

What Do We Celebrate When We Celebrate Thanksgiving?

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Now is the time to see the world and its infinite needs. Thanksgiving calls upon us to volunteer, even though we are busy. Thanksgiving calls upon us to give charity, even though things are tight. And if we are lucky enough to possess wealth, Thanksgiving summons us to share our wealth through philanthropic contributions.

Thanksgiving could not come at a better time. In the midst of the rapid change that characterizes modern life, we welcome this anchor of tradition. At this time of economic anxiety, we welcome the joys of family and friends, of home and hearth. In an era of uncertainty about the state of our country and the state of the world, we welcome the calm, the peace, the comfort that Thanksgiving brings.

What do we celebrate when we celebrate Thanksgiving? We celebrate the important truth that God has endowed humanity with God-like qualities. These Godly attributes include our abilities to reason, to distinguish between right and wrong, to exercise free will, to invent new medicines and new technologies, to dream new dreams.

Great responsibilities come with the God-like capacities we possess. We are nothing less than co-partners with God in the perfection of creation. Each and every one of us shares in the responsibility to live up to our God-given qualities, to strive for moral perfection in every day life. God wants us every human being to become the most morally concerned and sensitive person you can possibly be.

What do we celebrate when we celebrate Thanksgiving? We celebrate the all important truth that every human being possesses infinite worth. As it is written in our American Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Every human being possesses the right to be treated with respect, dignity, kindness, compassion, and justice.

Every holy day is a window into the mind of God. On Thanksgiving, God wants us to grow in our capacity for appreciation and gratitude. God wants us to count our blessings and learn not to take so much for granted. God wants us to share our blessings, to share our good fortune with those who are less fortunate. God wants us to experience one of life's greatest joys, which is helping others to get more joy out of their lives, helping others to breathe a little easier in this world.

So Thanksgiving is all about us doing special acts of caring, compassion, generosity, and hospitality for the homeless, the poor, the sick, the elderly. Thanksgiving offers us a vision of family members doing incredibly loving acts for other family members – not

just on Thanksgiving Day, but every day. Thanksgiving presents a vision of strangers doing incredibly loving acts for other strangers, not just on Thanksgiving Day, but every day.

The ideals of Thanksgiving are particularly important for us to hear right now. The recession's punishing effect on jobs and wages has caused the number of Americans who lack consistent access to adequate food to rise last year to 49 million people.

49 million!

One third of these human beings are in the category called "very low food security," meaning a lack of money has forced them to skip meals, cut portions, or otherwise forgo food at some point. Also due to the recession, soup kitchens and food pantries are really hurting right now. Demand is up. Contributions are down. According to the national conference on citizenship, 72 percent of Americans are devoting less time to volunteerism and other civic activities.

Thanksgiving could not come at a better time. Thanksgiving opens our eyes that now is not the time for us to turn inwards. Now is the time for us to turn outwards. Now is the time to see the world and its infinite needs. Thanksgiving calls upon us to volunteer, even when we are busy. Thanksgiving calls upon us to give charity, even though things are tight. And if we are lucky enough to possess wealth, Thanksgiving summons us to share our wealth through philanthropic contributions.

Economic recession must never put on hold our God-given responsibility to make a better world for all of justice, compassion, and peace.

Permit me to conclude with this final thought. Our American culture encourages us to buy things: big homes, fancy cars, the newest electronic toys. Of course, material possessions are nice to have. But the problem with possessions is, after a while, they begin to own us. After a while, we start thinking the key to happiness is making lots of money and owning lots of stuff.

Thanksgiving reminds us of what we all too often forget. Possessions are not what makes us happy. The most important things in life – love, friendship, and community – money can never buy!

Every holy day is a window into the mind of God. On Thanksgiving, God wants us to understand what shelter really means. Possessions do not protect us from the storms of life. True shelter is found in loving relationships. True shelter is found in belonging to a caring community like your Temple Sinai.

What do we celebrate when we celebrate Thanksgiving? We celebrate the beautiful truth that true shelter is to be found in God's guidance, nature's goodness, and each other's love.