



The Deep Thanksgiving of Our Souls

BY DANIEL S. SCHATZ, MINISTER, BUXMONT UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP, WARRINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

I have wonderful neighbors who delight in garish inflatable yard decorations. We love these neighbors, but would question their taste if they did not question it for us. One day, as we walked past their front yard and saw them plugging in the rotating Winnie the Pooh, Tigger and Piglet inflatable Christmas globe, they turned to us, grinned, and said, "That's right—we're THOSE kind of neighbors." They also told us that they might have held off on the Christmas decorations if they'd only been able to find anything for Thanksgiving.



Thus began a curious odyssey in holiday schlock. Wondering if we might be able to help in these efforts, I began to research Thanksgiving decorations. I found an eight-foot-tall inflatable turkey dressed as a Pilgrim. I found Pilgrim turkey windsocks and turkey-shaped hats. I found a set of four Thanksgiving rubber duckies—two Pilgrims, a turkey and an Indian. And I found something called an Autumn Jiggler Turkey Wobble Bobble—dressed, of course, as a Pilgrim.

The truth is that these images of Thanksgiving—happy Pilgrims and happy Indians feasting together on turkey after a bountiful harvest, and possibly playing touch football afterward—are largely mythical. To be sure, they have become the symbols of the day, but they tell only part—and a dubious part—of the real story.

What we think of as "the first Thanksgiving" was really more of a harvest festival than a religious observance, and there was little to be thankful for. Dozens of colonists had lost their lives to cold, disease and malnutrition, and most of the crops brought from England had failed. The deprivation was so severe that the Wampanoag guests had to return home and bring food to the pilgrims. The peace between the Wampanoag and the colonists did not last, and although various Presidents in times of war had declared days of Thanksgiving, the regular observance of the holiday was spotty until the time of the Civil War.

It was Abraham Lincoln who created the Thanksgiving tradition we know today, and he did it during one of the worst years of American history. In 1863, the nation had been rent in two by civil war, and violence had already claimed the lives of half a million people—nearly 15% of the U.S. population. Even if the North managed to win this terrible war, nobody knew what victory would look like, or if the country would ever be whole again.

This was the backdrop against which Lincoln made his famous proclamation:

I do...invite my fellow citizens...to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving.... And I recommend...they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to [God's] tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers....

The real Thanksgiving has its origins not in plenty but in deprivation; not in peace but in hardship. The real spiritual discipline of thanksgiving is not to ignore suffering, but to fully acknowledge it, work to alleviate it, and yet still give thanks. It is to find reason for gratitude even in pain or chaos. It is to look deeper into the fabric of our world and see blessings where we thought none could exist.

Quest for meaning

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Giving thanks for abundance is sweeter than the abundance itself.

—Rumi

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT GRATITUDE

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True thanksgiving is born of hardship as much as of joy, for it is in hardship that we realize and appreciate the foundations of our lives—the community and spirit that keep us going, the smallest blessings now thrown into relief, the tiniest seeds of hope that unfold in us when we thought all hope to have fled. True thanksgiving looks at life in its fullness and finds reason for gratitude.

During my chaplain residency I prayed with hundreds of families—many of whom were dealing with the death or imminent death of their loved ones. At first I wasn't sure how to pray, or to whom. So I muddled through the best I could, and then invited the families to pray in their own words. Sometimes they would pray to Jesus, sometimes to God, occasionally they would dispense with the address and just pray, but almost always their prayers were of thanksgiving.

Thank you, God, for our mother's life. Thank you for this hospital and its caring doctors and nurses. Thank you for the family that has gathered in this waiting room. Thank you for our pastor who came all the way from Roanoke to sit with us here. Thank you for every good thing about my husband. Thank you for sixty-three years of marriage. Thank you for the love that we shared. Thank you for bringing our family back together after so long. Thank you for that presence we cannot describe but yet can feel. Thank you.

Time after time, in the moment of the tenderest loss, families would give thanks.

Most were Baptist or Pentecostal or African Methodist Episcopal, and I stand here today as a Unitarian Universalist humanist who readily admits that these are the people who taught me how to pray. It didn't matter that I did not believe in the God to whom they prayed. It didn't matter what we thought about Jesus or God or evolution or gay rights. All that mattered

was that we stood together in some of the worst moments of their lives holding hands and giving thanks.

