

## Preparation for Session G78 – The Stranger

Many of us feel conflicted when it comes to our relationship to strangers. We live in a fearful society and yet, as Unitarian Universalists, we are challenged to respect “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” In this session, we try to understand our responses to strangers and explore what we can do to transform our attitude from one of fear or apathy to one of peaceful acceptance.

To begin, please contemplate this poem by Peter Goben:

### Stranger

Stranger, do not come one step nearer  
do not reach out toward me  
stranger  
we must not touch our hands  
to join your loneliness and mine

Abide by the regulation:  
no man shall approach a man  
no woman shall approach a woman  
nor man, woman, nor woman, man  
Our life depends on it

You wear a red scarf  
I wear a blue cap  
there can be nothing between us

If you ask me the time, I must turn my wrist  
If I ask you the way, you must point

The rules hang from every lamppost  
above the basket of geraniums  
they are nailed into the telephone poles  
Though we scream to break the silence  
who would conjecture the universality of his sorrow  
who would confess at the street corner

Stranger, at the time of fire  
you will pass through the smoke to save me  
Stranger, at the time of flood  
I will lift you from the water  
At the time of the invader  
we will gather together

Guard us from our intimacy  
now, as we stand adjacent on the endless belt  
conveying us into the future  
which, like the ancients' heaven  
will justify the disaster of this hour

## Questions and Exercises

1. Have you experienced the paradox of the verses of the poem "Stranger"? Explain.
2. Who are the easiest, and who are the hardest, strangers for you to interact with?
3. If you have, or are responsible for, young children, what have you taught them about interacting with strangers? Include what you have actively taught as well as what you might have shown by example. How does this compare to what you were taught as a child?
4. If you regularly engage in silent, absent, or fearful treatment toward strangers, what are the reasons?
5. Can you recall a specific situation that required you to come to the aid of a stranger?
6. How do you react, and how do you feel, when you pass by a homeless person?
7. Is it easier for you to be a hero to a total stranger than to engage in a kind way with a neighbor or the familiar "stranger" in the supermarket, the bank, the elevator, or even at the social hour in church?
8. Is it sometimes easier to be warm and open to strangers than to be intimate with friends and family?
9. Would you be willing to do something this week to become less strange toward strangers? Try one or more of these and reflect on the positive and/or negative aspects of your experience.
  - Walk through a park frequented by homeless people and look everyone you pass directly in the eye.
  - Wait by the newcomers table at coffee hour and introduce yourself to someone who has come to church for the first time.
  - Start several friendly conversations with strangers you meet in public places, such as the grocery store, bank, bus, or at school.