



Thanksgiving Reflections

Rev. Dr. Susan Suchocki Brown

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From the harvest of the soil we are given occasion to garner a harvest of the heart and mind.

A harvest of resolve to be careful toward all of life's gifts and opportunities... a harvest of gratitude for every good which we enjoy and of fellowship for all who are sustained by the earth's beauty.

From Rev. Percival Chubb

Though these words from the Rev Percival Chubb were written in the early 1930' s I think they are still relevant [especially as we begin to reflect on this upcoming thanksgiving season.] The season for me is about the harvest of life and about the earth's beauty. He reminds us that we need to be careful toward all of life's gifts and opportunities, all people and all beings in the universe.

Thanksgiving can be a day for gathering with friends and family for walks and football games and lazy naps and game playing. It can also be a day for spiritual reflection and a day to express gratitude and love to those around us. It can be a day of hunger and want for those without homes and food. It can be a day of sadness and loneliness for those who have lost loved ones. It can be a day of tension for those who are living in uncomfortable and unpleasant situations. It can be a day of chaos as you try to divide you and your family into manageable pieces to visit with the many sets of parents, grandparents, step parents, and all the configurations of children and relatives.

I remember trying to blend my very English/ Yankee ways of celebrating Thanksgiving with my former spouses' new American way of being about thanksgiving. For my family thanksgiving included suet pudding, bread stuffing, turnip, mashed squash, tapioca pudding, apple pies and cranberry sauce made from whole cranberries. For his family with the New American way it was an already cooked turkey breast, peas and onions, canned corn, pork stuffing, and chocolate cream and lemon meringue pies. One year we brought all the families together at my mother's home. It was near disaster. His family had never heard of a children's table and were appalled by this. Whereas in my family it was the only way to get everyone seated, and it wasn't just for the youngest ones it was for anyone who wanted to be there. It was at this table that I got to know my former spouse's father's deep despair and depression as he announced to the whole table, children and all that he thought of suicide every day. Talk about a conversation stopper to the question- "what are you grateful for?" In his family, everything was served buffet style; in my family, it was all out on the table with scrambling and reaching over and around one another. And my father was deeply offended at a pork stuffing instead of his bread stuffing made with the giblets, the recipe he had adapted from my Grampy Fay. When I married Ron, Thanksgiving was less chaotic because our kids were more grown up and we did not make them come and eat vegetarian food with us, but instead brought them their favorite desserts later in the day. This tradition has continued and I will be going to the family in Winchendon after my own meal at Country Lane this coming Thursday. Though one year Ron invited all the gang, my mother, his kids and spouses, Scott and my kids Eric and Andrea, Andrea's mother, father and auntie and grandparents meme and pepe to a ginormous Thanksgiving banquet. There was even some uncle from some side of the family, I didn't know and have never seen since. Anyway, Ron forbade them to bring anything and me from making anything, well truth be told I could not have found a single space in the kitchen to have cooked a thing anyway. I did not have fun at all. I missed the exchange of dishes across the various traditions and we didn't have tables enough to set up to eat at and everyone was all over the place.

I suspect you all have similar stories of trying to blend the traditions you were raised in with the traditions of a new family and the occurring stress and strain.

Ah the holidays and Thanksgiving it can be a joy or pleasure with much to be grateful for or it can be a day of gloom and dread with little to feel glad about. But without doubt it is a day when the emotions of childhood, traditions from our

childhood, and our current and past experiences cause a welling up of feelings. Thanksgiving Day can do that to us- a welling up from the heart, as tears of laughter and pain get caught in our throat when we begin to look at the day and all it means.

However as tough as the day has been off and on through the years, the most meaningful moments for me have been the thanksgiving gatherings sitting around the table with others. I remember one year my first spouse and I were living in Winchendon, my boys were still young, under 6. We were supposed to go to my mother's house for dinner and there was an unexpected and nasty snow storm. We headed out none the less but ice and falling tree limbs made it impossible to get to Gardner. We turned around and headed back to Winchendon. I know we didn't have turkey that day I think it might have been hamburgers and baked beans but I do remember that we had apple pie that I had struggled to make to bring to my folk's home. The making of the pie that had seemed second nature to my mother was a task I thought I would take on. But it sure was not as easy on my own. I couldn't get the dough to come together, or to roll out, in tears and not wanting to admit defeat I called my mother's best friend Lenny and asked her to help. Patiently and without judgment she talked me through the process but most importantly she told me she would not tell my mother that I had called in tears feeling like an utter failure because the pie dough was not coming together.

Years later sitting at the table over a thanksgiving meal with my mother and Ron and me- a nice quiet meal before we headed off to bring desserts to our family, I told the story of the pie crust and of her best friend talking me off the ledge. My mother had never heard the story before but she said had always wondered how I managed to get Lenny's recipe so perfectly correct. The story of the pie crust led us to share many other stories of sitting around the table and being with one another.

As I was thinking about the table wisdom of my thanksgivings and in fact of my growing up years, I came across this poem by the Native American poet Joy Harjo. It is titled. 'Perhaps the World Ends Here.'

The world begins at the kitchen table. No matter what -we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So is has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corner. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table, we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is the place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At the table, we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse we give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying and eating of the last sweet bite.

From: *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*. W.W. Norton.

When you are gathered however it is that you gather, during this time of thanksgiving, please keep in mind the gifts and opportunities brought to the table by each and everyone. Be gentle with yourself and with one another in these next days and weeks. We are humans, precious and special and the world is in desperate need for times of gratitude and appreciation and joyful celebration with one another.

May it be so.