We Unitarian Universalists have much to learn from families like these. We, who sometimes hesitate in our gratitude because we don't know who to thank, or how to thank a divinity that is amorphous or complicated or non-existent, nevertheless can find and feel gratitude in our hearts. We need that gratitude; we need that seed of hope found in the giving of thanks. We need the perspective that gratitude gives—and not just any gratitude. We need to allow ourselves to feel grateful for that which we cannot control, which cannot be controlled by any person or group of people. We need to be able to feel gratitude in a universe that is as chaotic as it is ordered. We need that sense of thankfulness to the larger reality that is.

There are as many ways to express our gratitude...as there are human souls and human thoughts.

We need such thanksgiving not only because it gives us cause for humility, but also because it gives us perspective that we might otherwise miss. It is thankfulness for a good meal, even when food is scarce. It is thankfulness for small steps toward peace even in a time of war. It is thankfulness for the distance our society has journeyed toward justice and freedom for all, even when there are many miles of that journey before us. It is thankfulness for the good in one with whom we have quarreled. It is thankfulness for the grass that grows through cracks in the sidewalk, for the robin that sings in the city slums, for the sun that yet shines, the sky that is yet blue, for the resilience of life, for the beauty of a child.

When I lived in New Hampshire I had the privilege of getting to know the Unitarian Universalist author Phil Sim-

mons, who lived in the next town over. Phil had been a college professor until he was diagnosed with ALS—Lou Gehrig's disease—and returned to live with his family in the White Mountains. Phil died a few years back, after nine years of living with the disease, but his book, *Learning to Fall*, is still in print and remains one of my favorites.

Toward the end of his life Phil began to receive a fair amount of attention for his book, and he frequently gave talks and interviews. He told the story of one radio interviewer who asked him to describe the highlights of his life since being diagnosed with ALS.

"Highlights," thought Phil. "You've got to be kidding." But he answered as best he could, realizing later what he should have said: "Getting my fingernails cut this morning."

"Here was Susan," he said, "my friend and nurse, trimming my nails as I sat warmed by the morning sun reflecting off snow covered fields, my wife beside me writing postcards and sipping coffee. If we're looking for what's sacred, what's holy—why look any further? The sacred world is before our eyes and in our nostrils and beneath our feet. What I should have told the radio interviewer is, 'If you're looking for highlights, you'll miss your life.'"

President Lincoln found reason for gratitude in bountiful fields and "healthful skies," in the productivity of the nation's mines and farms, in the keeping of peace with other nations, even as brutal war raged in our own. Phil Simmons found it in the simplicity of a moment when he was not looking ahead or behind, but simply existing as he was. Henry David Thoreau once expressed his gratitude that he did not know the species of the birds that sang in the morning: "The birds I heard today, which, fortunately, did not come within the scope of my science, sang as freshly as if it had been the first morning of creation."

Our gratitude will be no less if it is given to an anonymous universe or to a

loving God. The recipient of gratitude is not what we need to worry about. *Who* we thank is not as important as *that* we thank.

There are as many ways to express our gratitude and our grace as there are human souls and human thoughts. Words are unnecessary. We do not have to say anything or do anything, although there is much that we could say and do. All that we need is the calmness of gratitude, the wonder of a moment, and the deep thanksgiving of our souls. ■

Thanks! You Did It!



In an enormous show of support earlier this year, CLF friends rallied to meet the CLF's \$100,000 June/July 2011 Challenge Fund. Gifts and new pledges during that time were matched by an unprecedented initiative taken by the CLF Board and enabled through a special one time gift from a bequest left by late CLF members Ted and Nathalie Jones.

Thanks to your generous pledges and donations, we met our target! The CLF was thrilled to see the enormous effort that CLF members, CLF friends, and bricks and mortar churches all over the world made to help us achieve this goal.

The additional money provided by the challenge will create a CLF that is more robust and interactive for you and for seekers of this liberal religion. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for your support.

If you have a pledge balance remaining, please remember that it must be paid by the end of the year. Call us or email Lisa Kielt at lkielt@clfu.org with any questions about your charitable giving. ■

To Be Joyfully Determined

BY JOSHUA MASON PAWELEK, MINISTER,
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY:
EAST, MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

Recall a time when things weren't going well for you, when you didn't feel quite right, didn't feel quite like yourself; a time when you couldn't hear the still, small voice, or when its song was faint; a time when there was some emotional or mental dissonance in your life; a time when you felt disconnected, depressed, anxious, weak, subdued, out-of-whack, broken; a time when your sense of purpose and meaning waned, and you sought help.

