



## CHANUKAH SERVICE

### INTRODUCTION

Chanukah and Passover are among the most celebrated holidays in the Jewish world, Passover because of the deep resonance of the emancipation narrative in Judeo-Christian culture, and Chanukah because it is often close to Christmas, and the Jews can then celebrate in parallel with their Christian neighbors. At first glance, Chanukah is a fairly innocuous holiday; with candles, dreidels, the small pitcher of oil, and Judah the Maccabee emancipating the Jews from the Greeks, the songs celebrating freedom, it all seems perfectly tame and above board. But it is not; as in all nationalist narratives, stories of wholesale bloodletting are often swept under the rug. Consider the people Judah was fighting against; it wasn't only the Greeks, but also other Jews, specifically a type of Jew with whom we'd actually be familiar. That type is the Hellenized Jew, a Jew who had accepted Greek cosmopolitanism and many Greek values, a Jew who in many ways resembles the modern American Jew. Judah the Maccabee espoused a type of zealotry found today only in the most reactionary religious groups, a Judaism from which we distance ourselves.

Another disturbing aspect of the history of Chanukah is the idea of martyrdom for religious causes. Channah and her seven sons all died for refusing to bow to the idol in Hellenic Judea. Let us acknowledge that we would have bowed down to these idols with alacrity had we been put in that situation. In point of fact, we are very likely descended from people who chose to live and compromise instead of die for an abstract concept.



### **Ayfo Oree (Where Is My Light)**

*Lyrics by Rabbi Sherwin Wine,*

*Music by Abe Mandel*

Ay-fo-o-ree? O-ree-bee.

Ay-fo-tik-va-tee? Tik-va-tee-bee.

Ay-fo-ko-khee? Ko-khee-bee.

V'-gam-bakh. V'-gam bakh.

Where is my light? My light is in me.

Where is my hope? My hope is in me.

Where is my strength? My strength is in me.

And in you. And in you.

### **RETELLING SOME OF THE HOLIDAY STORY**

Following the fall of Babylon, the Persian empire, initially led by Cyrus, took over. The biblical accounts of the Books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and most importantly Esther tell of the Jewish experience in Persia. Though there is a good deal of debate regarding the factual basis of the Book of Esther, it does tell an optimistic tale of Jews surviving and thriving in the vast Persian empire and especially in the capital of Shushan. The situation it describes may very well have a partial basis in fact, considering the parallel stories of Daniel and Ezra, who also found success in the court.

<sup>2</sup>All the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honour of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? <sup>3</sup>For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was powerful among the Jews and popular with his many kindred, for he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his descendants.



This hopeful note at the end of Esther marks the end of the biblical story. Following the partial return to Judea under the Persian empire, a period of quiet descended – not upon the Jewish world, but upon our *knowledge* of the Jewish world. Great and momentous things happened on the world stage, perhaps most importantly that Alexander the Great, who had Aristotle as a tutor, conquered the entire Persian empire and expanded it greatly. This included the tiny province of Judea. But Alexander the Great died young and his generals fought over the empire that he had bequeathed them. The land of Judea changed hands a couple of times. As the age of the Maccabees dawned it was controlled by the Hellenistic kingdom of Syria.

### OH CHANUKAH, OH CHANUKAH 🎵

Oh Chanukah, Oh Chanukah come light the menorah.

Let's have a party, we'll all dance the hora.

Gather round the table, we'll give you a treat.

Dreidels to play with and latkes to eat.

And while we are playing, the candles are burning low,

One for each night they shed a sweet light

To remind us of days long ago.

One for each night they shed a sweet light

To remind us of days long ago.

Oy, khanike, oy, khanike a yontef a sheyner.

A lustiker, a freylekher, nito nokh a zoyner!

Ale nakht in dreydl spiln mir, frische heyse latkes esn mir.

Geshvinder, tsindt, kinder, di khanike-lihktelekh on.

Zol yeder bazunder, bazingen dem vunder

Un tantsn freylekh in kon.

Zol yeder bazunder, bazingen dem vunder

Un tantsn freylekh in kon.



## **THE JEWS AND THE GREEKS**

What happened to the Jews during this time period in Judea, or anywhere else for that matter? No one knows much. Following the silence of the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, all we can actually ascertain is that the Jews changed, though not unrecognizably. Consider the Book of Ben Sira, written in the early second century before the Common Era in Jerusalem. It is closer in spirit and content to the biblical Book of Proverbs than anything else – it still advocates the same prudent and practical advice -- but the Torah and the Prophets have since become holy books. Ben Sira does not speak of or relate to Hellenism explicitly, but does advocate a pious lifestyle, implicitly rejecting outside influences. But Ben Sira's rejection was not universal. Many Jews desired an accommodation with the Greek culture, for the Greeks had bequeathed the world cosmopolitanism and philosophy, a way of looking at the world which we would recognize. And thus, a civil war broke out in tiny Judea, one which would alter the trajectory of history.

