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Giving Thanks

Elliot Skiddell

In the autumn of 1621 the Pilgrims, along with their Native American friends, gathered to celebrate the bounty of their harvest. The Pilgrims were probably drawing on their knowledge and love of the Bible by emulating the “rejoicing before God” at the time of the fall harvest that is described in the Book of Leviticus [Chapter 16].

When Columbus “discovered” America, Luis de Torres was the expedition’s multi-lingual interpreter. Among the expedition’s discoveries was “a large wild bird with a head and body very similar to the peacock.” De Torres knew Biblical Hebrew and was reminded of the birds presumed to be peacocks that were carried back by King Solomon from his visit to the Queen of Sheba. In the Bible, these birds were called *tukki*. This just may be the origin of the word “turkey.”

In modern Hebrew the bird we call turkey is called “*hodu*” and interestingly that word can also mean “give thanks!” Psalm 136 begins with the words “*Hodu L’Adonai Ki Tov*”, “give thanks to God for all that is good.”

The American custom of setting aside a *national* day of Thanksgiving gives us an opportunity to express our appreciation as a diverse community sharing in a common tradition. This is surely one of the unique and wonderful aspects of life in the United States for which we are very grateful.

We are thankful for family and friends and the love and warmth that their presence provides, as we are thankful for the ability to give love to others. We are blessed to live in this great nation, yet we are anxious for our daughters and sons who serve to protect and defend us. We are appreciative of the diversity we are offered in our spiritual lives and the opportunity to enjoy the pursuit of the spirit in at least equal measure to the pursuit of our material well-being. Our lives are filled with unbounded goodness and for this we give thanks on Thanksgiving and every day.

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*Elliot Skiddell is rabbi of Reconstructionist Congregation Beth Emeth, located at 36 Franklin Ave. in Hewlett. Friday Evening Services begin at 8:00 PM. Saturday morning services at 9:30 AM. Please join us! For more information call 374-9220 or go to our updated website [www.rcbe.org](http://www.rcbe.org)*