



Vayeitzei

To be Jewish is to be Grateful

The essence of our Judaism is gratitude. Parshat Vayeitzei describes how after the births of her first three children Leah felt particularly despondent and this was reflected in the names she gave them.

But, when she gave birth to her fourth child she declared, “ha’paam odeh et Hashem”, “this time I will give thanks to Hashem” and therefore she called his name Yehuda, from the word ‘todah’ which means thankful.

Fascinatingly, Yehuda was the only tribe to survive and remain intact and to this day we are descendants of Yehuda and therefore we are called Yehudim or Jews. So, to be grateful is an essential part of our Jewish character. And this is reflected in many ways, for example, in our shul services, of course, we stand when the ark is open and we stand as well for the most important prayers. But in addition, we stand for thanksgiving prayers such as Mizmor L’toda, psalm 100, which we say every weekday morning, or via Vayavarech David, also in the morning service, which includes sentiments attitude and also, Mizmor Shir Le’yom Ha’sabbat, the psalm for the Sabbath day within which we say, “tov le’hodot, l’Hashem, “it is good to be grateful to the Lord” and we stand for Hallel and so on.

There is a further way in which this is expressed. We have in Judaism a very strong concept of shlichut, that is, representation. “Shlucho shel adam kemoto”, my

representative is my extended arm, and in a halakhic context can actually represent me as if I am doing what he or she is doing.

However, there is no concept of shlichut, of representation, of an ambassador's role, when it comes to gratitude. If I feel grateful to somebody, I should pick up the phone, I should write the letter and not rely on somebody else to convey my appreciation.

And this is why in the repetition of the Amidah, the Chazan recites all the blessings and we respond Amen, with one exception. And that is Modim. When it comes to the thanksgiving blessing, we all must recite it.

No wonder, therefore, that the very first words that we utter every morning are ‘modeh ani le’fenacha’, we give thanks to Hashem for enabling us to live on yet another day. From the very moment that Judah was born, we as Jews feel eternally grateful to those who brought us into this world, to those who have blessed us and more than anything, to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, to Almighty God, who continues to bless us always.

Shabbat Shalom.