

A SERVICE FOR CHANUKAH
THE FESTIVAL OF AFFIRMATION

The rainbow, taught the ancients, is the sign of a covenant affirming the continuing change and worth of the life of earth. Thus the rainbow covenant promises:

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

וְהָיָה קַוְּעוֹן הַבְּרִיאָה לְחֵטְאֵינוּ וְלִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְלִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(Genesis 9:13)

So may we also see the rainbow as the sign of a covenant of freedom, its many colors affirming the diversity of humankind, and its harmony affirming their unity in liberty. On this Festival of Chanukah we celebrate the covenant of earth and freedom.

This service is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Celia Reines. It is most fitting to do so for nothing characterized her life more than "Affirmation." Her every thought and action affirmed existence, yet she accepted its limits with extraordinary courage and joyous good humor.

Alvin J. Reines

Kiddush

Blessed is the wellspring of life	בָּרוּךְ מְעַיֵן הַחַיִּים
whose creative power	Baruch ma-yan hacha-yim
fashions the fruit of the vine.	אֲשֶׁר בָּחַז הַגְּבִי'א
	asher kocho habri-ah
	בְּזָרָא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן:
	borei peri' hagafen.
Blessed is the wellspring of life	בָּרוּךְ מְעַיֵן הַחַיִּים
by whose power of creation	Baruch ma-yan hacha-yim
we fashion	אֲשֶׁר בָּחַז הַגְּבִי'א
the commandments of the heart	asher bechocho habri-ah
and delight in them.	אֲנַחְנוּ יוֹצְרִים
	anachnu yotzrim
	מִצְוֹת הַלֵּב
	mitzvot halev
	וְרֹצִים בָּהֶם:
	verotzim bahem.
	חַג חֲנֻכָּה
	Chag Chanukah
we have taken the Chanukah Festival	בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרִצְוֹן
as our possession,	be-ahavah uveratzon
	בְּחֻלְנוּ
	nachalnu.

2.

a remembrance
of the goal of humankind.
For it is a preeminent event
among hallowed occasions,
a symbol
of the saving of humankind.
We have chosen freedom
and sanctified it
among all good things.
So have we sanctified
Chanukah in love,
and in favor have we
taken it as a possession.
Blessed is the power of being
that hallows Chanukah.

זִכְרוֹן
zikaron
לְתַכְלִית-הָאָדָם:
letachlit ha-adam
כִּי הוּא עֵת תְּחִלָּה
Ki hu et techilah
לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ
lemikra-ei kodesh,
זִכָּר
zecher
לִישׁוּעַת הָאָדָם:
lishu-at ha-adam.
כִּי חֶמֶת בָּחַרְנוּ
Ki chemut bacharnu
וְאֶזְחַז קִדְשָׁנוּ
ve-oto kidashnu
בְּכֹל הַטּוֹבִים:
bichol hatovim.
וְחֻנּוּכָה קִדְשָׁנוּ
Vechanukah kidashnu
בְּאַהֲבָה
be-ahava,
וּבְרָצוֹן
uveratzon
בְּחֻלּוֹנוּ:
nachalnu.
בָּרוּךְ כֹּחַ הַהַוָּיָה
Baruch ko-ach ha-havayah
מְקַדֵּשׁ הַחֻנּוּכָה:
mekadesh Chanukah

Reader

In the beginning of time the universe burst into being. Existence triumphed over nothingness, fullness was victorious over empty eternity. With the universe came order; galaxies swirled in cosmic cadence; stars and planets joined together in rhythmic flow.

Reader and Group

We live in a universe of order, yet change is its birth-right and time its heritage. As the banks of a rushing river guide its current, so does order shape change and mold time, but can halt neither. Earth, sharing in the rhythmic flow, pursues an ancient orbit about a ripening star to bring the seasons. Thus Chanukah comes to us, a child of change and a challenge of time. In this season of Chanukah, summer's light has dwindled to the darkness of winter; autumn's warm colors cool and vanish.

Reader

The darkness of winter betrays the frailty of humankind, and points to the void that threatens life's meaning. Still, though the boundaries of darkness's kingdom reach out in this Chanukah season, we do not despair. Chanukah brings the promise of hope and reveals the strength of light. Darkness soon reaches the limit of its rule, the crest of its power stays for but a moment.

Song

Life, life's many, many, many seasons
Have their beauty, their beauty and reasons.
Links in a chain, a chain of days,
Promising tomorrows to yesterdays.

Links in a chain of days, in a chain of days,
Promising tomorrows to yesterdays, to yesterdays.
Promising tomorrows to yesterdays.
Promising, promising tomorrows to yesterdays.

Reader

Our lives mirror the great universe beyond. As the firmament, to our gaze, is oftentimes a vast black vault speckled with fire, so may our lives appear darkened, with only pinpoint points of light piercing the shadows.

