A JEWISH LESBIAN CHANUKAH:

Prayers for lighting Chanukah candles.

These Chanukah blessings are the first things I wrote as a Jewish Lesbian ritual. They are my attempt to meet some of my needs for marking Jewish holidays in ways that enrich me both as a Lesbian and as a Jew. Each "blessing" was written shortly before the time of candle-lighting, except for the very first one which had been brewing for several weeks. I include a little of what was happening for me each time I lit the candles.

Since I wrote these, many women have requested them, and responded very positively to them. My hope is that they provide some of what we usually get from "prayers," that is, formal, poetic, structured comments on a particular occasion. Since I am indifferent to god, and do not believe in divinely-inspired miracles, I have tried to tap into the power sources I think all of us, as Lesbians, have inside ourselves.

Please use these in whatever way you can -- certainly they must mean different things to different women. Feel free to shuffle, alter, delete or transform any of them in any way that is useful. I would love to hear Lesbian's responses to these, and see changes or other rituals that women are using for Chanukah.

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This piece is part of my writings called Bobbeh Meisehs: Jewish Lesbian Rituals and Tales.
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FIRST NIGHT:  A dinner at my house with my closest friends

Blessed are we
a gathering of women
who have within us the strength of the universe
the depth of the ocean
the warmth of the sun.
Blessed are we, as together we mark this day from all others
and kindle the lights of Chanukah.

Blessed are you
creator of the universe
mother of the ocean
sister to the fishes.
Blessed are you, spirit within each of us,
who has birthed us, sustained us,
nurtured us and encouraged us
to reach this joyous occasion.

SECOND NIGHT:  First said with two very close friends

Blessed are we,
women as sisters
who together have grown
and have played and have shared.
Blessed are we
for in valuing friendship
we treasure each other
and honor ourselves.

THIRD NIGHT:  Alone, feeling very sad

Blessed am I, a woman alone
in all of my sorrow, my pain and my grief.
Blessed am I, that spirit within me
who pushes and struggles,
dances and weeps
who loves with great passion
and feels intense rage.
Blessed am I, in solitude and strength
as I kindle the lights of Chanukah

FOURTH NIGHT:  11:30 PM, a clear New England winter night

Blessed is the cold that quickens my step and clears my head.
Blessed is the cold that embraces the stars
which shine clear and strong
Blessed are these flames,
the lights that I make
my link with strong stars.
Blessed is the fire, the link, the purifier
blessed be these candles.
FIFTH NIGHT: Immediately after karate class

Blessed is the process of reclaiming our own bodies
our muscles and our fat,
our bleeding and our tears.
Blessed are our bodies in whose substance is our power.
Blessed are the touches which arouse in us
strong passion
and strong tenderness.
Blessed are our liquids, our oils, our tears.
Blessed are the tastes of us
salt like the mother ocean.

SIXTH NIGHT: After a terrible day at work when my best support came
from a surprising source

Blessed be the power of women banding together in myriad ways.
Blessed be the connections created on deep levels
among women whose lives seem to have no common ground.

Blessed be our patience, our nurturance, our humor,
Blessed be all our tools of survival.

SEVENTH NIGHT: Angry and depressed, overwhelmed by Christmas

Blessed be our survival tools
our powers of resistance.
May I ever grow stronger in my woman's wisdom
my intuition, my woman's wrath.
May I survive, my rage and joy intact
through the lifetime of this body and onward.
May I survive to watch the patriarchy crumble,
while we, the women,
build and rebuild life on the mother.

Blessed be the darkness of the sky
and the darkness of the soul.
In darkness is both rest and restlessness
may they grow within me.

As I light these, the candles of the seventh night,
I celebrate my rage, my pain,
my darkness.
EIGHTH NIGHT

Blessed be my visions and my loving,
the power of them together as I live my life.
Blessed be my love of women
for who we are,
for what we know,
for how it is we love ourselves
for how we love each other.

May my love for myself grow and deepen,
uprooting the self-hatred implanted in me.
May my love for other women deepen in strength
and in nature.

Blessed be my visions, my half-thought dreams,
my intuition, flashes, magic --
for this is what refuels me,
empowers me
encourages me.

May what I see
and what I know
and what I barely yet can dream of women becoming
grow within me
grow in others
through the cycles of darkness and light.

May our power find its source.
May our loving find its root.
May our growing never cease.

This is the eighth night,
the solstice
the brightest light
the darkest night.

In the spirit of creation
re-creation
transformation
I kindle these lights of Chanukah.
A JEWISH LESBIAN CHANUKAH

I have been working for a few years to create and transform Jewish celebrations in a way that enriches me both Jewishly and as a lesbian feminist. Although my Jewish identity has been exclusively secular (non-religious) for a long time, I feel the need to mark some Jewish holidays, and the need for ritual celebration in my life. I feel that I am in the early stages of a life-long process of creating meaningful spiritual expressions for myself.

Chanukah, for me, is a historical commemoration of a Jewish victory in a national liberation struggle. The meaning of Chanukah stands intact and genuine even without "god" or miracles -- two aspections of Judaism which I don't use. Chanukah also falls at the darkest time of the year, near the solstice, and at a time when the ancient women's religions ("paganism") traditionally had various celebration rituals. For all these reasons, it was important to me to find ways to mark this holiday.

These Chanukah blessings are an attempt to blend my Jewishness, based in Jewish history and culture, with my deepest spiritual needs which are based in my lesbianism. Each blessing was written shortly before the time of candle-lighting, with the exception of the first one which had been brewing for a few weeks. I include a little of what was happening for me each time I lit the candles. Most nights I lit the candles, said the blessings and spend a few moments watching the candles burn. On the 7th night, I lit the candles while chanting, and then said the blessing.

Since Chanukah, I have used pieces of the 7th and 8th night blessings in other ritual work. Any lesbian is welcome to use any part of these blessings which have meaning for her. I would really like comments and responses from other Jewish lesbians who are also working to create Jewish lesbian rituals.

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