Chapter 5 - The Ins and Outs of Hospitality

Introduction

The ins and outs of hospitality involves an exploration of creating both inner and outer space, conscious and unconscious musings like breathing in and breathing out. Interior musings alert one to practice the acts of hospitality, an ancient word which means both host and guest reaching outward to the stranger. Ancient cultures well understood the importance of being host to the stranger, as in many cases it meant the very survival of the guest. This was the norm in many societies that outlined the responsibilities for both host and guest. Protected by the host, the guest was treated with respect, fed, sheltered, and considered temporarily, a part of the tribe or clan. The host and guest were equals.

A Universal Understanding of Hospitality

In ancient Greece, hospitality was a right, and the host was expected to make sure the needs of the guest were met. A person’s ability to abide by the laws of hospitality determined nobility and social standing. The Sanskrit adage, "Atithi Devo Bhava," meaning the guest is truly your god, dictates the respect granted to guests in India. From a Hindu perspective, the practice of graciousness towards a guest comes from the belief that the guest was either favored by the gods or was a god themselves, and in offering hospitality, the host would find favor. The Hebrew Scriptures recall the stories of hospitality when Abraham becomes the host to three visitors (Genesis 18:1ff), and Lot and his wife offer hospitality to two strangers (Genesis 19:1ff). Noteworthy is how universal, if not archetypal, the theme of hospitality is emerging in the history of humankind. The guests of Abraham and Lot are angels, representing the sacred, the divine God. At the beginning of the Common Era, the Roman poet Ovid retells a Greek myth about Baucus and Philemon who are hosts to two gods, Jupiter and Mercury who are disguised as humans. Their names would be Zeus and Hermes according to the Greek pantheon of gods.

Both the stories in Genesis and Metamorphoses tell us Baucus and Philemon and Lot and his wife are favored because of they offered hospitality, unlike the parsimonious citizens who rejected their need for shelter and safety. Each story tells how they were welcomed, offered the customs of hospitality, the ritual custom of foot washing, of being fed with a meal reserved for honored guests, and given shelter. Because of their generosity and graciousness, Baucus and Philemon, and Lot and his wife were blessed and saved from the destruction of their towns, because the other residents refused to grant hospitality to the strangers.
In early Christianity, it was a common belief that in welcoming a stranger, you may be welcoming a god. By practicing hospitality in welcoming the stranger, you would be blessed. This practice is both praised and enumerated among the works of charity by which humankind will be judged. Matthew speaks about the rewards of the just, related to the Son of Man: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Mat.25:35ff). Jesus had no home and was frequently a guest as is mentioned throughout the Christian Scriptures. Recall the story of Jesus rebuking Simon, his host, because he did not offer Jesus the customary rituals of hospitality, even in preparation for his death. These rituals were the obligation of Simon, to wash Jesus’ feet, and offer him the customary welcome for a guest. When Paul and Barnabas were ministering to the citizens of Lystra, the crowds shouted “The gods have come down to us in human form” and later in Jerusalem, Paul exhorts the Hebrew community: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

**Archetypal Underpinnings of Hospitality**

I want to explore this ancient belief that when the host offers hospitality to a stranger, he may be entertaining an angel or a god. This insight is central to our discussion, and it is the belief of this author, that our experience as caregivers is transformational and is a sacred work. In our numerous acts of hospitality, of creating inner space to welcome the stranger, we, as caregivers, are given opportunities to ignite that sacred spark of life within us. We meet the sacred in the other and in doing so, discover the sacred in ourselves. William Augsburger discusses this interplay between the caregiver and the one being cared for, which I believe, is another fundamental attitude for the host. When the host is sensitive to the needs or wounds of the stranger, there is an interplay, a building of trust, and the experience of compassion. Likewise, as the host becomes an agent of healing, “when healing calls to healing,” there is awareness, insight, repentance, change, as well as growth, and h/she is transformed.

This interplay has a way of moving us out of ourselves and into our common humanity. Understanding the practicalities of being a host is paramount to being a caregiver. Caregivers are hypervigilant 24/7, in responding to the call to offer hospitality to those in need. Caregivers practice hospitality par excellence each time they create the space to welcome a stranger. So universal is this act of hospitality, that during times of need and during national emergencies or responses to floods, hurricanes, and fires, first responders and volunteers act without hesitation, responding to the stranger in danger. Even those affected reach out to their neighbors to offer support and safety. As host, being hospitable is about welcoming, being open and receptive, an action that is focused toward another, as in welcoming a guest or a stranger.

Whether a stranger appears in the emergency room, or at the scene of a crime, or at a burning home or building, or to meet the changing needs of an elderly or sick family member, caregivers, by their act of caregiving, train to be hospitable. “Hospitality holds the promise of sharing the best of what we have.” Giving the best also demands a discipline that, at times, is challenged and strained. How often one hears that the client or patient comes first, and the client and patient are always right, even if they are wrong. This attitude raises a multitude of conflicting feelings. How does a caregiver cope with difficult and painful situations? How often does the situation challenge the core of our beliefs? Such was the experience of Allison in the previous chapter. Charles, a chaplain at a large medical center, gives us another example of how he discovered one way he
was able to sort out his own feelings in a tragic situation. Chaplains too, need time to debrief. Here is his story.

Grandpa, I Can’t Play Football

Young Guillermo lay in a coma on a ventilator in the intensive care unit as the doctor called a family conference to discuss the child’s dire prognosis and plan of care. Gathered in the ICU conference room were the chaplain, Charles, a social worker, Guillermo’s doctor, and his parents, Anita and Billy. Also present was the child’s grandfather, Sergio. Sergio spoke of all the dreams he had for Guillermo and how proud he was to be his grandfather. Guillermo was adventurous as any two-year-old, interested in outdoors and loved to be in the family pool with his parents. This summer day, his mother was busy with some friends and relatives planning Guillermo’s second birthday party. One of the cousins was charged to keep an eye on Guillermo. Somehow, he wandered into the kitchen and saw the water of the pool glimmering through the locked screen door. He wanted to go swimming and determined as any two-year-old can be, he jumped up and unhinged the lock on the door.

Meanwhile, laughs and giggles over the coming birthday party could be heard in the living room. Distracted by a visitor at the door, no one noticed the absence of Guillermo. Then a cry, “Where is Guillermo?” They searched the rest of the house to no avail, even looking under the bed where Guillermo often would hide, but he couldn’t be found. Then they noticed the latch on the kitchen door was unhinged and terrified they searched the yard, discovering Guillermo lying on the bottom of the pool. The paramedics could not find a heartbeat but struggled to revive him. He was medivacked to the hospital by helicopter with a faint brainwave.

Since Guillermo was found without a heartbeat, and he was underwater for at least thirty minutes, it was doubtful he could survive. However, children often do survive, but he sustained severe brain damage. The family agreed to continue treatment and hope for the best. Each member of the support team personally felt the tragedy of this family, especially those with children. The next day, the chaplain held a debriefing at the patient-care rounds with the staff. When it was his turn to share his experiences, Charles explained that he is able to sort out his own feelings by writing in his journal. He found that writing and sorting out the emotions he felt, often helped him debrief in recognizing a situation that was too difficult to bear. As he wrote, a poem emerged which he shared called “Grandpa, I can’t play football anymore.” Here is his poem:

Each time Guillermo’s eye caught the reflection of glimmering light, he ran for the pool. Young, energetic, he was always stopped by a guardian who knew the danger of a two-year-old toddler falling into a swimming pool.

Doors locked, watchful eyes, careful to harness the energy of Guillermo who forgot he could not live in water.

Careful each moment, except one moment that changed everything. All the dreams, all the hopes, all the wishes of a family changed that afternoon when Guillermo thought he was a fish.

A visitor to the door, a mix-up in who was watching a curious thunderbolt, and thunderbolt he did, out the door and into the pool. Thirty minutes he laid there, on the bottom. Life being pushed out of him by the displacement of air for water.
“Where’s Guillermo?” The scream of a mother and family members. 911 and drugs and CPR as dedicated first responders cannot change that moment.

