

א ביסל תורה!

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Giving Thanks in Judaism

By Moshe Garland '25

As we prepare for פסח, פסח offers a powerful way to view the holiday; through the lens of gratitude. This comes from a unique sacrifice called the קרבן תודה - the thanksgiving offering. Unlike other קרבנות brought for atonement or obligation, the תודה was offered voluntarily, as a personal expression of thanks after surviving a dangerous or life-threatening situation: recovering from illness, traversing a desert, crossing a sea, or being released from prison. It marked a moment of salvation, both physical and emotional.

The קרבן תודה was also unusual in its composition: it included 40 loaves of bread, both חמץ and מצה, and all of it had to be eaten within one day and one night. Why so much food in such a short amount of time? חז"ל explain that this structure required the person bringing the offering to invite others, to gather a group, and to publicly share their gratitude to Hashem. Thanksgiving in Judaism is not meant to remain private. It overflows. It reaches outward and brings others in.

This idea ties beautifully into פסח. פסח is, in a way, the national קרבן תודה. It commemorates the moment when the Jewish people were rescued; not from an isolated danger, but from centuries of slavery, humiliation, and despair. And just as the תודה must be shared with others, פסח is entirely centered on storytelling and communal gratitude. The תורה commands us: "וְיָרַדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ" "and you shall tell your child" (שמות י"ג:ח). We do not just remember יציאת

מצרים - we relive it, retell it, and pass it down to the next generation. The entire structure of the סדר, from the הלל to דיינו to ארבע כוסות, is an extended act of giving thanks for redemption.

One especially striking detail about the קרבן תודה is that it includes חמץ, something forbidden on פסח. So why would a sacrifice so closely tied to redemption and thanksgiving permit חמץ?

The answer lies in the nature of gratitude itself. מצה represents humility and simplicity - לחם עני, the bread of affliction. חמץ, by contrast, can symbolize abundance, fullness, and the complexities of life. Real gratitude is not limited to the high points or moments of clarity. Gratitude includes the entire journey: the suffering, the healing, the exile, and the redemption. The presence of both חמץ and מצה in the קרבן תודה is a reminder that giving thanks is not only about the miracles, but also about the winding road that led us there.

As we approach פסח, we can transform our סדר into our own personal קרבן תודה. Not through sacrifices, but through song, storytelling, and gratitude that draws others in. When we sing דיינו, when we say הלל, when we tell the story of יציאת מצרים, we are not just recounting history; we are giving thanks for the redemptions in our own lives.



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