

Chanukah Candlelighting

We bless you, Ruler,
our God, eternal sovereign,
who made us holy with your rules
and told us
to kindle Chanukah light.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וַצִּוָנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנוּכָה

Baruch atah Adonai,
Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
asher kidshanu bemitzvotav
vetzivanu
lehadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Some add the shaded words to honor our matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.

We bless you, Ruler,
our God, eternal sovereign,
who performed wonders
for our ancestors
in those days, at this time.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים
לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזַמַּן הַזֶּה

Baruch atah Adonai,
Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
she'asah nisim
la'avoteinu ule'imoteinu
bayamim haheh bazman hazeh

For the first night, add this blessing of thanks for reaching this holiday

We bless you, Sovereign God,
Who rules eternal time and space;
You raised us and sustained us,
And you brought us to this place.¹

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזַמַּן הַזֶּה

Baruch ata Adonai
Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
shehecheyanu vekimanu
Vehigi'anu lazman hazeh.

After lighting the first candle, say this; then light the rest of the candles

These lights we kindle
for the wonders, rescues
and wars you fought
for our ancestors
by your holy priests.²
All eight days of Chanukah
these lights are holy,
and we don't have the right
to use them *for illumination*,
only to look at them,
so as to give you thanks
for your wonders, rescues
and miracles.

הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מַדְלִיקִין
עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת
וְעַל הַמְּלַחְמוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂית
לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ
עַל יְדֵי כֹהֲנֵיךָ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים
וְכָל-שְׂמֹנֶת יָמֵי חֲנוּכָה
הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ קִדְּשׁ
וְאֵין לָנוּ רֵשׁוּת
לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶם
אֶלָּה לְרְאוֹתָם בְּלִבָּד
כְּדֵי לְהוֹדוֹת לְשִׁמְךָ
עַל-נִסְיֶיךָ וְעַל-יְשׁוּעָתְךָ
וְעַל-נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ

Hanerot halalu anachnu madlikin
al hanisim ve'al hat'shu'ot
ve'al hamilchamot she'asita
la'avoteinu ule'imoteinu
al yedei kohanecha hakhodashim.
Vechol shemonat yemei Chanukah
hanerot halalu kodesh,
ve'ein lanu reshut
lehishtamesh bahem
elah lirotam bilvad
kedei lehodot leshimcha
al nisecha ve'al yeshua'techa
ve'al nifle'otecha.

¹ "Place" is literally "time"; but are not time and space a continuum?

² Mattityahu was a priest; pagan worship would have put him out of work, so he fought for his faith and his job.

Ma'oz Tzur

This song has five verses—some books print six—but most people stop after the first. The first verse indicates that we rely on God to slaughter our foes, and when the dirty work is over we'll come in singing psalms, clean up the Temple, and restore the Temple service. The next four verses thank God for rescuing the Jewish people from various enemies. These five verses form an acrostic for "Mordochai," the hero of—um—Purim. The sixth verse asks God to vanquish present and future foes, with an acrostic for "Chazak" (be strong!)

Fortress—rock—my rescuer,
to you, *to you all* praise is due;
please repair my house of prayer
so we may bring thanks *to you*;
when you complete the overthrow
of our snarling, *howling* foe,
I'll complete
with singing *sweet*
the altar's dedication.³

מְעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי Ma'oz tzur, yeshu'ati,
לְךָ נֶאֱחָ לְשַׁבַּח lecha na'eh leshabe'ach;
תִּכּוֹן בַּיִת תְּפִלָּתִי tikon beit tefilati,
וְשָׁם תּוֹדָה נִזְבַּח vesham todah nezabe'ach.
לְעֵת תִּכְיֶן מַטְבַּח Le'et tachin matbe'ach
מִצָּר הַמְּנַבֵּחַ mitzar hamnabe'ach,
אֲז אֶגְמֹר az egmor
בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר beshir mizmor
חֲנוּכַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ chanukat hamizbe'ach.

Thanks for the Exodus!

My sufferings were more than enough;
Exhausted, all my strength was gone,
Life was bitter, life was tough
In slavery to the pagan throne.
God with mighty vigor
Rescued us, God's cherished slaves:
Pharaoh's force, both man and horse,
Sank into the surging waves.⁴

רְעוֹת שְׁבַעֲנָה נַפְשֵׁי Ra'ot savah nafshi
בְּיָגוֹן כּוֹחִי כָלָה beyagon kochi chalah;
חַיִּי מִרְרוּ בְּקוֹשֵׁי chayai mereru bekushi
בְּשִׁעְבּוּד מַלְכוּת עֵגְלָה beshibud mal'chut eglah.
וּבְיָדוֹ הַגְּדוּלָה Uvyado hagdolah
הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסְּגֻלָּה hotzi et hasgulah:
חַיִּל פְּרָעָה וְכָל זָרְעוֹ cheil Par'oh vechol zar'oh
יָרְדוּ כְּאֶבֶן מִצּוּלָה yardo ke'even metzulah.

³ "O fortress, rock on which I can rely, my rescuer, / to you it is pleasant to give praise. / Prepare the house of my prayer, / and there we shall bring thank-offerings. / At the time when you shall prepare slaughter / to save us from the enemy who barks, / then I shall finish up with psalm-song (as in the daily Temple service) / the dedication of the altar." The Hebrew rhyme scheme really calls for "dedication" to rhyme with "foe," but even I couldn't write "I'll complete / with singing sweet / getting the altar ready to go"!