His grandfather sighs, his dreams lost for his only male grandson who lives only minimally, whose loss of oxygen leaves him in a deep coma.

In the silence, in the unspoken words and unfocused look, he thinks he hears a voice: “Grandfather, I can’t play football anymore.”

The Different Faces of Hospitality

While much about hospitality is given to creating space for others, little attention is given to the inner promptings that the act of hospitality stirs within the caregiver. Promptings and feelings can both increase and deplete one’s energies. The second understanding of hospitality focuses on the interior stirrings of the caregiver. Simply put, what does the caregiver experience, and how does h/she address these insights and a pantheon of feelings? These can range from feelings of endearment, excitement, satisfaction, and joy over a job well done, to feelings of vigilance, caution, suspicion, hopelessness, anxiety, fear, and compassion fatigue. Simultaneously, hospitality is about another, and at the same time, listening to the interior promptings of one’s own Soul.

My experience and understanding of hospitality have taught me that there is also a third dimension of hospitality. This focus entertains a curiosity about the client’s story, a willingness to be receptive to their fears, anxieties, and concerns. This third dimension of hospitality deals with the caregiver’s skill and practice of active listening in further understanding the stranger’s needs. I remember listening attentively while one of my professors addressed the importance of active listening during one of my courses in pastoral counseling. She said there are three rules that are the foundation of a great coach, caregiver, or counselor. The first rule she said, “is to listen.” The second rule she said, “is to listen.” Then she paused, allowing silence to activate the class’ curiosity, as she regained a quizzical poise, looking somewhat whimsical and a little mischievous as she gazed at each member of the class. She said, “Can you guess what the third rule is in developing the skill of active listening? It is to Listen!”

While there are a variety of definitions for active listening, I like the one posted for diplomats on the U.S. Department of State website. This gives the inquirer a visual metaphor that symbolizes the act of listening. The Chinese character tells us that to listen we must use both ears, watch and maintain eye contact, give undivided attention, and finally, to be empathetic. The article further states that there are four rules to active listening that help explain the deeper meaning of the Chinese symbol. These are: to seek to understand before you seek to be understood, to be non-judgmental, to give the individual your undivided attention, and to use silence effectively.54 In summary, the three dimensions of hospitality are responding to a need, understanding how you as a caregiver are affected, and understanding what the client is experiencing. Inner and outer space seem to merge whether one begins with the need of another or with one’s own self.

Lost in Reverie

My earliest understanding of hospitality surprised me, the summer I turned thirteen. In hindsight, I found myself being host to the stranger within me that I had often neglected. I was too young and inexperienced to fully understand these interior promptings of my Soul. They were
I was sitting on a hill overlooking a railroad track. The abandoned track seemed to meander through the edge of town, and I was curious as to when the last train passed through. I also tried to imagine where it was going and where it came from. I loved trains and had a large layout on two 4’ x 8’ sheets of green painted plywood in the attic with trestles, roads, houses, and a tunnel through a paper mache mountain.

I am not sure how I wandered off from my brother and father, who together were on an errand to get our car serviced. My father’s friend owned an auto repair shop just in front of the railroad tracks. Car talk was not my interest, and since there would be an hour or so for the car to be serviced, I was left to my own devices. We toured the shop and then we were on our own. Maybe I said, “Dad, I am going for a walk.” I was content, wandering behind the garage and going up this hill. I found a grassy spot overlooking the tracks, and I imagined I was sitting on a trestle with my feet dangling in the air. In many ways, I entered a threshold between what was before and what would happen next, an in-between place. Varying shades of gravel created a bed that cushioned the creosote-covered railroad ties, ties that fastened and held the rusted colored tracks. What drew me there, I do not know. I can only speculate. Maybe it was my love of trains or was it the wanderlust of travel, moving beyond a geographical boundary springing from the depths of my ancestral and immigrant past? Maybe it was simply an opportunity just to be, a moment of reverie, a common teenage escape, so to speak.

