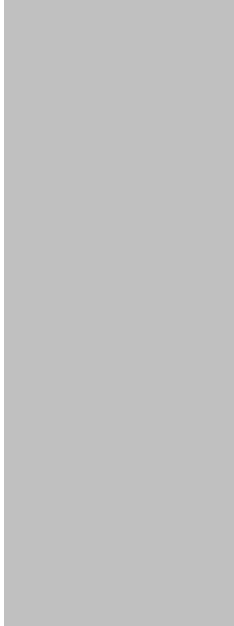


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## October 2004

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### From the Desk of Rabbi David E. Fass

#### *Thankfuls*

Many years ago I met some people who had an interesting custom. Every Friday night before dinner they went around the table and each person said something for which they were grateful. They called this their "thankfuls." It is so important to be grateful that every Hebrew blessing that begins Baruch attah Adonai... Praised (or blessed) are you, O God... is a statement of our thanks to the Eternal One. It is also something that we often find difficult:

A gentleman once told the Kotzker Rebbe that he had nothing for which to be thankful. His business was losing money; his wife had died; his son was not talking to him; and his house was too small.

"Take your thumb and index finger," the Rebbe directed the man. "Take a deep breath, and then place those fingers on your nose and squeeze to the point that you will not be able to breathe out. Do not breathe from your mouth."

As the man started to turn red, the Rebbe cautioned: "Do not take your fingers away until you cannot stand it any longer." Finally, the man released his grip and inhaled deeply. "Ah," the Rebbe concluded. "The air is what you most take for granted, and suddenly you are grateful to have it. Now, look at the rest of your life that same way and see all that you have taken for granted."

As a Yiddish proverb puts it, "If you are going to be miserable when you are sick, be thankful when you are well."

This month is our time for "thankfuls." It may seem very odd to celebrate this holiday of Sukkot that comes from a time so long ago and far away. Its symbols: the lulav, the

etrog, the Sukkah itself, are foreign to us. Literally. But the concept is not. To celebrate Sukkot is to celebrate the importance of gratitude. To celebrate is important. It is part of being human. To be grateful is even more important. It makes us even more human.

I am thankful for my wife and my children and my son-in-law and my grandchildren and my machatunim (my daughter's in-laws, for those of you who don't speak Latin) and my health and their health and my friends and all the wonderful people who help keep our congregation humming and all of you who are reading this... It is, thank God, a long list. This is only the first part. I'll keep going on my own. But instead of listening to me, I'd rather you start your own list of "thankfuls."

Baruch attah Adonai... Praised are you, O God, who gives us so many things for which to be thankful.

Hag Sameach. A happy and grateful Sukkot.

Rabbi Fass

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## Cantor's Notes

War is ugly and terrorism is worse. I am writing this article just a few days after the terrible violence in Russia and Israel. Inhuman and unprecedented in its cruelty, the three-day school siege in the North Ossetian town of Beslan in Russia, where 338 hostages, of which 158 were children, died, followed a suicide bomb attack outside a Moscow subway station, a near-simultaneous crash of two Russian planes on August 24, and the suicide bombing of two buses in Beer-Shevah.

Russia's conflict in the breakaway republic of Chechnya is part of global terrorism. The United States has declared war on all terrorists. Israel has called the actions of the Palestinians against Israel "acts of war." Russia, Israel and the USA are, as described the Russian Foreign Minister, "the crosshairs of terrorism, and forced to fight this universal evil. Yes, unfortunately, we live in a time of war. But how does a Jew fight a war and SHOULD we fight war at all? Torah has much to tell us in answering these questions. The very first Jew, Abraham, was certainly a man of peace. And yet, we read in Genesis 14, that when he needed to, he went to war. When his nephew Lot was captured, Abraham quickly went into action, saved Lot, defeated the occupying army, and ended the long war. He did not seek war, but in order to save a captive, one of the highest obligations in Judaism, Abraham was "forced" to wage war as the only means to save his nephew's life.

We now celebrate the holiday of Sukkot. Torah commands us to build a Sukkah. The essence of a "Sukkah" is that it be a "temporary" structure, because that conveys the idea of our dependence on God's protection. The sukkah comes to remind us that we are all vulnerable. But Jewish law also tells us that when it rains, even if the rain is only enough to spoil the taste of the soup, we may -- we must, in fact -- leave the sukkah for a safer place.

The current war compelled Israel, the United State and Russia to search and destroy terrorists by any means possible. Jews have long ago learned that our enemies are like an evil cancer. Failing to get rid of them will lead to more death.

In the evening prayer we recite -- "Ufros alenu sukkat shlomekha" -- "Spread over all of us Your sukkah of peace." May the "sukkah of shalom" protect us from our enemies and may God grant us courage, power and wisdom in this war against terrorism.

Cantor Sergei Schwartz