



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Levi Morrow



This week one of the Isralight Fellows showed us the first half of a very long movie entitled Masada, which was significant as we had just been there with Orayta. It starts out showing new soldiers in the Israeli Army climbing the Snake Path up Masada to prepare for their “*Tekesh Hashba`ah*” (swearing-in ceremony). The narrator then tells how Masada is steeped in powerful history for the Jews, before the film slides back to Jerusalem as the Second Temple burns in the night. It follows the story of *Elazar Ben Yair* as he and his family escape Jerusalem and make their way south to Masada. They and a group of survivors live peacefully on Masada for a time, before deciding to strike back against the Romans. This force, known as the Zealots, destroyed granary after granary that the Romans needed in order to collect the Imperial Tax. Eventually *Elazar* met and struck a deal with the commander of the Roman Legion in Israel, Cornelius Flavius Silva. However, as Flavius was taking the terms back to Emperor Vespasian in Rome, the Roman Legion began attacking Jews again, so the already tenuous truce was broken. From here on the war between the Zealots and the Romans would rage for years, ending in a year-long siege of Masada, with five full Roman Legions surrounding the base.

The end was certain from the beginning, but the Zealots couldn't have helped but to have some sense of invincibility while up there. Having been up there twice in my short life, I long for the feeling of strength that is inherent in being on its peak. When you stand up there, the wind presses against your face as you look down an unscalable cliff at tiny Roman fortifications below. You can't help but feel that you could last forever up there; hold off any attack. And I can't imagine the Roman legions circling the base felt anything but the exact opposite.

The truth is, however, that you would be defeated eventually. The Romans had attrition on their side, which is how they won out eventually. It's miraculous that the Zealots lasted as long as they did. And this is the true lesson of *Elazar Ben Yair* and Masada. No matter how weak and insignificant you feel when off Masada; or how strong and important you feel on top of it; neither is true. And I believe the south-eastern edge of Masada demonstrates

this quite nicely. Next time you're on Masada, which I assume you all will do in the future, stand on the south-eastern edge and yell as loud as you can at the cliffs before you. A second later your cry will come echoing back at you a thousand-fold, rolling across the plateaus.

This symbolizes our relationship with God in a few ways. Firstly, you hear your own voice, which Rabbi Aaron has taught us is how people hear God speaking. We are all manifestations of God, and so of course that's what we would hear. But more importantly it shows how we should rely on God. We cannot rely purely on God to make sure our lives happen as they should; we have to be the vehicles for his will. The echo does not exist without the shout. But nor can we pretend that we are all there is. The shout pales in comparison to the echo, recognizable only because we know it is there, merely a part of the greater noise we are hearing.

And so were the Zealots on Masada. Some of the Jews wanted to merely sit back and pray to God that the Romans would decide to leave. But the Zealots understood that they also needed to fight back for their freedom, all the while knowing that *Hashem* was with them. And this is the key to the incredible amount of time that they lasted on top of Masada. They fought hard and used the terrain to their advantage, but while they did so they also were the vehicles of *Hashem's* Will to enter into this world. And so must we all strive to be in our daily live