

Chanukah, the Maccabees, and the IDF

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As the war in Israel continues, Jewish educators around the world face the challenge of keeping their students invested and connected to what's happening in the Jewish State. One important way to do this is to connect their own religious observances and their awareness of Jewish history to the fight Israel is waging for its own safety and security.



A major theme of Chanukah is the phrase בימים ההם - בזמן הזה which literally means "During those days at this time of the year" (See the attached picture from a [Facebook post](#) by Rabbi Josh Broide of Boca Raton, Florida). We also interpret this phrase metaphorically to mean that the events that took place so many years ago also happen again in our time, in this place.

Herzog Global has prepared an English subtitled version of a video featuring a brief talk given by Lieutenant Colonel Rav Maoz Schwartz to his soldiers as they prepare to enter Gaza for the first time. This

video went viral in Israel when it was released about three weeks ago.

Content warning: The video refers to the kidnapping of women and children, so be sure to watch it first and decide if it's appropriate for your students.

Lesson Ideas:

Part 1:

Share the picture above with your students. Ask them to identify the phrase and in Hebrew in the banner on the right. Do they recognize it? Where is it from? Is the banner implying anything other than lighting Chanukah candles?

Part 2:

[YouTube Video Clip of Lieutenant Colonel Rav Maoz Schwartz](#)

In his talk, Lieutenant Colonel Rav Maoz Schwartz (who is a 12th grade teacher [from the Amit High School in Ashdod](#)) makes a direct connection between the fight against Hamas, and Jewish soldiers throughout history. Before screening the video, perhaps ask your students to note down the names of historical figures mentioned in the video. They may need to watch more than once.

1. The fighters of King David



The IDF - the Modern Maccabees

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2. The Maccabees
3. Mordechai Anielewicz and the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto
4. Fighters of Etzel and Lehi, the Palmach and the Hagganah

Have students identify the figures and terms that they don't recognize. They can research them and the era in which they lived, learn more about them, and share what they have learned with the class.

Possible discussion topics:

1. Why does Rav Schwartz mention these historical figures in his speech to his soldiers?
2. Do you agree with him? Are today's IDF soldiers connected with those people?
3. Did the students note the large historical gap between the Maccabees and the Warsaw Ghetto? Why didn't Schwartz mention other historical figures?
4. How do the events taking place in Israel connect to Chanukah, if at all?
5. Does a video like this change the way that you think about Chanukah?

A final note:

As educators, we should note how Lt. Colonel Rav Maoz Schwartz, clearly a seasoned educator, uses the opportunity to charge and encourage his soldiers as an educational, teaching moment. His example motivates us to find educational moments outside the classroom. Sometimes our greatest teaching moments happen when our students least expect them!

Chanukah Sameach!