

A SERVICE FOR CHANUKAH  
THE FESTIVAL OF AFFIRMATION

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

## Reader

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."

עד כל ימי הארץ נדע וקציר וקר וחם וקיץ וחרף ויום  
ולילה לא ישבתו  
(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.

## Kiddush

Blessed is the wellspring of life

ברוך מעין החיים  
*Baruch ma-yan hacha-yim*

whose creative power

אשר כוחו הבריאה  
*asher kocho habri-ah*

fashions the fruit of the vine.

בורא פרי הגפן  
*borei peri hagafen.*

Blessed is the wellspring of life

ברוך מעין החיים  
*Baruch ma-yan hacha yim*

by whose power of creation

אשר בכוחו הבריאה  
*asher bechocho habri-ah*

we fashion

אנחנו יוצרים  
*anachnu yotzrim*

commandments of the heart

מצות הלב  
*mitzvoth halev*

and delight in them.

ורוצים בהם  
*verotzim bahem.*

We have in love and favor

חג חנוכה  
*Chag Chanukah*

taken the Chanukah Festival

באהבה וברצון  
be-ahavah uveratzon

as our possession,

נחלנו  
nachalnu,

a remembrance

זכרון  
zikaron

of the goal of humankind.

לתכלית האדם  
letachlit ha-adam.

For it is a preeminent event

כי הוא עת תחילה  
Ki hu et techilah

among hallowed occasions,

למקראי קדש  
lemikra-el kodesh

a symbol

זכר  
zecher

of the saving of humankind.

לישועת האדם  
lishu-at ha-adam.

We have chosen freedom

כי חרות בחרנו  
Ki cherut bacharnu

and sanctified it

ואותו קדשנו  
ve-oto kidashnu

among all good things.

בכל הטובים  
bichol hatovim.

So have we sanctified

וחנוכה קדשנו  
Vechanukah kidashnu

Chanukah in love,

באהבה  
Be-ahava

and in favor have we

וברצון  
uveratzon

taken it as a possession.

נחלנו  
nachalnu.

Blessed is the power of being

ברוך כח ההויה  
Baruch ko-ach ha-havayah

that hallows Chanukah.

מקדש החנוכה  
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 birthright 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 pinpoints 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,  
And to dust you will return."

בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חייה: וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך ואכלת  
את עשב השדה: בזעת אפריך תאכל לחם עד שובך  
אל האדמה כי ממנה לקחת כי עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב  
(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 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.

---

\* Soteria means "ultimately meaningful existence."

## 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 Jereboam shall 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-cha na-eh le-sha-be-ach

Ti-kon bet te-fi-la-ti

Ve-sham to-dah ne-za-be-ach

Le-et ta-chin mat-be-ach

Mi-tzor ha-me-na-be-ach

Az eg-more be-shir miz-more

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)

### **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.  
Yours 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 Judeans 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 and nature lays bare our insufficiency.

### **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 and 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.