

Making a Jewish Thanksgiving



**Rabbi David Komerofsky
Temple Israel • Canton, Ohio**

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ:

Give thanks to Adonai; for God is good, God's steadfast love is eternal.

(Psalm 136:1)

וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ הַהוּא אַחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִהַדּוֹ וְעַד-כּוֹשׁ שִׁבְעַתְּשָׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה:

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus – that
Ahasuerus who reigned over a hundred and
twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia.

(Esther 1:1)

תַּרְנֵגוֹל הַחוּדוֹ

A Long and Winding History

- 1541 – Spanish explorers feasted in the Texas Panhandle for prayer and thanksgiving
- 1598 – after a harrowing desert journey, a group of Spanish Texans celebrated
- 1607 – Maine feast with colonists and Native Americans
- November 1621 – Plymouth Feast

- November 1775 – Boston anti-British call for Thanksgiving
- December 1777 – Thirteen Colonies celebrate victory in Battle of Saratoga
- November 1789 – George Washington calls for Day of Thanksgiving at end of Revolutionary War
- November 1846 – Sarah Josepha Hale begins letter writing campaign of 17 years to U.S. presidents to make it official, culminating in September 1863
- October 1863 – President Lincoln proclaims Thanksgiving Holiday on last Thursday of November
- 1939 – FDR moved the date to help the economy

The Role of Mythology

- How “true” must something be for it to be meaningful?
- The debatable origins of American Thanksgiving.
- Does our observance change when we re-examine everything we’ve learned?
- Let’s take a Jewish look at Thanksgiving...

The Holiday

- Thanksgiving is very Jewish. It's about giving thanks, and it's about food and family.
- Like Sukkot, it is a harvest holiday.
- The theme of struggling against nature and finding a balance between particularism and universalism is quite Jewish.

This Year

- Lessons from Passover 2020.
- Highest mitzvah is pikuach nefesh – saving a human life.
- Next year, in person, together.