

Night of Lights
Dec 18, 2022
Rabbi Amy Sapowith

“Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit says Adonai” (Zechariah 4:6). *Chag Urim Sameach*. Happy Chanukah everyone and thank you for coming out tonight. On this night, the 1st night of Chanukah, the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, we celebrate the resilience of the Jewish people, our courage and our faith.

Riffing on today's Hebrew date, a shout out to Beth Chaverim Reform Congregation who is celebrating our 25th year anniversary as a Jewish congregation in Loudoun. It was in thinking of the ways that we might celebrate this quarter century that the idea for this public gathering was born. Thanks go first and foremost to Julia Schneider, BCRC's membership VP, for getting this program off the ground; to Dave Waldman, BCRC president, for discovering and restoring our large scale Chanukiah, and to Shiri Rozenberg of Gesher Day School for being so willing to partner with us and to take this celebration to the next level: securing the venue, expanding the participation to include you, our community partners and friends, and for taking a lead in what we have before us this evening.

The main rituals of Chanukah are the lighting of the candles and the publicizing of the miracles of which there are many: the overthrow of a tyrant, a victory for religious freedom, oil that lasted as long as we needed it to.

We are meant to publicize the miracle each of the 8 nights, except in times of genuine persecution when to do so would be dangerous. Celebrating here in this public square this evening with the support of the larger community, therefore, is also a testament to the people of Loudoun County and to the larger promise of our country. I want to thank

all of you who in your own ways and in your own spheres of influence are standing up to those who *do* want to deny Jewish people our humanity and our history; you who are learning to identify antisemitism when it happens, you who are refusing to allow Jews to be the scapegoats for society's ills.

Tonight, the first night, we begin with a oneness. One candle that represents holiness. In oneness we invoke our God in whom we are one humanity, each a reflection of the divine. We have reform Jews, conservative Jews, orthodox Jews, pluralistic organizations, post denominational Judaism represented here this evening. Across movements, ritual practices, a shared history, shared sacred texts-- contrary to some divisive voices—we are one Jewish people. Across religions, races, genders and class, as Americans we are one people.

We begin with a Oneness. And from this night on we will add another light and then another and another as we strive to increase the holiness that we bring into the world and that we offer one another. “Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit says Adonai.”

It's not might or power that can overcome the rivalries and divisions that threaten our oneness as the American people and as the Jewish people. It is our spirit. Our will. It is our courage to follow that truth.

Keyn Y'hi Ratzon. May this be God's will.