

Israeli Soldiers Walk in the Footsteps of the Legendary Maccabees

Last week, more than 20,000 soldiers from all over the army took time out of their routines to celebrate Hanukkah and learn its meaning by taking tours across the country. The soldiers are took in the annual tradition In the Footsteps of the Maccabees, in which soldiers patrol the ancient stomping grounds of the legendary Maccabees, including Jerusalem, the northern Israeli city of Akko, and the Golan Heights.

Soldiers from all units of the IDF participated in daily tours and festive candle lighting ceremonies at various stops along the route—the largest such ceremony being held at the amphitheater at Latrun, with President Shimon Peres and Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz joining the soldiers.

“My favorite thing about this holiday is the feeling of unity. Everywhere, everyone comes together—in communities, in the army and on bases,” Chief Military Rabbi Brig. Gen. Rafi Peretz said. “Furthermore, the chanukiya is a special thing. It has not one light, but nine candles that illuminate in full. It has room for every light, and that is the philosophy of the IDF.

“The IDF is a people’s army, the army where we learn and are educated together out of a great love for the Jewish People. All opinions and ideas can be expressed, and they all connect to the big light that is expressed in the form of the rebirth of Israel in its land.”

One important focus of the tour is discourse on the differences between contemporary combat and the warfare of the period of the Maccabees.

On Dec. 11, hundreds of soldiers from the Galil Formation visited the northern Israeli city of Akko—the burial place of two leaders of the Maccabees. There, the soldiers visited the Underground Prisoners Museum and learned about historical events that took place in the city.

“Visiting these places is a modern expression of the historical heroism of the Jewish People,” said, Maj. Menachem, the Rabbi of the Galil Formation.