



# Signals



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## 2020 – What A Year!

by Robert Francis *ᏊᏍᏉᏍᏉ* jisquoquo

At one and the same time, the year 2020 seemed to drag by and rush to disappear into the past.

Living through the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic is counting the months since seeing and hugging loved ones. It is waking in the morning asking, “What day is this?” since every day seems like every other. It is reaching the end of the day, week, month, year wondering, “Where did it go?” and not able to recall what was accomplished. It is marking the time, such as it is, with deep sighs. It is turning on TV news and wishing they wouldn’t dwell so much on the pandemic while knowing if they didn’t give the pandemic full coverage, you would be even more upset. It is growing numb with all the deaths and dying. It is feeling uneasy about loved ones, family, friends, wondering, “Are they safe?” It is being careful: staying home when possible, wearing a mask in public, maintaining social distance, washing or disinfecting hands often, yet still getting the virus, because ¾ of the people in your county think the pandemic is a joke or a hoax or some dark political conspiracy. It is wondering, six or eight or twelve weeks later whether your health will ever be as it was before. It is knowing you can get the virus again and that it may be worse next time. It is hearing a relative say, on the phone, “As soon as everyone’s comfortable with it, we can all get together,” and thinking, “Comfortable? You think this is about comfort? I’d be much more comfortable saying, ‘I’m done with it,’ slipping into sweet denial and joining all the other deniers facilitating the wildfire spread of the pandemic. This is not about comfort; this is about health. This is about safety. This is about placing value on human life. This is about loving your neighbor.”



And yet, there are bright spots in the darkness of this pandemic, for to live through the Covid-19 Pandemic is also to see cleaner air than we have seen or breathed in decades, as human activities slow and smaller quantities of fossil fuels are burned. It is to see a larger percentage of people growing vegetable gardens than has been seen since the 1940s. It is to witness vulnerability experienced as a result of the pandemic helping many European-Americans understand and empathize with the sense of vulnerability constantly experienced by all people of color in this country, including American Indians, African Americans and Indians from south of the colonizer’s border, a vulnerability due to systemic racism foundational to America. Sadly, many other European-Americans have chosen to retreat further into the false security of obstinate ignorance and are fighting to retain systemic racism even while, in many cases, denying its existence. The reality of this was made evident to all with open eyes and unstopped ears January 6, 2021 as Trumpian white nationalist/white supremacist insurrectionists, incited by the (now former) president, penetrated and ravaged the U.S. Capitol.

Throughout the Earth there have been, so far, more than two million deaths directly caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic with more than 400,000 occurring in the United States. Scientifically, there is no doubt that if, from the beginning, 95% of people had worn masks and practiced social distancing in public, quarantining when experiencing symptoms or when knowingly exposed to the virus, the pandemic death-toll would be but a minor fraction of what it has become. And yet, for many people, simply wearing a mask in public seemed an unreasonable sacrifice, at least until someone close to them or they themselves were suddenly gravely ill or dying of Covid-19.

The big news now is that vaccination for the Covid-19 Coronavirus is here. Already, front-line healthcare workers along with those considered to be among the most vulnerable to serious complications of the virus are being vaccinated. The rest of us will have to wait

our turn, but within the next six months or so, everyone in the United States should have opportunity to be vaccinated, free of charge. So, will I be vaccinated? Those who know me well know that when I become ill, I am far more likely to consult with an herbalist of our own aniyvwiya or Chickamauga Cherokee people than to seek out an allopathic physician. But, will I be vaccinated for Covid-19? Absolutely! And at the first opportunity afforded. Aside from the obvious motive of the vaccine lowering my own chances of dying from Covid-19 to almost zero, once 70% or 75% of human beings are vaccinated, herd immunity will be achieved, and the virus will find itself with no place to go. So, along with others, I can rightly see being vaccinated as a way to save the lives of others.

As Paul Kelton writes in his book *Cherokee Medicine, Colonial Germs: An Indigenous Nation’s Fight against Smallpox, 1518-1824*, the response by indigenous Cherokee healers to smallpox, namely isolation of infected individuals and use of ceremony along with effective strategies to keep fever at a non-lethal level, proved more effective than early strategies employed by European-American physicians, namely blood-letting and piling on heavy blankets in hope of sweating the fever out. Even so, many Cherokee people continued to die from smallpox. The CDC says smallpox killed three out of every 10 people who became infected with it. Earlier figures showed even higher mortality rates. But then, in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Cherokees were among the first peoples to accept and incorporate the practice of smallpox vaccination. No one grew horns! No one sprouted a cow’s tail! None of the nightmare scenarios passed around by the misinformed conspiracy proponents of the time ever played out. What did happen was that Cherokees and others who were vaccinated stopped dying from smallpox. But not every people was as eager to be vaccinated for smallpox as were the Cherokees, and others had no access to vaccine. So, from the time of the first smallpox vaccinations in 1801, it took 176 years to annihilate the disease.

