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Re-Imagining Home  
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It is good to be back home! We are all coming home today, home to our newly renovated Hendrix Hall.

My husband Gary and I were away for 2 weeks in Costa Rica and another week outside of Boston staying with friends. We thank you for this time. We are all coming home today-arriving back to the place that names us, holds us, calls us, nurtures us, reminds us of who we are and also, when home is as rich as it can be, encourages us to be more than we are, to reach out to those in need, to experience what is not always comfortable.

Part of what we all call home includes this our Unitarian Universalist faith and Meeting House. Religion, when it is done well, holds, nurtures, strengthens and calls us to be more than we are and to reach out to others, to experience what is not always comfortable, to risk being changed by others.

We all know that home and religion have qualities that can also keep us small, inside the walls we know, physically and metaphorically, closed off, contained, content with the sameness that we understand and value.

Christian Wertenbaker, a neuro-opthamologist, writes in his article Imagination: that the brain constructs the outer world through an ordering of objects that match an inner order of concepts. For instance, when the word room comes to our minds, like it just did in all of yours when I said the word room, what we see with our eyes as a room is ordered by our interior concept of a room, one that has been with us since we were children. Wertenbaker goes on to say that people who are born blind whose sight is restored as adults are unable to make sense of what their eyes see because they have no stored concepts of the world to see through. So when they walk into a room, they bump into things. They can literally not make a room visible. No inner image of a room is formed that they can place onto the physical world through their eyes. In other words, we see with our brains. We create the world in our brains and then see the world with our eyes.

Home sets up rooms in our brains, tells us what is right, good, clean, loud, moral, sacred, beautiful, ugly and many other concepts. As I list these, can you add more to the list in your own mind? Can you locate within yourself concepts and perceptions you hold to be true that you learned from your home? These concepts make some things visible and keep others invisible.

This struck me clearly in my recent visit to Costa Rica.

Where we stayed in Costa Rica was quite far from distraction. Though our bungalow was part of a small collection of such homes, we were separated from them by about 100 yards or so, and many trees and the many monkeys in those trees.

We did not bring our computers or have a TV or radio. There was only the wind, the fierce, beautiful, frightening, endless wind that carried the smells of another place far from home and the sounds of an animal world that we had never heard before.

I wanted to learn this new home. I am a traveler at heart and have lived all over the world. Whenever I travel, I want so much to learn where I am, to sit with people from the place, who speak the language, who know the terrain. I want to learn myself in a new way and learn others in a new way too. I was going to say that I want to grow but more importantly than that, I want to belong, feel like part of something until I feel my consciousness expand and I know what it is to be human in a larger way. In other words, I want to create new brain furniture.

Mighty goals for a two week vacation I know! But how hard to learn when so much of what we experience we judge against what we already know. How many times I found myself comparing this place to my home, the one built inside of me: It's too hot, too buggy, too dirty, too loud, not clean enough, safe enough, easy enough to travel down so many dirt roads...all of these judgments happen against a backdrop of the normal that home sets up for us.

The first thing that happened to clue me into the understanding that in order to arrive I had to let go of some judgments that kept me comparing rather than experiencing was being bit by a scorpion. I was putting on my shorts that first morning after we arrived and I felt a sting and threw the shorts across the room and screamed. Out dropped a large, very large, scorpion. I was sure I needed to have one of the crosses made on my skin and the blood sucked out, but the locals said the large scorpions are not poisonous, that some garlic and vinegar should do the trick.

I learned to shake out my clothes and towels before use.

And so the entry to this new home began. It was as if the scorpion came to say, Hey Lady, you are not in Nantucket anymore! If you want to be well here, you better wake up! You wanted to learn what makes home so I am here to tell you that scorpions are part of this home.

A colleague of mine told me a story of when she was riding a NY bus and a child was looking out the window and a mother yanked the child down into the seat and said, What are you looking at? There is nothing to see out there!

This led my colleague to ponder that we are blind to our homes, that we cannot see what most clearly belongs to us, makes us up, constitutes our essence.

What struck me more was that home keeps us from seeing and experiencing anything except in relation to home. Religion does this too of course. This home of ours, Hendrix Hall and this sanctuary, is full of ideas of what is right, good, important, righteous, good. I believe in them all. And sometimes, we need to shake ourselves from the complacency borne of being surrounded by what feels comfortable, familiar, right and reach across the divide of our concepts and values and experience something we do not have any inner images to support, to create the possibility of a room we have never seen.

The renovations of this beautiful Hendrix Hall can be a catalyst to move us into unknown territory, unknown ideas and experiences. It can serve to remind us that we too need to be renovated from time to time, to be shaken from our roots, sanded down and exposed, refreshed with new ideas, new paint so to speak, new cushioning and padding.

While I was in Costa Rica, it struck me that I needed to let go of my assumptions of what was good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly until I could see with new eyes, eyes that could imagine another world rather than seeking to replicate my own. I needed to stop looking out the bus window for home and I needed to sit down and listen to the home around me.

The burning bush is an object described in the Hebrew Bible by the Book of Exodus as being located on Mount Horeb; according to the narrative, the bush was on fire, but was not consumed by the flames. In the narrative, the *burning bush* is the location at which Moses was appointed by Yahweh (God) to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into Canaan.

