



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be a
people of WELCOME?

September 2017

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Welcome?

Welcoming is most often associated with “bigness.” We speak about “expanding the circle” and making more room. We talk about make ourselves larger through the practice of welcoming in new experiences and new ideas. But there is also the work of becoming smaller. And sometimes that is the even more important work.

For instance, those of us who are white are learning that true welcoming of diversity just can’t happen until we shrink and de-center our voices. We also know that expanding community and welcoming newcomers requires right-sizing our needs and putting our preferences second. Welcoming regularly involves the smallness of humility and willingness to listen and learn. The great spiritual teachers remind us that the key to feeling at home in the universe is seeing ourselves as a tiny but precious part of a greater whole, rather than believing that the whole world revolves around us. Downsizing and living simply allows us to welcome in more experience, adventure and peace. And, of course, there’s also the work of downsizing our egos enough to admit mistakes, ask for forgiveness and welcome in the work of repair.

Bottom line: There is a deep spiritual connection between the smallness of self and the expansiveness of relationship. It’s a curious and wonderful truth: the road to widening the circle often starts with limiting our own size. By becoming “smaller,” we paradoxically are better able to welcome in and receive the gift of “more.”

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

Noticing All That You've Welcomed in With Your Life

We rarely take the time to step back and welcome in the full scope and story of our lives. Spiritual teachers from all traditions tell us this practice is essential. A greater sense of our whole story makes it easier to accept the things that didn't go as planned and helps us have gratitude for the gift of having a story at all. We also end up feeling more connected to the whole and holy, realizing we are part of an even greater story. Here are your instructions for welcoming in these gifts of acceptance, gratitude and interconnection:

1. Set aside time to read and watch Jenny Hollowell's wonderful piece called "A History Of Everything, Including You." Be sure to do it multiple times over 2-3 days. Read it here: <http://hannahhartbeat.com/2013/06/a-history-of-everything-including-you.html>. Watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDX5ixS5BME>.
2. As you go over it numerous times, let Hollowell's story help you retrieve and welcome in parts of your story that may have been forgotten or not visited for a long time. Take your time with this. Don't rush. Let the memories come up naturally and at their own pace. Consider writing them down as they come.
3. Then take a morning or an evening to pull your story together. You can keep it simple and create a timeline. Or do as Hollowell did and make it into a story - a short story of *your* life.
4. Come to your group ready to share how it changed your relationship with your story. What new feeling or insight did the exercise give you? Did a greater acceptance come? Did a deeper sense of gratitude emerge? Did your story expand or deepen in a surprising way? Did it become more truthful? More remarkable? Were you, like Hollowell's partner, left feeling "Can you believe it?!" Do you now have a different story to tell?

Option B:

30 Days to Welcome Something New!

Let's be honest: When it comes to new experiences or skills, we're not that great at being a people of welcome. We like our ruts. We're comforted by what we know. We drift toward what we're already good at. Yes, there is safety in the status quo. And yet all that safety comes at a cost. Ruts may be comfortable, but they are also constricting. The status quo may be safe, but it's also stale and stifling. So this month let's welcome in the fresh air of something new: a new skill, new experience or new side of yourself. And a month's worth of effort is the perfect amount of time to take on this challenge, since it turns out that 30 days is how long it takes for new habits to form.

Here's some guidance and inspiration to get you on your way:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/matt_cutts_try_something_new_for_30_days#t-60619

- <http://highexistence.com/30-challenges-for-30-days/>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffboss/2015/01/17/15-unique-thirty-day-challenges-guaranteed-to-make-you-a-better-you/#31b8b1e3291e>
- <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/12-life-changing-challenges-can-try-30-day-projects/>

Some questions to think about during your 30 days of something new:

1. Was your effort contagious? Did it lead to others welcoming something new?
2. How did it impact the quality of your days? Your mood? What was its gift?
3. What did you learn about your relationship with your “ruts”? Did your 30 days teach you something about why they are so hard for you to step out of?
4. In what way was this spiritual for you?
5. Do you think it will stick? Did something actually change for you? Are you now less likely to slide back into your old habits and the status quo?

A NOTE: If you can’t pull off an entire 30 days, feel free to pick a different period of time.

Option C: Your Many Homes

When do you feel “at home”? Answering that question reminds us that home is never a single place. Many places, experiences, and people offer us the experience of welcome, connection and belonging. The more we think about it, the longer the list becomes.

So take some time this month to finally write that long list down. That’s all there is to it. Just number a page and see how many things you can name that give you a sense of home: “At the ocean.” “Whenever I smell freshly baked cookies like my mom use to make.” “In the arms of my love.” “In the quiet of the morning.” “While painting.” “When my skills are noticed or put to use.”

