



To Be Seen

BY **TIM KUTZMARK**, MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF READING, MASSACHUSETTS

*Every particle of the world is a mirror,
In each atom lies the blazing light of a thousand suns.
In the pupil of the eye, an endless heaven.*
—Islamic mystic *Mahmud Shabistari*

In the pupil of the eye, an endless heaven.

The place is India. The religion is Hindu. The woman is old and determined. See her in your mind's eye. The old woman has walked a long, long way. Her feet blistered and bled days ago, but something within still pushed her forward. Her back bends from the bundle of food and offerings pressing down on her shoulders. Still, she walks.

She could have taken one in the long stream of buses carrying other pilgrims to the distant temple. She could have packed herself tight on a rickety cross-country train. But for this pilgrimage, this 80-year-old woman chose to walk—her own feet carrying her towards the place of power. A deep, aching need calls her. She yearns to be seen; to be seen in a way that will allow her to feel whole.

And so, she mingles her footprints with those who walked before her, crossing the heart of India, to the sacred temple on Chamundi Hill. Now, in the chilly pre-dawn, the temple mound soars 3,486 feet above her. Now, only one thousand stone steps separate her from the seven-story shrine rising from the summit.

One thousand steps to the shrine of the sacred Mahadevi, the Great Goddess.

As the woman makes her way up those last steps, she is engulfed in the sounds of horns and drums, the smells of incense and flowers, the pulse and push of thousands of worshippers cramming towards a single portal, a single door. She now hears the slow and insistent chant, calling on the Mother Goddess: "Chamundaye, Kali Ma, Kali Ma, Kali Ma, Kali Ma. Chamundaye, Kali Ma, Kali Ma, Kali Ma, Kali Ma." ("O Kali Ma, your radiant blackness shines within your shrine in my heart, just as in your shrine on Chamundi Hill.")

The sound of the chanting builds in intensity and speed as the woman steps across the threshold and enters the inner sanctum. In just moments, she will see the gold statue of the great goddess. For this Hindu woman, that statue is not a stone-carved representation of the Divine Mother. No, her faith tells her that the goddess herself is alive in that stone statue; from her Hindu perspective, the statue is the Divine Presence, not a symbol of it.

And then there are the eyes. On that huge gold statue, the goddess's eyes loom large. The divine eyes seem to see all, seem to see the old woman: *In the pupil of the eye, an endless heaven.*

Chamundeswari, the Goddess of Chamundi Hill, or Kali Ma, as she is also known, is a ferocious Hindu goddess of protection and destruction. Legend has it that when a deadly demon began terrorizing and devouring people, Chamundeswari killed the evil one and brought peace to the world. The mythological place of her victory was the Chamundi Hills, and the temple was erected there in her honor.

But those who make the pilgrimage to Chamundi Hill do so for more than honor or worship. Their need goes deeper. Faithful pilgrims journey to the temple to be seen. To be seen. Hindu statues and images of the Divine are characterized by large eyes. If you look at the eyes of the various Hindu gods and goddesses in statues and paintings, you will see that they are exaggerated. The eyes are huge. They are deep and open. They truly invoke a quality of Infinity itself.

Quest for meaning

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Visitor's footfalls
are like medicine;
they heal the sick.
—African Proverb

A monthly for religious liberals

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The eyes are not large by accident. The eyes are large because eyes are the key to the Hindu faith experience.

These eyes, these portals, create the possibility for darsan. Darsan means “to see and to be seen.” Diana Eck, a noted Hindu Scholar at Harvard University, writes in *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*: “When Hindus go to a temple, they do not...say, ‘I am going to worship’ but rather, ‘I am going for darsan.’ [It is] not...a matter of prayers and offerings... They go to ‘see’ the image of the deity.”

But even more important than seeing the Divinity, they go to receive darsan, to receive the grace-filled glance of sacred eyes. They go to receive the healing that comes when they are seen full and complete in their humanity—bent or broken, old or young, depressed or happy, lovely or misshapen. In being seen as they are, they are made whole. This is the key element of the temple experience. The hymns, the chants, the readings, the priest, the traditions, the building are all secondary. The open eyes are what matter. *In the pupil of the eyes, an endless heaven.*

No matter what our religious beliefs, being seen for who we truly are is something that most of us rarely experience.

Look around—we are a people of masks and disguises. We are a people who have been taught to transform ourselves into what others need us to be. We’ve learned the roles and rules—the art of subtle artifice. We’ve come to believe that most people don’t want to see or hear what we feel, what we need, who we are. We’ve learned that most people don’t want to see the messiness and confusion that each of us carries inside. We’ve learned that only parts of ourselves are publicly presentable. Other parts must be hidden away. For acceptability, approval or promotion, we conceal the rough edges, the broken places. Appearance is the key.

We are afraid that if anyone truly sees inside us, they will run screaming from the sight.

What have you hidden from view?
What don’t you let anyone see? What don’t you let yourself see?

There is a great price to pay for this fragmentation of our frailties. We cut parts of ourselves off from others. We cut parts of ourselves off from our own self. We become segmented people, compartmentalized false creations rather than the complex people we naturally are. And then we wonder: “Why do I feel out of sorts?” “Why do I feel like something isn’t right in my life?” “Why don’t I feel like me?”

But here, in our spiritual community, we have hundreds of eyes. Here, we have hundreds of chances to be seen.

We live deception when what we ache for is darsan, to be seen. And so seen, we ache for someone to love us anyway. Richard Selzer, a cancer surgeon in a major hospital, tells this story of ordinary darsan, of being seen:

I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face postoperative, her mouth twisted in palsy, clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one to the muscles of her mouth, has been severed. She will be thus from now on. To remove the tumor in her cheek, I had cut the little nerve. Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamp-light, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made? The young woman speaks. “Will my mouth always be like this?” she asks. “Yes,” I say, “it will. It is because the nerve was cut.” She nods

and is silent. But the young man smiles. “I like it,” he says. “It is kind of cute.” All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze. One is not bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works.

This is darsan—to truly see, to truly be seen. As Diana Eck says: “Beholding is an act of worship, through the eyes one gains blessings.” *In the pupil of the eye, an endless heaven.*

As Unitarian Universalists, we may not often stand in hospital rooms and create crooked kisses for our beloved. As Unitarian Universalists, we may not often climb a thousand steps to stand before a goddess and receive darsan from her two large eyes.

But here, in our spiritual community, we have hundreds of eyes. Here, we have hundreds of chances to be seen. Here, we have hundreds of chances to see.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith can become darsan. When we come into a Unitarian Universalist congregation, we don’t ask one another to leave behind our doubts or our discoveries. We don’t ask each other to leave behind our questions in order to adopt some system of beliefs that someone else figured out for us and tells us is true. We aren’t asked to pretend to practice or believe in something that doesn’t feel authentic to us.

Here, we are seen as the unique, free-thinking, questing spiritual beings that each of us is. Here, in this faith, we are seen, not as sinners needing salvation, but as human beings—beautiful, good, and flawed—who yearn to be recalled to our best selves again. And, here in this community, as we are seen for who we are, we also see in each other the potential to become together something so much more than we are on our own.

This is the true nature of hospitality: to offer, over and over again, to see the true selves of others. To offer our true selves to be seen. It isn't always easy, to live with such open eyes, so open to the eyes of others. But the purpose of this faith is not to make us comfortable; the purpose of this faith is to help us choose to see and bless the world.

And when we choose to see and bless the world we can open our eyes and see those in need: those pushed to the fringes and forgotten. We can see the injustice, be it in access to healthcare or living wages, be it in exploitation or violence. We can see the destruction our lifestyle and need for convenience are bringing to this fragile planet earth. And we can allow what we see to transform us into people committed to healing our world. We can do more than speak about social justice and environmental action—we can devote ourselves to creating it.

To see and to be seen—this should be the work of our church community. This is the heart of our Unitarian Universalist faith. The hymns, the chants, the readings, the minister, the traditions, all are secondary. The open eyes are what matter. Our open eyes are what matter. Through those portals we will be made whole. Through the pupil of the eye, we'll find an endless heaven. ■

We Welcome You

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Hospitality at Our Borders

BY KENDYL GIBBONS, SENIOR MINISTER,
FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF MINNEAPOLIS

There has been a lot of conversation lately in the United States in general, and the world of Unitarian Universalism in particular, about immigration. If you have been following the UUA's Standing on the Side of Love campaign you may have heard some of the heart-wrenching stories about separated families and exploited workers, about thousands of deaths as a result of attempted border crossings, and about the enormous amount of money that changes hands illegally in that process.

Perhaps you realize that every immigration is also an emigration. If we look at this issue from a global perspective, what we are really talking about is migration, which is a constantly occurring phenomenon in both the natural and human worlds.

