

# CHAYEI SARAH: Ger v'Toshav - a Jewish Thanksgiving

Rabbi David Gutterman –

David Gutterman. Thanksgiving is a holiday when we can act both as Ger and Toshav. It celebrates a Jewish value.

CHAYE SARAH: A Jewish Thanksgiving

What was the famous F. Scott Fitzgerald quip? 'The sign of an intelligent person is to hold two contradictory ideas...at the same time.' I'm not saying that Jews are an enigma wrapped in a riddle surrounded by a conundrum, but we do live in two worlds at the same time. We live in 2005 and 5766 simultaneously. No other time of year best exemplifies this phenomenon in a positive way as Thanksgiving.

But first, let's learn a fundamental lesson from father Abraham. Seeking to buy a burial plot for his beloved wife, Sara, Abraham utters a sentiment that may very well be part of our Jewish DNA. His comment to the would-be seller is: "ger v'toshav anoki imachem - I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." Here, one has to be a tad more precise. In Biblical Hebrew, a ger is a temporary resident whereas a toshav is a permanent resident. Dare I invoke an image from the last Jewish holiday: a ger lives in a sukka and a toshav lives in a villa.

If one were to ask for a one-line Henny Youngman approach to the history of Jews in the diaspora - any diaspora - it might very well be, ger v'toshav anokhi imachem. We are part of and a part from - at the same time. (Sometimes of our own volition, other times willy nilly) Yet, I think that Thanksgiving is one of those great precious and pareve opportunities to be both a ger and a toshav; to be fully participatory and assimilated in this quintessentially American tradition and yet, to do so from a posture of Jewish values. (By the way, keep in mind, as Dr. Norman Lamm has often said: assimilation is not the problem - it's just that Jews tend to assimilate the wrong things!) Thanksgiving is perhaps, a good thing to assimilate. Let me explain.

I challenge you to rediscover the very origin and meaning of the name Jew. It is our shared name. If you look again at the naming section of the Torah you will discover a wonderful and not-often-enough-spoken-of-truth. Why is Yehuda (Judah), who is the eponym of the Jewish people, given this name? Because, "ha'pa'am odeh et Hashem - this time," says his mother Leah, "I thank G-d." The very name Yehudi (Jew) means thanksgiving.

In his *Celebrating Life*, Rabbi Jonatahn Sacks writes: "There is one spiritual discipline which religion once gave us and which we still need. It is the simple act of saying 'thank you' to G-d...for the things that we do have: family, friends, life itself with its counterpoint of pleasure and pain, the sheer exaltation of knowing that we are here when we might not have been. Gratitude, the acknowledgement that what we have is a gift, is one of the most profound religious emotions." And may I add, it is one of the most fundamental of Jewish acts.

Happy Thanksgiving and Shabbat Shalom

David

(Submitted by Nisson Shulman - from his website, "Rabbi Gutterman's inTorah.net".)