foremost of the gods of Greece. All are afraid, all are meek, all are silent. But here is the voice of the aged Matityahu, eighty years old, tearing and rising through the silence: *"Even if my people abandon the Living God and worship Antiochus – I and my sons and what is mine do not, and will not agree! We shall always be loyal to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!"* And thus spoke Matityahu, his body frail, his spirit invincible; the call to revolt! This ancient and great spirit sensed and knew that in Life there is Truth Eternal, more precious than Life itself. And this also he knew: such tremendous truth is not at the whim of the majority, but each person must hold it sacred, and sacrifice to it even all the wealth of the land. And thus our Nation, descended from steadfast Jacob who always sent his sons to the fires of the Inquisition and to battle the riders of the desert, held faith with the Patriarch of the Hasmoneans. From that day until ours, the annals of Israel bear witness that the uppermost truth is not always the gold of the many, but that the uplifting spirit is ever with the few."

Ussishkin brought inspiration to an already inspired Movement, our Movement, which has grown across five Continents – 57 countries!! - sharing the ideals of Jewish continuity, Zionism and Community work. For all engaged in the everyday activity of Maccabi – in your countries, communities, Federations and Confederations - and for all who enjoy the fruits of the efforts of the Maccabi leadership worldwide, **let's rejoice in the example of the Maccabim strengthening and spreading our message for the strength and the unity of the Jewish People. Let's make the Maccabim voice our voice to multiply actions that bring out the best in our People.**

May this *Chanukah* bring all of you the light of the torch of the Maccabim, and of our Maccabi.

Chag Chanukah Sameach, Maccabim, and Chazak Ve'ematz!!

RABBI CARLOS TAPIERO

Deputy Director-General

Maccabi World Union