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the list. Did you notice a pattern? Was there a connection between your many experiences of home that you’d not recognized before? Did the list itself leave you feeling more at home in the universe? Are other people core to your sense of home? Or were you surprised at how much home has to do with solitude and spaces that allow you to connect with your deepest self? Was home less of a place than previously thought? Did you realize that it’s possible to “always be at home”? Or as poet John O’Donohue puts it, “Sometimes the urgency of our hunger blinds us to the fact that we are already at the feast. To accept this can change everything; we are always home, never exiled.”

Here’s some help and inspiration as you work on your list:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWt76WqRCVs>

Option D: Let the Music Welcome You In

Music is often the key to opening us up. This month our packet is filled with songs calling us to welcome in others and life itself in new and larger ways. So which song is calling to you? This month, use our list of recommend songs as meditations. Listen to them in one sitting or use the list as your daily meditation for a week. As you go through them, identify one that speaks to you most directly and deeply. Come to your group ready to share which one you picked, what message it had for you and how it helped you identify what needs welcomed into your life.

[Love Reaches Out](#) Erik Martinez Resly

[Wayfaring Stranger](#) Rhiannon Giddens

[Would You Harbor Me](#) Sweet Honey in the Rock

[Leave the Light On](#) Overcoats

[Home](#) Phillip Phillips

[Home](#) Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros

[Home](#) Flash Chorus

[Come, Come, Whoever You Are](#) Shimshai Live

[Invitation Song](#) with Micah Massey & Aaron Keyes

[When I Come Home](#) William Fitzsimmons

And if none of these speak to you, do a little searching and find “your welcoming song.”

Option E: Invite & Welcome 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.

For inspiration:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzrP1DNd0LO>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UuMbxLT9pc>

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is not to analyze what "welcome" means in the abstract, but to figure out what being a part of a people of welcome means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Do you spend more time welcoming in gifts or keeping out threats?
2. Can you remember the last time you truly "widened the circle"?
3. Might widening the circle mean you stepping away from the center?
4. Do you notice your ruts? Have you slipped so deeply into routine that you don't even notice anymore? When was the last time you welcomed in something new?
5. What would it mean to give yourself permission to shut the door for a while? Have you been too welcoming and tolerant of a toxic relationship or soul-killing commitment?
6. Is your house really ready for guests? Sometimes we need to get our house in order before we welcome in the new? What kind of clutter in your life needs cleaned up?
7. Is believing "I'm the only one" or "No one can understand" separating you from belonging?
8. Do you know yourself well enough to know where you belong?
9. Do you believe that you have to earn belonging? What would your life look like if you didn't have to prove that you're worthy?
10. That mess or roadblock which just came your way? Are you sure that it's not a guest in disguise trying to offer you a gift? Are you sure you need to fight or fix it? Or is welcoming it in and embracing it what you really need to do?
11. Are you ready to finally let that grief in?
12. 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 these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of welcome.

Word Roots

Welcome dates back to Anglo-Saxon days, from *Beowulf*. The word was originally *wilcuma* in Old English, a combination of *wil* (pleasure) plus *cuma* (guest). The verb form, *wilcumian*, meant to receive someone with pleasure.

Wise Words

We are lonesome animals. We spend all our life trying to be less lonesome. --John Steinbeck

Here we are – all of us – all upon this planet, bound together in a common destiny, Living our lives between the briefness of the daylight and the dark. Kindred in this, each lighted by the same precarious, flickering flame of life, how does it happen that we are not kindred in all things else? How strange and foolish are these walls of separation that divide us! - A. Powell Davies

Belonging: It's not quite love and it's not quite community; it's just this feeling that there are people, an abundance of people, who are in this together. - Marina Keegan

Where you belong is where you choose to constantly choose to show up. - Karina Antonopoulos

When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life - Jean Shinoda Bolen

The more you judge, the more you will feel different and on the outside. - Karina Antonopoulos

It's amazing really. As a human being all you have to do is enumerate exactly the way you don't feel at home in the world, and the moment you've uttered the exact dimensionality of your exile, you are already on your way home. - David Whyte

Sometimes the urgency of our hunger blinds us to the fact that we are already at the feast. To accept this can change everything; we are always home, never exiled. - John O'Donohue

"We all belong here equally... Just by being born onto the earth, we are accepted and the earth supports us. We don't have to be especially good. We don't have to accomplish anything. We don't even have to be healthy." - Polly Horvath, *My One Hundred Adventures*

He drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, a rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!
- Edwin Markham

"I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other. Call it my Muslim eyes on the American project. "We made you different nations and tribes that you may come to know one another," says the Qur'an." -Eboo Patel

"Whiteness has been used throughout the histories of America and Europe to praise desirable groups of people and exclude undesirable groups. But "whiteness" is not an ethnic group, a cultural group, or a nationality. In the United States, the Supreme Court legally defined what it meant to be "white" in a pair of

decisions in 1922. In other words, whiteness was created by law to let some people in and keep others out..."

