

HOW CAN I TAKE MY HOSTING TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

Through exploring the value of gratitude at a community event, learners will develop new insights that support their ability to cultivate gratitude at times when it might feel challenging to be grateful.

At-a-Glance:

Ever wondered how to elevate your hosting game? This resource will help you design and lead a purposeful and meaningful gathering for your community. Using the model of the *Seudat Hodaya* (Gratitude Feast) ritual, participants will experience gratitude through reflection, discussion, singing, and eating.



Time Estimate:

- 60-90 minutes



Best Uses:

- Teens, college students, community members, grandparents, in person or virtual

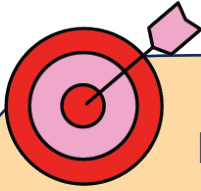


Materials Needed:

- Send invitations expressing the purpose of the gratitude feast (this can be a simple email or a printed invitation)
- Printed quotes on gratitude - enough for everyone to have one hidden under their plate or taped to the bottom of their glass (can use multiples of same quote)
- Printed text to scatter around the table(s) - Call Me Back text and Talmud text
- Venue to sit down and have a meal
- Food and drink (or consider organizing a potluck to share the responsibility.) as well as plates, cups cutlery etc.
- Playlist and a way to play it - if you plan to sing anything you may want to have that on there too

LET'S GET STARTED

15-20
min



FRAME THE ISSUE

Note to facilitator: Lead this section with your planning/hosting committee and work together to design the event. Make sure to assign roles so as to make sure the work is evenly distributed.

Within Jewish ritual there is a feast called a Seudat Hodaya (literally “Feast of Thanks” or a Gratitude Feast). As opposed to the American Thanksgiving or Jewish holidays, it does not take place on a specific day on the calendar, but rather is an organic framework for one to give thanks from something specific (from the big, like recovering from serious illness or surviving dangerous journey or an accident, reaching a milestone or even something small that you are grateful for).

- There are no specific rituals related to it, but it is customary to share words of Jewish wisdom, to sing, and of course eat, drink, and be merry.
- To help decide what we would you want to throw a Gratitude Feast in honor of, let us watch [this](#) clip of a Carvel advertisement from the 90s about celebrating the small things



Facilitator prompts discussion:

- Are you feeling moved to celebrate one of the “little things” or something momentous with our gathering?
- What specifically are you thankful for? How do you want to express your thanks?
- What is something big or small that we might want to express our gratitude for, as a community?

To design our gratitude feast, let us consider the following:

- What are we celebrating/grateful for (it can be something small)
- Who do we want to invite to celebrate with you?
- What food will we serve?
- What will be on our playlist? What songs or niggunim would we like to lead?
- What words of gratitude or wisdom do we want to share?

30-45
min



EXPLORE THE VALUE: GRATITUDE

Welcome everyone! We are so glad you could join us today. We have gathered together for a celebration of gratitude. But what is gratitude? We are going to explore that together. I encourage eating and drinking throughout. We will pause every once in a while to sing, study, reflect, and share gratitude.



Once everyone has arrived and is settled, host(s) prompt guests:

- Under your plate is a quote about gratitude! I would love to invite you to find a partner, share your quotes and discuss what the quotes mean to you. What is the message that the quote communicates? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Note to facilitator: If time allows and it feels like people want more of this activity, you can have everyone swap quotes with their partner and find a new partner and repeat the exercise.

GOING DEEPER: JEWISH WISDOM AND ACTIVITY

Now that we have explored some ideas around gratitude I would love to hear from each of you. Each person will have the opportunity to share one word that you connect with "gratitude."

The Seudat Hodaya or "thanksgiving feast" is first mentioned in the Torah in Genesis 21:8, "And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned." In the times of the Holy Temple, the Todah (Thanksgiving) sacrifice was an opportunity for a thankful individual to express gratitude to G-d for His benevolence—specifically for delivery from a dangerous situation. Nowadays Seudat Hodayas are held to show gratitude for rites of passage, recovery from illness or injury, or to just have an opportunity to gather and share our thanks.



