Soul Matters

September 2015

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Invitation?

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Do not try to save the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create a clearing
in the dense forest of your life
and wait there patiently,
until the song that is your life falls
into your own cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself to this world
so worthy of rescue.
-Clearing by Martha Postlewaite

Create a clearing, listen for your song and let it teach you how to give yourself to this world. There is no better description of the religious life than this! And notice that it all begins with invitation, with the deep humility and knowledge that while the song is deeply ours, it also comes from something or somewhere beyond ourselves. It takes time, but eventually we each come to realize that --to be whole and to find home-- a space must be made, a clearing must be created, and otherness must be invited in.

That otherness takes many forms. Most often, we Unitarian Universalists have focused on the otherness of diverse perspectives and ideas. We have a rich tradition of continually expanding the circle to make room for multiple voices. If there is one spiritual practice we all share, it is the practice of trying to hear and invite in voices other than our own. There is power and holiness in the chorus. About this we all agree.

But right along side the chorus of multiple voices and perspectives sits another kind of otherness. It is the otherness of our particular calling, our particular voice, our particular song. It is never separate from us and yet it is also never quite under our complete control. Every single one of us knows how easy to lose touch with it. As Postlewaite's poem says, we make dense forests of our lives where what is most precious is not easily seen or heard.

So clearings become essential. Some may say that the sacred is earned by believing the right things. But for us the sacred never arrives until we are able to carve out the right amount of space. With all due respect to those who ask, Do you believe?, we've placed our lot with those who continually ask, Are you making room? Are you committed to the precious clearing? Have you arranged a life with enough space to invite otherness in?

And so as this new year begins, we start with cupped hands.

Our Spiritual Exercises:

Option A:
An Invitation to Redefine Success

The Invitation by Oriah Mountain Dreamer is one of the most referenced spiritual writings among all liberal religious groups--for good reason. It invites us to completely rethink what this game of life is all about. Forget "what you do for a living" or "how much money you have," it says. Instead tell us about your ability to "risk looking like a fool for love," "disappoint another to be true to yourself" or be "weary and bruised to the bone, but still do what needs to be done for the children." It represents an entirely different spiritual metric. It invites a radically counter-cultural vision of "the good life."

This exercise asks you to engage its invitation. Here's your assignment:

1. Spend a week with the poem: http://www.stevenkharper.com/invitation.html. Read it at least once a day for a few days.
2. Pick the one line that you hope will most characterize your life. Don't worry about whether or not you are currently living up to it. This is about aspiration.
3. Come to your group and share why this particular invitation is one you want to aspire to.

Option B:
Are You a Pilgrim or a Monk?

In her essay, *Following an Ancient Call*, Christine Paintner reflects on two basic spiritual orientations. Each invites us to engage life differently. Using an animal spirit metaphor she writes, "*the bear hibernates to regain its power and the salmon follows the ancient call back home*." Using the metaphor of monk and pilgrim, she writes,

"The *monk* in me feels the call of moving inward. My inner monk knows the deep wisdom to be found in rest, in slowness and spaciousness, in not letting the productivity of the world keep me running ever faster. The *pilgrim* in me feels the call of moving outward. My inner pilgrim feels a longing to travel, to walk across new landscapes, to find myself the stranger so that everything I think I know can be gently released."

So which is it for you? Restoration of power or return to home? Deep wisdom found in rest or needed release found in new landscapes? Which kind of energy is life inviting you to nurture this coming year?

To help with your discernment, take some time this month to:

1. Read Paintner's essay: http://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2013/08/19/following-an-ancient-call-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/
2. Discern which of the two orientations is inviting you most clearly. Think about this as your spiritual work for the coming year.
3. Come to your group ready to share your discernment process *and two concrete commitments you are making to yourself to fulfill the call of the monk or the pilgrim*.

Option C:
Inviting In The Voices of Black Lives Matter

The sermon, "I, Racist" has been one of the most read and forwarded pieces of the Black Lives Matter conversation. For many, it is a challenging piece to invite into one's heart and consciousness. But if being "a people of invitation" means anything, it means at least being willing to make space for and invite in hard truths and new perspectives.

