

“Eight Days of Light”©
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
December 13, 2009

May the Light of Truth illumine our minds, may the Spark of Love set our hearts on fire, and may the Flame of Freedom burn brightly within us, now and always.

~ Rev. Richard M. Fewkes

PRELUDE¹

(In the spirit of peace, we invite you into silence and quiet reflection while we listen to the prelude.)

CALL TO GATHER

Come, Come Whoever You Are, #188

“Come, come, whoever you are;
Man, woman, parent, child
Whatever your religious journey,
Whatever your skin color,
Whatever your abilities,
Whomever you love-
You are welcome here this morning.
You are welcome at our table.
You are welcome in this religious home.”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good Morning! Welcome to the Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, affectionately known as MUUS. I am The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, and it is my great pleasure and privilege to serve this wonderful congregation. We welcome all of you.

- If you are a newcomer, and haven’t signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our activities. Newcomers may look for people with gold nametags. These are members of the Membership Committee, and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have been attending our services for a while and would like to join the society please see me or a member of the Membership Committee.
- Our time together continues with coffee, tea, and conversation after the service, and we invite you to join us.
- To parents – children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes.

- Later in the service newcomers will have an opportunity to introduce themselves and we hope that you will do so. It is optional, but we would like to give you a proper welcome.
- Since our Sunday services offer a variety of worship experiences, including ordained clergy as well as brilliant lay speakers, we encourage you to come back often.
- You may have noticed that we have a camcorder set up to record parts of today's service. Please be assured that Announcements, Joys and Sorrows, and Personal Reflections will not be recorded.
- So that we may maintain our spiritual space, please place your cell phone in a meditative state of being.
- The flowers this morning are given in honor of _____. Please consider making an offering of flowers for this sanctuary for various Sundays throughout the year, in honor of a special event or in memory of a loved one. You can sign up at the back table.
- Our fellowship time after the service is an important time for all of us, and food and drink always make that time ever so much more nourishing to the soul. Please sign up to bring and serve simple but wholesome snacks on the sign up sheet at the back table.
- Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for activities beyond our morning's service. Please note the announcements in your order of service. I have these additional announcements:
- If there are any other MUUS related announcements, we ask that you line up to my left to share them now and please use the microphone.”

“Here end this morning's announcements.”

And, now: I invite everyone to relax your body, come into this natural space in beauty & light. Take the next few moments to focus on your breathing. Breathe deeply. Relax. We welcome you into this place made more sacred by your presence.

SOUNDING OF BELL

[JEANNE] Hanukkah is called the Festival of Lights. This is fitting since it is said that it is to be celebrated at or near the time of solstice. Its emphasis on light feels very natural right now.

If you think about it, you will realize that for the Jewish faith, the symbol of their faith is not a synagogue. Synagogues may change or be destroyed. For them, the illumination of their faith comes from the Torah. For a people on the move so much, Judaism's

religious home is wherever the Torah is. The Menorah specifically symbolizes the light of the Torah, whereby it may illuminate Jewish hearts and minds with its spiritual glow. It is understood that a world without the light of the Torah is mired in darkness and confusion.¹

PAUSE

One cannot light the Menorah without oil. And, so the story begins.

CHALICE LIGHTING & OPENING PRAYER

Shelley & Mark to say a prayer & light the chalice and then the Menorah.

Mark & Shelley Albini

* **HYMN #362 "Rise Up, O Flame"**(sung as a round, 4x)

* **COVENANT** (in unison)

Love is the spirit of this society.

Dwelling together in peace,

Seeking truth,

Helping one another,

Serving human needs,

Honoring the Earth and all that is,

This is our covenant.

OFFERTORY No. 429

For this place of peace, and silence that heals our spirits, we give thanks.

For this place of memory and history that warms our souls, we rejoice.

For this place of prophecy and its vision that changes our hearts,

we offer our life's treasure so that others, too, may know these gifts.

SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS**

"If you are visiting for the first time, or have come back after a long time, or if you are still getting to know us, we would love it if you would introduce yourself to us. It is purely optional, but we'd like to give you a proper welcome. Please raise your hand so we can bring you a microphone."

PAUSE

¹ http://tehilimhotline.org/chanukah_symbolism.asp

Let the congregation say, "Welcome!"

As we begin the sharing of our joys and sorrows, please remember to tell us your name before sharing.

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

"Please wait for the microphone so that all will be able to hear."

INSERT SORROWS & JOYS

Many joys and sorrows live in the heart, and we recognize their presence, even as they are offered in silence. Now our circle has been drawn larger. May we support one another with compassion and care. Amen

SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace;
know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

In Words

There are moments in our lives when we are confused and disoriented. In those moments, we search for a light to guide our path, to help ground us, to help us find solace, faith and hope. These moments happen for all people, in all times.

Even now, today, there is someone here today who is searching for something to illuminate their way, to help them find answers to questions they cannot yet form.

INSERT SORROWS & JOYS

Let us reach out for a faith and community that encourages you to find the inner spark within that calls you forth to a life led with purpose and meaning. That spark within is the source of your creative energy; your faith lived into action, the practice by which to be in wholesome relationships with others; your voice, the way by which you will find your inner light, and make known to others the spark that resides within you.

May it be so.

In Silence
In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

A REFLECTION

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Oppression. When I think about the Jewish observance of Hanukkah, I think about what oppression does to us in our lives, how we respond to it, what it takes to stand up to it, and when we are down, what it takes to stand again, and move on.

In speaking today about a people who now call themselves Jews, and who, share a remarkable similar history at the large scale, yet, distinctively different in the details, I do not raise one people's history over another as more righteous than others. I merely observe, what it is like when a people are systematically and relentless oppressed, as few can claim, so persuasively as the myriad of branches of the Jewish people.

When I think about Hanukkah, I am reminded that given the opportunity, there will always be people who abuse power. Now, power by itself, is not bad. It is what we do with it, that makes it capable of promoting health and healing, or capable of destruction and violence.

I believe that some people's personality and behavior develop in such a way that they use their power over people, with little to no regard to what is fair or just or compassionate towards others. And, that in doing so, they cause great harm. Sometimes as much harm as genocide, murder, and slavery. I wish it were not so. I wish I believed otherwise. But, the evidence is there, for many people across the world, for African Americans, for Rwandans, for Bosnians, for various peoples in the Middle East, and for people in this country. People who know, first hand, injustice, and therefore seek justice, thought they may be caught in the oppressive systems of racism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transgenderism, and regrettably other “isms” too numerous to name here.

When I speak of an “ism,” I am talkin about institutional oppression. That is where a spiders-web of cultural practices exist to use one's power over a people (not just one person but a whole people) to force or coerce them to live in ways that prevent them from realizing their full potential as human beings. Certainly, among others, Jews qualify as a people who have experienced oppression first hand.

We are now in the year 2009. This form of oppression of the Jewish people has been going on for a really long time, as far back as 1200 B.C.E., when they arrived in the promised land of Canaan.

Most of us know about that part of the story. Moses, the plagues, the exodus. The wandering. We may think it ends there. Moses and Martin Luther King, Jr. held out “the promised land” as the dénouement of their stories. For forty years they wandered the desert to get there. For forty years, children no doubt asked, “Are we there yet?”

And, so they arrived in Canaan, with a strong sense of justice, because they knew what it felt like to be treated like slaves. And, in their exile, they set up a judicial system that still resonates today in the “rule of law” by which many countries, including ours, seek justice.

And, then what? Happily ever after? I don’t think so.

Internal factions between the Hebrews divided their land in half, between the northern part, called Israel; and the southern part called Judah. Despite stable moments during which the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel existed, successive generations would experience first hand, what came to be known as the diaspora.

The word diaspora comes from a Jewish word that means “to be scattered,” scattered to the winds.

In their division, their little countries stood in the way of access to the Transjordan trading route to the Mediterranean Sea, and they became vulnerable to rulers of great power, seeking land, resources, and profit.

Israel, the northern part, was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. Judah, the southern part, continued to exist as an independent political entity until the “[King of Ancient Babylonia], captured Jerusalem, destroyed the first Temple in 586 B.C.E., [and] deported the [Jews] to various Babylonian cities.

The history of Hanukkah starts at the end of [this period between 585 and 538 B.C.E., that was] called the Babylonian captivity . . .”² It was during this period of history, that these captives recalled their Jewish homeland as Zion, the promised land. And, in defiance of their captors, they refused forget Zion, even as they wept, in bitter exile.^{3 4}

When the Babylonians were subsequently conquered by the Persians, the Jews, were allowed to return to their homeland of Judah. Judah continued as a Persian province until the Persian empire fell to Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E.

² http://www.teshuvah.com/articles/holidays/chanukah_story.html December 10, 2009

³ Psalm 137.

⁴ <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/100/zionism/b1.html> December 12, 2009

Eventually, the Seleucids (sĭ-lōō'sĭds) took control of [Judah] . . . in 198 B.C.E., and held the land [until] . . . the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt, a quarter century later.”⁵

During this time of confusion & oppression, Jewish religious practices were outlawed, and Greek religious symbols were forcibly installed in the newly built Second Temple of the Jews. The temple in Jerusalem was looted, Jews were massacred, and Judaism was effectively outlawed. An altar to Zeus was erected in the desecrated Temple.⁶

PAUSE

A people’s relationship with their G*d, and crimes against their humanity will not long go unaddressed. There is a call to the spirit to stand for what you believe in, to protect your people, and to do so, seeking peace. Then as now, the use of power over a people to destroy and scatter them, requires a response. [A rebellion was] begun by Mattathias Maccabee and it ended in victory over the oppressor . . .⁷

In celebration and gratitude, a Second Temple was prepared for rededication to G*d. Tradition tells us that the word, Hanukkah, comes from the Hebrew word that means “dedication” or “consecration” and recalls the re-dedication of the Second Temple. The word, Hanukkah, thus commemorates the illumination of the temple by a miraculous container of oil. Miraculous, because [it was discovered that almost all of the ritual olive oil had been profaned. [Only] a single container remained that [had been] sealed by the High Priest, and ⁸ [of that] there was only enough . . . to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. [Tradition tells us that] miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, which was [coincidentally?] the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate fresh olive oil.”⁹

Now, here is the moment to which I want you pay attention. Have you ever been down and out. Broken. On your knees? Has your spirit ever cried out, indignantly, “No, not now, no more.” ?

I submit to you that the triumph of this holiday. Is paradoxically, not about the triumph of the Maccabees. What it has everything to do with, is the resilience of a people’s spirit. It marks that fragile moment when one gets up off one’s knees, stands again and begins to move forward in history. It celebrates the courage of the spirit to try, again,

⁵ http://tehilimhotline.org/chanukah_symbolism.asp, 13-15.

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah>

⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah>

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah>

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah>

once more, to seize one's identity again. And, though battered with scars of humiliation, to turn once again, not to war, but toward one's highest ideals, to that which calls out the best in one another, to that which sustains a people, to that which promotes health and healing.

Those eight days were not like switching on a light bulb. It wasn't like, "See, we did it! Told you so!" It was yet another reminder of the tenuousness of one's spirit and one's future. It was a liminal zone that underscored, once again that this religious life isn't going to be easy. "No, we are not yet there. Yes, there is a long, long way to go.

LIGHT CANDLE

But, look here, there is a light, a little light to call you forward into your future. A light you have no reason to hope will see you through to the other side, but surprisingly, somehow it does. A light that calls you to stand again, with courage and conviction that yes, your spirit, too, deserves to live, and so do your ideals and your people."

HYMN #279 "By the Waters of Babylon"(remain seated)

A REFLECTION

Shelley Albini

PERSONAL REFLECTION (congregation)

Reflection Question:

Think about a time in your life when you felt conquered. Describe "the light" that allowed you to move forward into a new history.

(In these moments we share a common responsibility to offer safe space for those reflecting on today's topic. We therefore encourage speakers to make "I" statements--speaking only for oneself--and to avoid language that is argumentative or critical of other viewpoints.)

*** HYMN 221 "Light One Candle" v. 1 & 2**

*** CLOSING READING**

George Kimmich Beach

In the mystery of life about us there is light.
It gives us a place to be, to grow, to rejoice together.
It opens the pathways to love.

In this place of friendship there is freedom.
Let the light we kindle go before us,
Strong in hope, wide in good will,
Inviting the day to come.

EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE

"Please join hands for the extinguishing of the chalice."

"We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again. Let the congregation say AMEN."

Minister: The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, M.Div., M.A.
Director of Religious Education: Denise Pedane
Choir Director and Pianist: Charlie Batchelder