Reader and Group

For human life is enclosed within a frame of vulnerability, and a world of limitation encircles us. Our desires strive to reach beyond the finite borders of existence within which we are destined to live. We seek of the world more than it can give; we seek of others more than is in their power; we seek of ourselves more than we have. Our desires thus return unanswered, and loose their force against the life that bore them and the world that denied them.

Reader

The roots of Chanukah's meaning are revealed by Scripture in the allegory of Adam, a drama of ultimate dilemma in the life of Everyperson. In the human beginning is Eden, the child's paradise made of dreams and innocence, of the unending and the unreal. Soon the days of childhood reach their close. From depths that will not be silenced comes a demand of Adam to depart Eden, to journey outside paradise to the finite world of reality.

Reader and Group

The view from Eden to the reality beyond its gates is frightening. Thus Adam envisions the demand to journey outside paradise as a judgment against humankind, a curse imposing more than life can bear. Born of terror, words sentencing humankind to the care of hostile nature arose in Adam's soul.

Reader

"By toil shall you eat of the ground
All the days of your life.
Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you
So that you will have to eat wild plants.
By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,
Until you return to the ground,
For out of the ground you were taken;
For dust you are are,
And to dust you will return."

בְּעֵצְבֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה לֶלֶם יָמֶיךָ וְקוֹץ וְדוֹרֵדֵר תִּצְמָחֶנָּה לְךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ
אֹתָם כִּשְׂעֵב הַשָּׂדֶה: כּוֹסֵת אֶפְרָת תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבֵד
אֶל־תֹּאדָמָה לִי מִנְּעָה לְקַחְתָּ בְּרִיעַפֶּךָ אֶת־הָאָדָם וְאֶל־עֵצֵי הַיָּשׁוּב:

(Genesis 3:17f.)

Reader and Group

No human's life remains always free of the view of life and world given by Adam's vision from Eden. Adam's vision knows no contentment in paradise nor comfort in the world beyond its gates. Adam's vision takes no pleasure in receiving as a child nor joy in giving as a parent. Adam's vision finds no delight in responding to life's demands nor peace in answering death's call. Adam's vision sees birth as a curse and life as exile.

Reader

The dark vision of Adam reveals our deep need for the message of Chanukah. Chanukah proclaims that the joy of soteria* is ours to reach despite the boundaries that surround and limit our life in the

*Soteria means "ultimately meaningful existence."

world. Chanukah, the Festival of Light, teaches that we are potent finites possessing the fire to light the darkness. Chanukah, the Festival of Affirmation, declares our power to affirm life and respond with joy to the mysterious question of our existence.

Reader and Group

The message of Chanukah is a challenge. For struggle and surrender are part of living; work and weakness are woven into the fabric of existence; a neutral nature proceeds indifferent to our fate; and death is our common destiny.

Reader

The message of Chanukah is a charge. For the joy of soteria, the lighting of darkness, and the affirmation of life does not come to us by grace. They are creations of will and courage fashioned from the divine possibility ever before us. Chanukah calls upon humankind to respond to life with the will and courage to be.

Song

"Only be strong and of good courage"

רק חזק ואמץ

Rak Chazak Ve-ematz

(Joshua 1:7)

Reader

Beyond the will and courage to be are the will and courage to be free. Thus is freedom the message of Chanukah, calling us through the voices of the ages to integrity and authenticity, to declare the beliefs we truly accept, to be the persons we truly are. So did the prophets among the ancient Israelites, fearing neither might nor mockery, reveal their truths and themselves before kings and multitudes.

Reader and Group

Amos, a shepherd of Tekoa, came before the people of ancient Israel to deliver his prophecy of justice and judgment against land and king.

Reader

Israel's punishment will be great upon them prophesied Amos:

"Because they have sold the innocent for silver,
And the needy for a pair of sandals;
They trample upon the heads of the poor,
And thrust aside the humble from the way."
"Behold I will make a groaning under you,
As a wagon groans that is loaded with sheaves,
Flight shall fail the swift,
And the strong shall not exert his strength,
Neither shall the warrior save himself,
Nor shall he stand firm that handles the bow.
Nor he that is swift of foot save himself."

(Amos 2:6,7,13-15)

Reader and Group

"Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to Jereboam, king of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is unable to hear all his words.

For thus says Amos:

'By the sword shall Jereboam die,
And Israel shall surely be led away into
exile out of its land.'

Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go away, Flee away to the land of Judah. But never again prophesy at Bethel, for this is the king's sanctuary, and the royal palace.'"

(Selection, Amos 7:10-13)

Reader

Out of conviction born of freedom, Amos did not flee, neither did he cease to prophesy.

"Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah:

'You say, "You Amos shall not prophesy against Israel,

And preach not against the house of Isaac,"

"Your land (Amaziah) shall be given away by measure,

And Israel shall surely be carried captive from its soil."

Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream.'"

(Selection, Amos 7:14-17;5:24)

Reader and Group

Jeremiah, a priest from the land of Benjamin, prophesied to Judah from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, son of Amon, until the time when Jerusalem was carried into exile.

Reader

Jeremiah, as Amos before him had prophesied to the land of Israel, foretold the tragedy that would now overtake the land of Judah.

"Proclaim this in the house of Jacob,
And announce it in Judah:
Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
Who have eyes, but see not,
Ears, but hear not!
This people has a restless and rebellious
mind,

They have turned aside and gone off.
The wicked are found among my people,
Who lie in wait as hunters do,
And set a trap to catch men.

As a cage is full of birds,
Their houses are full of deceit;
So they become great and rich,
They grow fat and sleek.
They pass all bounds in wickedness;
They uphold not the cause of the orphan,
And the rights of the needy they do not
defend.

An awful and appalling thing has happened
in the land:

The prophets prophesy by false gods,
 And the priests make profit through them;
 Saying: 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.
 My people love to have it so,
 But what will you do when the end comes?"

(Selection, Jeremiah 5:20-31; 6:14)

Reader and Group

Now when Pashhur, the son of Immer the priest, who was chief overseer in the temple heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks.

Reader

Yet the voice of Jeremiah was not stilled on account of that which had been done to him. Faithful to himself and his beliefs, Jeremiah remained steadfast in his freedom and spoke thusly to Pashhur:

"You, Pashhur, and all who live in your house
 shall go into exile.
 To Babylon you shall go,
 And there shall you die, and there shall you
 be buried,
 Yourself and all your friends, to whom you
 have prophesied falsely."

(Selection, Jeremiah 20:6)

Song

Ma-oz tzur ye-shu-ati	Le-et ta-chin mat-be-ach
Le-cha na-eh le-sha-be-ach	Mi-tzor ha-me-na-be-ach
Ti-kon bet te-fi-la-ti	Az eg-mor be-shir miz-mor
Ve-sham to-dah ne-za-be-ach	Chan-nukat ha-miz-be-ach

Reader and Group

Mattathias was a priest in the city of Modin in the land of Judah. He dwelled there with his five sons: John, Simon, Judas (called Maccabeus), Eleazar, and Jonathan. Antiochus Epiphanes, who above all craved power, became king of the Greek empire, which claimed sovereignty over Judah. Antiochus conquered Egypt and went up against Judah and Jerusalem with a great army. He entered the sanctuary there, and took all its holy gold and silver objects, among them the golden altar, and all its hidden treasures. Antiochus massacred many Judeans and spoke with great arrogance. Yet he did not forbid the Judeans to practice their religion.

Reader

Two years passed, and after this Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom that they should all be one people, the Greek people, and practice one religion, the Greek religion. The Judeans must give up their own religion or die. The holy books of the Judeans were burned, and those who stayed faithful to their religion were condemned to death. When Mattathias saw the blasphemous things that were done in Judah and Jerusalem, he said:

"Why was I born to witness the ruin of my people and the holy city, and to sit by while it is given into the hand of enemies? Her house has come to be like a man dishonored, Her glorious vessels are carried away captive, Her adornment has all been taken away; Instead of a free woman, she has become a slave."

(Selection, I Maccabees 2:6-11)

12.

Reader and Group

The king's officers who were forcing the Judeans to give up their religion came to Mattathias' city Modin, to make the people there offer sacrifices to the Greek gods. They said to Mattathias, "You are a ruler, illustrious and great in this city; and upheld by sons and brothers. Now, be the first to come forward and carry out the king's command. Then shall you and your sons be numbered among the friends of the king; and you and your sons shall be honored with silver and gold, and with many gifts."

Reader

As with the prophets before him, so great were the will and courage of Mattathias to be free that life enslaved could not be endured. Mattathias then answered the king's officers in a loud voice:

"If all the nations in the king's dominions obey him and forsake each of them the religion of their forefathers, and choose to follow (the king's) commands instead, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live in accordance with the agreement of our forefathers. We will not obey the message of the king, or depart from our religion to the right hand or to the left."

As Mattathias ceased speaking these words, a Judean came forward in the sight of all to offer a sacrifice upon the altar in accordance with the king's command. When Mattathias saw him he was filled with zeal and his heart was stirred. He

was roused to anger and ran up and slew the Judean upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was trying to force the Judeans to sacrifice. Then Mattathias cried out with a loud voice in the city and said:

"Let everyone who is devoted to our religion and who would maintain the covenant follow me."

And he and his sons fled to the mountains and left all they possessed in the city.

(Selection, I Maccabees 2:15-27)

Song

Come together, let our song
Praise the saving power.
Freedom midst the raging foes,
Was our shelt-ring tower.
Though in force they assailed us,
Freedom's call availed us.
Its reward broke their sword,
When our own strength failed us.

