

I've written about this before, but the image is so rich and evocative that I can't help but draw an experience during the 2004 Parliament of the World Religions held in Barcelona. Among the 4500 attendees was a large contingent from the Sikh community throughout the world. Indeed, there were so many who travelled to Barcelona that they set up their own tent community next to the convention facility where we gathered daily. On the opening night of the week long conference, a representative of the Sikh community rose to speak. He noted that after they prayed in their gurudwara, they would share a meal. All those who were present, according to their tradition, were welcome to the meal. Therefore, he noted, the whole conference--all 4500 people--were welcome to what the Sikhs call *langor*. That is each day of the week everyone was welcomed to a free meal.

Indeed, most of the conference participants took the Sikh community up on their offer at least once, and there were those for whom *langor* was their staple meal throughout the week. The Sikhs easily served 2000 people a day. Long rows of people sitting shoulder to shoulder were served with members bringing buckets of delicious Indian dishes and serving the outstretched plates of diners. And there was no pecking order or designation of who sat next to whom. Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Wiccan, and so many other traditions rubbed shoulders, broke bread, and spoke to each other regardless of race, ethnicity, country of origin, sex, or religion. It was a vision of the great banquet that Jesus describes regarding the Kingdom of God at the end of time.

What draws me back to this image of the amazing hospitality of the Sikh community is, in part, just that: the amazing hospitality. We all have ways that we show hospitality, and our traditions have articulated ways that we are to treat one another. Many of our traditions are handed down from Middle or Near Eastern practices regarding the other or the stranger. Hospitality toward those who are in need or on the margins or a passerby has always been held up as a model of hosting God unawares. What is interesting about the Sikh expression of hospitality and the Parliament of the World Religions is the scale to which it was implemented. It blew your mind! And every smug thought one ever had about how hospitable he or she was paled in comparison.

Not that we need to make hospitality a competition. Though, now that I mention it, perhaps that is precisely what we should do at this time. What would the world look like if instead of seeing scarcity and resource management, we strove to outdo each other in showing kindness, generosity, hospitality to those whom we know, but, and more importantly, to those whom we have never met? Indeed, the power of the Sikh model was that it quickly made strangers friends, and there was no litmus test for entry into *langor*. Everyone was welcome. Rather than hunker down and hold onto what the Sikhs thought was *theirs*, they instead offered a vision of largess that literally overflowed the buckets of food that filled the outstretched plates of those who were hungry.

It's always tricky to keep this type of focus, because we live in a world that is uncertain. Furthermore, alongside the narratives that encourage hospitality there are others that counsel wisdom in frugality. However, the two need not be oppositional. We can be frugal with what we have been given, *and* we can give away what we have been given as well. The key is *what we have been given*. While there are many in our community and country who feel that they do not possess much, the reality that we live where we live makes us among the wealthiest in the world. This is not to guilt anyone. The randomness of birth,

however, does give us pause as we consider *what is ours*. Indeed, people have worked long and hard to forge the lives that they know. Hopefully, they also enjoy those lives. Paramount to enjoying is not the freedom from any concern or care, rather the wisdom of hospitality is that it draws us into deeper connections with people where we realize so much more about ourselves and others that we are enriched in the exchange. We may also find that the world of scarcity that may have driven our thoughts and actions is really a world of abundance. Part of the trick is to simply step out and trust that it is not just us, alone, all by our selves, but that the richness of life showers us daily in myriad ways. Our practice is to recognize it, live into it, and share. If you doubt it, ask the Sikhs.