

A Thanksgiving for Earth Angels

Sometimes a homecoming can be fraught with anxiety and uncertainty. Unresolved issues, comments made and regretted but never addressed are like open wounds that painfully divide family. How will we ever heal? Will we be able to restore a sense of trust and connection? Will our Thanksgiving be a time of renewal that brings our friends and loved ones closer or will it be yet another gathering at which the tension is only relieved when we say our goodbyes after forced hugs and clinch-teethed smiles?

This week's Torah portion, *Vayislach*, features a reunion that could have ended badly. Our ancestor Jacob was heading home and anticipated an uneasy encounter with his estranged brother Esav. To ease the stress and to prepare his brother for reconciliation, Jacob sent *malakhim* to his brother (Genesis 32:4). *Malakhim* can be translated as "messengers" and "angels." According to many traditional commentators, there is a great deal in common between the role of an angel and a human messenger. Both are thought to be on missions that bring peace and increase harmony. Indeed, it does not take us too long to recall and recognize that our lives have been blessed time and time again by people who have gone out of their way to help heal the wounds that afflict us. Thank God for those *malakhim*, those "earth angels" among us that bless our lives.

As we are preparing to gather in celebration of Thanksgiving, let us acknowledge that the thanks we give is not just for the bountiful harvest. The thanks we give is not just for the food we eat at well-appointed tables. The thanks we give is not just for the warmth and comfort of our homes.

This year, let us also say Grace for the values that unite us. Let us say Grace for the moral and ethical code that good people share regardless of their faith, ethnic origin, the color of their skin, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. Let us say Grace for all those whose hearts ache when another is hurt, whose soul is burdened when another is oppressed, and whose passion is kindled when fighting for justice and peace. Let us say Grace for all those who rush to the aid of the fallen, who feed the hungry and lend a hand to the vulnerable. Let us say Grace for all who are quick to smile, who are quicker still to forgive, and who are slow to anger.

On this Thanksgiving, let us offer prayers to express our profound appreciation to God for all that we have and love. Let us express a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for friendship and good neighbors.

As we give thanks to God, let us also give thanks for the angels among us. Let us give thanks for each other!

Happy Thanksgiving and Shabbat Shalom!

Rick

Rabbi Rick Rheins