



DR. JACOB SOLOMON

TORAH TIDBITS CONTRIBUTOR

# Thanksgiving

**This is the law of the... peace offering... if he shall offer it as a thanksgiving offering... (7:11-12).**

The Gemara (Berachot 54b) brings the following tradition, based on Psalm 107:

**Four categories of people should bring a thanksgiving offering: those who survived a sea journey, those who survived a journey in the desert, someone who recovered from a dangerous illness, and someone who survived dangerous imprisonment.**

The text, as explained by the Gemara (Menachot 77b) states that the animal brought as a thanksgiving offering (*todah*) was accompanied by 40 loaves, ten of each of the four varieties mentioned in the text. Half the *todah*'s flour was used to prepare the 30 unleavened loaves (*matzot*), which included oil. The rest of the flour made up

the 10 leavened loaves (*chametz*), which did not include oil. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that the *chametz* is a symbol of growth and unrestrained freedom. The *matzot* represent food, and the oil suggests well-being – two essentials for living. So the combination of *chametz* and *matza* in a *todah* shows that the person has emerged from the constricting danger to unrestricted life (*chametz*), but at the same time he has recognized that he owes everything – his food and well-being – to G-d, and he rededicates himself to Him (*matza*).

The Gemara seems to imply that this *korban todah*, a private *korban shelamim*, is voluntary. G-d does not force a redemption ransom on those He helped. As the *passuk* tells us: “If he shall offer it as a peace offering”. If he volunteers to bring, as the right thing to do to bring. Not that he must bring.

Yet these offerings do add up to quite a lot. First, a whole bull, a whole sheep, or a whole goat. Secondly, 40 units of bread of different varieties. Other offerings, such as the *olah*, and *asham*, do provide for those of limited means to take part - allowing the much less costly birds or even grain in place of whole animals. Not the *korban todah*, though. That is the same for everyone. Quite expensive.

Possibly, this might serve to teach an important lesson. That is to avoid having memories that are too short. Imagine being stuck in the blazing hot desert where you are so thirsty that nothing, nothing

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matters, except a glass of water which at that moment can not be obtained. So much so, that you can think of nothing else. I'd give everything I have just for a drop of water. Now, think about being in a storm at sea, flat on your back sea-sick badly enough that you want to throw yourself overboard and end it all. And when in high fever and every breath is a struggle for survival. And when taken captive as in Gaza and you desperately yearn for freedom... and can't think of anything else. Nothing else matters.

The miracle happened. Somehow or other the person came out alive. But under the immediate pressures of day-to-day routines, the incredible survival occupies less and less of the mind. One doesn't forget of course; it makes a good story. But feelings of gratitude, of *hakarat hatov* tend to move to the background.

Yet short memories do not alter the reality of having been saved, of G-d's intervention on one's behalf. That feeling of gratitude must stay. That is why there is equality in the offering; rich and poor bring the same things. The Torah stresses that all people are equal, in that He created everyone in His image. The fact that the person was of limited means does not reduce the greatness of what G-d did for him, nor undermine the desperation and single mindedness for the one thing only that matters: "Get me out of this!" The poor person in his extreme suffering would have done what it takes to procure that offering if it promised deliverance. Now that deliverance occurred, let him strive hard to obtain what it takes and thus in the process connect himself to such a degree

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with his unbelievable salvation that *hakarat hatov* becomes part of his daily cognition, his daily operating system. And the rich person so delivered can see the poor person bringing the same offering and reflect that his formerly desperate position in the eyes of G-d is the same as the poor person's. ■

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