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Imrey Noam

Parashat Vayishlach

Shabbat Shalom!

November 28, 2026 | 18 Kislev | 5787

SHABBAT TIMES

City	Candles	Ends
New York	4:12	5:15
Los Angeles	4:26	5:24
Chicago	4:03	5:07

Local time in each city · All times PM

"I have plenty" or "I have everything"?

ON THE PARASHA

Rabbi Reuven Kuklin



Who Is Truly Rich?

"Who is rich? One who is happy with his portion" (Avot 4:1)

When Yaakov and Esav meet in Parashat Vayishlach, Yaakov asks his brother to accept the gift he has sent him. Esav initially refuses: "I have plenty, my brother. Let what is yours remain yours" (Genesis 33:9). But Yaakov insists: "Please accept the gift that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and I have everything" (33:11).



Esav says he has enough and asks his brother to keep the gift. Yaakov speaks of what he has precisely as he urges Esav to accept it. What is the difference between "I have plenty" and "I have everything"?

Kli Yakar explains that Esav's words express discontent. He has a great deal, but still wants more. Yaakov, who says, "I have everything," is happy with what he has and feels no need for anything further.

This helps explain Ben Zoma's teaching in Pirkei Avot: "Who is rich? One who is happy with his portion" (4:1). Why is such a person called rich, even if he owns very little? Because he feels that nothing is missing. A person who owns a great deal but feels he will never have enough until he acquires more still lives with a sense of lack.

Commenting on the verse "The righteous shall live by his faith," the Vilna Gaon writes that trust in God and contentment are foundations of all character traits (Aderet Eliyahu, Habakkuk 2:4). We can understand why he mentions them together. If we trust that God will provide for our needs, we can see what He has given us as the portion that is right for us now. That trust lets us keep working without putting off our joy until we attain what we still lack.

Notice the order of Yaakov's words. First comes "God has been gracious to me," and only then "I have everything." It is because Yaakov sees what he has as a gift from God that he can say wholeheartedly, "I have everything."

A Closer Look

Why Did Yaakov Space Out the Herds?

When Yaakov sends a gift to Esav, he puts each herd in the care of its own shepherd and tells them, "Leave a space between one herd and the next" (Genesis 32:17, Hebrew numbering). What does that space add to the gift?

Rashi explains that Yaakov wanted the gift to make a greater impression on Esav. Had the herds all arrived together, Esav would have taken them in at a glance. Instead, after receiving a whole herd, he could look up and see another one approaching. He could appreciate each herd on its own.

Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi teaches in the Kuzari (III:17) that even with ordinary pleasures, the moment before receiving them matters. When a thirsty person pauses to say the blessing Shehakol, he can notice how much he needs the water and remember Who gave it to him. When he drinks, that awareness adds to his enjoyment.

Adapted from a Vayishlach article on Imrey Noam.

Times: Hebcal.com. Candle lighting: 18 minutes before sunset. Shabbat ends at 8.5° below the horizon.

The Duty to Give Thanks

"I am unworthy of all the kindness" (Genesis 32:11, Hebrew numbering)

Yaakov worked for Lavan for twenty years. Before they parted, he reminded Lavan what those years had been like: "By day the heat consumed me, and the frost by night, and sleep fled from my eyes" (Genesis 31:40). Lavan had repeatedly changed his wages. Yet when Yaakov prays to God, he says, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown Your servant" (Genesis 32:11, Hebrew numbering). Ramban explains that Yaakov considered himself too small to deserve all this kindness. He had not forgotten what he had endured, but the hardship did not keep him from seeing the good God had done for him. Gratitude does not require us to deny what hurt; it teaches us to see the good we received as well.



Illustration of the account

Rabbi Emanuel Raavad of Petah Tikva told a story about his cousin, an officer in the French army. According to the account, he was taken prisoner by the Germans during World War II and held in a glass cage in a prison camp. He received no regular meals. When he asked to eat, a guard would humiliate him before throwing him a small piece of bread.

Years later, Rabbi Raavad asked his cousin what he would do if he met the guard again. The answer surprised him: "I would walk up to him and kiss him." The officer explained that, whether the guard intended it or not, he was an agent of Providence. That little piece of bread, received over and over, had kept him alive.

The officer had not forgotten the guard's cruelty. He also remembered that the bread, given to him in humiliation, had sustained him. When we eat a slice of fresh, clean bread, and all the more when we put freshly baked challah on our Shabbat table, we can pause for a moment and thank God for the kindness He shows us every day.

A Closer Look

"From My Brother, from Esav"

"Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav," Yaakov prays (Genesis 32:12, Hebrew numbering). The Beit HaLevi asks: Yaakov had only one brother. "From my brother" would have made it clear whom he meant. Why add "from Esav"?

The Beit HaLevi explains that Yaakov feared two kinds of encounter. If Esav came as an enemy, Yaakov and his family would be in danger. But what if Esav greeted him warmly and suggested they travel together? Yaakov feared that closeness too: family affection might draw his household toward Esav's way of life.

Yaakov prayed about both possibilities. By saying "from Esav," he asked for protection from his hostility. By saying "from my brother," he asked for help staying true to his path even if his brother welcomed him warmly.

Based on the Beit HaLevi, from a Vayishlach article on Imrey Noam.