



MACCABI WORLD UNION

Department of Education

KFAR HAMACCABIAH, RAMAT GAN 52105, ISRAEL

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י"ט כסלו תש"פ

המכבים ותורת המנהיגות היהודית

The Maccabees' message on Jewish leadership

Dear friends,

In already too many occasions, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas (*aka* "Abu Mazen") deny the ancient Jewish presence and connection to the Land of Israel. While violating the PA's international agreements by refusing to negotiate with Israel and trying to fast-track to Palestinian statehood, Abbas greets the world "*from Palestine, the Land of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ.*" Abbas conveniently ignores obvious historical facts: had there been no Jewish Faith, Jewish People, Jewish Galilee, Jewish Nazareth, Jewish Bethlehem nor Jewish Temple in Jewish Jerusalem, there would undoubtedly have been no Jesus Christ or Christianity...

In fact, the Chanukah festival we will be celebrating actually made the later religion of Christianity possible. Because the Maccabee Revolt succeeded during the second century b.c.e. in restoring the spiritual and physical life of our People centered on the Temple in Jerusalem, it made continued Jewish existence a concrete fact. Let's recall that the Seleucid¹ king Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" ("the resplendent") condemned our Faith, and tried to force our People to abandon Judaism. He enacted very specific measures² to force us to adopt Hellenist (ancient Greek) beliefs and ways of life; attempting to homogenize all his subjects

¹ The Seleucid (Syrian-Greek) empire was established after the death of Alexander the Great, when his generals divided his empire into Africa and Asia.

² Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their fathers and cease to live by the laws of God, and also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus the Friend of Strangers, as did the people who dwelt in that place. Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with harlots and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. The altar was covered with abominable offerings which were forbidden by the laws. A man could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the feasts of his fathers, nor so much as confess himself to be a Jew. On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when the feast of Dionysus came, they were compelled to walk in the procession in honor of Dionysus, wearing wreaths of ivy.

⁸ At the suggestion of Ptolemy a decree was issued to the neighboring Greek cities, that they should adopt the same policy toward the Jews and make them partake of the sacrifices,

⁹ and should slay those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them. For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. These women they publicly paraded about the city, with their babies hung at their breasts, then hurled them down headlong from the wall. Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day (2 Maccabees 6:1-11).



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by imposing one faith and culture, he saw monotheistic Judaism as an obstacle that could not be overcome, so it had to be destroyed.

Chanukah is generally better known for *the miracle of light* than for *the historic context of the heroic struggle and saga* of our small People against the world's most powerful empire which, despite great loss of life and suffering over several decades, did secure the Jewish future. It's worthwhile to briefly recap the historical content of Chanukah, the struggle led by the Hasmonean (Maccabee) family clan and the independence they restored to our People 2,176 years ago.

- 168 bce: Antiochus bans observance of Shabbat, Jewish holidays and circumcision; he imposes celebration of pagan sacrifices to Greek gods. **Matityahu Cohen ben Yohanan** (Ma-Ca-BY) calls for a people's war against the Empire under the slogan: "*Mi le'Hashem – Elai!*": "*Who is for God - come to me!*" and begins the great saga of the Maccabees versus the Seleucids.
- 165 bce: On 25 Kislev, Yehudah HaMaccabi ("Judah Maccabee") leads his forces to drive the enemy from Jerusalem and rededicates the Temple which had been deliberately defiled by the Hellenists. This does not mark a final Jewish victory; fighting continues intermittently for more than 20 years.
- 163 bce: Yehudah Maccabi obtains internal autonomy for his nation from Antiochus, but continues to fight for full political freedom.
- 161/160 bce: Yehudah is killed at the Battle of Elasa near Beth-Horon. Yonathan (Jonathan) is the new leader. An astute diplomat, Jonathan exploits unsettled political conditions to Jewish advantage, and the Assyrian authorities recognize him as both Governor of Judea and its High Priest.
- 143 bce: Jonathan is murdered, and Shimon (Simon), last of the five brothers who were Matityahu's sons, becomes High Priest and Ruler of Judea. He succeeds in expelling the Assyrian/Greek forces and establishing an independent kingdom. Then, Simon is murdered by his son-in-law Ptolemy who wanted to succeed him as ruler of Judea. However, his son John Hyrcanus takes over and rules until 105 bce.
- 104 bce: Alexander Yannai takes over as the Hasmonean ruler.
- 76 bce: With the death of Yannai, his widow, Shlomtzion Hamalkah (Shlomit Alexandra or Salome Alexandra) became the Hasmonean ruler, 76-67 bce. During her reign, the Pharisees gain a position of religious and political leadership in Jewish life.

What a glorious passage in Jewish life... One that Mahmoud Abbas hides – as he does with any facts of the rich history of our People, denying our existence... His attitude sits very comfortably in the reality of post-modernism, in which *actual*



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facts are not very important in its acceptance of the validity of many "**narratives.**"

We can learn much of relevance for our present from the great Maccabee saga. **The Maccabim developed a true example of Jewish leadership based on clear and important principles;** we should teach and communicate these. Many of them can and do guide our daily work in Maccabi:

- All significant projects require clear, easily-understood and communicated objectives, able to enlist the enthusiasm of those who must take part.
- To reach stated objectives, it is imperative to be very, very strong-willed to focus energies, creativity and commitment in the right direction. Theodor Herzl's famous phrase said it plainly and perfectly: "*Im Tirtzu, ein zo Haggadah*" - "*If you will it, it will be no dream.*"
- A project of redemption and revolutionary process must address the needs of everyone involved, providing real solutions to the reasons why they take part in the cause.
- To "make history", a cause must have be translated into an action plan with a clear forward vision, strategies and tactics.
- Determining the priority of topics and issues of an ideology and the action it inspires, is absolutely indispensable in order to invest the highest amount of effort and energy on the points of maximum effectiveness.
- Significant projects can emerge from several individuals, but to make them truly transformational, they must have the support, involvement and work of the many.
- Truly transformational processes take time, require patience, perseverance, determination and commitment to ideals that inspire them and that must to be transmitted and continued by past, present and future leaderships.
- The success of a transformational process is always seen "at the end of the road". An individual might participate in one of its stages without being around to see the ultimate, full resolution of all its components and aspects. It has always been so in respect of the geopolitical realities and internal challenges that Zionism and the State Israel face.

So, Chanukah brings us messages about leadership, vision, victory and success.

It tells a true, specific and very moving historical saga of our People in our Land - today, our State - which led to our continuity as a Nation. Miracles of faith, struggle, individual and national human action, *Divine* action... and light: the light of a holiday that in the winter of Israel warms the hearts of the Jewish People everywhere, who recognize in the life of the Jewish national revival, the continuity of the message of the Maccabim which our Movement is so privileged to promote.

**May this CHAG HA'URIM, the Festival of Lights,
carry the Torch of the Maccabees**



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**to illuminate our commitment to continuing the authentic Maccabi ideals
reformulated for our present and future.**

**May this be a very happy celebration with your families,
in the more than 400 Maccabi clubs and Jewish community centers
in 70 countries,
and in the modern Medinat Israel that so deeply and successfully
engages the spirit of the Maccabees.**

Chanukah Sameach!

Chazak Ve'ematz!

RABBI CARLOS TAPIERO

Deputy Director-General

Maccabi World Union