

A RITUAL FOR THE FIRST NIGHT OF CHANUKAH

OPENING READING

העם ההלכים בחשך ראו אור גדול.

Ha'am ha'holchim ba-choshekh ra'u or gadol.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

As the year reaches its darkest point, we gather to kindle light. As we commemorate the triumph of the few over the many, of miraculous faith in the face of mighty odds, let us reconsecrate ourselves to illuminating the dark places in the world and in our hearts.

AL HANISIM

When the Syrian king Antiochus ruled over Israel, he outlawed the practice of Judaism. He banned the study of Torah, and his soldiers desecrated the holy Temple.

The Maccabees fought for religious freedom, and won. They demolished the spoiled altar, and built a new one. They went to rekindle the Ner Tamid, the eternal light that burns in every Jewish house of worship—but there was only enough sanctified oil to burn for one day, and the journey to acquire more would take eight.

They lit the lamp anyway, trusting that You would provide, and You did: the oil lasted for eight days.

In lighting these candles, we renew their act of faith that light will endure.

BEFORE CANDLE LIGHTING:

Before lighting the shammas with which all the other candles will be lit, sit quietly in the dark. Then light the shammas, focus especially on the spot of darkness that is at the heart of the candle-flame, and say:

In darkness, be light!
And in your light preserve
a spark of darkness,
a spark of the Mystery
from which light grows.ⁱ

COUNTING BLESSINGS

Take a moment to speak aloud one blessing in your life before lighting the night's candle.

ברוך אתה, יי, אלהינו רוח העולם
אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה.

Baruch atah, Yah, eloheinu ruach ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are you, Yah, Breath of Life, who sanctifies us with Your commandments and has enjoined upon us the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights.

ברוך אתה, יי, אלהינו רוח העולם
שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה:

Baruch atah, Yah, eloheinu ruach ha'olam, she'asa nisim lavoteinu bayamim hahem bazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Yah, Breath of Life, Who made miracles for our ancestors in bygone days, at this time.

ברוך אתה, יי, אלהינו רוח העולם, שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Baruch atah, Yah, eloheinu ruach ha'olam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Yah, Breath of Life, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.

RE-CONSECRATION

Let us remember our duty to seek freedom for all, because we remember oppression.

Let us dedicate ourselves to tikkun olam, the healing of the world, as our holy sanctuary was once re-dedicated at this season.

Let us carry Divine Light into the world in this season of darkness.

If people feel like singing:

MAOZ TZUR

adapted by R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

My salvation's stronghold, fort
Praising You in such delight.
Build your House of Prayer, Lord
cleansed from idols after fight.

You came to our assistance
when we gave resistance,
then we sang
a hymn of thanks
for your aid's persistence.

Ramparts, pyramids and forts
Egypt had us build for them.
We found no justice in their courts
when they drowned our children.

With grace beyond all measure
You redeemed Your treasure.
You split the sea
to help us flee
now Pesach is our pleasure.

Dear to us Your Temple was
still we could not tarry there.
Babylon's superior mass
exiled us we knew not where.

We drank that poisonous potion,
were moved in that commotion.
When we turned
we were not spurned
but gave You our devotion.

Keen was Haman's hate for us
when he was in power.
He vowed slaughter, death to us
Expecting us to cower.

To pride he kept clinging
While on the gallows swinging.
On that tree
meant for me
Haman wound up swinging.

Ionian, Hellenist and Greek
did define our holy place.
God did aid the faithful meek
who gave the enemy the chase.

Then they found new meaning
when they found in cleaning,
in their toil
some pure oil
Hanukkah's beginning.

Holy aid extend to us
and bring the end of exile soon.
When the foes oppressed the just
You did protect us from dire doom

In an exile dour
at our darkest hour
Edom vain
lost its reign.
Make our shepherd flower.

ⁱ Adapted from Rabbi Arthur Waskow's Chanukah ritual, available at <http://wwwwww.shalomctr.org>.

About This Ritual:

This ritual was created by Rachel Barenblat, and is available for free download from <http://www.velveteenrabbi.com>; please feel free to disseminate and share freely as long as this message remains on the last page, or use this as a jumping-off point to create your own Chanukah ceremony! Rachel welcomes comments at rachel@velveteenrabbi.com, and/or at her blog, <http://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com>.