I was focused on outer space, the warmth of the summer day, the freshness of the grass, wildflowers covering the hill, and the blossoming of new foliage on the nearby grounds. My attention was also on the tracks leading to nowhere, or was it somewhere that I wished I could go? Focused on the railroad tracks, and like a mantra that leads one to interior space, without warning, I was lost in a moment of wonder and reverie. It was as if I had been transported to an inner world of wonder and peace. Time vanished, and for this moment, I felt like I touched infinity. Even as I write, the experience continues to deepen within me, a feeling of transcendence and oneness. For the first time in my life, I experienced Soul when time ceased to exist, I was simply present in the here and now. With this juxtaposition of outer space to inner space and this communion, the two became one. I was too young, however, to glean wisdom from this experience and to understand the stirrings of my Soul. It would take years for me to fathom the depths of this new awareness. After all, I had my turbulent teenage years before me, during which I struggled to understand my place in the world. Those years led me to discover my calling as a caregiver.

Inner and Outer Worlds

I was very much in touch with my surroundings on that spring day. I cannot say I was in touch with my inner world and how to relate it to the rest of my life. In exploring inner and outer worlds, where does one begin? Caregivers are drawn to respond to those in need. Trained as it were, to be self-sufficient, almost on autopilot, walking a tightrope between each of these two worlds. The worlds of a doctor, nurse, caregiver, firefighter, police officer, paramedic, parent, and educator transcend any one participant. Their struggle is humankind’s struggle in developing a relationship to interior and exterior resources that reveals something of the mystery of being human.

Inner and outer worlds create inner and outer space, an openness to receive the stranger, an openness to the universe, an openness to the movements of one’s Soul, and a receptivity to the story and experience of the stranger. “Hospitality is a word overflowing with abundance, like the pomegranate, a rich and ruby fruit from the desert, to comfort and delight.” Pomegranates, like
The Soul of Caregiving

some of us caregivers, are crusty and hard on the outside, then in due season when the time is right, we are open, vulnerable and reveal our inner secrets. Pomegranates are a metaphor for self-giving, an ancient symbol of fertility and charity, giving of themselves completely. As the pomegranate reveals its inner secrets in due season, so too, does Soul refresh with wisdom and insight, a tagline that I now use in this book. When we become aware and listen, Soul does refresh us with wisdom and insight.

This is the paradox of exploring inner and outer space. Outer leads to the inner and inner leads to the outer. The task for the caregiver is learning that the core of hospitality begins with one’s self in the “in between space” where inner and outer worlds meet, that I call the betwixt and between of liminal space. Paraphrasing the words of Psalm 139 from the Hebrew Bible, if we go to the highest heavens, or descend to the netherworld, or take the wings of the morning or dwell in the deepest regions of the sea or think we can hide in the shadows of the night, still that sacred spark of life, that unity of who we are, where inner and outer space meet, will be with and in us.”

The mythologist, Joseph Campbell, expands this notion of integrating inner and outer worlds in a discussion he had with one of his students. Campbell was exploring the ancient myths and religious traditions of monotheism and polytheism when one of his students asked: “Where does God live?” Think for a moment what you learned from your parents and religious teachers. Is God in the heavens, in creation, in one another, in your imagination, in your heart? Campbell, somewhat amused, comments: “Is it above? Then the birds will be there before you. Is it below? Then the fish will be there before you. The Kingdom of God is within you. Who and what is in Heaven? God is in Heaven. Where is God? Within you!”

Experience as Teacher

My experience and awareness of hospitality became real for me and matured when I joined a community of Brothers who took a vow of hospitality. For over five hundred years, the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God developed monastery hospitals, clinics, and health centers for the sick and infirm. The focus was outward, creating a space for another which prompted this outer response to host the stranger. In practical terms, the Brothers created monastery hospitals, taking the sick and infirm into their homes, and into their very lives. The brothers became the host to the stranger. I became intrigued how hospitality was lived out in such practical and concrete ways. What was it about hospitality that created this interior attitude of receptivity, and how did it become a spiritual practice?

