

**The Mayor's Office of New Bostonians
Cultural Awareness Committee Presents**

An Inspiring Perspective on the First Thanksgiving

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Three days of feasting and celebration long, long ago. Why is it the focal point of such intense feelings today?

School children play out an ideal scene of Pilgrims and Indians feasting and playing together. Families get together and enjoy a time over a meal said to replicate this feast eaten almost 400 years ago. A people long misunderstood stand up in anger. What is it about this time in America's history that carries such a charge?

Could it be that this controversy reflects a world out of balance? Could it be a symbol of unfulfilled promises? Did somehow this extraordinary origin story of two cultures rising to their highest level on the edge of a wilderness show us what is possible? It is said that "We promise according to our desires and fulfill according to our fears". Did the Massasoit Ousa Mequin and the Pilgrim leaders promise us all something we ourselves couldn't produce? Are we angry, guilty, and ashamed of what happened since the breaking of that 50-year treaty of friendship and peace signed at their first meeting?

I believe this is the crux of the situation: we are disappointed, embarrassed, ashamed, confused and we don't know what to do about it - so we find someone to blame for that confusion.

I think it is time we take a good look at the extraordinary people and circumstances that can take us up and out of the situation we find ourselves in today. These people can inspire us - and I feel that inspiration is the only way out - up and out to a higher level of consciousness to a place in our hearts we, perchance, haven't visited since.

I would like to share a perspective that can perhaps take us all to higher ground if we choose to go there.

After thoroughly researching original materials of the Mayflower Pilgrims I discovered these Separatists who became the Mayflower Pilgrims - these Cambridge-educated leaders of their community and families began to question the absolute monarchy of their king when the Bible was made accessible through its English translation in the early 1600's. Through the words and life of the man who embodied the Christ consciousness 1500 hundred years before, they realized that God intended humanity to live in freedom, the freedom to live according to our conscience. They committed treason, were jailed and chose to live in exile rather than submit to unjust laws that compromised that freedom.

These rebellious folks left their mother country, England, journeyed to Leiden, Holland where they and their families lived for 12 years as lecturers in the university and tradesmen, until they traveled to America where they met a visionary leader and with whom, at their first meeting, they created a bond of friendship that was to last their lifetime.

I quote:

April 1622: Edward Winslow tells of Governor Bradford in conversation with Hobbamock, a Wampanoag who chose to live in close proximity to the Plymouth Colony:

"To this the Governor answered, he should be sorry that any just and necessary occasions of war should arise between him and any of the savages, but especially Massassowat; not that he feared him more than the rest, but because his love more exceeded towards him than any. Whereunto Hobbamock replied, there

was no cause wherefore he should distrust him, and therefore should do well to continue his affections."
"Good News from New England" p. 13.

I believe these people - the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags recognized in each other - beyond any fear that could have been generated by differences in culture and appearance - a common ground of the human heart and the human spirit and a belief in a higher, loving power. The Pilgrims were country people. They knew the land. They loved the land and they came upon a people who lived simply as they desired to do. These two cultures so apparently different shared a connection few peoples have shared before or since.

I quote:

March 1623. Edward Winslow in the home of Conbatant, a Wampanoag leader:

"...Observing us to crave a blessing on our meat before we did eat, and after to give thanks for the same, he asked us, what was the meaning of that ordinary custom. Hereupon I took occasion to tell them of God's works of creation and preservation, of his laws and ordinances, especially of the ten commandments; all which they hearkened unto with great attention. Also told them, that whatsoever good things we had, we received from God, as the author and giver thereof; and therefore craved his blessing upon that we had and were about to eat, that it might nourish and strengthen our bodies; and having eaten sufficient, being satisfied therewith, we again returned thanks to the same our God, for that our refreshing, &c. This all of them concluded to be very well; and said, they believed almost all the same things, and that the same power that we called God, they called Kiehtan." Edward Winslow. "Good News From New England" pp. 38,39.

That connection was lost when the visionary leaders of both cultures died and another scenario was to play itself out: We weren't to live in harmony, we had work to do, we were to war and play out the underbelly of the human psyche. This we have done. We have played out our fear, our greed, our misbeliefs and now perhaps we can see beyond to a world we all want for our children - e pluribus Unum - out of many, one - where we each bring out gift to the table - here in America the most religiously and culturally diverse nation in the world. Can we do it? Can we rise to the promise of our origin story? I think we can, and we will.

I recommend that we each take a moment every day and look at the light of who we could be as opposed to the shadow of who we have been. Look at America's freedom documents and live every word every day. They are the inspired documents that developed out of the Pilgrims' desire to live free and the Indian experience of joining independent states in confederacy. These documents: The Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution express the ideas in the Mayflower Compact, drafted in the cabin of the Mayflower before the Pilgrims touched land here and, combined a hundred years later with structure from the Iroquois League of Nations, became that great articulation the human desire to live in freedom and abundance, our Constitution. But just as the Iroquois have not lived their essence of their Great Law, nor has America lived its great promise to the world. Again -we promise according to our desire - our vision of who we can be - and fulfill according to our fear. What can lift us up and out of our fear - this fear that we seem paralyzed by in this moment? Inspiration can take us to the knowing that we are each divine, autonomous, sovereign beings whose birthright it is to live in peace in an abundant world. We can be inspired by the people who have had the courage and vision to risk their lives and property to live in alignment with this knowing.

The relationship between the Native Americans and the Pilgrims was our first experience with multicultural relations as a nation. It laid the foundation for the pluralistic culture we have become. The former director of the Old State House once commented to me that by 1775, when the American Revolution formally began, the American character had evolved through the 150-year association of the settlers with the Indians to something distinctly different from the character of the people who remained in Europe - the "American mind", the "American spirit" became a force on the stage of human development.

These experiences with the Indians combined with the melding of the influences of the many diverse cultures who subsequently came to the New World place America in a unique position to become the significant emissary of world peace - we, as Americans - with every nation and religion in the world represented here can rise up now together and insist that every person was indeed created equal and endowed with inalienable rights - the right to life, liberty and above all, the pursuit of happiness. These words are empty promises until

we have the courage and understanding to live them.

I believe we will play out these great promises in our lifetime - once we return to this origin story, correct misunderstandings, put in the missing pieces and come together in our hearts as the human family we are.

Thank you.