

# UNITED CHESSED of TORONTO

Fast | Effective | Compassionate

## SMALL MIRACLES

*Hanukkah 2023*

Dear Supporters of United Chessed:

On behalf of all of us at United Chessed, thank you. Your support this year allowed us to provide aid to hundreds of families as they navigate financial challenges.

The crisis in Israel weighs heavily on our hearts and has not been far from our minds since October 7th. As Hanukkah approaches, it's difficult not to draw comparisons between the current war and the war that took place over 2,000 years ago. While we nervously follow the news in the Middle East, we hope and pray that we merit a miraculous victory in this modern-day war. The defeat of the Greeks at the hands of the Maccabees was indeed phenomenal, but as Rabbi Pinchas Landis points out, the story of Hanukkah is not about a military victory.

It is well known that when the Maccabees regained control of the Temple, they worked diligently and without delay in order to purify it and restart the Temple service. When the entirety of the Jewish people is in a state of impurity, however, the laws provide room for leniency, allowing the service to be performed without purification. So, why delay the service? Why scour the wreckage of the Temple in order to find pure, untainted olive oil for the Menorah?

While a statue of Zeus stood in the Holy Temple and the Greeks were forcing the Jews to assimilate to their ways, the Maccabees, then known as Hasmoneans, were practicing their Judaism in hiding. Assimilation was rampant and this small family of priests knew the fate of the Jewish people couldn't wait any longer. Even though they stood no chance of victory, they took a stand and fought, winning battle after battle until the war for religious freedom was won. And as they reclaimed the Temple, standing in its wreckage, they knew this was not the time to settle for leniency! Rather than hastily performing the service, the Maccabees knew that this was precisely the moment to once again go above and beyond and purify the Temple.

“ *Parents are sacrificing meals so that their children don't need to.* ”

The Maccabees could have continued to practice their Judaism in hiding. They could have kept to themselves, looking out for their private Hasmonean family, day by day. They could have even taken the win and set about performing the Temple service without delay, but they chose not to. The Maccabees refused to accept the status quo and stood up for what they believed in and in doing so merited more than just a military victory. They merited a miracle.

**One small family. One small jar of oil for 8 days. One SMALL MIRACLE.**

Here, in our very own community, families are starving. Parents are sacrificing meals so that their children don't need to. Seniors and Holocaust survivors are making the difficult trip to food banks. The budget of those on disability is too meager to support their specific, often medically indicated diets.

United Chessed has not sat idly by. Every day we receive calls from hungry families and have dispensed unprecedented amounts of food assistance in the past several years. The projections for the coming months, however, indicate a further increase in reliance on our services and even our careful planning and current fundraising have not been enough. So, what can you do about it?

Don't accept things for how they are.

Don't turn a blind eye to the difficulties faced by members of our community.

“ *All it takes is one small act of kindness to spark a bright light of hope for a family in need.* ”

One small family ignited a rebellion. All it takes is one small act of kindness to spark a bright light of hope for a family in need. So, please – channel your inner Maccabee. Take action and be that light of hope, and together we'll bring about **SMALL MIRACLES** for our community. And may all the modern-day Maccabees going above and beyond around the world bring about true peace for our people and our land.

*Dr. Brian Price*

President and Founder



# NEVER AGAIN IS NOW

## FIGHTING ONLINE ANTISEMITISM AND MISINFORMATION



**T**hese are dark times for Jews.

As if what's happening to Israelis wasn't tragic enough – the indiscriminate killing of more than 1,200 civilians on October 7th, as well as the kidnapping of more than 240 others – we have also had to face the ugly realization of how many millions around the world are marching against Israel's right to protect itself from the barbarism that is Hamas.

From rowdy anti-Zionist marches and antisemitism on college campuses to hateful rhetoric from political leaders and violence against synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses, it may feel more like 1935 rather than 2023.

There's a war waging online, too, and it can be equally as scary.

“... rowdy anti-Zionist marches and antisemitism... it may feel more like 1935 rather than 2023”

Spend just five minutes scrolling through social media sites like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, or Tik Tok, and it won't take long to stumble upon nasty comments about a “genocidal” Israel against innocent Gazans, videos of people tearing down posters of kidnapped Jews, or (perhaps ignorantly) sharing and commenting on blatant disinformation.

So, what to do, as a Canadian Jew?

### 1. TRY TO SOURCE A BALANCED VIEW OF THE NEWS

Just as you'll see different sides of reporting when watching CNN and Fox News, online publications may also be left- or right-leaning, such as Haaretz vs. Jerusalem Post. Be sure to visit multiple sites to get a sense of what's really happening, to try and cut through a platform's narrative. Yes, CBC, BBC and Al Jazeera seem to have a specific bias on the war – but so does Toronto Sun and National Post (usually, a friend to Israel and Jewry).

The truth may lie somewhere in the middle.

Try to step out of your own “echo chamber” (reading views you're aligned with) even though the algorithm of social media sites may dish up what you think you want to see.

“Surround yourself with people you love. Know that things will get better.”

### 2. QUESTION EVERYTHING, DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Anyone can publish lies and propaganda on the internet, often with no consequences, purposely creating or sharing misinformation or disinformation. It can be hard to know whom to trust. Look at the source to try and validate what you're reading or seeing. Do you trust Reuters or The Wall Street Journal's reporting more than a digital magazine called “The Middle East Truth Examiner,” created by a jihadist in his Montreal home? Probably.

If you're seeing a suspicious image online, do a reverse photo search at Google.com to see the source and/or if it's a fake photo created by A.I.

### 3. REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENTS, IMAGES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms often have rules about hate speech – not to mention a country's laws against it, including death threats -- so don't be afraid to report a disturbing post to a platform. You'll often need to tick off a box as to why you're reporting that person or specific post.

If it's a direct death threat, take a screen grab of it in case it's taken down, and report it to the authorities. It's up to you if you want to engage in an individual over a specific topic, but know a healthy debate over settlements in the West Bank could turn ugly very quickly. And do you think you're really going to change someone's mind?

### 4. TAKE A MENTAL HEALTH BREAK

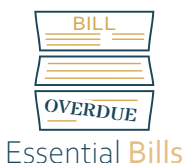
The war is weighing on our minds, as is the subsequent treatment of Jews around the world. It can be hard to turn away from it all. But do yourself a favour and take frequent breaks from “doom-scrolling.” Put the phone down, close the laptop lid, and take a mental health break. And yes, that includes tuning off a news network on TV, too. Talk to your kids and friends about doing the same.

Surround yourself with people you love, and go to places that make you feel good, to restore your faith in humanity. Talk to people about how you're feeling.

Know that things will get better. Because it will.

- MARC SALTZMAN

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP



Help us continue making **SMALL MIRACLES** happen for the most vulnerable members of our community.