

Thanksgiving: food and family...what fun. Family can engender warm and fuzzy feelings of love and togetherness, as represented in the story I read for the children. Alternately, time with our family can make us irritable and unsettled.

Thanksgiving for my family is not a storybook day. My mother, who is a very accomplished cook, starts to pull the dinner meal together early in the day. She has already prepped many foods in the days leading up to this special Thursday. At some point she gets overwhelmed with all that still needs to happen and becomes annoyed that my brother and I aren't reading her mind as to what she wants us to do. My brother David and I then scurry around trying to keep Mom's anger at bay. My husband and daughters, who represent the remainder of our extended family who come to Thanksgiving, pitch in, but they're only loosely subjected to the psychodrama I'm describing.

By the time our guests come, we're exhausted and hungry, looking forward to eating the meal. We visit with one another, getting full on the delicious appetizers. Some wine is drunk and the anxiety eases for me until Mom's annoyance with our not rescuing her again becomes apparent.

Eventually dinner is ready. Wonderful food! Delicious food! So much food! And we eat so much of everything. Seconds are de rigueur. We'll be stuffed, but dessert must be had. Yum. Feeling like the Pillsbury dough boy, we lounge in our chairs while we play a word game for a while. The game is fun, but we're totally wiped out by this time. I just want everyone to leave so I can get ready for bed. Eventually the guests do leave and we'll have at least an hour more of clean up before we can rest. And then Mom wants us to hang out in the afterglow of Thanksgiving Day, watching a movie or some TV. I'll look for the earliest possible moment when I can beg exhaustion and steal off to the bedroom.

I hope each of you here today have a much happier Thanksgiving Day tradition than what I've described, but I'd venture a guess that many of you can relate - through personal experience - to my story.

As I shared with you at our last service, I've experienced a radical change in how I respond to the world around me, grounded in a spiritual practice that focuses on acceptance and gratitude for what *is*. This is all true, yet when it comes to how I respond to my mother in particular, I am thrown back to ancient behaviors I developed in childhood. Believe me, I'm working on this, but at heart I'm a kid when I'm around my mother. I'm 49 years old, I say to myself, I'm a mother with adult daughters, can't I do better?! Yes and no.

For one thing, my eating this Thanksgiving Day will be no different than every meal I've eaten for the past two years. I will eat my plateful of delicious food, drink no alcohol and pass on appetizers and dessert. While this may sound abstemious to you, it is tied up with my spiritual practice and helps to keep me clear-headed and committed to my new principles of right living.

My mom has announced that this will be the last Thanksgiving Day she will host. It will be the end of a long tradition. I resolve to go to her home with an open heart and with appreciation for the many years of Thanksgiving feasts that brought family and friends together. I am making a promise to myself that I will remain dispassionate in response to any and all behaviors my mother exhibits that threaten my equilibrium. I will breathe deeply and connect with the love I feel for my whole family. I will do my part to make this a positively memorable Thanksgiving experience.

And if – when - I fail, I will renew my promises and return to giving thanks for family, friends, plentiful food and freedom from true conflict.