

Soul Workout

FIND YOUR MACCABEE

The secret of victory lies in a Whisper

By Rav Ilan Herrmann

YEHUDAH THE MACCABEE

The sound of the rustling trees awoke him. He was in his tent and stared at the ceiling. He washed his hands and recited his prayers. He sat up. What would the day bring, he wondered. Yesterday they had to run into the mountains chased by the swarming infantry. It was only due to their superior knowledge of the terrain, having grown up climbing the mountains and hills of Judea, Samaria and beyond, that they could out-manoeuvre the legions. Today however, he knew they could not be on the defensive. They would have to take the fight to the enemy despite being far outnumbered. Their families were under threat and their cities, already over-run. There was no other option.

He felt somewhat young and inexperienced for the challenge that lay ahead, but he knew it was a battle he had to fight. Somewhere deep in him he also knew that he was made for this. That the moment was coming when he would have to deploy qualities of strength and leadership that as yet were untried and untested.



His thoughts halted in their tracks as an inner voice shot out at him: 'But you are just a man. Who are you to stand against the might of Greece? How can you think, to compete against an enemy so vast in number, so superior in weaponry?' He felt his strength wane. He remained still. Thoughts swirled inside of him.. his head buried in hands.. groping for an answer...

His mind drew him back to his father's bedside just three days earlier. The venerated leader Matisyahu who had begun the rebellion against the ancient Persians lay close to his end, though his aura was still that of a man of G-d and a warrior of G-d. As Yehudah and his brothers gathered beside their father and commander, Matisyahu lifted himself one last time. He looked at his five sons and said, "Don't ever forget who you are. You are Maccabees. Warriors unlike any other. G-d's very own defenders of His land and people. Remember always that nothing, absolutely nothing in this world, is mightier." He then stared at Yehudah and with his last breath said, "Yehudah Ha'Maccabee lead your brothers and people to victory."

Now, as those words flashed through his mind again, a spirit enveloped Yehudah. He felt an energy-force racing through his veins. His confidence grew and his inner strength swelled. He was clear. It was clear. There was no other option - only victory. He heard himself whisper to himself, 'Yehudah Ha'Maccabee' and he rose like a lion about to hunt its prey.

THE CHANUKAH WHISPER

Chanukah was the last overt miracle in history to have been manifest, where the laws of nature were visibly suspended and neutralised. A single day's supply of oil burned for eight days. 2000 years on and we are still lighting the Chanukiah and celebrating that cosmically-charged event.

The Chanukah episode had two components: the humanly inspired courage and valiance of the Maccabees, and the Divinely inspired miracle that upended nature, with G-d demonstrating that He eternally rests with His people, Israel.

But, why is this the *final* 'open miracle' that G-d chooses to display to the Jewish people?

Chanukah is the last 'statement' G-d makes at that critical moment in history, as the Jewish people are about to be plunged into a deep and dark exile of some 2000 plus years. They would wander unceasingly amidst the hostile nations of the world facing enormous challenges and it was this, Chanukah, that was the chosen message to carry them through this coming epoch. Why?

The dual elements that make up Chanukah, when brought together, give us the answer. The miracle of the oil and the heroism of the Maccabees are one. The miracle of the oil of Chanukah, is an outcome and is in fact synonymous with the rise and representation that was the Maccabees extraordinary devotion and dedication. Their courage and fight to protect their Jewish identity, to defend their homeland and to preserve their people and faith, is the miracle of spirit at its most indomitable. It was this impetus of the Maccabees that inspired the miracle of the oil which transcended nature - just as the Maccabee did.

What is oil? It is the one substance that does not lose its identity when mixed with others. It rises to the top and retains its distinctness.

G-d was whispering: "Find your Maccabee and not only will you miraculously survive this long dark exile, but you will prevail. You will vanquish your enemy. You will rise to the top. You will achieve great and miraculous things."

So today and tomorrow and every day after, when 'challenge' rears up and you wonder if and how and can I succeed - remember the message of Chanukah, the Whisper of G-d: "Find your Maccabee".

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