

THANKSGIVING – A VERY JEWISH IDEA

I know you're not going to believe this but the Hebrew word for "turkey" and "to thank" are the same: *Hodu*. And beyond this, the original Pilgrim Thanksgiving Day which we celebrate this month was consciously modeled on the Jewish harvest holiday of *Succot* which we celebrated last month. You must admit, the very American holiday of Thanksgiving even fits into the general rule summarizing and explaining virtually all Jewish holidays: "they tried to kill us (in this case the "they" was the harsh winter), they failed, let's eat!" Yes, Thanksgiving is a very Jewish holiday; to me, it even feels a lot like Passover, with less ritual and much better desserts!

The connection between Judaism and Thanksgiving goes much deeper. Traditional Jews recite the *Hodahah* or Thanksgiving blessing (you can find it with a good translation on page 32 of our prayer books) of the *Amidah* prayer three times every day (four times on Shabbat and Holidays). In addition, we have an opportunity to recite some hundred blessings a day to thank God for all the good things that come into our lives.

As I often say, reciting these blessings or *b'ruchas* changed my life by re-wiring my brain and making me more thankful and grateful. Some 20 years ago, as I was getting more serious about my Judaism, a rabbi, Richard Levy, pointed out to me that a gift without thanks is a theft. We owe God thanks for the good things that entered our lives and there is a long list of blessings that we can use. Some of these, you probably already know such as the "*Ha-Motzie*" that we recite before we eat. There are others that we recite when seeing something of great natural beauty. I would be happy to send you a list of the most helpful ones.

But short of that, here's a suggestion that, I believe, will make you a happier person. Whenever you feel you've received a gift from God, take a moment to thank God. Use the traditional blessing, or the Hebrew "*Todah (or Baruch) HaShem,*" or just "Thank You God." If you are like me, you will begin to realize how much we are showered in gifts. We have shelter, we have bodies which (for the most part) function correctly, we have family, we have food, we have telephones, television, radio, computers – and on and on. What if you stopped and thanked God every time you used these?

Take my advise. Try being thankful, being grateful more than just once a year. You may just find "the attitude of gratitude" will change your life! Happy Thanksgiving!