That was then, this is now. How long do we want the Covid-19 Pandemic to last? Do we want this year to be just like last year? Do we want this coronavirus to circulate and re-circulate throughout the population every year? It is time for everyone to wake up, open our eyes and ears, stop listening to and passing along misinformation, roll up our sleeves and get vaccinated for Covid-19.

## Mid American Indian Fellowships Meeting Schedule, Etc.

**As far as I know, none of the fellowships are currently meeting due to the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic. Please call or e-mail for information about when and where meetings may occur and for Covid-19 protocols.**

**Dh̃õh̃U aniyansa Indian Fellowship: Topeka, KS:** For info contact Robert Francis [maif7784@gmail.com](mailto:maif7784@gmail.com) (660) 464-1749.

**Λ̃ÃFÕP do’hi soquili Indian Fellowship: Neosho, MO.** For info contact Jan Owens [kcbodywork@gmail.com](mailto:kcbodywork@gmail.com) (816) 896-1044 or Ron Owens [ronlowens@yahoo.com](mailto:ronlowens@yahoo.com) (816) 616-4360.

**Indian Fellowship of Joplin: Joplin, MO.** For info contact Bruce Redden [kannonkocker@yahoo.com](mailto:kannonkocker@yahoo.com) (417) 291-5848 or Jay Redden (417) 781-6791.

**᠆᠐ᠮ᠋᠔᠎᠎E kanalusgv Indian Fellowship: New Bloomfield, MO.** For info, contact Bud Moellinger [budsheri@ktis.net](mailto:budsheri@ktis.net) (573) 252-4494 or Robert Francis [maif7784@gmail.com](mailto:maif7784@gmail.com) (660) 464-1749.

**G̃᠔W walela Indian Fellowship: St. Joseph, MO.** For info contact Kathy Whitley [kathywhitley@ymail.com](mailto:kathywhitley@ymail.com) (816) 244-8942 or Randy Whitley (816) 676-8895.



**Traditional aniyvwiya Dh̃B᠋Õ᠋᠘ or Chickamauga Cherokee Ceremonies are held at the daksi gatiyo ᠋᠆᠃ ᠋ᠰ᠋᠕᠋ᠨ in Bates County, Missouri.** Those *seriously* interested in attending and participating may contact Robert Francis at [maif7784@gmail.com](mailto:maif7784@gmail.com) (660) 464-1749.

**To help with Compassionate Veterinary Care**, serving indigenous people and their animal helpers in South Dakota and Missouri, contact Sheri Moellinger, DVM (573) 252-4494 [budsheri@ktis.net](mailto:budsheri@ktis.net) .

**To get information about, help with or schedule a “Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change: Toward Right Relations with Native Peoples” presentation**, contact Jan Owens (816) 896-1044 [kcbodywork@gmail.com](mailto:kcbodywork@gmail.com) or Ron Owens (816) 616-4360 [ronlowens@yahoo.com](mailto:ronlowens@yahoo.com) .

**Mid American Indian Fellowships Gathering:** Watch for information in the next edition of *Signals*.

## Keeping Ceremony through the Pandemic

by Robert Francis *Iᵋᵋᵋᵋᵋ* jisquoquo

The Daksi Grounds or daksi gatiyo is a traditional Chickamauga Cherokee or aniyvwiya Ceremonial Grounds. The ancient Sacred Fire or ajila galvquodiyu of the Cherokee people is kept burning every day, every night and all year long at the Daksi Grounds, with the exception of a few days prior to the New Fire and Great New Moon ceremonies during which the Sacred Fire sleeps.

The Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic has had its effect on yet not halted the keeping of ceremonies at the Daksi Grounds. In March 2020, as the day of the New Fire Ceremony approached, we did not recommend people to attend yet said those who chose to attend would be welcome. There were only five people at the Daksi Grounds for the New Fire Ceremony on March 21. We were mindful of social distancing, foregoing the customary hugs of greeting. The ceremony went well and the Sacred Fire burned brightly once again. The Naming Ceremony, customarily held the day after the New Fire Ceremony, was canceled and later rescheduled as a remote ceremony enacted with the aid of cell phones. This was ironic, as we normally ask people to keep cell phones turned off during ceremonies. In the spring of 2020, we began sending up a special prayer from the Sacred Fire at 12 p.m. each Saturday, asking for courage and wisdom on behalf of the Real People or aniyvwiya, that we may learn what we need to learn and make necessary changes during this difficult time. Uku Jerry Painter at the Morningstar Grounds was first to begin this practice, but we quickly took it up too, at the Daksi Grounds, asking all our people to participate in the prayer from where they live.

As the year 2020 progressed, other ceremonies: Blessing of the Seeds in April, Green Corn in July, Flint Corn in August and Great New Moon in October were enacted in abbreviated form by the three of us who live and work at the Daksi Grounds. Others who normally attend and participate in ceremonies were asked to do their best to gather with the people around the Sacred Fire *in spirit* on the day of each ceremony: fasting prior to the ceremony; lighting a small, outdoor fire, where possible, using ashes from the Sacred Fire and blessed tobacco from the Daksi Grounds; in this way to make connection for sending thoughts and prayers to the Sacred Fire at the Daksi Grounds.

