Thanksgiving is a most gracefully unusual holiday, quite different from other American holidays. Major American holidays characteristically honor a secular event (New Year’s Eve and Day), a religious occasion (Christmas), an historical anniversary (Independence Day), or one of politico-social importance (Memorial Day and Labor Day). The second-tier holidays follow the same pattern and add iconic persons (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents’ Day, Columbus Day, and Veterans’ Day). Going further, we can identify quasi-national holidays that fit the model (Mother’s and Father’s Days, Flag Day, Halloween, Super Bowl Sunday).

Thanksgiving is so different from all other holidays. Yes, our national memory instructs Americans that Thanksgiving premiered as an historical occasion, a peaceful feast for Pilgrims and Native peoples. This picture has been interpreted, by some historians, as only legendary. In contrast, the Native American tragedy is altogether still too real. The State of Colorado shares this burden. The 10th Annual Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run/Walk will start today at the site in southeastern Colorado, where in 1864 more than 170 Native Americans, many of them women, children, and elders, were savagely slaughtered by hate-crazed white Americans, and finish at the State Capitol on Saturday.

At this moment, I would ask us to set aside our differing historical interpretations because I don’t think that’s the deepest importance of Thanksgiving. Unlike any other holiday, Thanksgiving focuses on a virtue: gratitude.

Reflect for a moment on the significance of this. A national day set aside to highlight the importance of giving thanks, gratitude. It is a national day for 304 million people to reflect on and recognize the bounty and beauty of our individual and collective lives. This is as close to a national religious day as I think we are going to see in a country that idealizes the separation of church and state. OK, if you want to nominate Valentine’s Day as a national day to celebrate love, we’ll have to postpone the debate until after the pumpkin pie. Seriously, consider, please, the integrity and idealism of a nation and a people who reserve a day of ritual for giving thanks.

Gratitude is a feeling - and more. I think gratitude is a state of mind. The corny part of me wants to say, “Gratitude is an attitude,” but that sounds too much like a platitude, and detracts from its significance in our humanity and our Buddha nature. Although the virtue of gratitude is not one of the paramitas, it very well could be. For having a mindful state of gratitude acknowledges our perfect solidarity with
the object of our gratitude. In a state of gratitude, we are intimately aware of the undifferentiated connection between others and ourselves. In gratitude, separation is suspended, dissolved.

We all know those positive moments in our lives that spontaneously generate gratitude: thankful for a loving son, thankful for the food before us, thankful we got hired for the job, thankful to get home at the end of the day from the job. And we all have heard the admonition that we ought to be thankful for the adversities and challenges as well. Thanksgiving has its Puritan shadows, doesn’t it? I have to agree that it is tough to give thanks for the sliced finger next to the diced potato. Nevertheless, most of us do accept that gratitude for hardships and misfortunes is a mark of strength and character, and it would do us well to cultivate this state of mind. How can we do this?

In our tradition there is the Noble Path to liberation from samsara that includes Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. With attention and gentleness toward others and ourselves, we cultivate Right Mindfulness to see the arising and passing of feelings, thoughts, and things. We train ourselves to observe in a skillful balance of empathy with detachment. We connect and yet avoid judgment and identification. We learn to see the unique and spectacular qualities of particular intersections of time, space, and energies. We gain a sincere intimacy and appreciation for the moment. We attend to the moment and honor it. This is gratitude.

And in the Zen sect, we emphasize Right Concentration. By diligently practicing our zazen, we are nurturing the expression of our True Nature of wholeness and completeness and solidarity with all beings. We realize that separateness is an artifice of the mind. Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh sings, “When we realize actuality, there is no distinction between mind and thing and the path to hell instantly vanishes.” Such awareness obliterates self and other. We practice to reveal our innate awareness of this Truth. If I might bend Seng T’san’s words a bit: this Truth is beyond all words, can’t be described. Though, perhaps, “gratitude” comes very close. Our zazen is a perfectly wonderful expression of gratitude.

The ground beneath your feet responds more lovingly to our steps than yours, he told his listeners, because it is the ashes of our grandfathers. Our bare feet know the kindred touch. The earth is rich with the lives of our kin.

--Chief Seattle (Seathl) (Trying to explain the fusion of the earth and the tribal dead.)

From Killing the White Man’s Indian by Fergus M. Bordewich

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**Calendar Highlights**

Center Closed  January 1-4
Zazenkai January 18

Karin, Sensei has been serving as Head of Zendo this past year, kindly and patiently bringing several new members through the gate. She has also worked behind the scenes fulfilling the various duties of the job. Nine bows and much needed rest to you!

Winter Ango Dokusan Schedule

Monday Evenings: Karin, Sensei
Tuesday Mornings: Danan, Roshi
Tuesday Evenings: Danan, Roshi; Peggy, Sensei
Wednesday Mornings: Ken, Sensei
Thursday Mornings: Karin, Sensei
Thursday Evenings: Danan, Roshi; Ken, Sensei
Friday Mornings: Peggy, Sensei

New Assistant Teacher/Head of Zendo

Congratulations and deep bows to Dennis Tesar who has become the newest Assistant Teacher. His duties remain to be worked out, however most of us know of his constant presence around the temple and within the sangha. His wisdom example and never failing help teach us all.

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Black Robe Ceremony

On Sunday, November 30, Mike Griffiths and Becky Wethington received full ordination and are now wearing black robes. A photo was not taken, and given that each of them are deeply connected to nature, the above image is being used as a reflection of their nature. We love you both and congratulations!