



Last year, a favorite spiritual teacher of mine, Christine Valters Painter, began a blog posting with this vignette:

*A few days ago I received an email from a woman who . . . asked me to respond to the question: "If you had to choose one spiritual practice that is a non-negotiable for spiritual growth in the 21st century, what would it be and why?" My answer was supposed to be short and succinct.*

*Here was my reply: "I would choose hospitality, both inner and outer,*

## Introduction

By Rev. Mara Dowdall



*because I believe that welcoming in all of the exiled pieces of ourselves to be essential for the healing of the world."*

Hospitality is an ancient spiritual practice, with roots in many sacred traditions. But for Christine, who is an academic, artist, spiritual teacher, Benedictine oblate and founder of the online monastic community, [Abbey of the Arts](#), hospitality is also the core spiritual practice for our time.

In the strictest sense, the word hospitality describes any relationship between a host and a guest, but in common parlance, it's most often used to refer to a positive one, as in, being "hospitable." Hospitality commonly means treating one's guests with warmth, friendliness and care.

Interestingly, if you trace the origins of the word hospitality back to the Latin from which it comes, you find its roots are intermingled with

*(continued on page 2)*

# The Path

Hospitality | November | 2016



*The Spiritual Themed Newsletter of  
the First Unitarian Universalist  
Society of Burlington*

### Inside This Issue

Introduction	1
Self Care	2
Spiritual Exercises	3
Questions	3
Resources	4
Creative Space	7

the roots of a word that's now its antonym: *hostility*. *Hospes*-which meant "guest" or "host" descended from *hostis*-which meant "stranger" or "enemy." To me, these linguistic roots are insightful. The close linkage between guest, on the one hand, and stranger/enemy, on the other, reveals a truth of the human condition that is still with us today. Namely, that the line between who is our friend and who is our enemy is a thin one. When we encounter someone who is a stranger to us, we might view them as a guest to be welcomed or an adversary to be avoided. And that choice makes all the difference.

This summer, when I was selecting spiritual themes, I chose "Hospitality" because, like Christine, I believe it is a crucial practice for our time, and also like Christine, I believe it is necessary for healing of the world, the deep spiritual work to which we are called. And I placed it here in November, mindful that this year's election season has both surfaced and deepened ancient and modern divisions in the human family, which only a spiritual stance of hospitality can mend.

Over the course of worship this month, we'll consider hospitality from a few different perspectives, including its internal and external dimensions, as well as the kind of transformation true hospitality might require of us.

We'll also have some programming that ties into the theme. Stay tuned for more details in upcoming editions of eNews!

Love and courage for the journey,  
Rev. Mara



### Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, there's always a chance we will encounter some tender spots in our own spirits and stories. Therefore, it is important when doing deep spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on the journey, and to know you are welcome to care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that's comfortable for you.

Likewise, please know that we are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Rev. Mara is our first point of contact for pastoral care. She may be able to set up a time to meet you, or refer you to **Andre Mol**, our ministerial intern, caring lay leaders through our **Care Network**, or outside resources. She can be reached at [revmara@uusociety.org](mailto:revmara@uusociety.org) or 802-862-5630 x. 24.

### 2016/2017 Themes

- September – Connection
- October – Deep Listening
- November – Hospitality
- December – Expectation
- January – Inheritance
- February – Perception
- March – Imagination
- April – Resistance
- May – Growth
- June – Delight

### Seeking Submissions for *The Path*

*The Path* introduces each month's spiritual theme, which we then explore in greater depth through our Sunday worship services and other programming. We welcome your submissions of readings, stories, videos, books and movies for any of our upcoming themes! For theme submissions to be included in the relevant edition of *The Path*, the team welcomes them ideally a month prior to publication. Do feel free to send materials in for upcoming themes at any point up until the one-month-prior deadline.

This month, we especially welcome submissions on December and January's themes: **Expectation** and **Inheritance**.

Please send them to [themecircles@uusociety.org](mailto:themecircles@uusociety.org).

We invite you to try one of the spiritual exercise options below (or more than one, if the spirit moves you!). If you are in a Fall Theme Circle, you will have an opportunity to share with your group about your experience of the exercise: how it felt, what you learned, etc.

**A. Hospitality and Habits**

For many of us, there are habits or practices we would like to add to our lives, but we have trouble fitting them into our routines or finding time for them in our busy schedules. Do you have one? It could be making space for a spiritual practice like meditation or prayer. It could be exercise or cooking or time with old friends or crafting. When it comes to forming new positive habits or returning to old practices that nourish and sustain us, and related, what blocks us from doing so, we often consider our failure to be either a logistical challenge (how to make the time?) or a will power deficit (how can I make myself stick with this?).

