

BEING A GOOD GUEST

Reflection on Being a Good Guest
by Wilson Chan

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My cultural tail comes from a Cantonese background where opium addiction and the opium wars were the reason why my recent ancestors experienced famine, poverty, and an exodus out of China towards Malaysia in order to survive.

As my whānau reached Malaysia they were blessed, lucky, and able to work hard to escape poverty within a couple of generations.

My parents migrated to Aotearoa with two suitcases, \$1000 and the mindset that one day their children and grandchildren would thrive in this world.

So here I am a diaspora Cantonese male who grew up in Ōtara, married a pākehā, and is currently training for the priesthood under Te Tai Tokerau at St. John's.

These are my cultural lenses through which I will offer a theological reflection and hopefully contribute towards a resource for Māori or indigenous churches.

I have always known that I was a stranger or guest in Aotearoa.

I am always reminded in everyday encounters with those who don't know me that I am a guest, sometimes subtly and sometimes not. This is the reality for many diaspora Chinese, their whānau, and their tupuna who grew up away from their homeland for generations.

In Cantonese culture the concept of hospitality has two key ideas.

The first is the idea of being a good host, the way we use our power and care for our guests.

The second is the idea of being a good guest; the way we empower and care for our host. Whenever my parents would take me and my little brother out to visit someone's house, they would always remind us to be good guests. I know that I am a guest in Aotearoa under the host of tāngata whenua due to Te Tiriti o Waitangi which is the reason why my whānau could migrate here.

It is a privilege that my wife, Esther, and I have been invited as guests to come under Te Tai Tokerau and Te Hāhi Mihinare and to engage in Tikanga Māori and Te Ao Māori spaces.

This brings me to my theological idea of hospitality: what does it mean and look like to be a good guest as tauwiwi/pākehā in Te Hāhi Mihinare and the Te Ao Māori spaces we are invited in?

In the ancient near east, hospitality wasn't just a meal but it was an expression of love practised in treating guests like family, providing shelter, protecting guests, involving guests with economic activity and integrating into the community.

The first formative story on hospitality in the bible is in Genesis 18 with Abraham receiving three guests.

This story connects hospitality with welcoming strangers and connects guests with the presence of God, promise and blessing.

The second formative story is in Genesis 19 with Lot receiving two strangers as guests. Lot was hospitable in receiving guests and he protected them when his community wanted to exploit them sexually. In the ancient near east, hospitality was a measure of a community.

Hospitality was a sign of a good and moral community and inhospitality was a sign of a bad and immoral community.

The stories of Abraham and Lot are compared to describe hospitality as hosts. However, I am interested in the guests in these stories, where guests carried the presence of God, promise, and blessing.

There is another story in Genesis 14 where Abram is a guest who receives a blessing and bread and wine from Melchizedek, his host.

So as I enter into Te Ao Māori spaces as a guest, do I bring the presence of God, do I carry His promises, and am I a blessing in Te Ao Māori?

And am I willing to receive blessing and bread and wine from my host?

Jesus gave hospitality as a host and he received hospitality as a guest.

Jesus sent out his disciples to be guests to rely on their host's hospitality. But Jesus' disciples were guests that healed the sick, raised the dead, cleansed those who had leprosy, drove out demons, brought peace, and proclaimed the good news, who brought the kingdom of God to come near.

So as disciples of Jesus and guest in Te Ao Māori, have I done the above?

Our understanding of hospitality in western societies took a dramatic shift due to the enlightenment and capitalism. This changed hospitality into an industry to make money and lost the moral side and the definition of hospitality being at home or community.

This has also changed the attitude of guests receiving hospitality, shifting from gratitude to entitlement. This is a key part of ancient hospitality for guests integrating into the host's culture and whether the host would keep guests in the long run. I wonder if I am a guest that tāngata whenua would want to keep around for the long run?

This is me figuring out taking my Cantonese culture on being a good guest and thinking Biblically and theologically about being a good guest.

Now I will share three tips in my journey of learning on figuring out how to be a good guest within Te Ao Māori spaces I have been in.

