

Is Thanksgiving a Jewish Holiday?

November, 2009

In just a few weeks, on the fourth Thursday of this month of November, many of us will wish each other, "Happy Thanksgiving." Some of us will invite family and friends to our homes. Others will travel to see family and friends. Still others will volunteer at various shelters to serve Thanksgiving meals to those in need. Some may just enjoy a day off from work in celebration of this National holiday. Wherever we are, the intention is clear. We, as Americans, take this day to offer our thanks – to be thankful for all that we have – and probably add a few pounds in the process. But outside of the huge amounts of food, which we Jews, could enjoy on any holiday, is there something Jewish about Thanksgiving? Could Thanksgiving even be a Jewish Holiday?

The closest Jewish Holiday to Thanksgiving is Sukkot. You probably remember Sukkot. We just celebrated it a few weeks ago. During Sukkot, which lasts seven days, we recall our 40 years of wandering in the desert and living in temporary shelters, by building a temporary hut-like structure called a *sukkah*. We are to sit in the *sukkah*, and invite guests to sit in it with us. We are to eat in it and even to sleep in it. With *Sukkot*, we also celebrate the end of the harvest season and all that it has brought us. Although most of us are not so agrarian, we recognize *Sukkot* as a time to give thanks and to have a feast - hence the similarity to American Thanksgiving.

When we consider *Sukkot*, it seems as though we have seven days of Thanksgiving, rather than just one day. Actually, we have even more days. The first prayer that we say upon waking up in the morning is a prayer of Thanksgiving: *Modeh/modah ani lifanecha* I give thanks to you God... for you have returned my soul to me. The rabbis thought that during sleep, our soul wanders. When we wake up, we thank God that our soul has returned. The first thing we do when we wake up in the morning is to offer a prayer of Thanksgiving. Also, Each of the three daily, Jewish prayer services contains a prayer for Thanksgiving: *Modim anachnu lach*..... We give thanks to You, (God).....And, the rabbis tell us to make a *bracha*, a blessing for almost anything we do and/or experience -- a blessing before we eat something, a blessing when we see an ocean, even a blessing when we see a friend who we have not seen in over a year. There are so many opportunities for Thanksgiving. And our blessings provide the means to our moments of Thanksgiving.

So, maybe we don't have just one Thanksgiving day or even seven Thanksgiving days. It's possible that

each and every day can be Thanksgiving. Each and every day can be a day in which we are thankful for what we have. May we all be able to feel a bit of Thanksgiving, not just on the fourth Thursday of this month, but each and every day of this month and the months to come. I guess Thanksgiving is a Jewish holiday after all.

Kol Tuv (All the Best)

Rabbi Ed