## **THE GREEKS**

The ancient Greeks felt themselves to be outside the divine order, strangers in the world, self-determining. They found themselves among peoples whose behavior they didn't understand. Despite their oracles, priests, folk wisdom, and Olympian deities, there was no ultimate authority on matters of truth in their culture. The way to understand was to ask questions. The first age in which this rare form of inquiry became common enough to emerge as whole schools of critical inquiry was that of ancient Greece in the 6th century B.C.E



In his Panegyricus, or book of praise, Isocrates of the sixth century B.C.E, defines the term Hellenes, not as a race, but as all those who share an overall philosophical and aesthetic outlook committed toward self-perfection. Isocrates credits philosophy with being the source of institutions that shaped Athens and, philosophy, in his words, “was given to the world by our city.”

[Excerpted from Daniel Robinson’s, *The Great Ideas of Philosophy*]

### **MEE Y’MA-LEL**

Who can retell the things that befell us?  
Who can count them?  
In every age a hero or sage  
comes to our aid.

Hark! At this time of year  
in days of yore.  
Maccabees the Temple did restore  
And today our people, as we dreamed  
Survived the tyrant, our nation  
was redeemed.

Mee y’ma-lel, g’voo-rote yis-ra-el  
o-tahn mee yim-ney?  
Hen b’chol dor ya-koom ha-gee-bor  
go-el ha-ahm.

Shma! Ba-ya-meem ha-hem  
baz-mahn ha-zeh.  
Ma-ka-bee mo-shee-ah oo-fo-dey  
Oo-yo-mey-nu kol ahm yis-ra-el  
Yeet-ah-ched ya-koom v’yee-ga-el.



## THE STRUGGLE

Matitياهو and his sons, led by Judah, were zealous priests living some miles from Jerusalem. They transformed this struggle of ideas between religious exclusivism and cosmopolitanism into a deadly civil war against Hellenes and their accommodators. After a bloody struggle against the Syrian army beginning in the 160's BCE, they were victorious. The wily politician Jonathan, Judah's brother, cemented this victory by playing rival Hellenistic kingdoms against each other and thus ushered in the era of the independent Hasmonean commonwealth. The deep irony is that by the second generation these Hasmonean kings who came from pious priestly stock, adopted Greek names, such as Aristobalus or Janai, and made their own accommodation with Greek culture.

## HANUKKAH LINDA

*Flory Yagoda*

Hanukkah Linda, 'sta aqui  
Ocho candelos para mi (2x)

*Chorus*

AHII! Un candelico, Dos candelicos  
Tres candelicos, Quatro candelicos  
Sinju candelicos, Sez candelicos  
Siete candelicos, Ocho canelos para mi

Muchas fiestas por fazer  
Con alegrías y plazer (2x)

*Chorus*

Los pastelicos vu comer  
Con almendricas y la miel (2x)

*Chorus*

A pretty candle is here  
Eight candles for me



One candle, two candles, etc.  
We eat pastries with almonds and honey

**TODAY**

How, as humanists, are we to relate to this? There is not one right way. There is not one correct answer.

We may admire the struggle of our ancestors for self-determination, but we must mourn the great loss of life.

We respect the Hellenistic Jews who wished to reach accommodation with the dominant culture of their period, for in many ways we are like them. We have learned that it is better to live for a cause than to die for it.

**O ir kleyne likhtelekh**

O ir kleyne likhtelekh  
Ir dertselt geshikhtelekh  
Mayslekh on tzol  
Ir dertseylt fun blutikent  
Beryeshaft un mutikent  
Vunder fun amol.

O, ir kleyne likhtelekh  
Ayere geshikhtelekh  
Vekn oyf mayn payn  
Tif in harts bavegt es zikh  
Un mit treyn fregt es zikh  
Vos vet itster zayn?

O little lights of mystery  
You recall our history  
And all that went before  
The battles and the bravery  
And our release from slavery



Miracles galore.

O little lights of mystery  
You retell our history  
Your tales are tales of pain.  
My heart is filled with fears  
My eyes are filled with tears  
"What now?" says the haunting refrain.

This is the history that led to our holiday of light, our holiday of rededication. But history was not the only factor that led to a holiday of lights and dreidels, the season determined it as well. Chanukah is celebrated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month of Kislev on the Jewish calendar, which always falls near the time of the winter solstice, just like Christmas, another holiday of lights, which falls on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. It is natural that at a time of great darkness, we will celebrate with light, with candles, with fire. And thus, the myth of the lasting light from one small jar of pure olive oil during the Maccabean rededication of the temple, was born.

