

AM YISRAEL CHAI "THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL LIVES"

an original service and narration by the Confirmation Class - Temple Beth Am, Miami, Fla. Sh'vuot, 5731, May, 1971 (with pictorial slides)

Processional - Torat Emet

Narrator #1: the first evidence we have in the history of the existencd of the Israelites is a piece of stone on which was in-scribed these words by a Semitic king, "We have met the people of Israel in battle this day and have utterly destroyed them". Thus, with the record of their death, do we have the historic birth of the Jewish people.

2: But the people of Israel lives, and what a life it has had! Our service today is based on the theme "Am Yisrael Chai", "The People of Israel Lives!" The Rabbis who fashioned the mysticism of the Kabbalah taught that each letter in the Hebrew alphabet had its own soul, its own essence, and its own meaning. We shall tell the story of the meaning of Israel by looking into the heart of the letters that fashion the three words, Am, Yisrael, and Chai.

Israel has lived so long because it has never ceased to reach up-ward to God. Let us rise to thank him who is the Supreme Giver. Bah-r'-choo et Ah-doh-nai hah-m'-voh-rahch.

Thanks be to him who has given us <sup>the</sup> goal of working to establish His Kingdom.

Bah-rooch Ah-doh-nai hah-m'-voh-rach l'-oh-lahm vah-ed.

3. The first letter of the word "Am" which means people, is called an "ayin". The word "ayin", itself, means an eye. The letter ayin is like an eye into which we can look to find the meaning of the mystery of the people of Israel.

The letter ayin lends meaning to a word like olam. Ayim is the first letter in that word also. Olam means "the world", the present world, but at the same time, olam also means the future. Throughout their history the Jews have been able to combine living for the present and living for the future. So many people today live only for the moment. The Jewish people has survived so many thousands of years because it mastered the art of charging the present with the dream of the future.

4. The letter ayin is also the first letter in the Hebrew word Ah-zuvah, meaning "abandoned, deserted, uncared for". We Jews know the meaning of this word ahzuvah. Throughout our long history, the world always seems to abandon the Jews. The world turned its back on six million Jews who died in World War II, and no aid was given to Israel in the six day war. Still, in spite of their abandonment, the Jews have always managed to pull through and stay together. Our people has survived because Jews have never abandoned one another. We have had the courage to suffer for our beliefs, and we were not afraid to be different. Am Yisrael Chai!

Let us rise to salute the God of Israel and the God of all mankind "Hear Oh Israel, The Lord Our God, The Lord Is One, Sh'mmsh Yis-rah-ayl Ah-doh-nai Eh-loh-hay-noo, Ah-doh-nai eh-chad. Thanks be to Him who has given us the mission of building His Kingdom. Bah-rooch shaym k'-vohd mahl-choo-toh l'-oh-lahm vah-ed.

5. The letter ayin is the first letter in the word "Am" meaning people. It is also the first letter in the word, "ahvodah", meaning work. Interestingly enough, this same word, "ahvodah", means worship. The people of modern Israel have worked with every ounce of their energy to make the land what it is today. The Jews have also worked to keep their faith when they were persecuted for not worshipping as the majority of the people.

In Judaism, worship without work is meaningless. The Talmud teaches, "All study of the Torah which does not lead to work leads to sin". It is not enough to pray for something, our teachers have taught. After praying, you must go out and work for the thing you want to realize. The people of Israel lives because it has combined work and faith.

6. The second letter in the Hebrew word for people is the letter "mem" or m. The Jewish mystics teach that the letter "m" has its own character and magic. "M" is the first letter in the Hebrew word "MIDBAR" which means "wilderness". Our tradition teaches that when our people left Egypt they went into the midbar, the wilderness. For them, wilderness meant escape, freedom, including the freedom to worship as they believed. In the wilderness we received the Ten Commandments, and there dawned a new day. In the wilderness, Moses saw the Burning Bush; for Jews, the wilderness was a glowing light after the darkness of Egypt.

In modern times we young people think of the wilderness as nature in its original form. It represents happiness, peace, and contentment. We hope and pray that men will not destroy the little wilderness that they have left on this earth, for it is a great gift of God, and it is one of the places in which we can find Him easily. The Jew lives because he has a memory and a vision of the wilderness.

#### SALENU

7. The letter "M" is the first letter of the word "MITZVAH". Mitzvah means commandment. Judaism is a religion of discipline. Morality is its root. It has its mysticism, but it is a religion for this world and its daily little problems.