This month, your invitation is to think about forming a new habit or

adopting a new practice in an entirely new way: as an act of hospitality. Think about your desired habit or life change as a new friend you are welcoming into your life, with open arms and a strong embrace. How can you provide this friend with the warmest possible reception? What does it need to feel at home in your life? What conscious or unconscious factors might be blocking you from fully welcoming it into your life? Once you’ve had a chance to apply this new lens, reflect on whether and how it makes a difference as you approach your desired habit or change in practice.

**B. Hospitality Journal**

Every day, we are afforded countless opportunities to practice hospitality — both to provide it and receive it from others. Some of them—like making a good meal for others— may seem obvious. Others —such as giving up your seat on the bus or holding the door for someone--may be more subtle. These are so many ways we can reach out to “the stranger” with warmth and kindness.

Over the course of this month, begin noticing the ways in which hospitality shows up in your daily life. Make a note of opportunities you have to show hospitality, both those you act on and those you let pass by, as well as others’ extending hospitality to you. Whether you use a paper journal or a note in your phone, track these over the course of the month (or even just a day). Do you notice any patterns? Does anything surprise you?

**C. One Act**

Identify one act of “radical” hospitality you would like to undertake this month. It could be preparing a meal for new neighbors, doing something with a loved one that they will enjoy (especially if it’s not your favorite activity), or visiting an unfamiliar faith community. Then dive as deeply into this activity as you can, preparing fully for it and being as present during it as you can. After, reflect on your experience. What did you feel and learn?



**Questions for Exploration**

Through the course of the month, we invite you to consider and reflect on the questions below. If you are in a Fall Theme Circle, you might come to your group prepared to speak about one or two of them.

1. What does hospitality mean to you?
2. What have you learned about hospitality in Unitarian Universalism? How do you think it shows up (or not) in our faith community?
3. What did you learn about hospitality growing up? How has your understanding changed over time?
4. Can you think of a time you received another’s hospitality? What was it like?
5. Can you think of a time you extended hospitality to another person? What was it like?
6. What challenges you when it comes to hospitality?

## Resources

### *With Children and Young Families in Mind*

\*In this year's editions of *The Path*, we plan to include resources that adults might share and enjoy with children. (We also think adults might appreciate these all on their own!)

Book recommendations, compiled by [\*Spirituality and Practice\*](#).

*Elijah's Angel*: Michael J. Rosen demonstrates how an exchange of gifts between a Jewish boy and an elderly Christian barber is an act of acceptance and hospitality.

*Grandpa's Soup*: Eiko Kadono is a richly spiritual story that affirms the practice of sharing and hospitality.

*Sammy Spider's New Friend*: Sylvia A. Rouss has written a spiffy story illustrating the vitality of the Jewish practice of hospitality.

*Immi's Gift*: Karin Littlewood presents a story of a little girl living in an igloo who is hospitable to animal guests.

*So Close*: Natalia Colombo depicts the need for kindness and hospitality in city living.

*A Dragon Moves In*: Lisa Falkenstern proves that disappointments and seeming disasters can be turned into something good through hospitality.

*Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*: Douglas Wood illustrates a parable about hospitality toward those who are on a different spiritual path than your own.

### Stories for telling and reflecting, from the UUA's Tapestry of Faith:

— The Best Meal: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/home/session11/60158.shtml>

— Mullah Nasruddin Feeds His Coat: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session6/123344.shtml>

### Words

*Hospitality invites to prayer before it checks credentials, welcomes to the table before administering the entrance exam.*

— Patrick Henry in *The Ironic Christian's Companion*

A good guest is an example of owning less (not even what is yours is truly yours) and thus having more.

— Nilton Bonder in *The Kabbalah of Money*

Many years ago, a traveler came to a small town. The custom at those times was to open your door to whoever comes as "God's guests," as they were called. When someone knocked on your door and said "I am God's guest," you were to invite him in, feed him, and give him a place to sleep.

— Sheikh Ragip Frager, editor in *Love Is the Wine*

How should one live? Live welcoming to all.

— Mechtild of Magdeburg, in *Open Mind* by Diane Mariechild

Hospitality is the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses, makes suspicious owners into generous givers, and makes close-minded sectarians into interested recipients of new ideas and insights.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen

Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring [people] over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

— Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*

The German word for hospitality is *Gastfreundschaft* which means friendship for the guest.... It means the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen

## Resources

I welcome every creature of the world with grace.

— Hildegard of Bingen quoted in *Wrestling with the Prophets* by Matthew Fox

### “Gate A-4”

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement:

“If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately.”

Well—one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. “Help,” said the flight agent. “Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this.” I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly.

“Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bitse-wee?” The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, “No, we’re fine, you’ll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let’s

call him.” We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up to two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade maamool cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—from her bag—and was offering them to all the women at the gate.