I had the opportunity to explore this question more deeply while I was attending a postgraduate program at the University of St. Louis. One of the requirements for a pastoral counseling and spiritual direction program I attended, was to do a study of the charm of the religious institute to which I belonged. Charisms are spiritual gifts, special graces that are freely given by a benevolent God to humankind. We can see how these are shown in the lives of such charismatic leaders like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, St. Francis of Assisi, John of God, and Mother Theresa of Calcutta, to name a few. In my research for a deeper understanding of the charism of hospitality, I discovered that the actual practice, experience, and reflection of hospitality was the spiritual foundation of the Order. It wasn’t about all the external manifestations of following a specific rule, specific customs for the host, what one wore, or the religious rituals and customs that were added on through the centuries. Hospitality was the actual doing and then the reflection on the specific acts of hospitality that was the core spiritual practice of the Order. All the brothers, no
matter their role, each morning would go to the wards and minister to the patients. This reflection added insight and wisdom that created a spirituality and an interior attitude of hospitality. Not something outside of one’s action, but rather integral to its practice.

**Caregivers and Hospitality**

Caregivers practice hospitality every day. Their scope of practice demands an openness that, at a drop of a hat when a call comes in, they are ready to respond. They don’t have time for a bad hair day or to deal with their family or personal issues when called to an accident, a bank robbery, a wildfire, or to the side of a critical-care patient. Each response demands attentiveness, and each response affects the caregiver differently because they care. While emotions may be held in check, emotions are there needing to be explored and even understood. Hospitality is directed toward another and at the same time directed toward the caregiver.

Learning to respond to the needs of others is easy for caregivers. Learning to welcome the stirring of emotions of one’s Soul is more complicated. Not only is the experience of caregiving often missed, but also the opportunity to be supported, fed, and nourished by the very act of caregiving is often neglected. The experience of reaching out as a caregiver to one who is ill, or in need, or in danger is one of the mysteries of the universe, argues the anthropologist, Dr. Angeles Arrien. She suggests that the caregiver’s experience of responding to one who is ill or in need “is an initiation to coming home again to a deeper sense of self and well-being.” Listen to the meaning of Dr. Angeles’ words, the act of responding, the act of creating space for another, the act of self-sacrificing for another, is a way of finding one’s self. While she focuses on the response to illness, I believe a broader understanding can be applied to all the different acts of caregiving. Wholeness and a renewed understanding of one’s self seem to be borne out of the trials and experience of hospitality.

Yet, what is the foundation of this interior attitude, which I believe is a spiritual practice? The act of hospitality is rooted in one’s interior stirrings of the Soul. It is one thing to believe being a caregiver is my job. It is quite another to believe caregiving is my calling. Years at the bedside as a registered nurse, pastoral counselor, and executive leader, would lead me to a deeper understanding of hospitality. Was I willing to be hospitable not only to those I was called to serve, but more importantly, was I willing to become aware of welcoming those interior movements of my Soul?

Explore with me how the three dimensions of hospitality affected me during one of my routine visits in welcoming a new patient into the hospital. Peter and his family taught me to listen not only to him and to his family, but also to listen to my own inner stirrings.

**Untangling the Cords that Bind Us**

As I started to knock on Peter’s door, I remembered the words of Dr. Christina Puchalski, a dear friend and colleague: “When you knock on the door of a patient, take a deep breath and know why you are entering the room.” Knocking on the door became a reminder for me to stop, and create that interior space of welcoming, so that I could be receptive to Peter’s story. Peter was admitted suffering from pneumonia and inflammation of his lungs, which is a complication and one of the last stages of AIDS. I was the Catholic chaplain on duty that evening.
After introductions, I asked if I could sit on the chair next to his bed. As we spoke, his eyes welled up with tears as he said to me: “You don’t know how long I have waited for someone like you to come and visit me.” There was no time to dismiss the compliment, which caregivers often do, or to have visions of grandiosity. I had to understand what was meant by his words, what was Peter really trying to say? Although he felt estranged from his church as a gay Catholic, there was still a deep desire within him to feel he belonged and could find reconciliation.

