



A Family Education E-Resource
November 2006



**“Living in Two Civilizations”
Celebrating Thanksgiving Jewishly:
A Thanksgiving Seder**

By Rabbi Fredi Cooper, Director of NESS

At Your Own Thanksgiving Table:

Think of the Thanksgiving meal as similar to our own **Pesah seder**; it is a holiday that we celebrate at the table and can include some similar elements, such as blessings, *maggid* and *birkat hamazon*.

- **Maggid: The Telling of Thanksgiving Stories**

Hakhnasat Orhim: Welcoming Guests into Our Homes

“When Rav Huna would eat a meal, he would open his door and say, ‘Whoever is in need, let that person come and eat.’” (Ta’anit 20b)

Ha’akhalat Re’evim: Feeding the Hungry

“Rabbi Tanhum, though he needed only one portion of meat for himself, would buy two: one bunch of vegetables for himself and one for the poor.” (Midrash Kohelet Rabba 7:30)

“And when you reap the harvest of your fields, you shall not totally harvest the field. You must leave the corners of your field . . . for the poor and the stranger.” (Leviticus 23:22)

- **The Four Questions:** Use these questions for dinner table discussion and reflection

1. Why is this holiday of Thanksgiving different for us from other holidays that we celebrate as American Jews?
2. What are the things we are thankful for this year, as a family?
3. How can we help others who are in need during this season?
4. Why do you think we eat special foods for Thanksgiving?

Read *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen (Yearling Publishers, 1990, for ages 6 - 9) with your family. Discuss the experiences of the many generations of "Pilgrims" who have settled in America. How can more recent immigrants to America participate in the ideals of Thanksgiving?

Other books about celebrating Thanksgiving Jewishly include *Rivka's First Thanksgiving* by Elsa Okon Rael (Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2001, for ages 6 - 9) and *Thanksgiving Wish* by Michael J. Rosen (Blue Sky Press, 1998, for ages 8 - 11).

- **Motzi:**

Suggested *berakhot* for Thanksgiving include the *hamotzi* for eating bread and various blessings for specific foods, such as turkey, vegetables, fruit, cranberry sauce, and drinking wine or grape juice. Find many blessings, and more, in Holiday Happenings at http://urj.org/_kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1704&destination=ShowItem

Blessings for additional foods can be found at http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/jrpguide/3_part1.shtml

- **Birkat HaMazon: Blessing at the End of the Meal**

In reciting the Grace at the end of the meal we conclude with the verse:

"I was a youth and now I've grown old - and I've never seen a righteous person go hungry."

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav taught: "I've been young and grown old and I could really see the needs of the poor (righteous). I could never let them be forsaken (hungry). I must look more closely."

- How can we reconcile both ideas in our Jewish tradition?
- What can each of us do to make the world free of hunger?

Words to the *birkat hamazon* can be found at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/birkat_hamazon.pdf

Celebrating our Abundance and Bringing Abundance to Others

"Jews in the Diaspora must of necessity live within "two civilizations" and will therefore have to adjust themselves to that necessity by participating in both . . . They enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of a Thanksgiving day . . ."

Mordecai Kaplan in *Judaism as a Civilization*, p. 344.

As Jewish families we can connect to our Jewish heritage with a variety of activities to fulfill the mitzvah of sharing our abundance, as our sages taught through their actions:

Gemilut Hasadim: Doing Righteous Deeds

At the time of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, it was traditional to bring a "Thanks Offering" to the Temple to acknowledge our thankfulness for the abundance of our lives. Today that could be interpreted as offering *tzedakah* to an organization whose mission is to provide sustenance to those in need. There are many organizations that provide the opportunity to take part in cooking Thanksgiving meals for others in facilities or joining in Thanksgiving meals with residents.

- Several Mitzvah, Hunger Relief and Social Action Links can be found on the web site of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia:
http://www.jewishphilly.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=124435
- The Jewish Family and Children Service provides the opportunity to assemble Thanksgiving baskets for families and delivering these baskets before the holiday to assure that they will be able to celebrate with their loved ones. Contact them at <http://www.jfcsphil.org/>
- It is possible to join a meal at the Abramson Center for Jewish Life or residents at any of the Federation Housing facilities. Contact them at several of the senior sites at http://www.jewishphilly.org/ir_category_listing.html?type=1&nt=1&id=917&view=1
- The Jewish Relief Agency identifies and helps feed needy Jewish families. Contact them at <http://www.jewishrelief.org>.

Ritual Foods:

The Thanksgiving table is set with foods that are particular to Thanksgiving. In many families the meal is not complete unless certain foods are present. Often, as with Jewish holidays, this food is made only for the particular holiday.

Sample Recipe: Cranberry Orange Bread

3 medium oranges	1 cup coarsely chopped fresh cranberries
1 beaten egg	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped walnuts
2 tablespoons cooking oil	2 cups all-purpose flour
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon of salt	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda

Lightly grease one 8x4x2 inch loaf pan

1. Squeeze the juice from the oranges.
2. Combine the orange juice with the egg and oil.
3. Stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda.
4. Add the orange mixture and stir until moistened.
5. Fold in cranberries and walnuts.
6. Bake in a 350 degree oven for 50-60 minutes.
7. Cool.

We can open our homes and our generous hearts to others at this time of abundance. We can recite the blessings for our country and recite blessings of thanks for our food as we celebrate this time in a meaningful manner in our homes this Thanksgiving day. Let's experience this holiday as a time of blessing in our lives.

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