

A Ceremony for Winter Solstice

gathered and arranged by
Rabbi Everett Gendler

(The room in which the ceremony is to take place should be dimly lit, perhaps by a single lighted candle.)

Desirable ceremonial objects include:

an oil lamp with olive oil;

a candelabrum, preferably seven-branched, with beeswax candles if available;

if Hanukkah, a Hanukkah with candles;

if Shabbat, a pair of Shabbat candlesticks with candles.)

At the dark of the year we acknowledge the darkness with a poem, with verses from Scripture, and with a song.

The poem:

This is the dark of the year.

Sun dies and earth dies.

Flame sinks low.

Hope dies and will dies

At the dark of the year.

 Only the moon rides clear

 In the dark of the year;

 Makes strange the known,

 Loosens the unknown---

 Bushes hunched one with its shadow---

 In darkness is fear.

They say one conquered death,

Therefore no fear

At death of sun and earth

In the dark of the year.

 They say! They say! What do we know?

 The ancient death is here.

 It's always now at the dark of the year.

 Only the moon rides clear. (1)

Some verses from Scripture:

On that day, says the Eternal God,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.

God sent darkness, and made the land dark...
the sun will be dark at its rising...

And if one look to the land---only darkness and distress,
and the light grows dark with clouds.

“Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness?”

We wait for light, and lo! there is darkness;
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. (2)

A song:

Hanshamah Lakh

The soul is Yours, the body Your work;
compassion, please, on Your handiwork!

CAPO: 2nd

ARTING NOTE (Singing) +

Moderately

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of 12 lines of music. The lyrics are written below the notes, and guitar chords are indicated above the staff. The chords are: Cm (Am), G7 (E7), Cm (Am), Eb (C), Fm (Dm), G7 (E7), Cm (Am), Cm (Am), Fm (Dm), Cm (Am), Fm (Dm), Cm (Am), Fm (Dm), Cm (Am), G7 (E7), Cm (Am), and Cm (Am). The score includes first and second endings for the final phrase.

Lyrics:
Ha - n' - sha - ma - lakh v' - ha -
guf pa - a - lakh chu - sa,
chu - sa al a - ma -
lach. Ha - n' - lakh. Ha - n' -
sha - ma - lakh v' - ha - guf
pa - a - lakh chu - sa, chu -
sa al a - ma - lakh.

(2)

Sun dies...earth dies...hope dies...will dies...flame sinks low...
 Let us re-ignite the flame.

“You shall command the Israelites to bring you pure oil
 of beaten olives for the light, so that a lamp may be set up
 to burn continually.” (4)

(The olive oil is poured into the lamp and the lamp is lighted.)

It is written: Pure olive oil beaten for the light---
 We shall be beaten and bruised,
 but in order to glow, not to grovel. (5)

Praise the Eternal, O Jerusalem!
 Praise your God, O Zion!
 For God strengthens the bars of your gates;
 the Eternal blesses your children within you.
 God grants peace within your borders;
 God fills you with the finest of wheat.
 The Eternal sends out a command to the earth;
 the Divine word runs swiftly,
 Giving snow like wool,
 scattering frost like ashes.
 God hurls down ice like crumbs---
 who can stand before such cold?
 God sends out a word and melts them,
 making the winds blow and the waters flow.
 Thus God declares the Divine word to Jacob,
 Divine statutes and ordinances to Israel. (6)

Yisraël V'oraita

ישראל ואוריתא קוד הוא.
 ישראל ואוריתא וקדשא בריך הוא קוד הוא.
 תורה אורה, תורה אורה, הקל ליה.

Liturgy

With joy

Yi - yi - yi - yis - ra - ðl. { yi - yis - ra - ðl v' - o - rai - ta
 v' - o - rai - ta v' kud - sha b'rih hu

had hu. v' - o - rai - ta had hu. FINE
 had hu. v' kud - sha b'rih hu had hu.

Ami.

To - rah o - ra, To - rah o - ra, Ha - l' - lu - yah, To - rah o - ra,

1. Ami. 2. E Ami.

To - rah o - ra, Ha - l' - lu - yah, Ha - l' - lu - yah. Ha - l' - lu - yah. (7)
 C. AL FINE

The [seven -branched] candelabrum is lighted with the following blessings:

בְּרַחֵם אֶתְּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
 אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְשִׁכְוֵי בֵּינָה
 לְהַבְחִין בֵּין אֹר וּבֵין חֹשֶׁךְ .

BA-RUCH A-TA A-DO-NAI, E-LO-HE-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM,
 A-SHER NA-TAN LA-SECH-VI VI-NA
 L'HAV-CHIN BEN OR U-VEN CHO-SHECH.

You abound in blessings, Eternal our God, Source of all Creation,
 giving Your feathered creatures sense to sing at dawn and dusk,
 and giving all Your creatures sense to distinguish light from darkness.

בְּרַחֵם אֶתְּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
 כַּחֲלִיף אֶת - הַזְּמַנִּים

BA-RUCH A-TA A-DONAI, E-LO-HE-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM,
 HA-MA-CHA-LIF ET HA-Z'MA-NIM.

You abound in blessings, Eternal our God, Source of all Creation,
 changing the seasons at fitting times.

בְּרַחֵם אֶתְּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
 שֶׁחַחֲיֵנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה .

BA-RUCH A-TA A-DO-NAI, E-LO-HE-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM,
 SHE-HE-CHE-YA-NU V'KI-Y'MA-NU V'HI-GI-YA-NU
 LA-Z'MAN HA-ZE.

You abound in blessings, Eternal our God, Source of all Creation,
 having kept us alive and having sustained us that we might reach
 this season. (8)

תּוֹרָה אוֹרָה, תּוֹרָה אוֹרָה, הַלְלוּהָ .

To - rah o - ra, To - rah o - ra, Ha - l' - lu - yah, To - rah o - ra,
 Ha - l' - lu - yah, Ha - l' - lu - yah. Ha - l' - lu - yah.

The menorah is the outflowing manifestation of God's power, the Light-Stream shining forth from God to man, but most properly shining back to God, beyond man's power to comprehend...the many-named single streaming outflow of God's nature.

The function of this stream from God is that it permeates all things, as the creative and cohesive force in the universe.

A man-made menorah, or a light which a man can kindle, is of course inferior to the light of God: it is as when a man has invited a king to eat with him, and puts out all his best, only to find that the light and the other furnishings which the king has brought with him put all he has to shame, so that the man wants to hide his poor utensils.

But the king will not allow him to do so, and uses the man's equipment rather than his own. So God came in the Shekhinah when Moses made the lamp. (9)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

BA-RUCH O-SE V'RE-SHIT
Blessed is the Crafter of Creation.

וְאֵת אֲנִיחֵינוּ אֵת אֲנִיחֵינוּ
וְאֵת אֲנִיחֵינוּ אֵת אֲנִיחֵינוּ

B'OR-CHA NIR-E OR
In Your light we see light. (10)

*(If Hanukkah, light the Hanukkah candles with appropriate blessings and songs.
If Shabbat, light the Shabbat candles with appropriate blessings and songs.)*

At Winter Solstice, let us now celebrate this season with a poem from William Blake and additional verses from Scripture.

TO WINTER

O WINTER! bar thine adamantine doors:
The north is thine; there hast thou built thy dark
Deep-founded habitation. Shake not thy roofs,
Nor bend thy pillars with thine iron car.

He hears me not, but o'er the yawning deep
Rides heavy; his storms are unchain'd, sheathed
In ribbed steel; I dare not lift mine eyes,
For he hath rear'd his sceptre o'er the world.

Lo! now the direful monster, whose skin clings
To his strong bones, strides o'er the groaning rocks:
He withers all in silence, and his hand
Unclothes the earth, and freezes up frail life.

He takes his seat upon the cliffs; the mariner
Cries in vain. Poor little wretch! that deal'st
With storms, till heaven smiles, and the monster
Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath mount Hecla.

(11)

And from Scripture:

From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?

The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail?

God thunders wondrously with the Divine voice,
doing great things that we cannot comprehend.

For to the snow God says, 'Fall on the earth';
and the shower of rain, God's heavy shower of rain,
serves as a sign on everyone's hand,
so that all whom God has made may know it.

Then the animals go into their lairs,
and remain in their dens.

From its chamber comes the whirlwind,
and cold from the scattering winds.

By the breath of God ice is given,
and the broad waters are frozen fast. (12)

And now in conclusion...

Some Scriptural verses of encouragement:

Give glory to the Eternal your God
before it grow dark,
and before your feet stumble
on the mountains at twilight.
If you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the Eternal,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness---
on them light has shined. (13)

And a song:

HAL'LUYAH

Halleluyah!

Praise, worshippers of the Divine, הַקְדוּתָהּ הַקְדוּתָהּ הַקְדוּתָהּ שֶׁבְרֵי אֲדֹנָי
Praise the name of the Eternal! הַקְדוּתָהּ הַקְדוּתָהּ הַקְדוּתָהּ שֶׁבְרֵי אֲדֹנָי.

Chorus
הַקְדוּתָהּ

Not too fast

Ha - l' - lu - yah, Ha - l' - lu - yah, ha - l' - lu av - dē A - do - nai. Ha - l' - lu - yah; Ha - l' - lu - yah, ha - l' - lu et shēm A - do - nai. Ha - l' - lu - yah, Ha - l' - lu - yah. Ha - l' - lu - yah, Ha - l' - lu - yah. Ha - l' - lu - yah, Ha - l' - lu - yah.

(14)

Sources

- (1) Toby Bretell, December 22, 1965 (from Harvest, 1966)
- (2) Amos 8:9; Psalm 105:28; Isaiah 13:10, 5:30; Job 37:19; Isaiah 59:9
(Translations are from the New Revised Standard Version
with some further gender modifications.)
- (3) Shlomo Carlebach
- (4) Exodus 27:20
- (5) Martin Buber: Ten Rungs
- (6) Psalm 147:12-19
- (7) Harry Coopersmith: The New Jewish Song Book
- (8) The seasonal adaptation from the Evening Service of ha-mach-a-lif et ha-z'ma-nim
is that of Rabbi Neil Kominsky.
- (9) Erwin R. Goodenough: Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period
- (10) Berachot 59b; Psalm 36:10
- (11) William Blake: "Poetical Sketches," Miscellaneous Poems
- (12) Job 38:29-30, 22; Job 37:5-10
- (13) Jeremiah 13:16; Isaiah 58:10, 45:3, 9:1
- (14) Coopersmith, *ibid.*