I remember a kaupapa was happening at the local Marae. I turned up early for the powhiri and I knew no one who was there; all of my Māori friends for various reasons couldn't turn up. I was by myself. It was awkward so trying to connect with people as they arrived.

Someone handed out a white envelope for a koha and I brought nothing and I felt so awkward. It was so awkward sitting in the powhiri not knowing what was said. It was so awkward not knowing what was happening. I remember thinking after the cup of tea I should head off.

I awkwardly grabbed a cup of tea and then tried to quickly down it while burning my throat so that I could leave. Then a youth person's aunt came up to me and said 'are you Wilson the pastor at the baptist church?'

I replied 'yes' and she said 'it's good that you are here for this kaupapa on mental health'.

And the rest of the day turned out fine.

I think what I learned here as a guest was turning up to embrace the feeling of awkwardness and make friends with it.

I mean if I had left because I felt awkward I would have missed out on connecting with people, being part of the conversation and kaupapa. I think turning to kaupapa is important but I know for many people, they will not turn up if they know they feel awkward about it.

It's okay to feel awkward in Te Ao Māori and if you push through the awkwardness something good will emerge and you might learn something about yourself. I think being a good guest is embracing feeling awkward and an openness by the host to guide you.

The question as a guest is can I embrace feel awkward in Te Ao Māori?

When I was studying at Praxis, our block courses were on Marae. During that time the whaea looking after us would always call out for extra hands for the kitchen to help out. This was like meal prep, dishes, serving kai etc. She always kept calling me, in particular, to come back to help in the kitchen. At first, I was annoyed but then I enjoyed going to the kitchen. This was the place where jokes, conversations, singing and stories would happen. It was a lively place.

I remember at the end of our block course, the whaea came up to me and said 'you are always welcome back'.

I learnt something about being a good guest: it's when they want you back.

In Israel's history, they have always recognised good guests. In 1 Chron 4: 13-15 Kenaz is a foreigner and artisan living and working in Israel's community. Also in Judges, a Judge called Shammar delivers Israel is a foreigner too.

Both guests are mentioned in Israel's history because the people of Israel wanted them to stay in their nation and stories for future generations of the gifts foreigners can bring.

I think part of being a good guest is making the host's job easier, contributing towards your stay and they want you back or possibly stay because you are an asset.

The question as a guest is am I an asset in Te Ao Māori?

Last story: there is a youth worker who is Māori. Somehow I pissed them off with my ignorance. In public, I got a telling off for sitting on a coffee table. I was so embarrassed. The crazy thing is that they didn't tell anyone else off in the crowd for being ignorant, just me.

Afterwards, I apologised and asked in private, why did they yell only at me. The essence of that was that they thought our relationship was valuable and safe enough that I would take feedback and learn from it. They also mentioned that normally they wouldn't yell at anyone else because they won't change.

What I learnt as a guest is that if you are worth it, the host will be straight up with you and be willing to invest in you. Often in western society, it is hard to receive correction or feedback.

In Te Ao Māori, as a guest I am a child within this Tikanga Māori and I am still learning to exist in Te Ao Māori. Children need feedback and corrections to navigate the world so why would I not be expected to be corrected within Te ao Māori. We need to be open to correction.

As a guest, if you are getting corrected even by yelling this is because they care about the relationship. The question is: am I willing to be open to being corrected, even if I am yelled at in public?

These are my reflections on what I have learnt being a guest in Te Ao Māori.

I have learnt a beautiful kupu for the word hospitality; manaakitanga.

A tutor called Danette broke the word down Mana aki tanga.

Aki meaning to urge and to encourage.

Tanga means people.

Mana aki tanga meaning to urge and to encourage the mana of people.

Often it's used for hosts but here I like to think about it for guests. As a guest do I urge and encourage the mana of tanaga whenua? As I engage within Te Ao Māori with Tāngata whenua as a guest, am I a blessing within the spaces I walk in?

Only God and Tāngata whenua can answer that.

I look forward to future reflections on my journey of learning to be a good guest.