

A COMMON SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

by

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with Dr. Alvin J. Reines

Reader

In the beginning was chaos, a vaporous and formless mass whirling endlessly through time and space. Slowly, -- with pain, and never without struggle, there came into being a cosmos, an orderly system of life. From insubstantial potentiality actuality emerged. From darkness, light, clear and sparkling, burst forth. Out of the boiling lava cool rivulets of dew flowed. "A mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground."

In the triumph of time, this brown, crusted planet became a garden, a rich and voluptuous continuum of fields and mountains, swamps and rivers, islands and seas. Growing and developing, thickening and richening, it gave birth to myriad forms of life...budding, swarming, creeping, flying, multiplying over its surface.

In that distant past, a new form arose which counted itself blessed to be part of the cosmos: Adam, Homo sapiens, man. Man learned to acknowledge the unity of all the world and to give thanks to the creative power that sustained him and kept him in life. He saw visions of harmony and dreamed dreams of peace. A universe of splendor and majesty opened before him, and he thrilled to the ecstasy of his existence.

Congregation (Singing)

ארץ זבת חלב

Reader

In later times, our forefathers expressed their gratitude for nature's abundance by making a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. They offered thanks for the blessings of life's sustenance and acknowledged the creative power of the source of life. In awareness of their responsibility to their fellow men, our ancestors shared their produce with the poor and the needy. Together they broke bread as a sign of brotherhood.

(Pieces of Chalah may be distributed to the entire congregation.)

Reader and Congregation

Bread is the foundation of civilization;
Without bread there is no science, neither is there art.
Bread is the foundation of peace;
Without bread hunger leads men astray.
We give thanks for nature's abundant providence as we
celebrate the nourishment that makes for life and peace.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן-הארץ

Blessed is God by whose eternal power the community of man
brings forth food from the earth.

Blessed is the spirit of community, which inspires the people of
Israel and all mankind to break bread together.

(Music)

Responsive Reading

Man, the zenith of creation, is the eternal creator;
He is ever building, inventing, crafting.

Before there was man, were there planes or railroads,
ships or highways?

Were there machines or engines, instruments or tools?

Man creates with his hands and his mind;
He unlocks earth's secrets hidden from the beginning.

Before man, was there art or science, literature or philosophy?
Were there schools, hospitals, cities or factories?

Wherever his spirit has touched, he has left the impress of civilization;
He has spurred the process of evolution and gained control of his destiny.

The city teems with the works of man: the sounds and colors
and smells of variegated life.

Wheels and gears, smokestacks and domes, all spin and point in
frenzied excitement.

Man's offspring have increased and become like the sand on the shore,
like the stars in the heaven.

Still he cannot rest with the miracles he has wrought.

The towns burst their bounds as crowds of men and women
surge through the streets and into the fields;
They plan and build and break and rebuild again in
a never-ending cycle of creation.

Men are challenged by the demands of feeding, clothing, and sheltering
their fellow men:

At each turn they dare themselves to explore and discover anew, to
reach out and conquer ever more distant worlds.

What a noble creature is man! How excellent are his works,
how manifold are his creations!
Has he not striven mightily? Does he not rule the earth?
Is he not the fulfillment of the divine ground from which
he came?

Reader and Congregation

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר ברא אדם בצלמו בצלם
אלהים ברא אתו ויחסרהו מעט מאלהים. ברוך אתה יי בורא אדם.

Blessed is God, by whose eternal power life came to man, a being
who strives to create as he himself was created. May we ever be imbued
with the spirit of creativity, and may our genius be used wisely and
for the good.

(Music)

Responsive Reading

Great is the work of man, and highly to be praised. Great are his cities and his nations. Nothing like him ever was.

Yet man has despoiled Eden, the flowers fade and the birds are silent; he has poisoned the earth and laid waste the goodness that nature has set before him.

How noble a creature is man. How artful he is in all his ways, how wondrous in all his doings. Nothing like him ever was.

Yet man's ways are corrupt on the earth; he lies and ravages to gain victory; he devours the land in his hunger.

How valiant is man, how glorious are his deeds. His reach extends to the furthest boundaries. Nothing like him ever was.

Yet the pomp and glitter of majestic dynasties belong to an unreal past; the dead today, on distant battlefields, do not tell of glory.

How great is man, highest of life's forms, fittest of the evolutionary chain, little lower than the angels. Nothing like him ever was.

Yet, we who are the mighty look upon our works in sorrow.
Is our tomorrow only to descend into the valley?

Surely, we will not let this be. In ancient Israel the prophets sang of the divine union between man and man, between man and nature. In this unity there is life and to this unity we would yet commit ourselves.

Congregation (Singing)

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד:
ברוך עם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:

(Music)

Reader

Though the earth for man has become a cell in which he fitfully rests, a heap, a swamp of greed, creation still is strong. The winds blow, days and seasons pass in orderly succession. Though men continue to strive against nature in a mortal contest, we will not surrender to despair. For we have faith that man will come of age. We look for a new time when there will be harmony in place of discord, when the blunders of the past will be set right, when gardens will take the place of wastes, and flowers the place of stenching gutters. For there are men whose spirits cannot be bought, who will not deceive and sell other men, who will affirm other men and give to them. For there are men who will fight to see the earth sweet and the heavens clear. We are right then, still to hope: without hope, who can live?

Congregation (Singing)

"SIM SHALOM"

Torah lesson or Sermon

(Music)

Reader

We have given thanks before. Men have always expressed their gratitude. We have thanked the source of life for its overflowing goodness and sustaining power. We have thanked men for their brilliance in draining the strength of nature. But nature has not shared in our ~~thanks-~~giving; we have used her wantonly, without thought, without generosity, without care. Thus we pray that men soon will give a fuller richer thanks, for a new covenant that shall be made, a covenant affirming the eternal harmony between man and the natural world. The ancient sage wrote of that time: "Then the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, while

a little child shall lead them." To this covenant we dedicate our Thanksgiving wine, (wine on this Sabbath of Thanksgiving) a sweet symbol of the common purpose that exists between man and his world.

Let us, then, in hopeful anticipation of that coming age, raise our cup in joyful praise of the unity of all life.

Reader and Congregation

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן:
(Kiddush, if desired)

Benediction

Hymn

(This service is meant to conclude at this point. Where local custom prevails, the Kaddish may be added.)