

Dear Chavraya,

Waking to the increasing chill of these November mornings, wishing we could stay warm and snug in bed, the first response for most of us is probably not one of gratitude upon having to get up. Perhaps recognizing the pull of a warm bed on a cold morning, it is precisely a sense of gratitude that Jewish tradition seeks to inculcate in these first moments of awareness at the start of a new day. The first words that we are challenged to say as Jews upon waking are *Modah/Modeh Ani Lefanecha...*, I give thanks to You God for returning my soul to me..., great is Your faith. If God has great faith -- in me to start the day, then how can I not have at least a measure of faith in myself as my feet touch the floor and I rise to a new dawn? A short while later, in the liturgical framework of a day's unfolding, we come to the *Amidah* of *Shachris*, the morning prayers, and shift from a personal offering of thanks to a collective one, from singular to plural. In the morning *davening*, and so too in afternoon and evening, we say *Modim Anachnu Lach...*, We thank You..., for our lives that are in Your hand, for our souls that are in Your care, for Your miracles that are with us every day, for Your wonders and Your goodness.... *Modah/Modeh Ani...*, *Modim Anachnu Lach...* In this week of Thanksgiving, it feels right to note that every day for us is meant to be a day of thanksgiving.

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayishlach*, Yakov expresses thanks to God, saying, "I am humbled by all of the kindnesses that You have done for me." To give thanks, to acknowledge God's gifts of life and of wonder, this is the essence of what it is to be a Jew, *Yehudi*. The Hebrew root of this word through which each one of us is called is *yud, daled, hey*. It is the same root of *todah*, thank you, *l'hodot*, to thank, to acknowledge! Our sacred calling as Jews in the world is to thank and acknowledge God, to know God's presence, to acknowledge and be grateful for goodness in spite of all that threatens to hide and eclipse it. To thank and acknowledge is to bear witness, to say *Sh'ma Yisrael* and to live in accord with its hope of Oneness. When we have done wrong, causing hurt, and seek to make amends, to restore Oneness, the way of *teshuva*, of turning and returning, begins with self-acknowledgment, *vidui - l'hitvadot*, from yet again the same root, *yud, daled, hey*, the root of who we are, each one of us as a *yehudi*. So too, we each stand as *Yehudi'im* with our ancestor *Yehuda* when he approaches Yosef to acknowledge past wrong and offer sublime plea on behalf of our brother Binyamin. To acknowledge and to thank is our calling as Jews and it is how each of us is called.

In this week of warmth and memory, may the meaning of one day remind us that simply in our waking, everyday is one of thanksgiving.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor