

Thanksgiving Came Early for the Lotkers
Rabbi Michael Lotker

Who would have guessed it. Not long after I labored on and delivered a sermon for Erev Yom Kippur which I called “The Attitude of Gratitude,” Sonia and I had an opportunity to experience it first hand.

It’s not a new experience for many of us in Southern California. Smoke in the air - helicopters overhead - glued to the TV and radio for the latest news – wondering when to start packing in the event of evacuation – answering nervous phone calls from family and friends. I’m sure it will seem like old news as you read this in November, but in mid October we were all too close to what was called the “Sessnon Fire” in Porter Ranch. Sessnon street, after which the fire was named is only about 10 blocks away, and on one scary, smoky night the flames were only a few hundred yards away from our home. Our bags were packed and the house reeked with smoke.

Today, a day later, the bags are unpacked and the house is airing out. On the TV, everyone of the residents has a different story but with one common theme. They are all saying how lucky they are. Families whose home was untouched of course feel protected and blessed. But even those who lost everything said they were so fortunate to have their lives and even their pet’s lives saved. The gratitude toward the firefighters who literally parked their trucks and themselves between the inferno and our homes is universal.

It makes you think. If we feel lucky because the fire didn’t hurt us and even more lucky because the fire skipped our street and even more lucky because the fire skipped our community, how lucky should we feel on those mornings when we didn’t have any fire at all? Or any earthquake at all? Or mud slide? Or _____ (insert your favorite disaster)?

As I mentioned in my sermon, Judaism tries to help us capture this “attitude of gratitude” with our blessing system. We are to thank and bless God not only when we escape disaster, but every time we eat, study, go the bathroom, and even when we get up in the morning or go to sleep in the evening. Remember that a gift without an acknowledgment is, in some sense, a theft. So we are obligated to thank for our health, our food, our shelter, our freedom, for all the little joys that make life so wonderful and for a day without trauma.

Most of us say we only want happiness for ourselves and for our children. If you truly mean this, try noticing every time you are blessed during they day. Then, thank the source of that blessing. Often this will be someone who has shown you a kindness or two; more often this will be God. Try thanking out loud – even quietly. And try keeping a gratitude journal. This will make you more thankful and happier. I guarantee it!

Sonia and I wish you a happy Thanksgiving day, and, more importantly, wish you thanksgiving every day.