Peter came from a large Catholic Italian family who, as a gay man, tried to reconcile his beliefs with his family and Church. He also knew that he was dying and was seeking comfort and support. He asked for the sacraments. Tears ran down his face as he discovered a deep peace and was grateful that someone understood. Important in itself, as he did not feel so isolated, but also important because he and his partner were coping with their decision not to inform his parents that he was sick or in the hospital. I knew I would have to explore this with him and his parents sooner than later. He asked if I could help, and I reassured Peter that I would in any way I could. I told him I would check on him in the morning, but if he wanted me to come earlier, just call the hospital operator and have me paged. He reached out to hug me. We embraced and said good night.

_Paged to CIO to My Office_

No sooner had I begun my rounds the next day, I got a call that Peter’s father, Antonio, was waiting for me in the chaplain’s office. He wanted to know if his son was in the hospital. This was the first of three hospitals he intended to visit. Listening to his concerns and fears about his son helped me to understand more about Peter and his father. While understanding the importance of confidentiality and the patient’s wishes not to let his family know he was in the hospital, I reassured Antonio that I would investigate and get back to him. Soon after, I visited Peter. “Peter, your dad was here earlier and wanted to visit you,” Peter began to cry. “Yes, I do want him to come; I want to tell him what is wrong with me. Can you help me?” Peter expressed to me his fears and inability to face his family by himself in the past, and even more so today, due to his weakened condition. He just couldn’t bear the possibility of being rejected. I asked if I could have his permission to call his family to come visit and tell them his diagnosis. That afternoon, his dad, Antonio, and mother, Lucia came with two of Peter’s four brothers, Markus and Georgio. We met in the chaplain’s office.

I remember leading them down the hall as I felt the intrigue building up. I wanted to be understanding and receptive to the needs of Peter’s parents. They, too, were affected by Peter’s illness. They, too, were strangers needing a safe harbor. I had no idea what the outcome of this meeting would be, but I realized it’s importance. All I could do was to create a space of welcoming and actively and compassionately listen. I shared with them my initial awkwardness in not informing them of Peter’s condition until I had his permission. During the conversation, Antonio asked about his son’s condition. “Do you know what is wrong with my son?” There was silence. I waited for some response from one of his brothers with whom Peter had earlier shared his diagnosis, but there none. Just more silence.

Perhaps the silence was due to their awkwardness in discussing AIDS openly with their parents present. After a few minutes that seemed more like ten, I broke the silence explaining that Peter requested I speak to them, as it was too difficult for him. Too many years and opportunities had passed, and too many unspoken words weighed heavily on Peter to tell them himself. I told them of the seriousness of his condition, that his immune system was failing and that his prognosis was
The Soul of Caregiving

...poor. You could hear a pin drop, as all were focused on me as I continued, “Antonio and Lucia, your son has AIDS, and he is in the final stages of the disease.”

The Sounds of Silence

Surprised and yet not surprised, his mother, Lucia tearfully said this is what she always suspected. Mothers always know. More silence, deliberate silence, as I wanted the silence to permeate their hearts as they searched for answers. They each tried to avoid looking at each other and became more focused on me. I was expecting one of the two brothers to speak up and support their parents. Again silence. Then Antonio, looking up sheepishly, his face etched with emotion, asked poignantly, “What should we do?” I paused for a moment, knowing, so conscious of the fact that many families rejected their gay sons and daughters with AIDS during the height of the epidemic. As I made eye contact with Antonio, the words gently came forward from the deepest resources of my heart. “You need to love him!”

Like an arrow aimed at each of their hearts, the truth of what I said allowed them to feel the pain of their son’s diagnosis, as well as to see what each of them needed to do. Tears filled the room and I choked up. Each knew, loving Peter was what each of them wanted and needed to do. “Can we see him?” both Lucia and Antonio seemed to intone at the same time, full of eagerness, full of a parent’s love. “Yes, of course, Peter is expecting you.” The nurses on the floor, as well as Peter, knew that I was meeting with his family. It seemed the nurses were holding a silent vigil as I escorted the family past the nurses’ station and knocked on Peter’s door. “Peter,” I said, “your parents and brothers want to see you.” I vaguely remember what happened next, as I remained on the sidelines as Lucia and Antonio almost smothered Peter with hugs and kisses. Then, his brothers Markus and Georgio, one by one took Peter’s hand and hugged him. Peter was beside himself, as there was no need for excuses or explanations. There was not a dry eye in the room nor at the nurse’s station. Each nurse on duty also came in to meet Peter’s family. In a moment, all the worries and fears of a gay son vanished in the embrace, and he experienced love from his family. The silence of the years was broken as we all deeply felt the numinosity of reconciliation.