As a powerful religious symbol, the burning bush represents many things to Jews and Christians such as God's miraculous energy, sacred light, illumination, and the burning heart of purity, love and clarity. From a human standpoint, it also represents Moses' reverence before the divine presence.

In the narrative, an angel of God is described as appearing in the bush and God is subsequently described as calling out from it to Moses, who had been grazing Jethro's flocks there. When Moses starts to approach, God tells Moses to take off his sandals first, due to the place being holy ground.

What we must learn to do in the face of mystery is to take off our shoes, our strongly held beliefs, that which keeps us from touching the earth, the world around us, that which we cannot understand and want to walk away from.

Rebecca Parker writes in a talk she gave at General Assembly in 2012 called, Standing on Holy Ground, "Paradise is a name for earth's creative fullness, its life-

giving waters, and protective encompassing atmosphere, and its myriad plants and creatures. Paradise is a name for the inter-connected and interactive Sacred Wholeness that generates and sustains multiple, diverse, life-giving eco-systems and human cultures. Paradise also names that inter-penetrating realm, of beauty, spiritual and the material, in which the ancestors rest in close proximity to us visiting us in dreams and rituals to guide our path.”

Paradise is all around us. We cannot see it because we are blinded by home, by what we know and think and believe and expect. We walk away from fully exploring life and are content to see only what we have always seen, to know what we have always known. Part of experiencing paradise has to be about opening ourselves to what scares us, challenges us, disorients us. For surely paradise must contain more than each of us can imagine. It must contain the collective imaginings of all of us and we can only begin to see and experience this when we take off our blinders, take off our metaphysical shoes and are then able to feel each other and the world with our soles/souls, those of our feet and those of our beings.

Wendell Berry writes in his book, *Imagination Place*, “If imagination is to have a real worth to us, it needs to have a practical effect. It needs to establish us in our places with a practical respect for what there is besides ourselves.”

Home sets us up with expectations of how the world should be. Then we judge the world and each other against these expectations, and in this sense, never leave home. But home is or should be the place that gives us the courage to not know, to be unsure of the way, to reach out beyond ourselves and those we love until we can experience something new. Home should hold us until we are whole enough to know who we are and where we are, and then it should give us the courage to let go, to experience something else, someone else, somewhere else. We need to re-imagine home.

Forrest Church in his book, *The Cathedral of the World, A Universalist Theology*, writes about being told to hide under his desk at school if ever there was a threat of nuclear attack. His mother was displeased with this and told him that if there was a nuclear attack she wanted him to run home so that they could face it together. The school wrote a new policy that allowed children to run home if they had their parents’ permission during a potential nuclear threat.

I love that story. Home is the place that nurtures us enough so that we can be with others even during a time of nuclear threat, strengthens us enough so that we could run back to even in utter chaos, and loves us enough so that being there is the only place to be that makes sense as we face life and death.

Home is the place where we can make sense of who we are and how we are to go on. But we forget why we need home, why we created it to begin with- not to be complacent and compare everything to it, to what we know, but to feel loved until

we might imagine anew, to feel whole enough to come to others with enough cushion, with enough of ourselves held, to hear who they are and what makes them whole, empty handed, no apples ready to offer or throw. We can arrive with our hearts open because we are lucky enough to have each other, to be home together.

There are many ways to come to re-imagine home until it can allow us to imagine beyond our own truths. The renovation of this space can call us to see ourselves in another reflection; travel of course is a common way to remember that so often the burning bush appears and we forget to remove our shoes, to touch the earth and each other with our souls; our own illness or the illness of others is certainly a way that we are reminded of the sanctity of life. These are things we have all experienced.

I think that this our Meeting House has a special role to play in this awareness too, this soul touching, this reverence to life that can speak to us outside of what we know.

We can each risk more than we usually risk when we are here. We can give more of ourselves, expose our differences to each other, ask for compassion; we can listen.

We can show up more fully here because we are Unitarian Universalists, and this has to mean that we seek to grow ourselves beyond what we know, beyond what home and religion have taught us, beyond what is comfortable and easy, beyond what we have been taught is normal and good.

We can bring ourselves fully here because when we join this church we join a sacred covenant that promises we will live in accordance with our principles and purposes. The first principle, the inherent worth and dignity of all people, guides us, gives us the courage to stand before the burning bush whether that burning bush is a neighbor in need, a family member we struggle to be compassionate to, someone of another race, creed, ability or political stance, an experience that feels unfamiliar that we shy away from- whatever the burning bush appears as, in whatever shape and guise, it has come to say what it has always said, "Listen, imagine, show up, take off what keeps you from touching this experience fully, know that you cannot know what is truth all by yourself, know that it is only when you risk being in relationship that what you thought to be true can be shaken, set aflame, changed.

Let's commit anew to each other as Unitarian Universalists to re-imagine home, to shape new realities in our brains so that we can experience something we do not know, so that we can grow into our compassion and wholeness as human beings here together. Let's walk into the world and greet what we cannot understand easily with compassion, hope and reverence, taking off our shoes, opening our hearts and insisting that home challenge us while it nurtures us until we no longer bump into the walls of our limitations but expand them.

Amen.