

Today's Israel: Giving Thanks Amid the Darkness

More than 160 years ago, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation that all Americans should “observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.” Thus began the cherished American holiday, Thanksgiving.

It has always been one of my favorite holidays, and I have many fond memories of our Thanksgiving table growing up in the U.S. While we don't observe Thanksgiving in Israel, the theme of giving thanks is intricately woven throughout Jewish life and holidays—which has paradoxically been felt exceptionally intensely during this past year of tragedy and war.

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But what strikes me most about Lincoln's proclamation for a day of Thanksgiving was *when* it was issued. In 1863, the nation Lincoln led was involved in the Civil War, the bloodiest conflict in all of U.S. history. Yet in the midst of this struggle which pitted brother against brother, the president called upon his countrymen to set aside time to give thanks to God—in effect, declaring to the nation: even in the toughest of times, we must appreciate our blessings.

This message particularly resonates with me this year as we in Israel recently marked the somber one-year anniversary of the horrific Oct. 7, 2023, terrorist attacks. More than 1,200 lives were lost—sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers and friends brutally murdered, some right in their own homes—in the greatest single-day loss of Jewish lives since the Holocaust.

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More than 200 innocent Israelis were taken as hostage. As I write this, nearly 100 of these *remain* hostages, somewhere in the Hamas terror tunnels deep beneath Gaza. For over a year, families have lived with the anxiety of not knowing whether they will ever see the faces of their loved ones again.

Today, over 400 days later, the fight continues as our enemies wage war on tiny Israel from seven different fronts. Today, we continue fighting for our right to live and for the survival of our beloved Jewish homeland.

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