- Sarah C Stewart, from The Story of Whiteness, <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/story-whiteness>

I'm on my way to a job where I am the only black person in my office. I work with people who either don't know or don't care about Alton Sterling or Philando Castile. They are going to ask me "How are you this morning?" and the simple truth is that I can't be honest. I can't say that I'm scared and angry and that I want to take a mental health day. I can't say that I and people like me subconsciously fear for our lives on a daily basis. I can't say how I am this morning because it will make them uncomfortable and offended. The offensiveness of my pain is why we have to remind America over and over again that Black Lives Matter: because if you lack empathy for our tears it's likely that you lack respect for our lives.

- Shane Paul Neil

The me that shows up in mostly white UU spaces isn't inauthentic, but is guarded and not my full self.

- Rev. Marisol Caballero

Principles

by Danez Smith

let us not be scared of the work because
it's hard
let us move the mountain
because the mountain must move
let us, oh lords above us and within,
let us be useful to our neighbors
& tender their wounds
let us be more bandage than blade
unless the blade is needed
let us be a sword against what does not
bring us closer to home
let us be dangerous to that which fails us
and bring us a world good to us, all of us
all us all us
amen

Brave Space

by Micky ScottBey Jones

<http://www.mickyscottbeyjones.com/invitation-to-brave-space/>

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a "safe
space."
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused
wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the
outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard
elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love,
We have the right to start somewhere and
continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we
think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But
It will be our brave space together,
and
We will work on it side by side.

"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

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

Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of the present experience. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without either clinging to it or rejecting it.” - *Sylvia Boorstein*

Guest House

by Jelaluddin Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning is 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.
[S]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.

The Fine Art of Being a Good Guest

by Jeffrey Lockwood, from [A Guest of the World](#)

The most important thing that I've learned in traveling to more than twenty countries is the art of being a guest. And I'm a particularly fine visitor at the supper table. I've consumed live fish in Inner Mongolia, not-quite-coagulated blood sausage on the Tibetan plateau, shredded pig's ear in China, grilled lamb fat in Uzbekistan, horse steaks in Kazakhstan, vodka made from fermented mare's milk in Siberia, vegemite in Australia, goat in Brazil, and snails in France. I don't have an iron stomach, by any means, but I do have the will to be a virtuous visitor.

We are all visitors—even when we are home. Our time in any relationship or place is ultimately limited. We are passing through; nobody stays forever. How might we act if we consider ourselves guests in the lives of friends and family? Being a good guest is rather simple in principle but occasionally challenging in practice.

One begins by demanding nothing more than the bare elements of life and dignity, which every host is more than delighted to exceed. The good guest then simply allows the other person to be a good host—to share his gifts, to play her music, to tell his stories, to show her places, and to serve his foods. Finally, a guest should cultivate and express genuine gratitude. It need not be effusive or exorbitant, only sincere.

We might also think of ourselves as uninvited, but not unwelcome, guests of the planet. And I think the rules for being a good guest of the world are just the same: Ask little, accept what is offered, and give thanks.

Hospitality is a form of worship.

- Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127a

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. - *Hebrews 13.1 - Christianity*

Talking to Grief *by Denise Levertov*

Full poem found here:

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/talking-to-grief/>

“Ah, Grief, I should not treat you like a homeless dog who comes to the back door for a crust, for a meatless bone. I should trust you. I should coax you into the house and give you your own corner...”

A Blessing for a Friend on the Arrival of Illness

by John O'Donohue

A meditation on welcoming illness and a life turned upside down

Full poem found here:

<http://bealightcfsawareness.blogspot.com/2011/02/blessing-for-friend-on-arrival-of.html>

Read by author:

<https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/a-blessing-for-a-friend-on-the>

Now is the time of dark invitation...
You feel that against your will
A stranger has married your heart...
When the reverberations of shock subside in you,

May grace come to restore you to balance.
May it shape a new space in your heart
To embrace this illness as a teacher
Who has come to open your life to new worlds.
May you find in yourself
A courageous hospitality
Towards what is difficult,
Painful and unknown....

In Sweet Company

by Margaret Wolff

Full poem at:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thedivinefemine/2012/01/in-sweet-company/>

We sit together and I tell you things,
Silent, unborn, naked things
That only my God has heard me say.
You do not cluck your tongue at me
Or roll your eyes...
You stay with me in the dark.
You urge me into being.
You make room in your heart for my voice...
I see my future Self in you...
Just enough to leave
The familiar in the past where it belongs.
I breathe you in and I breathe you out
In one luxurious and contented sigh.
In sweet company
I am home at last.

Videos

What makes you feel “welcomed home”?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWt76WqRCVs>

How is love calling you to reach out? What or who is it asking you to welcome in?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvIPa28cVfA>

Struggles with Fitting In

Karina Antonopoulos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTGq22E7vrc>

Lessons learned along the path toward belonging.

Belonging and Work: Am I What I Do?

<http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssiv/belonging.html?index=2>

First Unitarian of Rochester, NY Celebrates Coming Home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbJ32h-YpQA&list=RDOvIPa28cVfA&index=2>

This is My Religion

First UU of Brooklyn, NY celebrates our welcoming faith!

<https://vimeo.com/204551565>

What if Starbucks Marketed Like a Church?

A Cautionary Tale (and funny one!).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7_dZTrjw9I

Podcasts

Belonging Creates and Undoes Us Both

- *On Being*

<https://onbeing.org/programs/padraig-o-tuama-belonging-creates-and-undoes-us-both/>

Opening the Question of Race to the Question of Belonging - *On Being*

<https://onbeing.org/programs/john-a-powell-opening-the-question-of-race-to-the-question-of-belonging/>

Articles

A History Of Everything, Including You

by Jenny Hollowell

<http://hannahhartbeat.com/2013/06/a-history-of-everything-including-you.html>

Video mediation of the piece:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDX5ixS5BME>

A very short story of belonging to a life. A celebration of all we “welcome in” during our lifetimes!

Religious Community Is Not Enough

by Tom Shade

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/religious-community-not-enough>

“Being a community” is thinking small. Our ultimate goals and purpose cannot simply be about ourselves. Unitarian Universalists, like members of every other religion, are trying to change the world by encouraging people to live a different way. By word and by deed, Unitarian

Universalists are trying to change people. It is time for us to acknowledge and proclaim this, and to see that building a religious community is but a means to that larger end... Inclusion has been our goal. But inclusion is about "bringing in." We should now be thinking about "going out." Now we should turn ourselves inside out to turn the world upside down."

Music

Wayfaring Stranger *Rhiannon Giddens*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1Z4PAZX9Bs>

"I'm goin home..."

Would You Harbor Me?
(musical video meditation)

Sweet Honey in the Rock

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0XBXJjoXJ4>

Leave The Light On (for myself!) *Overcoats*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wLGdxw8_ao&t=69s

Home by *Phillip Phillips*

Original:

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

Cover: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSN-vrQ41Ak>

"Just know you're not alone, cause I'm going to make this place your home..."

Home

Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4306i99LMXo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSTLv8cYBms>

Imagine your choir or whole congregation singing it together!

Come, Come, Whoever You Are *Shimshai - Live*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hdp1_QIT1qA&index=16&list=RDOvIPa28cVfA

When I Come Home by *William Fitzsimmons*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2xWn2YXGLE&index=63&list=PL3-eyz5YvY1UibQd1itVXv1RLd7u6lilZ>

When a once welcomed love doesn't work out...

Movies

Antonia's Line

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/antonias_line

A celebration of family, home and radical welcome.

Chocolat

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1103080_chocolat

"We must measure our goodness, not by what we don't do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist, or who we exclude. Instead, we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include?"

Southern Comfort

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1104978_southern_comfort

This 2001 award winning documentary chronicles the final year in the life of Robert Eads, a transgender man living in the Deep South. An early and moving call for a more welcoming world.

Welcome

Directed by Philippe Lioret

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/19861/welcome>

An astonishing film about a Kurdish immigrant trying to get to England and the help he gets from a Frenchman who empathizes with and welcomes his dreams as his own.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-mozilla-002&hsimp=yhs-002&hspart=mozilla&p=trailer+my+big+fat+greek+wedding#id=2&vid=47ed1b338b4ff729161e759e3de01886&action=click>

The father of the bride says, "There are some differences between us. Some of us are apples and some of us are oranges, but in the end we are all fruits."

Books

In the Shelter: Finding a Home in the World

Padraig O Tuama

<https://www.amazon.com/Shelter-Finding-Home-World/dp/1444791702>

Radical Acceptance

Tara Brach

https://www.amazon.com/Radical-Acceptance-Tara-Brach-ebook/dp/B000FC2NHG/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1499375549&sr=1-1&keywords=Radical+Acceptance

You're in the Wrong Bathroom! And 20 Other Myths and Misconceptions About Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People

Laura Erickson-Schroth, Laura A. Jacobs
<http://www.beacon.org/Youre-in-the-Wrong-Bathroom-P1261.aspx>

Confronting our myths to become a community of true welcome

Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations

by Thomas L. Friedman

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0374273537/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0374273537&linkCode=as2&tag=inccom05-20&linkId=936076487a4a54ddf02eeb934316f423

Welcome to the age of acceleration!



Get daily inspiration on the monthly theme
by liking our Soul Matters Facebook inspiration page:
<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

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