

Count your blessings – and make a difference

Thought for the Day

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Next week Jews around the world will mark a very unusual anniversary – the rarest of all the observances of a religion that sees ritual as part of daily life. This takes place every 28 years, when, according to one of the calculations discussed in the Talmud, the sun returns to its original position in the heavens at the same time on the same day. This so-called “blessing of the sun” is not a blessing in the sense of bestowing good wishes, but a simple short prayer of thanksgiving, like those said before food and drink, or over natural phenomena like thunder or rainbows.

You don’t need to take the creation story of Genesis literally to engage with this. Just as we give thanks that we have food to eat, clothes to wear, roofs over our head, so we show appreciation that, in the larger-scale workings of the world, we are not afflicted by fire, flood, or famine. It is in that way that Judaism incorporates ritual into daily life – by investing the mundane with an element of spirituality.

It does us no harm to reflect on our own precarious survival. We know only too well that there are millions who lack the very things for which we give thanks – whether because their lives have been blighted by earthquakes or tidal waves, forest fires or freak floods, or through poverty, unemployment, debt, and homelessness in our own back yards.

Last week I attended the launch of a new anti-poverty project, the Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund, which took as its motto Jimmy Carter’s echo of John Wesley:

“My faith *demands* – this is not optional –
that I do whatever I can,
wherever I am,
whenever I can,
for as long as I can,
with whatever I have,
to try to make a difference.”

That’s true of every faith I know of – and it’s a spiritual challenge to us all: with the blessings I have that others may lack, what difference am I going to make, here in this place, today?

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