

My friends, tonight's is a Thanksgiving sermon. I can't imagine a pulpit rabbi not talking about Thanksgiving either last week in advance, or tonight, the next day. But if you saw the sermon title I posted on Facebook and Twitter, it could have easily confused you. That's why I made sure to mention that it had to do with Thanksgiving. The number keeps changing and may well have changed since I wrote this out, but at the time I wrote it the title of this sermon was "How to Get Seventy-Four Likes on Facebook."

Here is how I did it. I posted the following: *Let today remind us of the importance of trying to live every day with a feeling of gratitude. Happy Thanksgiving, everybody!* And by the way, when I went back to Facebook to copy the exact wording of my post, I saw the number had gone up to seventy-five.

Evidently, people liked the idea of trying to live with a sense of gratitude. But I am no genius for coming up with that idea. I'm just Jewish, and this is a very Jewish idea.

Let me start discussing this by sharing a conversation we had around a bonfire, making smores and talking at the Silverman's home, who hosted the last 3D@CST¹ session. Our topic was why do we need organized religion and Jewish law? Isn't it enough just to be a good person? One of the things we talked about was prayer, and the kids seemed genuinely surprised when I told them that the reason I pray is not because I believe God needs my prayers. *I* need my prayers, and giving thanks is just one of the reasons I need prayer. Would I remember to be thankful, or at least try hard to be, every single day? I don't know the answer, but I do know the following by heart (in Hebrew, but here I will use the *Siddur Lev Shalem* translation):

We thank You, for You are ever our God and the God of our ancestors; You are the bedrock of our lives, the shield that protects us in every generation. We thank You

¹ Dessert, Discussion, and Debate@Congregation Shaarey Tefilla; our older teen program.

and sing Your praises—for our lives that are in Your hands, for our souls that are under Your care, for Your miracles that accompany us each day, and for Your wonders and Your gifts that are with us each moment—evening, morning, and noon. You are the one who is good, whose mercy is never-ending; the one who is compassionate, whose love is unceasing. We have always placed our hope in You. For all these blessings many Your name be praised and exalted, our sovereign, always and forever. May all that lives thank you always, and faithfully praise Your name forever, God of our deliverance and help. Barukh atah Adonai, Your name is goodness and praise of You is fitting.

Perhaps you recognize this prayer in English. Some may recognize it more easily by its first three words in Hebrew, *Modim anachnu lach*. It is the penultimate blessing in the Amidah, one of the parts that never changes, so for a Jew who prays daily, this prayer is said three or four times every single day. How can I forget to be thankful when I am reciting these sacred words? That is but one reason I say that I need my prayers far more than God needs anything from me. God may, and does, want things from me, but God does not need anything from me.

This is but one example of how Judaism tries to build a sense of gratitude into our lives. Another is the rabbinic law that tells us to recite one hundred blessings per day. I would be perfectly comfortable paraphrasing that law as asking us to look for at least one hundred times per day to recognize the presence of God in the world. And as I have shared with you before, there is the Jewish prayer recited after a successful visit to the facilities. A properly functioning body is indeed something that is too easy to take for granted, but is something for which those so blessed should be ever thankful.

And so, my friends, that is how I got at least seventy-four Likes on Facebook. I simply shared the Jewish perspective that every day, not once a year or even three times a year on our Pilgrimage Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot,

but every day is a day to give thanks to God. As I said earlier, this clearly resonated with at least seventy-four people. And for each of those seventy-four Likes, I am thankful.