



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

PILLARS OF LIGHT FESTIVAL
Sunday 28 November 2021

Rabbi Gabi Kaltmann, Rabbi of the Ark Centre
Lisa Thurin, representing the Gandel Foundation
Belinda Bardas, representing the Loti & Victor Smorgon Family Foundation
The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of Melbourne Cr Sally Capp
Members of Parliament
Members of the consular corps
Distinguished guests

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are gathering, and I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and to Elders of other communities who may be with us this evening. And I thank Uncle Ringo for his warm welcome to country.

Chanukkah is an important Jewish Festival, but like many religious festivals, practices or traditions, its meaning can resonate more widely.

That's something we reflect upon frequently within the diverse cultural and religious setting of our State, knowing that, when we open our hearts and minds, we see the common themes of goodness, respect, gratitude and harmony – fundamental human themes – that bind us all.

Chanukkah is a Festival of lights. It focuses on how a little bit of light can dispel the darkness. It is about renewal, rededication, hope and optimism. It's about collaboration and togetherness.

How relevant is that right now.

I want to warmly thank the ARK Centre, the Victorian Government, Fed Square, the Gandel Foundation and the Loti & Victor Smorgon Family Foundation for supporting an event that brings us together in this way.

Thank you for helping multicultural groups to learn more about each other. And for the thoughtful design of this event so that on each of the evenings that people will gather to light these candles, a different universal theme will lie at the heart of that gathering.

This evening's theme is Inclusivity.

Of course, it doesn't take a crisis on the scale of a global pandemic to remind us that we need to work together to ensure that no one is marginalised or left out, whether because of religion, age, gender, disability, language or background. To remind us that when each Victorian can fully participate in the economic and social life of our community, we are all the stronger for it.

But, certainly, the recent challenges have brought these reminders to the forefront of our minds.

The tough times that we have endured have, disappointingly, occasionally shown us at our worst – when we have been selfish or too fast to criticise or ostracise an entire group, because of the mis-steps of a few.

Happily, these tough times have much more often shown us at our best. We have seen the love and care that individuals and groups have extended to their fellow Victorians, regardless of race or religion.

There is no finer example than our many essential workers who, like those they've so carefully looked after, come from the hundreds of backgrounds we see across our State.

They are of course just the tip of a big iceberg of inclusivity in care.

Now, as Victoria starts the rebuilding phase, I am optimistic. The cleverness, innovation and goodness that led to our successes before the pandemic have not left us.

They will help us grow back and, if we are mindful of the opportunities that lie before us, we will grow back better and stronger.

Nothing could be more integral to that than being together in the endeavour.

Thank you to everyone involved this evening for using this Festival and this moment to put us on that pathway.

And for those to whom it is relevant, I wish you a Happy Channukah.