

November 18, 2021

Rabbi Wexler – *Vayishlah*

After a twenty-year estrangement, in this week's Torah portion, *Vayishlah*, twin brothers Jacob and Esau are finally (temporarily) reunited. As we are now only a week away from the holiday of Thanksgiving, I can't help but think of the role of gratitude in their encounter. Ahead of their reunion, Jacob sends many gifts as a peace-offering to his brother, Esau. When they finally see each other, Esau asks Jacob why he was so generous and sent so much. Jacob responds that he offers the gifts to him in the hope of finding favor in Esau's eyes. Esau exclaims: "*yesh li rav*. – I have much. Keep that which is yours," (Genesis 33:9). To which Jacob replies: "*yesh li kol*. – I have everything," (33:11).

The Kli Yakar (late 16th/early 17th century, Prague) picked up on this important exchange and reflected on the difference between having "a lot" and having "everything." He wrote that those who are bent on physical and materialistic pleasures never feel they have it all. Jacob, on the other hand, had a very different approach – "*yesh li kol* – I have it all." Those who set their sights on spiritual growth and accomplishment understand that, in terms of their materialistic standing, God has sent them exactly what they need. *Yesh li kol!* We mirror this sense of appreciation and gratitude every day in our morning blessings when we thank and praise God by saying: "*she'asah lee kol tzarkee* – You have provided for all of my needs." Judaism teaches that happiness should be based less on how much we have and more on the sense of gratitude and contentment for the blessings that fill our lives. In this week before Thanksgiving, Jacob teaches us an important lesson about gratitude which is echoed in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) where Ben Zoma says: "Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he/she has..."(Talmud—Avot 4:1).

This is the time of the year to be thankful for all that we have, but really, Thanksgiving is just a reminder. Our job is to find that sense of gratitude each and every day. What are you thankful for today? What will you be thankful for tomorrow?

I am thankful for the love of family and friends. I am grateful for our wonderful TBS community. And I am thankful that we continue to find ways to come together safely, both in person and virtually, to give thanks, to celebrate the blessings in our lives, and to help each other say: "*yesh li kol*."

I hope you will join us (either in-person or virtually) tonight at 7PM at TBS as we are honored to host this year's Thanksgiving Interfaith Unity Program sponsored by the Cherry Hill Township Human Relations Advisory Committee. And then, please join us this Shabbat as we are both excited and grateful that for the first time in a long time, we are able to welcome a scholar-in-residence to TBS. We will be joined this Shabbat by Rabbi Bec Richman, a *soferet* (scribe) who will be teaching about her wonderful work and art.

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom and wonderful Thanksgiving filled with joy and an abundance of gratitude.