Facilitator prompts group:

- Can you think of a time when you went through something difficult and decided to celebrate after it? What was that like?
- How if at all is it different to express gratitude for big things as compared to small things?



Note to facilitator: here you might choose either to have a break to eat or keep the momentum going and launch into the next activity. For the next activity, there are two options of texts to share or you might share both: Option 1 is from the Jewish Talmud. The second is an excerpt from an interview with Rachel Goldberg, mother of Hersh Goldberg Polin (z"l).

OPTION A

Talmud Berakhot 58a - from Jewish oral tradition this text compiled around 200 CE gets at the idea of different blessings that are appropriate at different moments.

The Gemara relates: Ben Zoma once saw a multitude of people while standing on a stair on the Temple Mount. He immediately recited: Blessed are you Who knows all secrets and Blessed are you Who created all these to serve me.

Explaining his custom (and what he meant by all who serve me), he would say: How much effort did Adam the first man exert before he found bread to eat: He plowed, sowed, reaped, sheaved, threshed, winnowed in the wind, separated the grain from the chaff, ground the grain into flour, sifted, kneaded, and baked and only thereafter he ate.

And I, on the other hand, wake up and find all of these prepared for me. Human society employs a division of labor, and each individual benefits from the service of the entire world.

Similarly, how much effort did Adam the first man exert before he found a garment to wear? He sheared, laundered, combed, spun and wove, and only thereafter he found a garment to wear. And I, on the other hand, wake up and find all of these prepared for me. Members of all nations, merchants and craftsmen, diligently come to the entrance of my home, and I wake up and find all of these before me.



Facilitator prompts group:

- What is this text communicating?
- What is something that you usually take for granted that you would like to express gratitude for?
- What or who enabled you to be here today, sitting together and eating this food? What or who enabled us to have the food in front of us? (e.g. farmers, the animals, the chefs, the food transporters, the event organizers, etc.)



OPTION B

"Well, Dayanu means it would have been enough for us. I think it's 14 verses of explaining what steps were taken in order to be redeemed. And along the way, we keep saying, if God had only done this, it would have been enough. If God had only done. Now, the truth is, I don't know that we mean that. We don't mean if you had just brought us to the tip of the Red Sea, but you hadn't opened it up, it would have been enough. I actually think that would have been a big bummer. But what we're trying to say, I think the whole point of the Haggadah is actually, it's this gratitude training workshop. And sometimes in life, we have to be able to stop, even when we haven't won the whole lottery. And we have to be able to say, I am blessed, I am blessed right here. And that I think is the message of Dayenu, is we have to be able to stop and acknowledge that maybe we don't have it all, but what we have is a blessing."



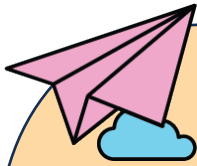
- From Call Me Back - with Dan Senor: The Paradox of Passover 2025 -
with Rachel Goldberg Polin, Apr 7, 2025



Facilitator prompts group:

- What was a time when you did not have it all - or were even in a bad situation
- when you were able to reframe what you had as a blessing?
- Where in your life might this perspective be welcome?

15-20
min



REFLECT AND PROMPT ACTION

I would love to invite us to each write a short gratitude blessing. You can use these line starters as a guide:

May I take the time to pause and express gratitude for _____. I have gone through _____ and been supported by _____. May I share my gratitude with _____. May I remember that _____ has made it possible to _____. Even though it is hard to _____, may I remember to _____. May I remember to send gratitude inward to myself, to show myself compassion for _____. Even though I have not yet _____, may I remember that I have _____ and _____. I will continue hoping for _____ and dreaming for _____.



Facilitator invites participants to share a line from their prayer. Then facilitator prompts group to share/discuss:

- What was it like to be at an event all about gratitude? How if at all has this event changed your thoughts or feelings about gratitude, or ability to express gratitude?
- Find a person in this room that you are grateful for. Go and share gratitude with them!