

Dear Chavraya,

Yesterday at noon, on Thanksgiving Day, Native Americans and supporters gathered on Cole's Hill in Plymouth to observe a national day of mourning, as has been done on Thanksgiving every year since 1970. On what is the quintessential American holiday, drawing us together from wherever we have come, a nation of immigrants from the Mayflower onward, I have often wondered, what about those who were already here, the only ones whose ancestors weren't immigrants? In an admirable effort to acknowledge what this day evokes for Native Americans, the town of Plymouth erected a plaque that explains: "Thanksgiving Day is a reminder of the genocide of millions of their people, the theft of their lands, and the relentless assaults on their culture. Participants in National Day of Mourning honor Native ancestors and the struggle of Native peoples to survive today. It is a day of remembrance and spiritual connection as well as a protest of the racism and oppression which Native Americans continue to experience."

I do not share these thoughts to minimize or diminish the beauty that most Americans associate with Thanksgiving, the warmth and closeness of families gathered, or the importance of giving thanks. By acknowledging that there is another very different, more painful experience of this day, we deepen the positive meaning of Thanksgiving and our own experience of it. As Jews, there is something in our very being that calls us to hold two realities at the same time. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayetze*, the progenitors of the tribes of Israel are born. Among them, the fourth child born to our mother Leah is *Yehudah* / Judah, from whom derives the name that each one of us bears as a Jew / *Yehudi*. The common root of our name and the name of our ancestor, *yud*, *daled*, *hey*, is also the root of *today*. Used more commonly in its meaning of "thank you," *today* also means "acknowledge."

To thank and to acknowledge means to be able to hold two realities at once. To the degree that we can do that, recognizing the suffering of others, and reaching out from that recognition, even as we celebrate our blessings, adds profound depth to the meaning and sincerity of our gratitude. We do this at the Pesach Seder, even for our oppressors, when in the midst of joy and gratitude for our redemption, we pour off drops of wine to acknowledge the suffering of the Egyptians. In the same way, holding two realities, it seems to me that as Jews we should be able to understand and acknowledge why the "flowering of our redemption" today, our return to the Land of Israel, is experienced by Palestinians, though I wince at the term, as the *Naqba/Catastrophe*. As Jews, whose calling is not meant to be in name only, we should be able to do both.

Even as the Pilgrims modeled the first Thanksgiving on our own festival of Sukkos, the challenge in the name given to each of us as *Yehudi*, one who is able to thank and to acknowledge, offers a way today to deepen the meaning of Thanksgiving. As a day of commitment to end all racism and oppression, Thanksgiving can become a day of national reconciliation. The Hebrew word *hashlamah* / *reconciliation* means literally to make whole or complete. When through understanding we can stand in the place where the other stands, the

circle of reconciliation will be complete. *Hashlamah* is the root of the word and the goal of the way that is *Shalom*.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor