

Giving Thanks

Parshat Vayetze, Genesis 28:10- 32:3

Haftarah: Hoshea 12:13

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This week's Thanksgiving holiday is a time to open our eyes. As Americans we think of the Pilgrims and Native Americans of the Wampanoag tribe that sat down to a meal to celebrate the bounty of the first white man's harvest in the New World. One that would not have been possible without Native American know-how! At the heart of this meal is the food of cooperation. Even across a great cultural divide, the Wampanoag tribe shared its knowledge of the local crops and local game and navigating the local rivers and ocean with the new arrivals from England, the Pilgrims who came over on the Mayflower in 1620.

This spirit of cooperation should be as much a part of our holiday celebrations as the turkey, yams and pumpkin pie! Cooperation between and among family members and friends is a good place to begin as we gather around the holiday table. And as we sit down together to over-eat we can begin a process that examines all that we have to be thankful for. Of course the Pilgrims of old based their own Thanksgiving feast on the fall Harvest festival of the Bible—we Jews call Sukkot. And they did in prayer give thanks to God for the abundance they had been blessed with. They were able to say aloud even though they had a very harsh passage across the ocean and arrived in the New World during a bitter winter where many perished, a thank you to the Holy One of Blessing for that which they were able to grow and harvest and build.

They acknowledged that their work together and the cooperation with the Wampanoag Indians made the difference in their lives.

In this week's parasha, our patriarch Jacob has a moment when he too opens his eyes to the blessings in his life. Jacob is fleeing the wrath of a very angry brother, Esau. Jacob managed (with the help of his mother Rebecca) to deceive their father into giving him the family blessing. And Jacob's eyes are opened to many things.

And so as he stops for the night on his journey to Haran to his mother's family, he lays down to sleep and has a vivid dream and vision. God speaks to him and offers him a blessing of protection and a covenantal promise following in the footsteps of his father Isaac and grandfather, Abraham.

Upon awakening, Jacob's awareness comes into focus, his eyes are open to a new possibility and new reality. "Surely God is present in this place and I did not know it." "How amazing is this place! This is none other than the abode of God." Jacob's reality is

changed. And he gives thanks there. Thanks to God for the promise of protection and the promise of abundance and the spirit cooperation that he will connect with God. This week's parasha outlines a special kind of Thanksgiving between Jacob and the Holy One of Blessing. From this time on out, Jacob our patriarch gives thanks to God and sets a tithe for God. (See verse 28: 22).

A promise of abundance by God is echoed by a sharing of abundance by Jacob. And the Pilgrims did the same. The Native Americans gave them the promise of abundance through sharing their farming knowledge and the Pilgrims shared their abundance with them.

And so, too, we should on this Thanksgiving open our own eyes to the abundance in our life- whether material abundance, or an abundance of love and family and friends, and give back.

One way to do so is to participate in the Jewish Federation and Board of Rabbis Fed Up with Hunger Campaign. Help bring some abundance to those who need it most. More than 1, 000, 000 people in our city do not have nutritious food or any food at all. They are hungry and their food insecurity reaches unparalleled heights. By participating in the Fed Up with Hunger Campaign we can share our abundance with others in many ways. Click on the link www.givelifemeaning.org to learn how you can open your eyes to the many ways to help, by donating, or volunteering or becoming a hunger advocate. We need to cooperate to defeat hunger in our city and our county.

This Thanksgiving the time has come to open our eyes to those that are hungry in our midst and how we might cooperate and act with compassion and caring.

Happy Thanksgiving