You sought help from a therapist—a psychologist or a psychiatrist or some other mental health professional, or you talked to a social worker or school guidance counselor. Maybe you attended a twelve-step group, or an affinity group for bereavement, divorce, cancer. Maybe you talked to a minister, priest or rabbi, maybe your doctor. Maybe you turned to a self-help book or a friend you could trust to give good advice. I assume most of you have been in this situation at some point: you've sought help when something didn't feel quite right.

Put that memory aside and recall a time when things were going great, when you felt exactly like yourself; a time when you could hear the beautiful, compelling melody of the still, small voice; a time when you felt emotionally and mentally healthy; a time when you felt joyful, happy, inspired, powerful, whole; a time when you had a potent sense of purpose and meaning, and you sought help. You said to yourself, "Wow, I feel so good I need help immediately! I need help to figure out what I'm doing right so I can keep doing it—so I can do it more, do it better."

We've all had that experience too, right? No, we haven't. My guess is



Photo by Joe Madar.

there are few people to whom that thought occurs. We don't typically approach our lives this way. For everyone I know, it's fair to say we spend an awful lot of time and energy looking at what's wrong with us, what our diseases are, what our weaknesses are, and how to overcome them. We don't spend nearly as much time and energy looking at what's already right with us, what gives us joy and fulfillment, what our gifts are and how to use them well. To the extent I understand it, focusing on what's right is the essence of Positive Psychology.

Happier is the title of a bestseller by Tal Ben-Shahar. With its bright yellow cover and vivid red lettering, with its seductive new-age style messaging ("Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment") it has all the trappings of the kind of cheesy self-help book at which I automatically snub my jaded, pious, Generation X, Master of Divinity nose. However, this past January, in search of continuing education credits, my wife Stephany enrolled in "Positive Psychology 1504" at the Harvard University Extension School. "Positive Psychology 1504" is the most popular class at Harvard these days, with an enrollment of over 1400. The professor is Tal Ben-Shahar, author of *Happier*, the bright yellow book at which I snub my nose.

Steph and I share an office. Since her course began, every night as I've been catching up on email and preparing sermons, she has been listening to Ben-Shahar's lectures over the internet. Thus, I have been listening to Ben-Shahar's lectures—and realizing this

isn't your standard new-age snake-oil self-help happiness class for overstressed Harvard students in search of an easy A. This is a very well integrated survey of an increasing body of scientific studies of the nature of happiness and well-being.

The more I listen, the more I realize Positive Psychology's emphasis on the quest for well-being, fulfillment and happiness resonates with Unitarian Universalism's historically positive view of humanity. The more I listen, the more I sense my ministry and our shared ministries can benefit from a dose of Positive Psychology. The more I listen, the more I realize Ben-Shahar's prescriptions for happier lives require a disciplined spiritual practice that can help answer the persistent question, "How shall we live?"

My jaded, pious, Generation X, M.Div. nose-snubbing isn't working. Ben-Shahar makes an important, if obvious-sounding point: So often we focus on what is wrong, and we let that determine the course of our lives. What if we choose instead to focus on what is right, on what makes us happy, on what fulfills us? What if we choose instead to be joyfully determined?

For more background on Positive Psychology I read a few articles on Stephany's syllabus. In *The Review of General Psychology*, Shelly Gable and Jonathan Haidt write, "In the second half of the 20th century, psychology learned much about depression, racism, violence, self-esteem management, irrationality, and growing up under adversity, but had much less to say about character strengths, virtues, and the conditions that lead to high levels of happiness or civic engagement."

"In one metaphor," they explain, "psychology was said to be learning how to bring people up from negative eight to zero, but not as good at understanding how people rise from zero to positive eight." They also describe how a majority of psychological studies

from this era focus on how to diagnose and treat mental illness and dysfunctional behavior, while almost never asking how to diagnose and enhance well-being. For example, "There are volumes of work examining how couples and families resolve conflict but very few studies examining them having fun and laughing together."

To be fair, in my experience there are many psychologists who already approach therapy in this positive light. And to be clear, no one in the Positive Psychology movement is suggesting that psychologists ought to stop study-

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ing and treating mental illness, dysfunctional families, alcohol and drug abuse, etc. The Positive Psychology movement is simply appealing for balance—not only a focus on how we reduce the negative, but how we enhance the positive.