So this exercise invites you to invite it in. Read the sermon: https://thsppl.com/i-racist-538512462265. Sit with it. Open your heart to it. Let it validate you. Let it make you defensive. Let it make you cry. Let it make you angry. Everyone is sure to have different reactions. **This is not about responding "correctly." It is about finding a way to respond as a "person of invitation."** Figure out what that means for you. Come to your group and share what you figured out.

Option D:
Invite A Friend To Church

This exercise may seem predictable, but that doesn't mean it's easy. We UUs have a complicated relationship with sharing our faith and inviting others to receive what has been given to us. If sorting through those complications is something your heart is calling you to do, then this exercise is for you. Don't rush into it. Take time to figure out why you want to invite someone to church. This exercise is really about you figuring out ***your*** reason. Once, you've got better clarity, go do it. And let your group know what you learned – and were surprised to learn.

Option E:
Is This A "UU Invitation Song"?

Watch and listen to this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNx10tHhpvU

On the surface of things, the answer is simple: this is **NOT** a UU invitation song. But are your sure? Your exercise, if you are willing to do it, is to listen to it over and over until you find, not only ***you,*** but ***us*** in it. Come to your group ready to share where you feel the invitation to us is in it. What invitation is it offering that you want us to hear?

Your Question:

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." Instead, simply pick the one that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. **Is there enough silence, stillness and space in your life to hear "the invitation"?**

2. **Are you open to the invitation of the divine?** Many traditions talk about the divine as an "ache" or "lure" that invites us to transformation. Do you experience such a divine ache or lure in your life? Do you want to?

3. In her song, May I Suggest, Susan Werner sings, "May I suggest this is the best part of your life…" What if that were true for you? **What would it mean for you to accept the invitation that right now is the best and most blessed time of your life?** Would it change the way you see what's in front of you?

4. **Does your discomfort with traditional religious language prevent you from hearing an invitation into relationship?** When others talk of "praying for you" or seeing you or others as "children of God" or joining together to do "God's work," do hear the invitation to connect or do the words sound like nails on a chalkboard? Do your accept their invitation or correct their language?

5. It is said that behind great anger is great pain. If so anger is an invitation to look at your deep sadness or feelings of lack of control. **What is anger trying to invite you to see *and feel* right now?**

6. **Are you living your "calling"?** Most religions speak of God or Life –something beyond ourselves- inviting us to some unique mission or cause. If it is true that each of us has a unique calling, what's yours? Have you found it? Or are you too distracted to notice the invitation?

7. **How are you handling Life's invitation to live gracefully and even gratefully with uncertainty and change?**

8. When were you "the stranger" and someone invited you in? More importantly, **how are you re-paying that gift in your present day living and loving?**

9. **What are you doing with the invitation to love yourself?**

10. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Recommended Resources:

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be "a people of invitation."

Invitation (n.)

noun
1. the act of inviting, such as an offer of entertainment or hospitality
2. the act of enticing or attracting; allurement
3. a formal request to be present or participate

synonyms: encouragement, provocation, temptation, lure, magnet, bait, enticement, attraction, allure; come-on

Wise Words:

Invitation
by Shel Silverstein

If you are a dreamer, come in.
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer.
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,
For we have some flax golden tales to spin.
Come in!
Come in!

Invitation
By Mary Oliver
http://yearsrisingmaryoliver.blogspot.com/2010/10/invitation.html
https://confessionsoftheanxious.wordpress.com/2012/03/26/reflection-on-mary-olivers-poem-invitation/

The Invitation
by Oriah Mountain Dreamer
http://www.stevenkharper.com/invitation.html

Clearing
By Martha Postlewaite
https://wildandpreciouslife0.wordpress.com/2013/06/20/clearing-by-by-martha-postlewaite/

Prospective Immigrants Please Note
By Adrienne Rich
https://vimeo.com/39836802
http://www.onbeing.org/program/exodus-cargo-hidden-stories/feature/prospective-immigrants-please-note/1440

"The Mountain and the River"
by Pablo Neruda
https://calebbeissert.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/the-mountain-and-the-river-by-pablo-neruda/

