

# SPECTRUM

## Metanoia by John Valk

Thanksgiving/  
Succoth

Two important autumn religious festivals occur on the same day this year. They are Thanksgiving and Succoth. The first has its origins in the Christian tradition. The other, more ancient, stems from the Jewish tradition. Both recognise that the abundance we receive from the earth comes ultimately from God. Both affirm the importance of acknowledging this with thanksgiving.

The Jewish festival of Succoth (or *sukkos*) has a long history, reaching back 3000 years or more. It stems from the time Jews first settled in Palestine, after their exodus from Egypt and long sojourn in the Sinai Desert. After the people had finished gathering their crops from the fields, they observed a great festival. They gave thanks to God, through prayers, music, singing, and eating.

The festivity, which was to last seven days, also involved a pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem, or to a synagogue in the local town. With a great influx of people to the central locations, the building of "booths," temporary huts made of green branches, became necessary (Deut. 16: 13-15). Hence the origin of Succoth as the "pilgrimage festival of Booths, or Tabernacles." Jerusalem, in particular, swelled on these occasions, both with people and greenery. While on the pilgrimage, and huddled in their booths, the people were encouraged to remember and reflect upon the great deeds of God: rescue from slavery in Egypt, and the granting of a promised land "flowing with milk and honey" (Lev. 23: 39-42).

Succoth was a joyous occasion. According to one author, it was "the merriest time of the year; there was song and rejoicing throughout the land." That merriment had its excesses, as might be expected. On occasion it degenerated into bacchanalia, to which the prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah responded harshly. All in all, however, Succoth remained a time of

remembrance and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, as a harvest festival in the Christian tradition, originated in

It amounts to little more than a thanklessness, a fundamental inability to appreciate, let alone recognise, all that which we have. That such thanklessness might occur here in North America should not surprise us. Daily we are barraged by advertising, informing us of our unfulfilled lives. Fulfilment and contentment will be achieved, we are led to believe, by more



1620 in Plymouth, Massachusetts. It represents heartfelt thanks to God for the bounty of the first harvest of the first Pilgrims to New England. They joined with native people, who themselves had given thanks to God the Creator since time immemorial. The native people helped the unprepared Pilgrims, teaching them ways to survive the sometimes harsh conditions. In 1863 Abraham Lincoln, persuaded by a petition from Sarah Josepha Hale, composer of the children's song "Mary Had a Little Lamb," proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a day of prayerful thanksgiving for Americans.

An important ritual for both Thanksgiving and Succoth is the communal meal. Eating has always been integrally linked to the festivity, perhaps because a dinner is so often a communal and celebrative occasion. The communal table then becomes the very place to utter thanksgiving, not least to those who produce, make, even prepare, the things we have.

Both religious traditions recognise that *not* giving thanks to God for the bounty we enjoy carries its own message.

"things" or adventures. But do these cravings and desires—our wants—ever cease? Do they ever satisfy the restless heart?

Human needs are an entirely different matter. It is interesting to know how little we actually *do* need to survive. We really *need* only the love and forgiveness of God and neighbour, and basic food, shelter, and clothing. When such basic needs satisfy the heart we prosper spiritually, emotionally and physically. All the rest has the tendency to distract, to preoccupy our time and energy, to divide our allegiances. Gratitude for basic needs has a way of refocusing our thoughts and actions.

At some point, perhaps as we recline from our sumptuous Thanksgiving meal, our thoughts might focus on the *ultimate* source of what we have. That ultimate source can be only one of two things as I see it: a purely unexplainable accident, or loving God. Showing thanks and appreciation to God recognises the ultimate source of all that is, and can be expressed in creative and thoughtful ways. Showing thanks and appreciation for something that is ultimately little more than accidental, happen-stance and unexplainable, however, is more difficult. Some, I suppose, would consider a good belch more than sufficient.

## Pride by Raphael

### COMING OUT: THE NEXT GENERATION

On Wednesday, October 11, UNBF and STU will join other universities across the country in celebrating National Coming Out Day. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, this day has been presented as a Blue Jeans Day Campaign; a reminder to the entire world that homosexuals and bisexuals are just as "normal" as everyone else. Why celebrate it? Well, it is more a day of affirmation rather than a celebration per se. A day was chosen when the importance of "coming out" was acknowledged, as an important step in the process of self-acceptance as a gay or bisexual man or woman. Although it is somewhat easier to be gay or bisexual in this day and age, coming out is still nerve-racking. Let me clarify certain positions.

First, coming out is the process by which a homosexual/bisexual man or woman figuratively leaves the closet that society has forced us to remain in for many years. Symbolically, it is accepting oneself as gay, lesbian or bisexual and recognizing that there is nothing wrong with who we are in terms of our sexual orientation. Second, the choosing of a "day" to "celebrate" our sexual orientation and the process of acceptance, is really a moot point. The importance of National Coming Out Day, is within its significance as a marker of the right we have to be ourselves without discrimination, prejudice and fear of harm. It is also the marker of acknowledging the fact that homosexuals and bisexuals are as much a part of society as the next person. Third, the subheading of "Blue Jeans Day Campaign" is a humorous poke at the misperceptions that society has concerning gays and bisexuals. Almost everyone wears blue jeans, and the point of the campaign is to make everyone aware that a person who is homosexual/bisexual leads similar lives like their heterosexual counterparts. The play on an item of clothing as important to an awareness of sexual orientation, helps realize the gravity of the situation. Gay and bisexual men and women, and those who support/accept us, often are harassed verbally and/or physically by homophobic people who truly do not understand sexual orientation (heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual) at all. Thus the creation of National Coming Out Day.

As an individual who is gay (among the many other roles we play as a person), coming out is an important decision. At some point in their lives, gay/bisexual individuals need to come to terms with their sexuality/sensuality. This is not easy, given the remaining negative views that persist in these supposedly enlightened times, concerning homosexuals and bisexuals. The decision to acknowledge and express one's sexual orientation or not, is entirely up to the individual. When I say express one's sexual orientation, I don't mean being flamboyant in stating your sexual orientation, nor am I saying that it is an in-your-face attitude. What I do mean, is that one must realize that one's preferences are not wrong, nor are they abnormal, disgusting or perverted. No one can make this decision for you, it must be freely decided and once given, there is very little that can be done to turn it back.

The process of coming out, is not a once in a lifetime experience. Granted you do not have to come out to everyone everyday, but coming out is a continuous process. Since you meet new people throughout your life, there is bound to be an outing moment. There are a few guidelines to coming out. First, make sure you really think things through; after all, this decision will affect your life. As a good start, talk to someone who is supportive of homosexuals and bisexuals, whether it is a local counsellor, a close friend, a gay/bisexual friend, anyone. Find out all you can about homosexuality and bisexuality; the more informed you are, the better you will be able to decide. Next, come out at your own pace to people you can trust. Also, remember to come out at a fairly neutral time and place. A public area is not good, and coming out during a special event (e.g. a birthday, Christmas, etc.) may not be a good idea, especially if the people you come out to react negatively. Every time this particular event occurs, they may be reminded of the coming out process.

Regardless of whether you decide to openly acknowledge your sexual orientation, or accept it and do nothing about it, coming out helps us accept ourselves and, to an extent, lets others understand, and at least tolerate who we are.



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