

**Chanukah:  
Giving Thanks**  
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*Class of 2017*

The very first words we say when we wake up in the morning are “מודה אני”. We thank G-d for giving us back our souls and allowing us to wake up and experience the world again.

Interestingly, the word for Jews in Hebrew is יהודים (*yehudim*) which comes from the same root - to thank. We are named for Yehuda, Leah & Yaakov’s fourth child and head of the Jewish royal line. Leah was the first person to publicly thank G-d:

“This time I will thank the Lord - therefore she named him יהודה”  
Yehuda.” פַּעַם אֹדָה אֶת־ה' עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָהּ שְׁמוֹ הַיְהוּדָה!<sup>1</sup>

Leah showed thanks and appreciation to G-d for her child in spite of her difficult situation as the less-loved wife of Yaakov.

Why is giving thanks so important?

The Rambam teaches that prayer is composed of three parts: שבח (praise), בקשה (request), הודאה (thanks) . Praise and request are one-directional - from us to G-d. Giving thanks indicates <sup>2</sup> a two-way relationship between us and G-d. We recognize G-d’s handiwork in our world and through prayer we give him thanks.

Our cornerstone prayer – the *Amidah* - incorporates all three of these components. We recite them in our personal, silent prayer and we listen to the *chazzan* recite them in the public repetition of the *Amidah*. Yet when the *chazzan* reaches the *Modim* prayer which is about thanks – the congregation says their own *Modim* prayer! From this we can learn that we cannot send a messenger to give thanks for us – instead we each must say our own thank you.

There is tremendous power in gratitude. Often we find ourselves on the receiving end in a relationship, when another person does something meaningful for us. Help can come in many forms: meals for a new mother, a kind word, giving someone a lift and sometimes just the offer of a listening ear. Receiving help can create a feeling of imbalance in the relationship as we cannot always reciprocate in the exact same manner. But here is what we can do. We can look the other person in the eye and say a true “thank you” from the heart. By giving thanks, we acknowledge and appreciate the other person’s actions. We admit that we needed help - and received it. In that instant, balance is restored.

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<sup>1</sup> Bereishit 29:35

<sup>2</sup> Rambam, Laws of Prayer, 1:2

On Chanukah we add the *מיסינה לע* (*al hanisim*) prayer to the *Modim* section of the *Amidah* and to the *נוזמה תכרב* (Grace after Meals). We tell the story of the battle of the Maccabees and how G-d delivered our enemy into our hands. At the very end we say the following words:

"Your children then entered the holiest part of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courts, and designated these eight days of Chanuka to **thank** and praise Your great name"<sup>3</sup>

"ואחר כן באו בניך לדביר בתיך ופנו את היכלך, וטהרו את מקדשך, והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך וקבעו שמועת ימי חנוכה אלו **להודות** ולהלל לשמך הגדול"

Some holidays, such as Purim, are about remembering. Other holidays, like Succot, are about celebrating. Chanukah is about **thankfulness**. We have eight days to bring light into our lives by acknowledging and being thankful for what we have.



Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe served, for many years, as Community Educator and Director of Mercaz Center for Adult Education in Beth Tfiloh synagogue in Baltimore, MD. Her love of tefilla and ritual led her to be an experienced gaba'it and organizer of women's tefilla groups. She has taught many women and girls to leyn and is the voice of the JOFA Megillat Esther App. Rabbanit Bracha interned at United Orthodox Synagogue in Houston, Texas and at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale in New York. She participated in chaplaincy programs at New York Presbyterian Hospital and at a maximum security women's prison. Rabbanit Bracha is a 2017 graduate of Yeshivat Maharat, following a long career in hi-tech in Israel. She feels blessed to be following this path which nourishes and fills her soul.

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by R. Jonathan Sacks, The Koren Siddur