

Humanistic Service for the Celebration of Hanukka

חנוכה

Song

Opening Meditation: *“So long as a single light illuminates the world’s darkness, there will be a joy on earth that empowers our lives.” -Herbert Napiersky*

As we approach the time of the winter solstice, and our own Jewish holiday of Hanukka, let us remember that there is a reality that exists beyond the warmth and familiar sights and smells of the season; that there are those of us at home and abroad who are imprisoned by poverty, disease, and discrimination.

The messages of freedom, dignity, and joy that come with our celebration of Hanukka are meaningless unless they are accompanied by generous acts of outreach, and other important mitsvoth to those who suffer.

Let us endeavor to be gentle with ourselves and with others; to not be so distracted by our own duties and problems this year that we forget the wider web of life of which we are a part.

May we enjoy the festivities of our celebration with a light heart and boundless patience, and may all the joys of this season be ours.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Responsive Reading: *The Festival of Lights, Nayrot*

Now is the moment of magic, when the whole round earth turns toward the sun.

-The days will be longer and brighter now, even before the winter settles in to chill us.

Now is the moment of magic, when people, beaten down and broken with nothing left but misery, and candles, and their own clear voices, kindle tiny lights and whisper secret music.

-The dark universe is suddenly illuminated by the lights of the menorah, and the whole world is glad with winter singing.

Now is the moment of magic, and now is a moment of blessing: We've already possess all the gifts we need; we've already received our presents.

- Ears to hear music, eyes to behold lights, hands to build true peace on earth and to hold each other tight in love.

-Victoria Saffed - Walking toward Morning

The Holiday

Hanukka is our winter solstice celebration, where we customarily light candles and oil lamps for eight days. Its origin is in the ancient Hebrew Feast of Lights or "Nayrot," and was an important part of our early religious observances. During the short, cold days of this time of the year, our ancestors lit fires and lamps in an attempt to encourage the sun to lengthen the days again with sunshine. In the apocryphal Books of the Maccabees, we see the holiday connected to the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it was desecrated in the war with the vanquished Syrian Greeks. The Temple lamps were rekindled and the name "Hanukka" or "Dedication," was given to the period of festivity. The holiday was celebrated for eight days as a substitution for the previous festival of Sukkot, which was interrupted by the war. (2 Maccabees 10. 6-7)

The Menorah

The seven-branched golden candelabrum is called the **menorah** or "lamp." It was the most important ritual object in the Temple. Fueled by olive oil and wicks, it is one of the oldest symbols of Jewish civilization and culture. We see it carved into the Arch of Titus in Rome, and scratched as graffiti into the steps of the ancient library at Ephesus.

The instructions for the construction and care of the menorah are indicated in the Book of Exodus (*Exodus 25. 31-40*). We celebrate our holiday with an eight-branched version of the Temple lamp called the “*hanukkiya*.”

The Significance of the Menorah

The menorah has become the symbol of the nation of Israel. According to Isaiah, Israel’s mission is to set a good example to the world, to be a ‘light unto the nations.’” (*Isaiah 42. 6*).

These sages also emphasize that light is not a violent force. Israel is to accomplish its mission through peace and understanding. This idea is highlighted in Zechariah’s vision of the menorah (*Zechariah 4. 1-6*). Peace will not be obtained by might or power, but by a generous spirit.

Olives and Oil

The use of oil is an important feature of the Hanukka celebration, commemorating the ritual use of oil in the Temple menorah. The Bible contains about 60 references to the olive, an important source of food and fuel. Olive groves still dot most parts of Israel (*Deuteronomy 28. 40*). During the harvest season, harvesters beat the tree branches to shake the olives free and then collect the fallen crop.

The olives are preserved for food or taken to an oil press. Archeologists have unearthed hundreds of ancient oil presses at various sites all over Israel. Today, it is fascinating to see the pale green oil flow into containers to be used for a food item, fuel for lamps, or in medicines and cosmetics.

It is traditional for Jews during this holiday season to serve foods prepared with oil, such as fritters, pancakes, and doughnuts.

Reading: THE FLAME (*from Chanukah: Eight Shades of Light*)

The Flame: We can sit and gaze at it for hours. It’s luminous, it’s warm, it’s romantic; but most of all it moves our spirits.

A yellow droplet of light, laced with red, bright-white at the edges, and blue at the core as if dirtied by its contact with the wick. But we didn't see all those colors until we counted them - the flame itself is a perfect, integral whole, emanating calm and tranquility.

How, indeed, can something as agitated as the flame radiate such peace? For the flame is a clash of forces pulling in opposite directions. Look closely; see how it strains upward, striving to tear away from the wick which tethers it to the candle or lamp and lose itself in the great expanses of energy that gird the universe. But look again, and see how it clings to the length of braided cotton that spears its heart, and supplies it with the fuel that supplies its luminescence and life.

Back and forth, up and down, it strives, vacillating between being and nothingness, between presence and oblivion.

It is this perpetual up and down, this incessant vacillation between selfhood to selflessness and back again that we call life. It is this eternal tension between our eternal desire to escape the physical and to our commitment to inhabit it and develop it that makes us transcendent in our own very human way.

We can gaze at the flame for hours because we are gazing at ourselves.

Song - Ayfo Oree

Lighting the Hanukka Candles *(blessing by Rabbi Sherwin Wine)*

(Traditionally, Hanukka candles are lit from right to left as in reading Hebrew. The newest candle placed last in the Hanukkiya and lit first. This candle lighting service can be used on the eight individual nights of Hanukka. On the first night light the "helper-shamash" candle and use it to light the first candle.)

ברוך האור בעלם, ברוך האור באדם, בהאור האור בתנוכה

Ba-rookh Ha-or Ba-o-lam. Ba-rookh Ha-or Ba-Adam. Barookh Ha-or Ba-Ha-nooka

Radiant is the light of the world. Radiant is the light of humanity. Radiant is the light of Hannuka.

The **Shamash** - the Helping Candle: Just as this candle is used to light others we are called to help all of our sisters and brothers in need.

1st Candle: **Horef** (*Winter*). We light this first candle to call to mind our natural world, the changing of seasons, and our obligation to work for a safe and clean environment.

2nd Candle: **Nayrot** (*Lights*). We light the second candle to be reminded that in our lives, we must create our own lights that will brighten our darkness.

3rd Candle: **Ahava** (*Love*). The third candle represents the love of others. The Torah says: "Love one another as you love yourselves."

4th Candle: **Tsedokoh** (*Justice, Fairness, Charity*). The fourth candle calls to mind the most important duties in Judaism - helping the poor and needy, and striving to make the world a just and better place.

5th Candle: **Hokhma** (*Wisdom and Knowledge*). We light the fifth candle to remind us of Jewish dedication to learning in all its various forms. The Book of Proverbs says that "Wisdom is a Tree of Life to those who grasp her; whoever holds fast to her will be made happy." (*Proverbs 3. 18*)

6th Candle: **Yisrael** (*Israel*). We light the sixth candle to honor the culture, history, and values of the Jewish people.

7th Candle: **Hayyim** (*Life*). We light the seventh candle in thanks for the precious gift of life. The Talmud says: "Whoever saves one life, saves the entire world." (*Mishna Sanhedrin 4. 5*)

8th Candle: **Shalom** (*Peace*). We light the last Hanukkah candle to express our hope for peace and understanding in the world. The scriptures say: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim *shalom*." (*Isaiah 52. 7*)

Song

Closing

May we aspire to be like the Shamash candle; ready to share our light through service; through courage and determination; through joy and thanksgiving.

And may we see beyond our own limitations to a world made whole by the strength our connections have helped to forge. Ken yehi.

(Charles Blustein Ortman, adapted)



Humanistic Hanukka Service prepared by Rabbi Frank Tamburello for the Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism - December 2013 - Kislev 5773