We can bring the same appeal to the religious life. So much religion focuses on human brokenness, sinfulness, disconnection from the sacred—our spiritual pathologies. It's necessary to take into account the human capacity for evil, but I never want us to forget the importance of beginning the spiritual life with a proclamation of what is right and good about humanity, with an affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Happiness and fulfillment, says Ben-Shahar, come from what we choose to see and seek, what we choose to focus our attention on. These days it can be difficult to see goodness, dignity, worth and wholeness, let alone bring it

into our lives. In a world facing potentially catastrophic climate change; in the midst of tragic land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a more amorphous and seemingly unending war on terror; in the midst of an economic recession with enormous housing and job insecurity; in the midst of a first world culture focused on material consumption and addicted to corporate media—in the midst of all this breaking and brokenness, all these generators of fear, anxiety and numbness, all these demonstrations of human shortsightedness, arrogance, selfishness, and sinfulness—how do we focus on what is working well, on what brings joy, on what brings happiness and fulfillment? Tal Ben-Shahar says, "Practice."

What do we practice?

Start with **joy**. Ask yourself: What brings me joy? Ask this every single day. Notice the answers. Remember the answers. And be joyful.

Then **gratitude**. Ask yourself: For what am I grateful? Ask this every single day. Notice the answers. Remember the answers. And offer thanks.

Then **praise**. Ask yourself: What in my life is worth praising? Ask this every single day. Notice the answers. Remember the answers. And offer praise.

Then **strength**—don't shy away from strength, don't shy away from being strong and powerful. Ask yourself: In what ways am I strong? Ask this every single day. Notice the answers. Remember the answers. And be strong.

Then **meaning and purpose**. Ask yourself: What gives my life meaning and purpose? What makes me come alive? Ask this every single day. Notice the answers. Remember the answers. And come alive!

Then, because our memories fade, because our lives are full and hectic, because the pressures of life in this often toxic culture will compete ruthlessly with our ability to hold onto the answers to these questions, turn them into

rituals. The things that give you joy, the things that fill you with gratitude, the things that are meaningful, the things that make you come alive: turn them into rituals so they become anchored in your life.

Ben-Shahar says “It could be working out three times a week, meditating fifteen minutes every morning, watching two movies a month, going on a date with your spouse on Tuesdays, pleasure reading for an hour every other day, and so on.” If civic engagement brings you a sense of meaning and purpose, make it your ritual. If working with your hands or numbers or people is one of your strengths, make it a ritual. If watching birds at the feeder gives you joy, make it a ritual. Anchor it in your life. Ben-Shahar quotes Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence... is not an act, but a habit.”

I struggle with whether such practice is really just a privilege of the elite, of the mentally well, of the undicted and unafflicted. Ben-Shahar doesn't address this question. But in my reflections I find that this capacity of striving for happiness and fulfillment is a human capacity. It is universal. Certainly poor people, people with mental or physical illnesses, people in struggle can answer these questions, experience joy, discern strengths—and it would be insulting to suggest otherwise.

This practice is not a privilege for the few. Everyone can engage in it. Everyone can come alive. There's an old gospel hymn in our hymnal called “I've Got a New Name.” Everyone can claim a new name. Let us sing, then, trusting there is a path that can get us to the name of joy, to the name of well-being, to the name of strength, to the name of gratitude, to the name of praise, to the name of meaning. Let everyone come alive and be joyfully determined. ■

CLF Nominating Committee Seeks Leaders

FROM THE CLF NOMINATING COMMITTEE: LAUREL AMABILE, CHAIR, WENDY WOODEN, A.W. “BRAD” BRADBURD

The Church of the Larger Fellowship Nominating Committee seeks CLF/CYF members to run for positions on the Board of Directors beginning June 2012:

- **Directors** three for three-year terms
- **Treasurer** for a one-year term
- **Clerk** for a one-year term



Board members set CLF policy and approve the budget. The Board meets in Boston twice annually and periodically by conference calls.

The CLF also seeks to nominate one member for the Nominating Committee, a three-year term. The Nominating Committee nominates new Board members for election. Most of its meetings are conducted by telephone and email.

For more information, including Frequently Asked Questions, visit www.clfuu.org/boardofdirectors/nominating. You may nominate yourself or another CLF/CYF member for any of these positions.

Please contact the CLF office at nominating@clfuu.org or 617-948-6166 by January 15, 2012, with your nominations. ■



Aspects of Gratitude

BY JOHN SANGER, CLF MEMBER IN HOMINY, OK

Gratitude is an attitude and there are aspects of it that I would not have realized if I had not come to prison. At least not in the same way. Although it may sound like an empty cliché to some and be disbelieved by others:

I need to be here for the lessons I need to learn, and these lessons have nothing to do with what the state claims I did.

