YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**CHANUKA 5782**

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Dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky z"l, whose yahrzeit falls on the 19th of Kislev. May the world-wide dissemination of Torah through the VBM be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

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Dedicated in memory of Abraham Gontownik z"l

on the occasion of his twenty-second Yahrzeit, the 29th day of Kislev,

and in honor and in celebration of the recent Bat Mitzva of

Ruth Zina Gontownik, daughter of Daniela and Zev

By the Gontownik Family

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**Chanuka: Responsibility and Dependence**

**Based on a sicha by Harav Yaakov Medan**

Adapted by Yair Oster

Translated by Karen Fish

On Chanuka we commemorate the miracle, the salvation, and the battles. In order to understand the significance of the days of Chanuka and the lessons we should learn from them, let us consider two of the main players in the events: Matityahu the Chashmonai and Yehuda the Makkabi.

**The Zeal of Matityahu**

*Sefer Ha-Makkabim* records Matityahu's defiant response to the king's decree and compares his zeal for God to that of Pinchas:

"Even if all the nations subservient to the king will each abandon their ancestors' laws, I and my family shall not do so, for we shall not turn right or left from following our ancestors' laws. Far be it from us to leave the commandments of the Lord our God and to violate His covenant with us. Therefore we shall not obey the king's decrees, nor shall we exchange our laws for those of the king.”

When he had finished speaking, a man of the Children of Israel came forward in the sight of all those present, to the altar in Modiin, to offer a sacrifice according to the king's command. And when Matityahu saw it, his heart seethed and his zeal burned for the Torah of his God. And he ran, in his fury, to the man, and killed him by the altar, and also killed the officer, and tore down the altar. He acted for the Torah of his God, as Pinchas had done with Zimri, son of Salu. (*Sefer* *Makkabim* I 2:20-27)

Matityahu is a religious zealot whose primary concern is his obligation towards God. In this respect, he belongs to a minority within society that is fighting against the majority – the Hellenists – who are desecrating God's Name. This is a civil war. The situation echoes other instances where we see zeal leading to civil war, including the zealots at the time of Vespasian's siege of Jerusalem (*Gittin* 56a); the episode of Pinchas and Zimri; Eliyahu at Mount Carmel; and others.

In Chapter 19 of *Mesilat Yesharim*, the Ramchal addresses the attribute of zeal. He argues that the zeal of Pinchas and Eliyahu (Ramchal equates them, on the basis of Chazal's teaching that "Pinchas is Eliyahu") is zeal for God's honor. Obviously, their actions are not “regular” expressions of concern for God's honor, but rather spontaneous outbursts in extreme situations where *Am Yisrael* faces annihilation. Notably, Matityahu's inclusion in this category indicates that the danger need not involve physical annihilation. Zeal for God can also be prompted by the prospect of the spiritual death of the Jewish people. This is an important and eternal lesson.

Still, it seems that Chanuka would not have been established as a festival for all future generations solely on the basis of Matityahu's act. We must therefore seek some additional explanation, and this leads us to focus on his son, Yehuda.

**Yehuda's Double Success**

As noted, Matityahu was the leader of a small minority of *Am Yisrael* that was zealous for God and for the Torah, and which consequently found itself at war not only with an external enemy but also with enemies from within. The game-changer in this situation is Yehuda, Matityahu's son. Yehuda is more closely connected to the general milieu. We might characterize him as having a greater measure of the attribute of kindness, and less of the attribute of strict justice. He manages to transform the internal, civil war against Hellenist Jews into a battle fought collectively by the Jewish nation against the external enemy.

But Yehuda also introduces another innovation, which we will explore below. It is told that the Rebbe of Kotzk taught that when we pray, we should be like a young child, crying and screaming, "Abba!" However, in my mind, while pray to God and beseech him, we should do so not as infants but rather as adults. How so?

Yehuda appears to achieve the impossible by merging two spiritual elements that are inherently contradictory: on one hand, he leads the army into battle, planning and employing different military tactics, and not just displaying helpless weeping – all with the aim of impacting and molding history. On the other hand, he never for a moment forgets his complete, constant reliance on God, as evidenced in many different places.

The combination of these two elements finds expression, for example, in the battle against Siron at Beit Choron:

Yehuda replied and he said: “Is God's hand incapable of delivering the many into the hand of the few? Is there anything that can stop Him from saving by many or by few? Deliverance belongs to God, and it is not the size of the army that decides the matter. They rely on their numbers and their military might to destroy us with our wives and children and to despoil us. But we shall defend ourselves, and fight for our lives and for our Torah. Therefore do not fear them and do not be afraid of them, for God will surely crush them before our eyes.” (*Sefer Makkabim* I 3:18-22)

Likewise, in the battle of Beit Tzur, against Lysias:

Yehuda went out to them with ten thousand men. When he saw the great might of the enemy camp, he prayed to God and said: “Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel and their Redeemer; You smote the giant at the hand of David, Your servant, and gave the host of Philistines into the hand of Yonatan, son of Shaul, and his armorbearer. Deliver also now this camp into the hand of Your people, Israel; let them be confounded and ashamed in their great power and their numbers. Put fear in their hearts; cast terror and fear upon them, set Your hand against them, let them tremble in their destruction, that they may fall by the sword of Your beloved ones, and let all who know Your Name sing songs of Your praise.” (*Sefer Makkabim* I 4:27-32)

**In Those Days, At This Time**

This combination of activism and initiative to shape history, together with remembering one’s complete dependence on God, is very special and unusual – in those times, and in ours.

Secular Zionism adopted the former principle – a sense of responsibility for molding history – while completely ignoring the latter one. Not just disregarding Divine Providence, but deliberately ignoring it. Thus, songs came to include lines such as “*al ha-nissim ve-al ha-niflaot asher cholelu ha-Makkabim*” (“on the miracles and wonders that the *Makkabim* brought about”) and “*mi yemalel gevurot Yisrael*” (“Who will number the mighty acts of Israel?”), instead of “*mi yemalel* *gevurot Hashem*” (“Who will number the mighty acts of God?”). At the same time, the *charedi* world fully embraced the latter principle, of Divine deliverance, but rejected the idea of assuming responsibility. Religious Zionism tried to add a layer to secular Zionism: to start with a foundation of initiative and action motivated by a sense of responsibility, while constantly feeling and remembering our smallness in relation to God. We still have a long road ahead of us in this regard, and need to work hard in order to fully achieve the goal.

We can draw inspiration from the visions of two personalities who were successful in this combination. The second is Yehuda Ha-Makkabi, as described above. The earlier model for this vision is King David.

A reader with no prior background would find it hard to accept that David, as described in *Sefer Shmuel*, is the same David who composed *Sefer Tehillim*. The same energetic doer and military tactician, sat playing his harp and composing songs? In truth, David’s success lay precisely in the combination described above: he brought action and initiative together with a constant and profound consciousness of his complete dependence on God.

This combination was what inspired Yehuda Ha-Makkabi, and it will be the same special combination of these qualities that will characterize Mashiach, may he come speedily in our days.

(This sicha was delivered on Shabbat Parashat Vayeshev 5777 [2016].)