Beginning to Begin
By Gunilla Norris

Can we recognize that now and then
there comes an inner sense,
a fleeting thought, a little yearning
to live our lives differently?
We don't know what this means
or what it requires.
We shake these notions off like a dog shakes off water
And go about our business.
But the longing continues.
Our practical selves only know how to perfect, produce and perform.
This, at least, we can see as useful.
This has results.
We want to believe in this way of perceiving.
For a little while it seems to give us some sort of self-image.
But the longing doesn't let us alone.
It won't go away.
We become even busier perhaps to "take care of it."
We numb ourselves with distractions—
things to do, consume, and maintain—
Things to collect, experience, and entertain.
We can always think of more miles to run.
Still the little yearning continues. . . .
Could we sense that this longing is not lack or something worse–some kind of

fundamental fault in us?
Could we receive it as an invitation instead,
a calling, a small voice inviting us home,
back to our truer self?
This shift in thought can move mountains.
It can let us begin to begin.

The Guest House, By Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Calling, by Nancy Shaffer

When you heard that voice and
knew finally it called for you
and what it was saying—where
were you? Were you in the shower,
wet and soapy, or chopping cabbage
late for dinner? Were you planting radish
seeds or seeking one lost sock? Maybe
wiping handprints off a window
or coaxing words into a sentence.
Or coming upon a hyacinth or one last No.
Where were you when you heard that
ancient
voice, and did Yes get born right then
and did you weep? Had it called you since
before you even *were,* and when you
knew that, did your joy escape all holding?
Where were you when you heard that
calling voice, and how, in that moment,
did you mark it? How, ever after,
are you changed?
Tell us, please, all you can about that voice.
Teach us how to listen, how to hear.
Teach us all you can of saying Yes.

You don't have to attend every argument you're invited to. -- ANON

A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal herself or himself to you, to tell you who they are or what they want.
--David Whyte

"Our weakness is an invitation to discover God's strength." -- Carlos A. Rodriguez

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of a 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 men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit" --Henri Nouwen

"This month, I plan to do a sermon on reclaiming language of reverence. If we are to welcome visitors and invite the interfaith community into partnerships for justice (or be invited by them), we must not cringe at vocabulary they may use. This is especially true for our Black Lives Matter partners. So how do we create a UU lexicon and translation of words like Faith, Spirituality, Salvation, Sin, etc. How can we reclaim the words using definitions that work for us so we can be people of invitation?"
- Soul Matters Minister

Videos & Online:

Our House is So Big
An acceptance speech that declares "Our house is so big" and invites us all to not go back into our tiny separate rooms
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AejUt7TdexI&app=desktop

Songs

Land of Milk and Honey
by Kelley Hunt
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btl5zL8ctEI

Come and Go With Me
UU Hymn
http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session1/132151.shtml
Peter, Paul & Mary's version:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXEf_Wld8hA

May I Suggest
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSO-WrIWOtg

Invitation Song
Modern Christian worship band inviting the spirit in
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNx10tHhpvU

Articles:

Following an Ancient Call
Christine Valters Paintner
An essay that wrestles with two very different ancient invitations and callings: "the bear hibernates to regain its power and the salmon follows the ancient call back home."
http://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2013/08/19/following-an-ancient-call-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/

Our Racial Moment of Truth
New York Times Essay
A call and invitation to have a US Truth and Reconciliation Commission around race.
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/19/opinion/sunday/our-racial-moment-of-truth.html?emc=edit_th_20150719&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=62154555&_r=0

The Door: Americanization of Immigrants and African Americans
An essay reflecting on Adrienne Rich's Poem, Prospective Immigrants Please Note
http://english11redclass.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-door-americanization-of-immigrants.html

Reason and Reverence: A New Religious Humanism
William Murry
Humanism as an invitation to be fully human
http://www.uuworld.org/articles/the-emerging-religious-humanism

Movies:

Grand Canyon
An invitation for two families to enter into each other's very different lives.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1037642-grand_canyon/

Wings of Desire
Peter Falk offers an invitation to Bruno Ganz: Join me in becoming human!
An angel tires of overseeing human activity and wishes to become human when he falls in love with a mortal.
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wings_of_desire/

Books:

Inviting Silence – Universal Principles of Meditation
By Gunilla Norris

Living Beautifully: with Uncertainty and Change
Pema Chodron
An invitation to live into uncertainty not resist it.

Don't Forget Facebook!

Join the Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from all around the US and Canada**:**
https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/