

Wind on the Water

A Viewsletter To Encourage
Unitarian Universalist
Theology and Spirituality

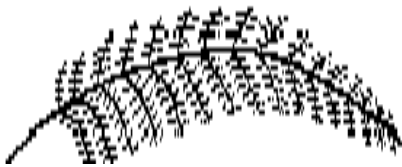
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Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of Wind on the Water, a viewsletter of Unitarian Universalist theology and spirituality. "Theology" we define as "reflections on the meaning and purpose of life and the articulation of those reflections." (This definition comes from Diane and Michael Brown and Pat Guilbeault.) "Spirituality" we prefer not to define at all. We will point towards it by saying that there is much more to the individual human than the conscious mind and that Life is, at its heart, a mystery.

This viewsletter is intended to encourage theologizing and spiritual work. It will contain two varieties of pieces: (1) reflections and suggestions for reflection, and (2) practical pieces on doing spiritual work, either alone or in groups.

Now, let's do it!



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Spelunking Myths

A spiritual technique is reflection on myths. The goal is to find meaning in myths, but a special kind of meaning. As Edward F. Edinger says (*Ego and Archetype*, Penguin Books, 1972), "Most commonly the word ['meaning'] refers to abstract, objective knowledge conveyed by a sign or representation. ... However, there is another kind of meaning, namely, subjective, living meaning which does not refer to abstract knowledge but rather to a psychological state which can affirm life. It is this sense of the word we use when we describe a deeply moving experience as something meaningful. [It is this] living meaning which, laden with affect, relates us organically to life as a whole. Dreams, myths, and works of art can convey this sense of subjective meaning...." It is this subjective meaning of myth we wish to explore.

When exploring myths deeply to look for the hidden meaning, here are some things you should keep in mind:

Assume the myth has meaning. Do not assume it is just a random jumble of unrelated images and details.

The main reason to assume the myth has meaning is that if you don't assume it, you won't look for a meaning and you won't find any.

Do not take the myth literally. A literal meaning is only a meaning in the objective abstract sense. You want the meaning in the subjective sense. For example, consider the gifts of the Magi (Matthew 2:11). If you take the myth literally, you may merely think, "gold, frankincense, and myrrh how quaint." You must look for a non-literal meaning to see the symbolism: gold is tribute to a king; incense is tribute to a god; and myrrh is embalming spice for the sacrificial lamb.

Do not consider the myth to be a figurative representation of historical fact. Some scholars believe certain myths of Dionysus represent the historical arrival of the cult of the god in Greece from Asia Minor and the initial opposition by the authorities. This may even be true, but it probably doesn't hold any great personal meaning for you.

Don't get hung up on trying to understand the myth the same way as the people out

of whose culture it came. Certainly knowing the background of the myths, knowing the ways of life that the

The poet Rilke looked at a statue of Apollo about fifty years ago, and Apollo spoke to him. "You must change your life," he said. When the genuine myth rises into consciousness, that is always its message. You must change your life.
Ursula K. LeGuin, 1976

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myths make reference to, will add a richness to your understanding. But you can never completely understand a myth the way the person sitting next to you understands it, let alone the people in some remote culture. If you insist on understanding it that way, you have made your task impossible. Your job is not to understand the myth the way they did. Your job is to understand the myth the way you do.

Seek coherence. Try to make connections and relate things. Coherence is more satisfying than disconnected fragments, and more importantly, being harder to achieve, it will inspire you to look longer and more closely, to take more time with the myth.



For Reflection

Pull out your Bible and look up the two creation stories in the beginning of Genesis.

In the first story, Genesis 1:1 to 2:4, God creates the world in six days. After each day of creation, God saw that it was good - except for one day. Which day? Which creation? And why did God not see that it was good?

Approach the second story, Genesis 2:5 to 3:24, as a story of a child's growing up. What do the elements of the story mean then? What is Eve?

The Labors of Theseus, part

After King Aigeus of Athens lay with Aithra, daughter of King Pittheus of Troizen, he placed his sword and his sandals under a huge rock. He told her that if she bore him a son, when the lad was old enough to move the rock, he should take what was beneath and come to Athens.

When Theseus was fifteen, Aithra showed him the rock, told him his father's words, and said that someday he could take what was beneath to Athens and claim his birthright. There upon Theseus easily moved the rock and took the sandals and sword. Despite being warned of its dangers, Theseus choose to take the land route to Athens.

The Labors of Theseus is a story of an archetypal boy growing up. (I will not speculate on what parts may be applicable to a girl growing to womanhood.) The boy is eager to be a man, more eager than his mother to let him.

The symbols of manhood are sandals and a sword. As for the sandals, we have a phrase, "big enough to fill the shoes." The boy has to have the stature to fill the sandals and to fulfill the responsibilities of manhood. The sandals also give freedom of movement, the freedom to follow the path he has chosen. Theseus chooses the path of a hero, the dangerous land route rather than the safe route by sea.

The sword is a clear symbol of manhood. Robert Moore suggests there are four male archetypes: the King, the Warrior, the Magician, and the Lover. The symbol of the King is the scepter; of the Warrior, the sword; of the Magician, the wand; and of the Lover

- well, you get the idea.

It is significant that the symbols of manhood both are a gift from the father and also have to be uncovered (discovered) by the boy himself when he grows old enough. This is the paradox that makes adolescence so trying: struggling to become what is already within us, by strength and effort taking the gift we have been given long before.

Next issue, we shall reflect on his journey.



Starting Spiritual Intensives

It is the beginning of the church year and the best time to form spiritual intensives. A spiritual intensive is a small group of people who meet together to do spiritual work.

The most important thing in forming a spiritual intensive is to gather the right group of people; a bad interpersonal "chemistry" is the most common reason for intensives dying in their infancy. You must look for people who can respect, value, and trust each other. You should look for people who are hungry for spiritual growth, but are not famished: those with no hunger will lead the group into mere socializing; those who are famished will not give the others a chance to dine.

A good way to find people for an intensive is to run a course such as "New U" or "Building Your Own Theology." The participants can look each other over and decide if they wish to keep meeting.