

An Afghani-Jewish folktale tells of two beggars who went each morning to the king's palace to ask for food, each receiving a daily loaf of bread. One of the beggars would always thank the king for his generosity. The other would always thank God for giving the king sufficient wealth that he could give to others so graciously.

The second beggar's words stung the king, and so he decided to teach him a lesson. He ordered his royal baker to create two identical loaves but to place inside one of them precious gems, making sure that it was this loaf that arrived in the hands of the first beggar. The baker did as instructed, handing the jewel-filled bread to the one who always thanked the king himself.

When the first beggar felt how heavy and hard his loaf was, he concluded that it was part of a poorly made batch and asked his friend to exchange with him; the second beggar, wishing to oblige, agreed. Then the two men parted ways. When the second beggar arrived home, finding his loaf filled with gems, he thanked God for his good fortune. No longer would he need to rely on others for food!

The next morning, the king was surprised to find the first beggar at the palace gate and not his compatriot. "Did you mix up the two loaves I had you prepare?" he asked the baker. "No, your majesty," replied his servant. "I did exactly as you said."

"And what did you do with the bread that you received yesterday?" the king asked the beggar. "It was hard and poorly baked so I traded it with my friend," the man replied. Only then did the monarch realize that all blessings, indeed, come from God who can make a poor man rich and a rich man poor. Not even a king can change the will of Heaven!

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Tomorrow we come together for Thanksgiving, joining around tables laden with food and surrounded by family and friends in order to express gratitude for our many blessings. To be sure, compliments should be paid to the hostesses and chefs, those whose hard labor went into preparing beautiful place-settings, sumptuous feasts, and an atmosphere of relaxation and comfort. On this day of appreciation and gratefulness, however, we might also pause to acknowledge the presence of God who makes all this abundance possible.

There are many ways to elevate the Thanksgiving meal and make this day not only an occasion for food, family, and football but also an opportunity to reflect on shared values and gifts. Included below is a reflection guide prepared by American Jewish World Service which includes questions and activities to further deepen our holiday observance. As we gather around our tables this year, may we turn our gratitude into action!

<https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/AJWS-Thanksgiving-Reflection.pdf>

Wishing all of you and your families a very Happy Thanksgiving and an early Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Annie Tucker