We are all in prisons. Mine just happens to have a fence and razor wire around it. Maybe yours is an office cubicle in a steel and glass monolith. Or a house purchased beyond your means and now worth less than its mortgage. Or an addiction to sugar, salt, steroids or sex.

My prison confines me physically but has freed me spiritually. Whereas in the “outside world” I tended to look out and about, I now look inward and upward.

What I now know that I did not know before is that the rent I pay to occupy space on this planet is the service I provide to my fellow beings—not just human beings but all beings, large and small, seen and unseen. I also know intuitively that there are no accidents in the universe and it is always in balance, even if I do not understand one iota of how it operates. Therefore, my unique gifts are needed right here, right now. It is rent that I am grateful to have the opportunity to pay.

John's prison job is tutoring other inmates to help them obtain their GED certification. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

As a kid, I loved the idea of the Indians and the Pilgrims having a happy feast together. In my liberal family and small congregation the generosity of the Indian people, and the fact that the starving Pilgrims wouldn't have survived without them, was a beautiful story with the Indians squarely in the role of heroes. (Go, Squanto!) I always imagined the Indians during that first Thanksgiving as secure and happy, with plenty to share, as if the genocide which would later pretty much destroy their cultures hadn't yet begun and the honeymoon was still on.

But here's something I didn't know as a kid: In 1452, through a papal decree, Pope Nicholas V declared war against all non-Christians throughout the world, and specifically sanctioned and promoted the conquest, colonization, and exploitation of non-Christian nations and their territories.

Pope Nicholas directed King Alfonso of Portugal to "capture, vanquish, and subdue the ... pagans, and other enemies of Christ," to "put them into perpetual slavery," and "to take all their possessions and property."

So when Columbus sailed west in 1492, he was authorized to "take possession" of any lands he "discovered" that were "not under the dominion of any Christian rulers." There was no honeymoon for those he "discovered."

I always thought that language about Columbus "discovering" America was just hideously inaccurate. I didn't know that the word "discovery" was shorthand for saying that Columbus was a general in the religious war on non-Christian people.



Now, the Pilgrims weren't Catholic, and well over a hundred and fifty years had passed between the decree of Pope Nicholas V and the famous landing at Plymouth Rock. The Pope's "Doctrine of Christian Discovery" would not matter to me any more than any other papal edict, except that it is also the law of the United States. In 1823 the US Supreme Court used it as justification to strip indigenous people of land and rights, and it is still the basis used by courts today in order to take away Native people's mineral and water rights, and to violate existing treaties. It's usually shortened to the "Doctrine of Discovery," but it's all about Manifest Destiny and the Christians' rights to dominate the rest of the world.

How do I manage the Thanksgiving season, when my heart is filled with outrage and grief as well as gratitude for all of the bounty which life has heaped upon me?

I don't know about you, but I am outraged that blatant religious discrimination is still legally used to oppress indigenous people in this country which celebrates religious freedom. Unitarian Universalists have now and have always had religious freedom as one of our most central tenets. So I feel specifically called as a Unitarian Universalist to demand that the US government quit using a papal edict as a valid source of legal decisions. We are not a Christian nation!

I'll be working with other Unitarian Universalists to inform more people about this, imagining how we might most meaningfully let our voices be heard. You can learn more about UU activism toward this end by going to www.rd-ad.org/Website_flyer.pdf.

If you're not from the US, you can still get involved—this doctrine has been challenged in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

In this season of Pilgrim hats and Indian headdresses, I just had to say that. You might wonder: how do I manage the Thanksgiving season, when my heart is filled with outrage and grief as well as gratitude for all of the bounty which life has heaped upon me? Same as I manage the rest of the year: imperfectly and awkwardly. As E.B. White says, it makes it "hard to plan the day" when you are torn between the desire to savor the world and the desire to save it.

My own savoring is greatly enhanced when I feel that I am standing on solid ground with other people who share my values, rather than constantly fighting for balance in the quicksand that comes from half truths and denial. That's why I've cast my lot with our quirky bunch. We may not always be the most fun at a party, and this column may not be what you want to read when you are in need of pastoral support, but we do know that our faith means nothing if we don't live it out.

