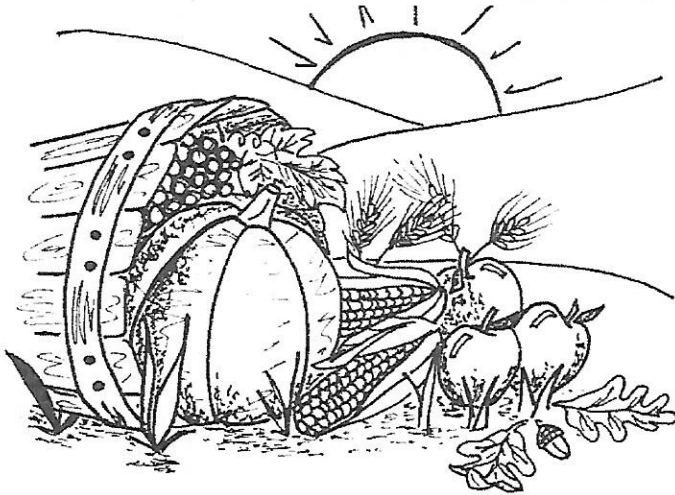


WHAT IS JEWISH ABOUT THANKSGIVING?



Making connections is at the heart of learning. It enables us to go beyond knowing facts to being able to use the information. Judaism becomes more meaningful when it can connect to all areas of a student's life. Thanksgiving offers rich learning and a way to see the secular through a Jewish lens.

- **Sukkot**—In our joyful Sukkot celebrations, emphasize how crucial a successful harvest is (and was). Children know about how difficult the lives of the Pilgrims were and how they showed their gratitude for surviving and finally having food by having the feast. It may be a myth that the pilgrims saw their celebration as Sukkot, but Sukkot and Thanksgiving connect with each other. Why would the pilgrims have celebrated Sukkot? What “harvests” do we have for which we can be thankful?
- **America**—Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday and turkey is kosher. It welcomes Jews to be a part of a celebration of America as a safe haven for many people. We are a nation of immigrants. What are your students' stories? How long have their families been in America? Why did they come? How do they see the United States in light of their families' experiences?
- **Hakhnasat Orhim/Hospitality**—Hospitality is simply making a guest welcome, but Judaism considers this an important *mitzvah*. In the Torah, Abraham and Sarah teach us the *mitzvah* of *hakhnasat orhim*, hospitality. Hosting friends and the cousins from Cleveland becomes something special, something holy, a *mitzvah*. Who is hosting, and who is being hosted?
- **Thankfulness—an Attitude of Gratitude—Brakhot**. When we say a *brakhah* before eating we have to stop and think. Is it bread or from other grains? Is it a fruit or vegetable from a tree or the ground, or something else? It is full intention/*kavanah* before eating. I am thankful for being able to eat “this.” Do your students say *הַמוֹצֵיאַת הַמּוֹצֵיאַת* *Ha-Motzi* or *בּוֹרֵא מִיְי מְזוֹנוֹת* *borei minei m'zonot* for everything they eat? This is an opportunity to teach the *brakhah* system.
- **Thankfulness—Birkat Ha-Mazon/Grace After Meals**. “When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to your God for the good land which God has given you” (Deuteronomy 8:10). If you have always wanted to teach *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, this is perfect time to introduce it to your students or for them to learn more of it.
- **Tzedakah/G'milut Hasadim**—Tzedakah money collected in November can be donated to an organization providing meals to people. For *Gemilut hasadim*, get involved in a holiday food collection. Go on a field trip to a supermarket and shop for a holiday dinner for a family. Cook desserts or side dishes and bring them to a homeless shelter. How will you involve families in putting these mitzvot into action?
- **Torah Study**—The Torah has many laws that people in Israel long ago followed to feed poor people. Again, this is a “teachable moment” or month, an opportunity for our students to learn something that is not always a part of the curriculum.

Here is a Thanksgiving prayer for *Birkat Ha-Mazon/Grace After Meals*. It can be included where the prayers for *Hanukkah* or *Purim* are said.

In the days of the Pilgrims, the Puritans, when they arrived at these safe shores, suffered hunger and cold. They sang and prayed to the Rock of their Salvation. And You, standing by them, roused the caring of the Natives for them: who fed them, turkey and corn and other delights. Thus saved You them from starvation, and they learned the ways of peace with the inhabitants of the land. Therefore, feeling grateful, they dedicated a day of Thanksgiving each year as a remembrance for future generations, feeding unfortunates feasts of thanks. Thus do we thank You for all the good in our lives, God of kindness, Lord of Peace; thus do we thank You.

—Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi