

## Words of Gratitude 2019

Recording my gratitude each Thanksgiving season has become a tradition of sorts. While pondering the high points of this past year, I naturally find myself comparing each season to the one before. I realize that as time goes on, as I grow richer in years, the seasons differ in a poignant fashion. Tradition, as it turns out, has 3 variations. The third definition, as defined by the dictionary, states that, "Tradition is an artistic or literary method or style established by an artist, writer, or movement, and subsequently followed by others." The example says, "There are visionary works in the tradition of William Blake."

My predisposed notion of tradition (prior to looking it up), was something more predictable, more pragmatic when practiced time and time again. I thought tradition meant customs, if you will, that should remain intact and expected year-in and year-out. In my early twenties, newly married, I desperately grasped onto an idea that because Thanksgiving was always a special time for me in adolescence, I needed to create a culture surrounding the holiday that would transform over time into even greater, more meaningful occasion. I wanted to ensure that the future holiday seasons would generate memories of the highest joy possible once they passed. Of course, I had very specific ideas of how this should look and play out in action and in practice. Of course, I implemented customary ideas. Of course, once the fourth adult holiday concluded with massive family upheaval, overflowing dishes, and a back ache, I began to recognize that I wasn't in control of the tradition's course.

While my internal locus of control was clearly not solely to rely upon to create the ideal tradition my mind and expectations had manifested, I began to see that I did have control over my own ability to acknowledge gratitude. I began to understand that, like the Grinch did (upon his great epiphany where he realized Christmas wasn't about presents and Santa), this holiday isn't about the food, ensuring all particular family members were present (and getting along). It isn't about grandiose presentation of home or hospitality. While these offerings are wonderful and substantial, the sole offering that this holiday calls for is gratitude.

I practice gratitude pretty regularly. I don't find it arrogant to state that I believe this is something I prioritize and vocalize often in word and action. One of the phenomena I appreciate most about dance, and specifically in the vocation I am honored to practice, is that there is an unspoken reciprocity between educator and learner with regards to gratitude. The example that comes to mind right now is when I misspeak while teaching and my students correct me, or when a student's demonstration a correction. Our correction of one another comes from a place of clarity and care, not from a place of "I am right and you are not." Each time there is room for correction, we create a safer environment for all involved because we all realize together that it is acceptable and even encouraged to make a misstep where there is room to grow. We begin to feel a tight sense of camaraderie as we problem-solve together to create the largest possible success rate together.

In this sense, the above definition in the first paragraph of 'tradition' leaves an infinitely high ceiling for growth. What an incredible notion—that from generation to generation, the capacity to grow together through safety surrounding our ability to overcome obstacles is boundless.

I welcome all of us to consider where our meaningful traditions can be found this beautiful Thanksgiving holiday. I invite us to love others and ourselves even when plans don't follow our predisposed 'traditional' expectations. I encourage us to find growth through the process.

Love,

Simone Peterson