In the midst of that living, there are still untold ways to find and express gratitude. For instance, here is a poem by our member Nancy Andrews of Golden, Colorado:

In Gratitude

Not for Granted

*how simple this step—each step
my foot on the ground
placed fully down
feeling the earth's distribution
ratio of weight...
my identity
this ancient relationship
no echo—no drama—no fanfare
such privilege
supremely quiet*

As always, I remain grateful to be in this community with you. ■

REsources for Living

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

If you've been paying close attention you might remember that back in May I wrote about how it felt a bit odd to be talking about gratitude when it wasn't November, the month in which we celebrate Thanksgiving. And yet, here it is November now, and we're back to the topic of gratitude. What's up with that? Didn't we do a good enough job covering the subject back in May?

But gratitude isn't the kind of subject that you just get done with. Really, gratitude is pretty much the spiritual key to inner peace. Think about it. Was there a time in the last week that you've felt grumpy because things weren't going your way? How about a time recently that you resented a family member because they weren't being considerate of what you wanted? A time you felt depressed because the world is full of people acting like twits? A time you used more of something than you needed, just because it was convenient?

I think it would be an unusual person who didn't feel each of these things at some point in the course of any week. But a healthy dose of gratitude might be a cure for them all. Here's the thing about gratitude. Being grateful starts with admitting that the world and all the people in it aren't here for our own convenience. Each of us has a tendency to believe, somewhere deep in our hearts, that we are the center of the universe and whatever happens on this planet happens in relation to us. So we get mad at people blocking our way, or we ask, "Why is God punishing me?" or we complain that it's unfair that we can't go to a movie the day or week that it opens.

But starting from a place of gratitude means affirming that we don't necessarily deserve to have things



come out the way we wanted them. Everything—from our being alive, to our having food to eat, to

our having friends to talk with—is a gift. Every day thousands of people die or go hungry or feel lonely, without deserving their fate any more than do the healthy people who sit down to a Thanksgiving feast with their friends and family. When we remember that we aren't the center of the universe, and that we aren't always entitled to have things the way we want them, then every time things do turn out well—well, it's a reason to be grateful.

Have you ever seen a Guest at Your Table box?

So as I'm sitting here at this moment, I can be grateful that I have hands to type with and teachers who taught me to write. I can be grateful for the electricity powering my computer and the amazing fact that this little box can not only record my words, but can also connect me to people literally around the world. (If you've grown up with computers in the house you have no idea how amazing this is. I'm not that old, but I can remember our first video game and our first calculator, and I first saw a personal computer when I was in college!) I can marvel at the fact that I had a choice of what I wanted to eat for lunch, and a choice of what room in the house I want to sit in. I can appreciate the fact that I'm able to write whatever I like without having to worry about being arrested for expressing my beliefs and opinions.

Acknowledging that you aren't the center of the universe, and that the world doesn't have to be arranged to make you happy is step one. Feeling and expressing gratitude is step two. But Thanksgiving isn't complete without step three: trying to shape the world toward everyone else being able to enjoy the things we're grate-

ful for. That's why the Thanksgiving holiday is a time of food drives for the hungry, and of interfaith worship services that remind us that it's possible to have a world in which people who have different beliefs don't have to argue about who is right.

But for Unitarian Universalists, Thanksgiving also marks the beginning of the season of Guest at Your Table Boxes. Have you ever seen a Guest at Your Table box? The Unitarian Universalist Service



Committee each year sends participating congregations a bunch of printed cardboard that you assemble into little square boxes. And then you keep that box on your table from Thanksgiving until Christmas, and every day you imagine that the little box is a person you've invited to share your good fortune, and you put in money to represent the food you would share with your guest.

And then, come Christmastime, you bring in your box full of money, and your church sends the money from all of the boxes to the UUSC to help in their good work of partnering with people all over the world to build better lives. Of course, if you're not in a local "3D" church you might never have seen such a box. But that's okay. Your family can make your own box out of a milk carton or a cottage cheese container, collect money through this season of Thanksgiving, add up the total, and give that amount online to the UUSC at www.uusc.org.

The feeling of gratitude is a spiritual practice that admits that the world is not arranged for our pleasure and convenience. The practice of sharing and of working for justice is also a spiritual practice—one that admits that we have the power to shape the world we dream of. The balance point between our lack of control and our power to change the world—that's gratitude. ■



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Blessing

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Thanksgiving is blessing. And blessing is mindfulness.

And so, blest are each of you, you who are precisely who you are and no one else.

Blest are you, wood above our heads; and you, carpet beneath our feet; and, you, flowers before our eyes, which together display the diversity of color which brings pleasure to the soul.

Blest are you Eternal, source of all wonders, whose Name we have yet to know.

And blest are you, final word of this blessing, for you are the threshold between this moment and the next, the very heaven and haven of our present and totally precious lives. ■