You may also remember that we are a nation founded and built by migrants; even the very oldest of our citizens, the Native American tribes, are descended from ancestors who crossed a long ago land bridge from Asia and settled across the continent. Any of us who are of European or African heritage have migrant forbears within historical memory; some of us may be transplanted here from other national origins ourselves.

And you may have already come to understand that the way the United States government currently responds to these migration patterns has three practical flaws, which produce untold and unnecessary injustice and human suffering.

First, the process by which it enables families to enter the country legally together, or to be reunited with relatives already here, is arcane, and currently has a processing backlog of years. It often forces would-be mi-

grants to remain unmarried, or allows one spouse to enter the U.S. while the other waits for an unspecified period, usually multiple years, to join them.

The second essential flaw in the way our laws handle migration is the way they deal with temporary workers. While many people will go to extraordinary lengths to become American citizens and establish new lives in this country, not everyone wants to relocate here permanently. There are hundreds of thousands of seasonal and temporary workers who are lured to the U.S. by jobs that attract few local citizens, but represent prosperity to migrants. These workers form an essential part

Every immigration is also an emigration. . . What we are really talking about is migration.

of the economy, and employers rely upon them. While here they pay taxes, including \$7 billion a year in Social Security that they never collect, because they aspire to return to their homes eventually, not remain in this country.

By unrealistically limiting the number and type of workers allowed to enter the country legally, the current system encourages employers to circumvent the laws and hire undocumented illegal migrants. Moreover, whether they enter the country legally with a difficult-to-obtain employer-based visa, or illegally, such workers are vulnerable to the worst kinds of abuse and exploitation by both employers and recruiters. Once in the U.S. they may face unrealistic hours or productivity requirements, dangerous working conditions, unfair wages, underpayment for their work, abusive bosses or other exploitive conditions.

Most feel that they have no recourse and are powerless to complain, for if they are working illegally, their employers can have them arrested and deported. But even if they are legal, once the employer fires them their visa disappears. They cannot effectively unionize, or seek the protection of occupational safety laws. Their tentative status becomes an incentive for employers to treat all workers irresponsibly, and undermines the principles of fairness and accountability that have made the American workplace trustworthy. It is worth remembering that some part of the corporate sector has a vested interest in the continuation of this inequitable situation.

The third broken element of existing U.S. policy is the arbitrary, inhumane and unjust ways in which these policies are enforced. Migrants detained by the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are held in jails, whether or not they have committed a crime. They may be denied bond, and deported without hearings.

The ICE itself acknowledges that between 2005 and 2008, 66 people died while being held in its custody, many of them from inadequate medical care. It is common for detainees to be denied medication for chronic illnesses, or needed medical treatment. Raids by the ICE are frequently conducted with unnecessarily violent tactics, traumatizing children as they are forcibly separated from their parents.

Even beyond all of these grave issues, as a religious person—as a Unitarian Universalist—it appears to me that the whole concept of a managed immigration policy is based on both an outdated understanding of the world and the willingness to live by our basest fears rather than out of loyalty to our ideals. At the heart of every religious tradition is the fundamental insight that we are called upon to welcome the stranger, to share our prosperity, and to put the well-being of humanity ahead of the sovereignty of nation-states. And

the most rational of humanist logic must concede that on our shrinking globe, it makes no sense to build walls against one another, either physically or legally. Such walls never achieve their alleged purposes, and they inevitably create injustice and suffering. The progress of humanity has always been, and will always be, about the tearing down of arbitrary exclusions, and the freedom to seek our personal and collective fulfillment where we believe it can best be found.

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Personally, I long for a world in which it makes no more sense for Korea to aim missiles at China than it does for Kansas to bomb North Dakota; where someone can move from El Salvador to New York to find a better job as easily as they can move from California to Texas. If Unitarian Universalists believe what we say about the goal of world community with liberty and justice for all, it seems to me that this is a vision we share.

Indeed, I would propose that every one of our UU basic principles is challenged by the inequities of this country's current tangle of immigration policies. Do you believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person? Is that dignity a function of nationality or citizenship? Then how can we justify creating an underworld of workers and families who dare not claim the rights and freedoms so precious to the more fortunate among us? How can we let it be okay that thousands of people die every year in the deserts and on the seas around our borders, trying desperately to share in the life we have demonstrated is possible?

Do you believe in acceptance, and encouragement? Then why do we separate families, forcing children to grow up without their parents, and partners to struggle alone across the world from each other for years on end? How does this help us to accept and befriend those who are different from ourselves, and encourage people to become good citizens and responsible neighbors, building a shared community and a better future for everyone?

