



# THIS LAND BELONGS TO NO ONE

*Thanksgiving Prayer Honoring our Ancestors and Native Peoples' Land*

*By Hila Ratzabi*

## INTRODUCTION

This prayer is intended to be said at the beginning of a Thanksgiving meal. For many of us, Thanksgiving can be a complicated holiday: on the one hand, we may feel drawn to the nostalgia of family meals and traditions we grew up with, but at the same time, we feel conflicted celebrating a day that for many Native peoples is a day of mourning. While some people may eschew the holiday altogether, for many Americans the holiday is a time to connect with family and express gratitude for the good things in our lives.

This prayer takes its inspiration from the verse in Psalm 24, “The earth is God’s.” We begin by acknowledging that this land belongs to no one. We then honor the ancestral Native peoples who cared for this land, followed by our own immigrant ancestors who endured hardship to come here. We then thank those who cooked our meal, and those who planted and harvested the food we eat. Finally, we state our commitment to sustaining the land for future generations.

*In preparing to bring this prayer to your Thanksgiving meal, answer the following question:*

### **WHOSE LAND DO YOU LIVE ON?**

The prayer includes a land acknowledgment, stating that we honor the Native peoples who were the original inhabitants of this land. In order to find out which tribal land you live on, visit the website [Native Land](http://NativeLand.com) and enter your address or city. Insert the name of your local tribe in the statement below.

*Before reciting the prayer, ask your guests to take a moment to reflect on their own ancestors:*

### **WHO ARE YOUR ANCESTORS?**

For many American Jews, our ancestors were immigrants from other countries. As we recite the prayer, you may insert the names of the countries your ancestors immigrated from. For Jews by choice, non-Jewish guests, and people of mixed Jewish heritage, your ancestors may have arrived to America in other ways: for example, the ancestors of African-Americans were brought to this land enslaved against their will. Hold these ancestors in mind as you recite this prayer.



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This land belongs to no one but God. The Earth was here before us and will endure after we are gone.

Let us walk gently upon this precious earth, taking only what we need, leaving little waste, nurturing the soil, revitalizing the land to sustain future generations.

This land we dwell upon today is the ancestral land of [insert name of local Native people]. We acknowledge their historical roots in this place, the many generations who were stewards of this land. We hear the echoes of their prayers to the Great Mother Earth and seek to learn from their wisdom.

We acknowledge the history of pain, disease, and bloodshed the Native peoples' endured when they were colonized. Though we can't reverse the course of history, let us not ignore it. Let us look history in the eye and accept its painful truth. Let us honor the memory of those who died on this land, who lost their sovereignty. Let us honor the Native people who, to this day, keep their sacred traditions and culture alive.

Our ancestors came to this country from [names of countries], often enduring hardship that laid the foundation for our freedom. We acknowledge their sacrifices so that we could enjoy better lives.

We are grateful for the bounty we enjoy today, the abundant variety of foods this earth provides. We acknowledge those who cooked this meal, [name the cooks!] and set this beautiful table. We acknowledge those who planted and harvested this food, many of whom are immigrants. We send them blessings for safety and freedom.

We commit to sustaining this earth so it will continue to sustain us, our children and grandchildren. We commit to give more and take less from this fragile earth.

**RECITE TOGETHER:**

*Thank you, God, for the land that sustains us, for our family and friends, and this sacred moment we are privileged to enjoy.*