It was my privilege to witness their individual fears surrender to a greater collective need to restore the family unity that is such an important part of their Italian heritage. Peter was no longer a stranger, but a welcomed and restored member of his family. Each day, different members of his family came to visit. When it was time for Peter to transition to Hospice care, they came faithfully each day with food and helped his partner with daily care until Peter died three months later. He died happy, reconciled with and surrounded by his large Italian family. The logjam of silence was finally broken in the honesty and the integrity of the love a father has for his son. Peter’s illness became a portal for him and his father to begin a needed conversation, one that might have been lost forever, if not for this experience.

Conclusion

The ins and outs of hospitality lead one on a journey, a pilgrimage of self-awareness and transformation. Following centuries of tradition and custom across different cultural and spiritual practices, hospitality is ingrained in the Soul of caregivers. While being host to a stranger, the act of hospitality demands an internal discipline to be open, to be welcoming, to be receptive to the stranger who knocks on our door. In a paper for my certification to be a Board-Certified Chaplain for the National Association of Catholic Chaplains, I had to present my personal understanding...
and pastoral approach to my work as a pastoral counselor. I chose to share my reflections on Hospitality that have continued to be a touchstone in being a caregiver. I have come to believe that the heart of compassion is hospitality, and the practice of hospitality is the ability to welcome another. To welcome another means to accept and be present to where the other is, to be present to one’s pain, abandonment, faith, crisis, doubts, anger or fears. One can only be present or hospitable and therefore, empathetic and compassionate if one can understand these same experiences within oneself. If the caregiver denies their own anger, grief, loss, pain or suffering, they cannot be hospitable to another.

To be hospitable means to be present in such a way that the one who is in need discovers within themselves the capacity for and the possibility of one’s dignity being restored through their encounter with the caregiver. Concurrently, as the caregiver is welcoming the stranger and facilitating this process, h/she rediscovers their own human dignity being restored. This transformation is similar to gods or angels appearing through the acts of hospitality. The ins and outs of hospitality define that special relationship each caregiver experiences and what makes the work we do so rewarding and life-giving. The paradox of this relationship is that the one who wishes to comfort and be a host is also the one who is comforted and transformed.

There is much to develop about this interaction between the caregiver, the one in need and the caregiver’s need for self-care. There is also much to explore in what some consider to be a minefield of one’s emotional intelligence or lack of support or what hinders one in their service to another. Chapter Six, “Love is a Wounded Healer,” will explore in depth the archetype of the wounded healer and how each caregiver can own and resource its life-giving energies.
Timeout: A Moment of Reprieve

At your own pace, give yourself a moment of leisure to reflect on each question below. Be creative. Reflect with a spouse or friend, trusted co-worker, spend time taking a walk, writing in a journal, writing a poem, tending to a garden, listening to music, writing a song, or drawing a picture.

1. What is one of your favorite stories of being a caregiver that continues to give you goosebumps or makes you tear? (I must admit, I was in tears of gratitude as I talked about Peter and his Family).

2. Can you give an example of when you went out of your way to practice the skill of active listening to one of your clients?

3. In exploring the different dimensions of hospitality, what has been your experience in being the host, in being aware of the client’s story, and of recognizing your own feelings.

4. What is most difficult for you in allowing yourself to become aware of what has been most painful for you in your service to others?
Hospitality

an ancient word which means both host and guest.

Its meaning holds the promise of sharing the best of what we have.

It is a word overflowing with abundance like the pomegranate—a rich ruby fruit from the desert to comfort and to delight.