Mitzvah also means a deed that is done voluntarily, not because one is commanded to do so, but because one wants to help from his heart.

In this double meaning of the Hebrew word Mitzvah, we see the kind of genius that has kept the Hebrew people alive.

8. The "m", last part of the word "am" happens to be the first letter in the word "M'NUCAH", meaning rest or contentment. In today's world with everything automatic and speedy, man is always rushing around and never taking time to rest and think about the meaning of life. The Jews of the past set aside the Sabbath Day just for this purpose. The Hebrew word which means, "and He rested", also means, "and He took on a new soul". The Bible says that God rested, that is, He took on a new soul after His creative labors. How much more does man need to take on a new soul, slow down and get away from the hustle and bustle of life.

Some young people today are trying to find "M'NUCHAH!", the peace of deep thinking. The Jewish people has long known this secret. Let us hope that we do not lose it.

9. The letter M also begins the Hebrew word "mate", which means death. Individuals are born and they die, but if they are part of a great people, they live forever. Moses lives today as do David and Jeremiah and all the average Jews who tried to live out Jewish ideals and kept our people thriving.

Death is a mystery. It is an undefinable happening. It is a question without an answer. The individual can be afraid of death, but not if he is tied to friends and a people who carry his labor and memory with them.

#### Rise for Kaddish

10. The next word in the phrase "Am Yisrael Chai" is "Yisrael", Israel. The first letter in Yisrael is the "yod" or Y. Y is a letter with special associations in Hebrew. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah began their names with the "yod" or Y, but, most important, the name for God, in Hebrew, begins with Y. Some people call this name Yehovah, more popularly known as Jehovah, but the letters that form the name for God have no real spelling. They are a mystery in themselves.

One of the spellings given to the name of God is Yihveh, which means "He who creates or gives life". The Hebrew idea of God is that he is a creator, not a controller. Our word for God is expressed in terms of life! we do not speak as some other religions do, of a God who dies. We associate with God the beauty of all parts of creation, and the beauty of all living ideas. This emphasis on vitality and change has kept us alive as a people, and our goals will keep us alive as long as there is a need to better life and society.

11. Y is also the first letter in the Hebrew word "yadayim" meaning hands. Hands take many forms. There are hands of friendship, and when a Jew could find no welcoming hand in the many countries in which he wandered, he found the hand of a Jew clasping his in the dark.

There are hands clasped in love, and the Jew has wrapped his hands around the Torah, holding it close, believing in its promise. There are hands of brotherhood, and the Jew has held out his hands to non-Jews around him, calling them also to worship the universal God and to follow the moral law. We have survived because we have not been unwilling to join our hands to our own people and to others.

#### Dance

12. The letter "s" in the word "Yisroel", stands for SIMCHAH, Happiness. A Simchah for Jews is not just another party. It is a religious festival. It is stamping out Haman at Purim time and marching around the synagogue on Simchat Torah. It is a wedding and the joy of two families merged together. It is celebrating the six day war, as the Israelis broke the ring of steel that surrounded them. Because we have been able to celebrate every precious event in life, we Jews have survived.

13. The second letter in the name Yisrael is also the first letter in the Hebrew word for song, Shirah. Israel has survived amongst other reasons, because of its many meaningful songs. These songs recall the history of our fathers, and they tell of present day victories. Some of our songs are sad songs, but most are joyful. Through song we have balanced our sorrows with happiness and laughter, and hope. Our songs are a memory bank of our past, and a lift for the future. They have helped to keep us alive.

14. The third letter in the word Yisrael is a "resh" or R. R. is for REKUDE which means dancing. R is for Rina, which means rejoicing. But R is also for RA-DAH which means going down. Many times have we watched the sun go down on Israel's fortunes. The Assyrians captured the ten tribes of the North in 721 BC, the Babylonians captured the remaining tribes in Judea in 586 BC.

R also stands for RISHONE, first. We Jews were the first to believe in a God of Justice and mercy, the first to talk about international peace. We are the first in Nobel prize winners in proportion to our numbers. So long as we continue to be first in our effort to improve the world, we will continue to live.

#### DANCE

15. The fourth letter in the word Yisrael is the "aleph". Aleph is also the first letter in the alphabet. As such it is the beginning of all things and especially precious. Aleph is the first letter in the word EHMET which means truth. Interestingly enough, the last letter in the word ehmet, is the last letter in the alphabet; and the middle letter in this Hebrew word for truth, is the middle letter in our alphabet. So ehmet, truth, contains the beginning, the end, and the middle of knowledge. Truth involves the understanding of many different things and opinions. We young people often see truth one way, while our parents see it another way. Maybe the truth is a combination of all our views. It is the search for truth that has kept Jews vital and concerned with intellectual activities.

16. Aleph, the first Hebrew letter is the first letter in "ah-ha-vah", love. While other religions taught men to fear God, Judaism taught, "And thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might". While other peoples stressed competition, Judaism taught, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself and thou shalt love the stranger as thyself". Love, ah-ha-vah is a basic part of the word and the people yisrael.

17. Aleph is the first letter in ERETZ, land. By eretz, Jews mean two things; they mean all land everywhere, but, more especially, THE land, the land of Israel. The Book of Genesis reads, "The Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country and unto the land that I will show thee. And I will make thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and be thou a blessing". For Jews, eretz, the land, and the labor to be a blessing to the World, are tied together. After the destruction of their state, Jews set themselves a goal to return to the land. Someday, they would regain and rebuild eretz yisrael. Then in 1948, the dream came true, and the life of the Jewish people has been doubly enriched.

Exodus - Cantor

18. L is the last letter in the word yisrael. It is the first letter in the word "Lo" - meaning do not. The letter "L" is a basic part of the commandments which Israel gave to the world. One of the commandments is "Thou shalt not make thee a graven image... and bow down to it". People still make graven images today. Simon and Garfunkle, the authors of modern songs, have written, "And the people bowed and prayed to the Neon gods they made". It is not a problem in our day that people worship many idols, but we do have a problem of worshipping material possessions. Money is an idol and the greedy person worships it. If Israel is to continue to live in spiritual sense, we must help ourselves and the world to transfer their attention to those things we associate with the true God, namely, kindness and mercy.

19. "L" is the key letter in the beginning of the commandment, "Thou shalt not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block in the path of the blind". This commandment means, you should not take advantage of the handicapped. You should have compassion for your fellow human beings. If you are smarter than someone else, you shouldn't use your mentality to take advantage of him. The world needs tenderness and compassion if we are to survive.

20. What has been the secret of Jewish survival? The Hebrew word "Chai" means, lives or survives. The first letter of Chai is from the word Chayyim meaning life. The Jewish people, in spite of living in the ghetto and being persecuted, always had a grand sense of life. They were always optimistic and joyful, as the Jewish holidays make clear. Let Haman come, Mordecai would overcome him. Let Jerusalem fall, it would be rebuilt.

The Jews were happy when they had nothing to be happy about. In his poverty in Europe, he learned to love the simple things of life. While the nations around him made war, he learned to love peace.

The toast "L'chayyim" is more than a toast. It is the Jewish philosophy. "L'chayyim tovim U'l'shalom" is the full toast..To the moral life and to peace! This has been our ideal and our dream. It has kept us alive.

"The Jews of Silence" -Confirmands sing original song

21. The last letter in the sentence we have been using as the basis for our service, is "Y" a letter we have used before. Y is the first letter in the Hebrew word, "yivneh", he will build. A Jew is one who builds even when all the odds are against him. All through Jewish history, we have tried to build in whatever country we have lived. Unfortunately, we have frequently been cast down. When we were exiled into Babylonia, we helped to build up that land. We helped to build the great Spanish culture until 1492; then we were cast out. Now many Jews have returned to Israel to rebuild their own land, and they have worked miracles in the desert.

Let us rise and pledge allegiance to the struggle to unify the name of God and to unify mankind,

Ark opened VA NACHNU

22. Y is also the first letter in the word "yesh", which means existence, being. It is the opposite of non-being and death. In the face of famine, war, and persecution, Israel has continued to exist. We have never cursed what events have brought us. We have had faith in God and have considered our existence a blessing.

Existence has two parts. One exists physically, and one can exist spiritually. Physical existence is relatively simple. Throughout our history, we have had our share of misery due to the lack of physical things like food, clothing, shelter, but this has not seriously disturbed us.

Spiritual existence is different, however. When you are denied freedom of religion and thought, death comes more quickly than in the mere denial of food and shelter. Through the years men have tried to dampen the Jewish spirit with hated words of "dirty kike" or the like, but we have not faltered.

Our spiritual existence, you see, is based on a belief stronger than any persecution or hatred- It is based on a belief in God, in the basic goodness of the world, on a high moral system, a belief in human potential, a belief in every rising goal. As long as Jews retain this spiritual essence, this kind of existence, the people of Israel will live!

"SING A SONG OF THE WISE"

Cantata

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