To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal

thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, “This is the world I want to live in. The shared world.” Not a single person in that gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

—Naomi Shihab Nye

### Videos, Books, Articles, Sermons

The February 2016 edition of *Quest, the journal of the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship*, was devoted to the theme of Hospitality. It includes several great pieces which you can check out or can download it in its entirety here:

<http://www.questformeaning.org/quest-monthly/hospitality/>.

Spiritual Literacy: The Desert Dweller’s Hospitality

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWjOmCWsWkc>

“Radical Hospitality,” by Rev. Marilyn Sewell:

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/radical-hospitality>

"Living in the Shared World," by Rev. Mara Dowdall

<http://www.uusociety.org/Sermons?y=2014> (see April 13, 2014)

*The Dignity of Difference*, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

*The Holy Intimacy of Strangers*, by Sarah York

*A New Religious America*, by Diana Eck

*Bread and Wine: A Love Letter to Life Around the Table*, by Shauna Niequist

*Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*, Fr. Daniel Homan OSB

Film recommendations, compiled by *Spirituality and Practice*:

*Chocolat*: A charming and edifying comic fable about hospitality. It is set in a small French town where the repressive Catholic mayor squares off during Lent against a free-spirited woman who dispenses more than sweetness in her chocolate shop.

*Promises*: A soul-stirring documentary about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict reveals how the children of these neighbors are hospitable toward each other even when it seems that hatred reigns supreme.

*Into the Arms of Strangers*: An inspiring documentary chronicles the humanitarian effort to save the lives of 10,000 Jewish children during the months prior to World War II.

*Lost Boys of Sudan*: An excellent documentary follows two African youth as they try to adapt to their new life in America.

*Babe*: An animated moral masterpiece about a pig and his barnyard friends reveals the importance of hospitality, empathy, and service of others.

*As Good As It Gets*: A shaggy dog romantic comedy advises us to practice hospitality to all and never to write anyone off.

*Louisa May Alcott's Little Men*: A patient and loving couple run a school for boys and treat them all with respect, believing the best in them will surface.

*Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas*: A screen version of a classic children's book shows that the true spirit of Christmas is hospitality.

*Witness*: A collision between two worlds is incarnated in a big city cop and an Amish woman, but a deep friendship ensues from the practice of hospitality.

*Starman*: A science fiction drama about the welcome afforded an alien becomes a way to look afresh at ourselves and to ponder what it means to be children of the Universe.

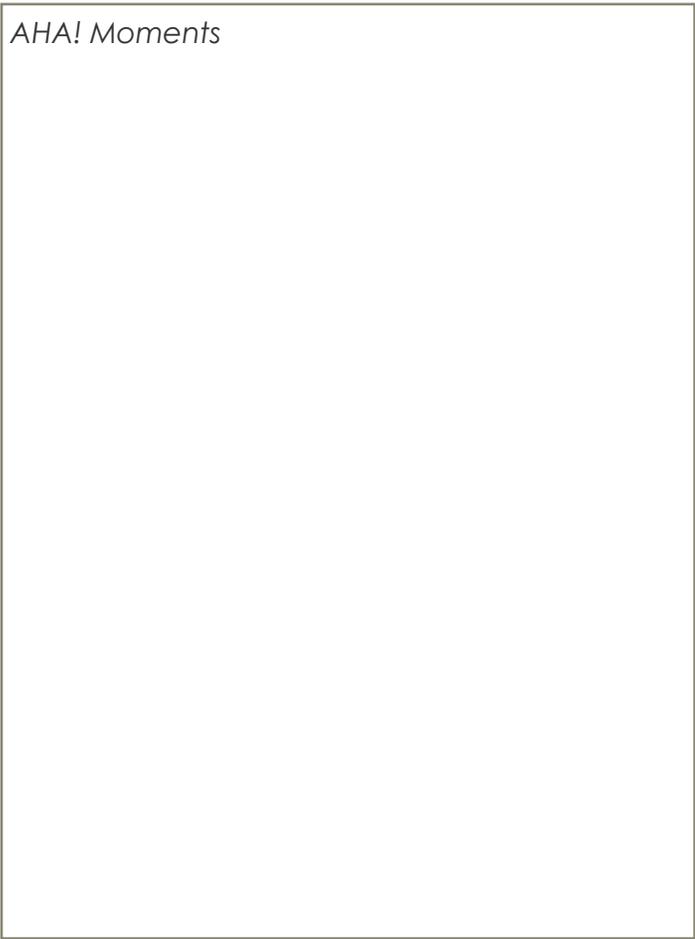
*Code Unknown*: A morally provocative film examines how hate rather than hospitality manifests in the lives of some ordinary people in Paris.



## Creative Space

Use this section to write, doodle, and create!

*AHA! Moments*



*Notes*