Do you believe in freedom and responsibility? What could be more responsible than the incredible effort required to recreate your life from scratch in a new land, so that your sons and daughters can be safe from violence, can grow up to be educated and productive people? Where is the freedom in walls that lock people out, and laws that lock people up, when they seek to participate in the great experiment that is America?

Do you believe in justice, equity, and compassion? The immigration policy and practices of the United States government as they presently exist are neither just, nor equitable, nor compassionate, but rather arbitrary, discriminatory, and the cause of suffering. Even a highly exclusionary policy—which I think would be a mistake—could still be rationally designed, fairly administered, and humanely enforced. But there is no footnote in our commitment to the ideals of justice, equity, and compassion which says that they are to be for legal American citizens only. These are the qualities to which we aspire in our dealings with the whole world, and all people, and that includes the strangers in our midst.

Do you believe in democracy? It is a common expression to say that people vote with their feet. True democracy includes the voices and votes of everyone who is affected by a decision, and continually strives to extend its franchise. Is it not the very opposite of democracy to create a second class of those who must abide by laws and policies that they have no influence in for-

mulating? In our increasingly connected world, where what we do to the earth impacts everyone, can we afford a democracy only of the privileged? Or are we not called upon to take into account the needs and the dreams, the wishes and the ambitions of people wherever they are?

Do you believe in the interdependent web of all existence? If so, the future of our one nation does not exist apart from the fate of the planet as a whole, or the well-being of all our neighbors. Do you believe that that web is sustained by our diversity as much as by our similarities, that the beauty of every part of our lives depends on the variety inherent in the universe? To affirm diversity is to hark back to the words of John Stuart Mill: "It is hardly possible to overrate the value, for the improvement of human beings, of things which bring them into contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar.... There is no nation which does not need to borrow from others."

Together with trade, migration is one of the most ancient and enduring ways that human beings learn from one another, and are improved by contact with thoughts and actions and ways of life that are different from their own. I submit that the greatness of the United State of America—whatever it is that restrictive immigration policies are meant to protect—is the product of all the diversity, creativity, innovation and energy that centuries of human migration have brought together here. And I propose to you that we have far less to fear from those who seek to join this adventure and become partners in our future than we do from the tyrants we become when we try, and fail, to stop them.

For in the end, if our liberal faith teaches us nothing else, surely it teaches this—that there is no "us" and "them." Only evil ever results from thinking that humanity can be divided

The Fine Art of the Good Guest

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.

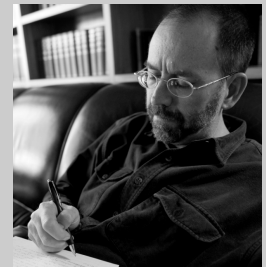
One begins by demanding nothing more than the bare elements of life

into those who matter and those who don't. We are in it together, for whatever this life and this world are worth. The doors to injustice open wide whenever we start to believe that there are certain people who need not be treated in the ways we have agreed we must treat each other. Adlai Stevenson once said, "The world is now too dangerous for anything but truth; too small for anything but brotherhood." Our world has only become increasingly vulnerable since he uttered those words, and our global village more closely interrelated. All people are our neighbors, no matter where they live; we share the air and the atmosphere, the seas and the aquifers, the nuclear power plants and the nuclear bombs,

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.

by **Jeffrey Lockwood**, from *A Guest of the World*, published by Skinner House in 2006. Jeffrey Lockwood is professor of natural sciences & humanities at the University of Wyoming, and a 25-year member of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Laramie, Wyoming. ■



the corporations and the stock market fluctuations. The earth is our common wealth, and it is only when we welcome one another that we are just, and only when we are just that we are secure. We have only one shared future on this planet. Either our capacity for competition will kill us, or our capacity for cooperation will save us. We are all migrants through history, on a journey together that will bring us either to destruction or to a whole new place of possibilities for humanity, the earth, and its inhabitants. The summoning of that longed-for land, with all its promise and the perils of the journey from here to there, is for every one of us, neighbors and strangers alike. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

For years, Biblical scholars have suggested that the real sin condemned in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexuality, but inhospitality.

When Lot welcomed in wandering angels, who were sent to see if the town of Sodom was really as wicked as its reputation, the neighbors demanded that he throw them out of his house. According to many scholars, it is because of their inhospitality to the angels that the town was destroyed.

Of course, inhospitality is not the sin that has been named from that story, nor the one that has been called “an abomination.”

