

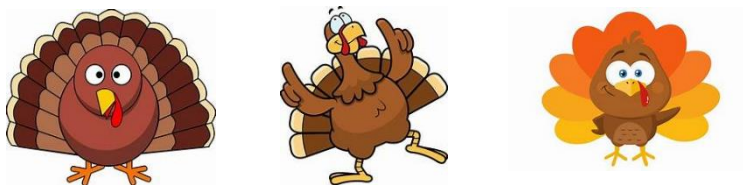
Thanksgiving and Sukkot Share Common Themes

Resource sheet prepared by Rabbi Shari Shamah, Moishe House Jewish Life Specialist



If you research Thanksgiving and Sukkot, you'll find a variety of sources that seek to connect Thanksgiving with Sukkot. Instead of trying to speculate whether that first Thanksgiving (in Plymouth 1621) was a meal with Biblical origins, instead look at how Thanksgiving and Sukkot today share multiple common themes.

Thanksgiving Word Play: In Psalms we read: *Tov L'hodot La'Adonai* (Psalm 92). In Hebrew **hodu** is the word for Turkey. Therefore, on Thanksgiving we should offer Thanks to God for Turkey.



How the Torah describes Sukkot:

חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּאַסְפָּף מִגֶּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ: וְשִׂמְחָתָּ בְּחַגֶּךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וְהִלּוּי וְהִגֵּר וְהִיְתוּם וְהָאֲלֻמָּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחֲלֶה לִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֶׂה יָדְיָךְ וְהִיְתָה אֵד שִׂמְחָה:

After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. You shall hold a festival for your God יהוה seven days, in the place that יהוה will choose; for your God יהוה will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy. (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

- These verses form the essence of Sukkot. What themes do you find in these verses?
- Are there themes that are connected to Thanksgiving?
- Why do you think the Torah stresses that you should have nothing but joy?
- When times are difficult is it possible to have nothing but joy?



What is the Feast of Ingathering?

וְחַג שִׁבְעַת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ בְּבוֹרְי קִצִּיר חֲטָיִם וְחַג הָאֲסִיף תְּקִיֶּפֶת הַשָּׂנָה:

You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; and the **Feast of Ingathering** at the turn of the year. (Exodus 34:22)

- The Feast of Weeks refers to Shavuot. The Feast of Ingathering refers to Sukkot. Why is this a name for Sukkot?

"Sukkot is the Festival of Ingathering; it is the time when the produce of the field, orchard and vineyard is gathered in. The granaries, threshing floors and wine and olive-presses are full to capacity. Weeks and months of toil and sweat put into the soil have finally been amply rewarded. The farmer feels happy and elated. No wonder Sukkot is 'the Season of Rejoicing'."

(https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/645/jewish/The-Festival-of-Ingathering.htm)

- How might the idea of harvest be a connection to Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving: A full belly joyful holiday

משנה תורה, הלכות שביתת יום טוב ו'י"ח

וְכִשְׁהוּא אוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתֶה חַיֵּב לְהַאֲכִיל לַגֵּר לִיתוֹם וְלְאַלְמָנָה עִם שְׂאֵר הָעַנְיִים הָאֲמֻלָּלִים...
אֲבָל מִי שֶׁנוֹעֵל דְּלִתוֹת חֲצֵרוֹ וְאוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתֶה הוּא וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִינוֹ מַאֲכִיל וּמִשְׁקָה לַעֲנִיִּים
וְלַמָּרִי נָפֶשׁ אֵין זֶה שְׂמִיחַת מִצְוָה אֲלָא שְׂמִיחַת כְּרִסּוֹ

When one eats and drinks, one must feed the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, along with the rest of the poor who are in need. **But one who locks the gate of their courtyard and eats and drinks with their family and doesn't provide food and drinks for the poor and for those who are despondent, this is not the joy of a mitzvah, but rather just the joy of a full belly...** (Mishneh Torah, Rest on a Holiday 6:18)



- How might this text from Maimonides relate to Thanksgiving?
- What is the joy of a mitzvah?
- What's the difference between the joy of a mitzvah and the joy of a full belly?
- Thanksgiving often consists of eating a lot, sitting around in comfy pants, and watching football or the Macy's Parade. Are there lessons in this text that offer a different perspective?