Children of the Maccabees,
Whether free or fettered,
Sing out bravely all your songs,
That life may be bettered.
Your's the message cheering
That the time is nearing,
Which will see
Each one free,
Tyrants disappearing.

Reader and Group

Thus did the war of the Judeans against Greek tyranny begin, in dedication to authenticity and integrity. Many battles were to be fought, and many lives lost. Still the will and courage of the Judeans

to be free prevailed. When Mattathias' time came to die, Judas Maccabeus became the leader. Under Judas, the Judaeans put the enemy to flight and they retreated from the land of Judah. Judas and his brothers then said:

"Behold our enemies are vanquished; let us go up to purify the sanctuary and rededicate it. And all the army was gathered together, and they went up to Mount Zion.

And they found the sanctuary desolated and the altar polluted, the doors burned up, weeds growing in the courts as they do in a wood or on some mountain, and the priest's quarters torn down.

And they tore their garments and made great lamentation.

They covered themselves with ashes, and fell on their faces on the ground, and sounded the ceremonial trumpets, and cried out to heaven. Then Judas appointed priests that were without blemish.

And they built the sanctuary and the interior of the temple and consecrated the courts.

And they burned incense on the altar, and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and they lighted the temple.

And they arose early on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, Kislev, (that is, December twenty-first, the solstice,) and offered sacrifice upon the new altar which they had made.

And they celebrated the rededication of the altar for eight days and offered burnt offerings with joy, and offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise."

(Selection, I Maccabees 4:36-56)

Song

Hi-ne ma-tov u-ma-na-yim
She-vet a-chim gam ya-chad.

Reader

In this season that sees the shortest days of the year, when the shadows of darkness are longest, we come together to celebrate Chanukah, the Festival of Affirmation. Joining together in cosmic harmony, sun and earth bear witness to life's perilous nature.

Reader and Group

The challenge and struggle of Chanukah are all about. We find everywhere the boundaries that surround and limit our lives. Uncertainty pervades existence; and risk lies in all things. Time and events flow beyond our control, sweeping us swiftly on a surging tide. The Sage truly speaks:

"Man that is born of a woman
Is of few days, and full of trouble.
He cometh forth like a flower, and withereth;
He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

We seek the infinite, to be free of the burdens of time and space. Yet our efforts to possess within ourselves all that we would desire are confounded. Our bodies betray our wish for self-containment nature lays bare our insufficiency.

16.

Reader

Though it is that the conflict between the finity of life and the infinity of desire is our heritage, we do not despair. For given as well are the power of mind and spirit to heal that which is divided within us.

Reader and Group

Thus the heavens in this season point to Chanukah's eternal message. Darkness does not prevail; light returns. Humankind, finite though it may be, can yet in triumph affirm life's value. Rejoicing in the will and courage to be free, on this Festival of Affirmation, we declare life's promise of meaning, and rededicate ourselves to its abiding worth.

(LIGHT CANDLES)

Bar-ruch me-kor ha-cha-yim,
si-bat ha-ha-va-yah
a-sher be-cho-cho a-nu mad-li-kin
ner shel cha-nu-ka.

Blessed is the source of life,
fountain of every being,
By whose power
We kindle
The lights
of Chanukah.

Ba-ruch me-kor ha-cha-yim,
si-bat ha-ha-va-yah
a-sher be-cho-cho
Cha-yinu, ve-kam-nu
Ve-hi-ga-nu laz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed is the source of life,
Fountain of every being,
By whose power
We have abided,
We have endured
To reach this festive season.

EPILOGUE

Reader

We dedicate Chanukah to the children, to our own children and to ourselves as children. We dedicate this Festival of Affirmation to our progeny and the progeny of others never known, to those united by community, and those united by visions of the future that reveal the saving possibilities of the fleeting present.

Reader and Group

We give Chanukah to the childlike, and ask gifts of innocence in return:
Glimpses of simplicity; moments of spontaneity;
faith in life renewed.

Reader

We devote Chanukah to the children;
As a gift that is part of ourselves.

Reader and Group

Together we will affirm life's meaning;
Together we will share the warmth and values
that give life worth.

Reader

There is joy in being. There is joy in the simple and childlike. There is joy in feeling free, in our spirits and in our lives. These times of joy are for us to treasure; moments of delight to remember; to wish that others, too, will know and share them.

Reader and Group

Moments of joy come not as gifts, fruits of neither work nor effort. They come as rewards, pleasures from mystery's depths derived. Joy reveals the world as light, challenging the darkness in our lives, bringing meaning and hope.

Reader

May the memory of joys we have known, and the prospect of pleasures to come, give us the clearness of vision to see ourselves as belonging to this world, with a rightful place in the order of life.

Song

Shalom chaverim, lehitra-ot.