But it makes me imagine. What if—instead of “sodomy” becoming a name for sexual activity between people of the same gender—TV preachers railed about the *abomination of inhospitality*? Imagine what our culture might be, if being inhospitable was seen as the deepest indication of depravity!

Kids would feel terrified and ashamed, not because they might be gay, but because they were not kind enough to strangers. Laws would be passed and in election years politicians would posture not about who could or could not benefit from equal protections under marriage laws, but rather about just how generously guests ought to be treated. Imagine how that would transform our conversations about immigration policy!

I love to think about it. I know people from other cultures for whom inhospitality *is* an abomination, unforgivable. They are trained from the earliest age to watch for the needs of others, to tend to them, to offer what they have to welcome the stranger.

I remember a trip to China I took a few years back. I was part of an interfaith delegation, walking into remote villages to interview women about abortion and birth control. (This was after President Bush had cut off all U.S. appropriations for the United Nations Population Fund, declaring that the UN was coercing Chinese women into having abortions. We were investigating this claim.)

We would walk into a tiny one-room house, with one giant brick bed. In several houses, women told us that four generations lived happily together in their house. They would beam as

This sharing of self is radical hospitality.

they told us this; it was the deepest source of pride. Not belongings, but harmony among the generations. Hospitality to one another in a very small space.

In each house, we were offered whatever sustenance might be at hand. A cup of tea, an orange cut into tiny pieces.... In one house, we were offered a dirty jelly jar of water—water which someone had walked miles to procure—to pass around and share. The generosity of that offer—“Here is the only thing I have, please take it!”—was profound, even though I was terrified about what would happen if I actually drank it. (Years of mothering came in handy here, with plenty of practice fake-eating stuff cooked by kids.)

I kept imagining, what if five or six totally random people from China wandered around my town, knocking on doors to ask residents about birth control and abortion. Would they be greeted by someone saying “Come in, all that I have is yours!” More likely they’d be greeted by hostility and a slammed door, if not outright violence. Hospitality is neither an expectation,

nor even particularly a virtue, in my town.

Here at the CLF, we have been thinking a lot about hospitality as we struggle to design and launch an online sanctuary that is truly welcoming to strangers while still serving the needs of those who are already here. What angels might wander by, we have wondered, and what is the very best of ourselves that we might offer to them?

One section of the online sanctuary I particularly love is called “Care and Help.” I think of it as a giant, multi-faceted welcome mat. Here, dozens of Unitarian Universalists are sharing themselves with wild generosity, by telling tender stories from their own hearts and lives. Essentially, these people are saying: *Here is my story, please use it however it may help you. My child is autistic. My mother has Alzheimer’s. My partner died. I am lonely. Reading the newspaper overwhelms and depresses me. My marriage fell apart. I can’t find a job.*

In every case, the person then says, in essence: *If you are on the same road, I offer you a blessing! Here, take a piece of my own broken heart and carry it with you, and let me carry yours with me. We are not alone. Life is not hopeless. We will carry on.*

This sharing of self is radical hospitality. It may look more like a dirty jelly jar of water than it does an opulent feast at a wealthy table. But the gift of transforming a life tragedy, through years and tears, into a spiritual practice is no small thing. We hope that it will be experienced by seekers as healing balm indeed—precious elixir.

May you entertain guests that arrive from all directions, knowing that they may be angels. May you share from your own heart the blessings that are yours to offer the wanderer. And may you always feel welcomed here, seen as the spark of the divine that you truly are, able to trust that whatever we have is yours. ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

How do you feel when you are about to head off to a party? Excited? Eager? Maybe a little bit anxious? For me, heading off into the midst of a group of people, some of whom I don't know, always makes me a little jittery. Am I wearing the right thing? Am I bringing the right kind (or amount) of food? Will anyone want to talk with me? If people do want to talk with me, will I say the right things?

Of course, hosting a party provides at least as many opportunities for anxiety. Will people come? Will they like each other? Will there be enough to eat? Is there enough room? Is the house clean enough?

The whole situation gives even more reason for worry when the guests don't know each other well, and there's even *more* anxiety when the guests come from different parts of your world. It's pretty low stress when your book group comes over, but if you've invited both your book group and your soccer team, then the odds of people not quite "getting" each other go way up. And if you have a block party and invite over a bunch of neighbors who have nothing more in common than living on the same street, the chances for awkward communication (or no communication at all) go up again. Just imagine if you were giving a party for not only your neighbors, but also for a bunch of people across the country, and even the world!