We also made provision for the people, in that, should anyone have need or desire to physically visit the Sacred Fire at the Daksi Grounds some time other than the day of a major ceremony, they may call and make an appointment to do so. This provision still stands.

Since the Bounding Bush Ceremony is by nature more easily socially distanced, we allowed the people to attend and participate in this ceremony, held October 31 – November 1, 2020 at the Daksi Grounds , with strict Covid-19 protocols in place. Not many elected to attend in person that day. There were only nine at the Daksi Grounds, yet as with other ceremonies, many participated from home.

As the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic continues to rage, we will not invite the people to gather for ceremonies at the Daksi Grounds again until everyone has opportunity to be vaccinated for the virus. We are hopeful that full access to the vaccine will happen before the Green Corn Ceremony in July. In the meantime, ceremonies will be enacted, in abbreviated form, by the three who live here at the Daksi Grounds with others participating remotely, as described above.



**Watch the birds and all the animals. Connect with the trees and all the plants. Listen to the voices of the four winds. Lift your face to the Sun by day and gaze upon the stars at night. Sit quietly with the Fire. Visit with a friend. Ponder the words of an elder. Share a story with a child. These are the older social media.**  
- jisquoquo

## The Land Cares for Us as We Care for the Land

by Robert Francis *Iᵋᵋᵋᵋᵋ* jisquoquo

Due to the isolation, uncertainty and financial instability caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic, many people have either returned to gardening or elected to raise a garden for the first time during 2020. Such is not the case with our household; we have always been gardeners, raising much of what we eat.

At the daksi gatiyo, we are grateful to the land and to the growing plants for taking good care of us this past year. We raised a small patch of gaduhvi selu (Cherokee Town Flour Corn), this being our first time raising this rare, genetically diverse, multicolored. We raised a larger patch of gigage selu dewisgala (Cherokee Red Flint Corn) and a much larger patch of unega ganhdohgv selu (Cherokee White Tooth or Gourdseed Corn). The three varieties of selu (Corn) were planted at intervals of three weeks or so to reduce chances of cross-pollination, and all were planted in Thee-Sisters patches along with tuya (Beans) and wagugi (Squash). The beans raised this year were tlogesi tuya (Cherokee Cornfield Beans). The four varieties of squash raised were dalonige wagugi (Yellow Summer Squash), wagugi ganvhida agilageni (Long Neck Squash), ganvhida wagugi (Long Squash or Candy Roaster) and iya siqua (Hog Pumpkin).

While we ate roasting ears or corn-on-the-cob a time or two, most of the corn we raise is either ground into flour or made into hominy. We picked a good amount of green beans for eating fresh and canning, and are still shelling dry beans. We also harvested plenty of summer and winter squash although not as many winter squash



as the previous year. Aside from selu ale tuya ale wagugi (corn, beans and squash) we raised and harvested several varieties of tomatoes and peppers, two varieties of cowpeas, okra, potatoes, sweet potatoes, egg plant, cucumbers, watermelons, muskmelons, garden huckleberries, beets, collards, kale and turnips. We also harvested wild onions, several kinds of wild greens and even huitlacoche (an edible fungus that grows in the corn). We picked raspberries and blackberries as well as mulberries and persimmons in season, and from the orchard: apples and pears. We also raised a good crop of jola (Old Tobacco). That about covers it.



The animal helpers have taken good care of us during these hard times too. Aside from eggs from chickens and ducks and milk from the goats, we have meat from chickens, ducks, turkeys, rabbits, sheep and goats, all raised right here, as well as squirrel and deer from the woods. We are most grateful.

Debbie McSweeney or wadulisi also raised many Cherokee heirloom varieties of corn this year on the farm where she and her husband Noel live, near Peabody, Kansas. Recently receiving several rare old varieties from Kris Hubbard, Native agriculturist from Wild Wood Farms in Kentucky, wadulisi decided to plant small patches which she hand-pollinated, a painstaking, labor-intensive process. The selu or corn varieties wadulisi raised in 2020 include He-Is-Twisting-It-All-Around Cornstalk Shoot Sweet Corn, Plucked-From-The-Sky Sweet Corn, Spotted Acorn White Flour Corn, Cherokee Red



Gourdseed Corn, Cherokee Sacred Purple Spotted Corn and Great-Great-Grandfather Pod Corn. Sorry, I don't have the Cherokee names for these.

I know that many more of our people raised gardens in 2020. No matter where a person lives, there is almost always a way to raise some sort of garden. I know people even in the most urban of areas: Topeka, St. Louis, Chicago, who raise gardens and have procured seed from here at the daksi gatiyo. You may e-mail, write or call and I will send a seed list, letting you know what is available for 2021.

#### Mid American Indian Fellowships

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