

November 26, 2009

Shabbat Shalom!

Happy Thanksgiving and an early Shabbat Shalom! I asked our Religious School students in Grades 4 through 7 last Wednesday, “What are you thankful for?” They listed many of the aspects of life that we might expect them to mention, with a few additions:

Family - Everything - Siblings - Food - Life - Pets - Home - Teachers - Friends - Ability to Learn - Trees - Sun - the Beauty of the Earth Good Grades - Chanukah - Freedom

Their comments offered a contrast to the vow/prayer uttered by Jacob at the end of the first section of this week’s Torah reading. Jacob awoke from his dream of a ladder reaching to the sky, in which he received comforting words from the divine, with an expression of surprise: “God was in this place and I, I did not know!” He set the stone on which he rested his head as a marker to recall this special moment. Then he proceeded to offer this vow, “If God is with me and watches over me on this path that I am taking and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and if I return safely to my father's house, then will the Eternal be my God; and this stone that I have set up as a monument shall be a house of God. And [of] all that You give me, I will dedicate a tenth to You.”

Some commentators have wondered whether it was appropriate for Jacob, to say, “God, if You do for me A,B and C, then You will be my God.” Having just left home, Jacob was in an uncertain position, not having total confidence that all would turn out right for him. His sense of a divine presence in his life seemed to be more through looking back to where he had been rather than looking forward to where he would be going. He saw God in the place where he spent the night only after he slept there, but he also seemed to have a sense that he would be able to fulfill his vow, that he would look back on his life in years to come and say, “God was

with me!”

Saying “what we are thankful for” in life is like Jacob’s vow and prayer, but it voices a greater certainty that we can be grateful now for the blessings we enjoy. May we put our lives in perspective, not only on Thanksgiving, but every day, and recognize the good that we have, the good that we have done, and the good that we will do.

-- L’shalom, Rabbi Larry