Well, however you'd feel, that's how I imagine the people who are planning for the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly this June in Phoenix, Arizona must be feeling. Of course, planning GA is always a big deal. Thousands of UUs from all over gather together for days of worship, workshops, lectures, meetings, decision-making and hanging out together.



"Will I say the right things?"

Planning anything that complicated is always a huge, hairy deal. But this year it's decidedly hairier.

In case you haven't heard about this, let me explain. As is the case with most huge events, the location for General Assembly is always chosen a number of years in advance. It's the only way you can book that much space. So several years ago plans were made, and a bunch of money committed, to have the 2012 GA in Phoenix, Arizona. Then, in 2010, the governor of Arizona signed SB1070 into law, putting into effect policies that many people, including many UUs, felt were unfair and unkind to immigrants in the state. Many people called for a boycott of Arizona, and when SB1070 went into effect a bunch of UUs, including our president, Rev. Peter Morales, were arrested for protesting the law.

So, what to do about existing plans for GA in Phoenix? Some people felt strongly that we should take GA someplace else, even if it cost the UUA a whole pile of money. Some people felt strongly that we should go to Arizona and make our presence and beliefs felt there. Some people felt that setting foot in Arizona would be a betrayal of everything we believe. Some people felt that we couldn't know what would be happening in the two years between when the law was passed and when GA was scheduled, and that we couldn't afford to lose all the money we'd committed.

Being UUs, there was a big discussion at General Assembly in 2010, and the compromise (which, as with all compromises, some people loved and some people hated) was that we would go ahead and hold GA in Phoenix in 2012, but that it would be a special General Assembly focused on justice, and that we would work with local partners in Phoenix to try to make a positive difference for immigrants in Arizona.

That's the kind of party that folks are planning for June this year. And

so the GA planners are asking themselves questions like "Will people come?" "Will they like each other?" "Is there enough room for everyone, even if we know that people might disagree on things we care deeply about?" "Is our house clean enough to take on issues of justice and discrimination outside the walls of Unitarian Universalism?" Will there be enough spiritual sustenance for the difficult work?

And I imagine that folks who are thinking about, or planning on, going to GA this year are asking themselves some questions like "Will I say the right things?" "Is what I bring to the table enough?"

It's not the easy kind of party where you know that just your best friends will be there and everyone will already know the same inside jokes. It's the challenging kind of party where you really have to push the envelope of offering and receiving hospitality. The kind of party where maybe people speak different languages, as well as having different points of view. The kind of party where the food we have to offer each other might be things we've never tasted before. The kind of party where you need to walk up to people you've never met and try to find a way to talk about things that matter to both of you—even if you're not sure just what those things are.

Luckily, there are a few simple rules for being a good host, and a good guest:

- Bring your best to share.
- Catch the eye of someone near you, smile, and be prepared to talk.
- When you speak, tell your truth. When you listen, assume the other person is telling their truth.
- Never miss an opportunity to laugh, unless it involves laughing *at* someone.
- Be willing to try something you haven't tried before.
- Even if you're anxious, show up. ■



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Did you know that the CLF now offers streaming video worship services? Find out more in the Reflecting section of www.questformeain.org.

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Descent into JFK

Descent into New York airspace is hard.
... Languages crisscross
from polyglot to melting pot.
As the cabin pressure changes,
the world shifts its weight
to the other foot. Great care
is required now in opening
the compartments of the mind.
Her Arabic thoughts, ways
of walking, of looking and talking,
wad up like a faded identity card.
Here everyone believes only Israel
is real; the people living in its shadow,
her clan and family, do not exist.
If they saw Uncle Shukri
in his checkered headscarf,
like when he let her ride
behind him on his motorbike,
they'd think he was a terrorist.
They'd never know Khaleda
has a Ph.D.
because she wears a veil they'll
never see beyond.

“Local temperature 17 degrees.”
People reach for coats and caps.
She reaches for protection from the weather
and other kinds of cold, rummages up
lipstick to change the color of her words,
earrings to dangle like her fears,
things that cover and reveal.
“Arrival time 10:42 p.m.”
People synchronize their watches.
She tunes the dials within
for descent into another world.
Other eyes will look at her with other expectations.
The walkway opens:
This is America.
Who will be waiting?
Who will be descending?



by **Mohja Kahf**, associate professor of comparative literature at University of Arkansas, from her book *Emails from Scheherazad*, which was published in 2003 by University Press of Florida. Mohja Kahf tweets for the Syrian revolution @profkahf ■

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