Thanksgiving Dinner Invitations:

סידור אשכנז, חגים, סוכות, תפילות בסוכה, אושפיזין א'-ו'

...תִּיבּוֹ תִּיבּוֹ אוֹשְׁפִיזִין עִילָאִין, תִּיבּוֹ תִּיבּוֹ אוֹשְׁפִיזִין קַדִּישִׁין, תִּיבּוֹ תִּיבּוֹ אוֹשְׁפִיזִין דְּמַהֲיָמְנוּתָא...
...יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי שֶׁתַּשְׁרֶה שְׂכִינְתָּךְ בֵּינֵינוּ וְתַפְרוֹס עָלֵינוּ סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמָךְ...
בְּלֵילָה רִאשׁוֹן כַּשֶּׁנִּכְנַס לְסוּכָה קוֹדֵם שִׁישֵׁב לֵאכּוֹל וּבְכָל יוֹם קוֹדֵם סְעוּדָתוֹ יֹאמַר זֶה : אֲזַמִּין
לְסַעוּדָתִי אוֹשְׁפִיזִין עִילָאִין אֲבָרְהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

Sit, sit, [you] lofty guests; sit, sit [you] holy guests; sit, sit [you] guests of faith...

May it be Your will in front of You, Lord, my God and God of my fathers, that You have Your Divine Presence rest upon us, and that You spread out Your sukkah of peace upon us...

On the first night when one enters the sukkah before sitting to eat, and on every night before the meal, one should say: I am inviting the lofty guests, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David....

(Siddur Ashkenaz, Festivals, Sukkot, Prayers in the Sukkah, Ushpizin 1-6)

- This text teaches that on Sukkot we can partake of the mitzvah of inviting people (both our Biblical ancestors, and friends of today) into our Sukkah.
- Are there connections between Ushpizin for Sukkot and Thanksgiving?
- How does this play a part in the fairly modern tradition of Friendsgiving?
- Could this text influence part of your Thanksgiving tradition?



Appreciating what we have:

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said: "From all who taught me have I gained understanding" (Psalms 119:99). Who is mighty? He who subdues his [evil] inclination, as it is said: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). **Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot, as it is said: "You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors, you shall be happy and you shall prosper" (Psalms 128:2) "You shall be happy" in this world, "and you shall prosper" in the world to come.** Who is he that is honored? He who honors his fellow human beings as it is said: "For I honor those that honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonored" (I Samuel 2:30). (Pirkei Avot 4:1)

- What do you think of this definition of who is rich?
- What are the "riches" you have in your life?
- What are the "riches" we have in our world today?



Offering Thanks is also a Jewish Tradition:

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: אַרְבָּעָה צָרִיכִין לְהוֹדוֹת: יוֹרְדֵי הַיָּם, הוֹלְכֵי מִדְבָּרוֹת, וּמִי שֶׁהָיָה חוֹלָה וְנִתְרַפָּא, וּמִי שֶׁהָיָה חֲבוּשׁ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים וְנִצָּא.

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: Four must offer thanks to God with a thanks-offering and a special blessing. They are: Seafarers, those who walk in the desert, and one who was ill and recovered, and one who was incarcerated in prison and went out. All of these appear in the verses of a psalm (Psalms 107). (Talmud Berakhot 54b)

- The ritual described here is a blessing of Thanksgiving. It is called Birkat Ha-Gomel. Traditionally you recite it in a service where you have a minyan, ideally within a few days after you have returned, recovered, or gone free.
- How do you offer thanks in your life?
- What are you thankful for this year?

Common themes of Sukkot and Thanksgiving:

- Harvest
- A holiday of rejoicing
- Inviting others to share our joy
- Appreciating what we have
- Stopping to offer thanks
- And a reminder that when we have a full belly, we should think of others...
- Others?

Links for additional reading:

[Did Sukkot Shape Thanksgiving? - Algemeiner.com](https://www.algemeiner.com/content/did-sukkot-shape-thanksgiving/)

https://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Birkat_HaGomel

<https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/279392?lang=bi>