⁴ "Evils filled my spirit; / in oppression my strength was exhausted; / they embittered my life with harshness; / with slavery to the realm of the calf (worship of the Golden Calf was the epitome of idolatry, and the poet suggests that the Hebrews got the idea from their time in Egypt); / and in God's great power/hand; / God brought out the treasure (i.e., God's treasured people Israel); / the army of Pharaoh and all his seed (i.e., all the young men who could have populated the land); / fell like a stone to the abyss."

Thanks for ending the Babylonia Exile!

Settled in our holy site,	דְּבִיר קֹדְשׁוֹ הֵבִיאֲנִי	Devir kodsho hevi'ani
There we had but short respite,	וְגַם שָׁם לֹא שָׁקַטְתִּי	vegam sham lo shakat'ti;
Exile through fresh tyranny	וּבֹא נֹגֶשׁ וְהִגְלֵנִי	uvah noges vehiglani
Punished our idolatry.	כִּי זָרִים עֲבַדְתִּי	ki zarim avad'ti.
Poison wine we swallowed,	וַיֵּין רַעַל מִסַּכְתִּי	Veyein ra'al masachti—
Our death almost followed!	כִּמְעַט שְׁעַבְרְתִּי	kim'at she'avarti!
Exile to quell, Zerubavel	קֶץ בָּבֶל זְרֻבָבֶל	Ketz Bavel, Zerubavel
Closed 70 years of sorrow. ⁵	לְקֶץ שִׁבְעִים נוֹשַׁעְתִּי	leketz shiv'im noshati.

Thanks for rescuing us from Haman

Upright Mordochai to kill	כְּרוֹת קוֹמַת בְּרֹאשׁ בִּקְשׁ	Kerot komat berosh bikesh
Sought Haman, evil Agagite,	אֶגְגִּי בֶן הַמְּדָתָה	Agagi ben Hamdata,
With crafty tricks and devious skill	וְנִהְיָתָה לוֹ לְמוֹקֵשׁ	venih'yata lo lemokesh
Until you stopped his self-delight.	וְגִאָּוָתוֹ נִשְׁבַּתָּה	vega'avato nishbata.
The righteous you defended	רֹאשׁ יְמִינִי נִשְׁאָתָה	Rosh yemini nisetah
And the evil ended:	וְאוֹיֵב שְׁמוֹ מַחִיתָה	ve'oyev shemo machita;
Haman's lads with all he had	רַב בְּנָיו וְקִנְיָנָיו	rov bnav vekinyanav
On the gallows ended. ⁶	עַל הָעֵץ תְּלִיתָה	al ha'etz talita.

⁵ “To the sanctuary of God’s holiness (God’s holy sanctuary), God brought me / and also there I did not find peace; / and came the attacker and exiled me / because I served foreign deities; / and wine of poison I mixed for drinking / --I almost perished! / For the end of Babylonian exile, Zerubavel / at the end of seventy years saved me.

⁶ “Cutting down the notable one (Mordochai, notable because he publicly refused to submit to Haman) at the top sought / the Agagite, son of Hamdata (Haman, son of Hamdata the Agagite, former king of the Amalekites, the Jews’ perennial enemies) / and Haman was for Mordochai a trap / and you, God, his pride interrupted. / The head of the right one you upheld / and as for the enemy, his name you blotted out (as we drown out Haman’s name on Purim). / The large number of his sons (or, the greater part of his children) and his possessions / upon the tree you hanged.”

Thanks for Chanukah!

Grecian mobs attacked us all	יְוֹנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי	Yevanim nikbetzu alai
Back in Hasmoneans' time,	אָזַי בִּימֵי חֲשֻׁמָּנִים	azai bimei Chashmanim
Smashed our towers' every wall,	וּפָרְצוּ חוֹמוֹת מִגְדָּלַי	ufartzu chomot migdalai
And our holy oil begrimed.	וְטָמְאוּ כָּל הַשֶּׁמֶנִּים	vetimu kol hashmanim;
Just one cruse remaining	וּמְנוֹתַר קַנְקָנִים	uminotar kankanim
Gave us light to right the wrong.	נַעֲשֶׂה נֶס לְשׁוֹשָׁנִים	na'asah nes leshoshanim;
We're so bright, eight days of light	בְּנֵי בִּינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה	benei vinah yemei shemonah
We fixed for festival and song.⁷	קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וְרִנָּנִים	kavu shir urenanim.

Many siddurim add a sixth verse, but it's a bit nasty and I've always considered it spurious. So there.

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⁷ “Greeks assembled against me / back then in the days of the Hasmoneans / and breached the walls of my towers / and defiled all the oils (made them unfit for divine service; I sometimes wonder how exactly this could happen but it’s an important part of the story, so let it go.) / And from what was left of the containers *of oil* / was made a miracle for the roses (i.e., the Jewish people, perhaps because they hopped into the mikveh at the slightest excuse so they didn’t smell as bad as everyone else) / children of intelligence (i.e., we think we’re so smart); eight days / they fixed for song and celebration.”