## SVIVON

S'vee-von sov, sov, sov  
Cha-nu-kah hoo chag tov  
Cha-nu-kah hoo chag tov  
S'vee-von sov, sov, sov  
Chag seem-cha hoo la-ahm  
Nes ga-dol ha-ya shahm  
Nes ga-dol ha-ya shahm  
Chag seem-cha hoo la-ahm

S'vee-von, turn and turn  
While the lovely candles burn.  
What a wondrous holiday  
Watch us sing and dance and play  
Tell the story full of cheer  
A great event happened there





It's a holiday of light  
For eight days and eight nights.

### **CHANUKAH BLESSINGS** 🎵

for a Secular Humanistic Chanukah Celebration

*Song to the traditional melody for lighting the candles*

1

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lahm  
Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dahm  
Come gather round and light the menorah  
As we say, "L'hahd-leek ner shel cha-nu-ka"

2

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lahm  
Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dahm  
We celebrate freedom won a long time ago  
Ba-ya-meem ha-hem baz-mahn ha-zeh.

3

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lahm  
Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dahm  
We light these candles in our home tonight  
and we hope  
that in the world  
light will shine for all.

*Light the Menorah*



## THE EIGHT LIGHTS OF CHANUKAH

The first light is  
the light of REASON.

It is the light of reason that teaches us  
to see the difference between right and wrong.

The second light is  
the light of SELF-ESTEEM.

It is the light of self- esteem that inspires us  
to believe in ourselves.

The third light is  
the light of COURAGE.

It is the light of courage that gives us  
the strength to stand up for our beliefs.

The fourth light is  
the light of FREEDOM.

It is the light of freedom that reminds us  
to take responsibility for our own lives.

The fifth light is  
the light of LOVE.

It is the light of love that enables us  
to care for those in need.

The sixth light is  
the light of LOYALTY.

It is the light of loyalty that helps us keep  
our promises to those who depend on us.

The seventh light is the  
light of GENEROSITY.

It is the light of generosity that encourages us  
to give even when we do not receive.

The eighth light is  
the light of HOPE.



It is the light of hope that leads us  
to a vision of a better world.

**LIGHT ONE CANDLE**  
**by Peter Yarrow**

Light one candle for the Maccabee children.  
Give thanks that their light didn't die.  
Light one candle for the pain they endured,  
when their right to exist was denied.

Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice  
justice and freedom demand.  
Light one candle for the wisdom to know  
when the peacemaker's time is at hand.

*Chorus*

Don't let the light go out  
It's lasted for so many years.  
Don't let the light go out  
Let it shine through our love  
and our tears

Light one candle for the strength that we need to never become our own foe.  
Light one candle for those who are suffering  
the pain we learned so long ago.

Light one candle for all we believe in,  
let anger not tear us apart.  
Light one candle to bind us together  
with peace as the song in our heart.

*Chorus*

What is the memory that's valued so highly  
that we keep alive in that flame?  
What's the commitment to those who have died when we cry out, "They've not died in vain."

We have come this far always believing  
that justice will somehow prevail.  
This is the burden and this the promise  
and this is why we will not fail

*Chorus*

Don't let the light go out (3x)



## Two New Adaptations to the Traditional Melody

### Maoz Tsur (Rock of Ages)

#### JEWISH HEROES, LET OUR SONG

Jewish heroes, let our song  
Praise our saving power  
Though amidst the raging foe  
We raised our sheltering tower  
Furious they assailed us,  
But our arms availed us  
And our fists broke their swords,  
Our own strength prevailed us.  
And our fists broke their swords,  
Our own strength prevailed us.

Children of the human race  
Whether free or fettered,  
Wake the echoes of your songs  
Where you may be scattered  
Yours the message cheering  
That the time is nearing  
Which will see all people free

Tyrants disappearing.  
Which will see all people free  
Tyrants disappearing.

## MACCABEES OF OLD 🎵

Maccabees of old did rise,  
To defy the wicked king.  
They stood tall and bravely fought  
Soon they heard freedom's ring.  
They brought a message cheering,  
That the time was nearing,  
Which will see, all people free,  
Tyrants disappearing.  
Which will see, all people free,  
Tyrants disappearing.



Written by Rabbi Dr. Tzemah Yoreh

### *Sources:*

Excerpts from Daniel Robinson's, *The Great Ideas of Philosophy*  
"Let There Be Lights! A Secular, Cultural, Humanistic Celebration of Chanukah," by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer  
Humanistic Chanukah Blessings: 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> – Rabbi Peter Schweitzer; 2<sup>nd</sup> – Rabbi Daniel Friedman