

## Wind on the Water

A Viewsletter To Encourage Unitarian  
Universalist Theology and Spirituality

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### The Source

Seek God from out yourself, and learn who it is that takes possession of everything in you, saying *my* god, *my* spirit, *my* understanding, *my* soul, *my* body; and learn whence come sorrow and gladness, and hate and love, and the unwished-for wakefulness and the unwished-for drowsiness, and the unwished-for anger and the unwished-for love. And when you examine all this closely, you will find God within yourself, the One and the Many, for it is from you that God has God's origin.

- Monoimos

### Between River and Desert

In the cult of Isis, the eternal battle between Osiris and his brother Set can be understood as a metaphor for the eternal battle between the Nile and the desert: the Nile rises and floods the valley, bringing rich soil, then the Nile recedes and the desert advances.

It is not a bad metaphor for the creative life: Sometimes creativity floods us and we are almost swept away. Sometimes the desert of mundane life advances. But we cannot live in a flood; we cannot live in a desert.

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### The Five Aggregates

Buddhists say that you can see the impermanence of all things by meditating on the Five Aggregates: sensations of physical forms, feelings, perceptions, mental functioning, and consciousness.

1) The Buddhists group physical objects, the sense organs, and the sensations of the physical world. Sensations are fleeting. The physical objects themselves are aggregates, forms composed by other things put together. They are impermanent, coming into being as the objects are assembled, and going out of existence as they fall back apart.

2) We attach feelings, positive, negative, or neutral, to all we experience.

3) We are always classifying things, relating them to other things. We treat nothing as just itself, but are always associating it with what we have come to know before. This is implicit in the use of common nouns.

4) Our mental functions, giving attention to some part of our environment or experience while withdrawing it from other parts are aggregated and impermanent. We select what parts we will attend to, aggregating what we are aware of out of what is available. Attention shifts very easily, and when most impermanent, when out of control, they sometimes refer to it as "monkey mind," the mind being like a drunken monkey.

5) Consciousness includes the other four aggregates, and hence is aggregated from them. As the contents of consciousness come into and go out of existence, so consciousness itself shifts and flows and changes.

All these aggregates, which seem to sum up all human experience, are impermanent, they are a flow.

We imagine ourselves to be lasting beings, but where is the lasting identity in this flow? Are we only imaginary? Or are we something like an eddy in the stream of our experiences? Or are we somehow more solid still? And can we live and function if we do not believe

### For Reflection

Abel was a shepherd; Cain tilled the soil. When they brought the products of their labors to the Lord, He accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's. Cain's face fell, but the Lord said to him, "Do well and you will be accepted."

Cain invited his brother to go out into the country where Cain murdered him. The Lord confronted Cain and banished him, condemning Cain to be a vagrant and wanderer to whom the earth would no longer yield its wealth.

There was a recent estimate that by the year 2000, seventy percent of black males in America between ages 18 and 27 will be in the criminal justice system or on drugs - seventy percent, that is, of those who are still alive.

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## Pockets

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A Hasidic rabbi said:

In my coat pockets I always have something I need. In my right pocket I have a slip of paper on which is written, "For you was the world made." In the left pocket is a paper that says, "You are nothing but ashes and dust." I always have something I need in one pocket or another.

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## Abraham and Isaac

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[Warning: do not read this to a child.]

Abraham lived sadly, an old man among an alien people. Although he had wealth, he had no son to inherit. God had told him once, "Go out of your tent and look at the sky. Count the stars. That will be the number of your descendants." But Abraham was ninety-nine and his wife Sarah was ninety.

Yet Sarah conceived and bore him a son. Abraham had laughed at the idea that he and Sarah would have a child again at their ages, so they called the child Isaac, "he laughed."

Abraham watched his child grow and delighted in God's words: "I shall make your descendants through Isaac as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the beach."

And then one night, Abraham woke in a sweat; he had heard the voice of God, the voice he had always trusted, command him to take Isaac off to a hill top in Moriah and there to sacrifice him, but God had promised that his descendants through Isaac would be as numerous as the stars.

Abraham could not sleep again that night. And the next night, he woke again, with the same words in speaking in his mind: "take Isaac, your beloved son, and sacrifice him to Me."

Abraham could sleep no more; the words pursued him in his dreams. And when Sarah asked him what was wrong, he would not tell her.

The voice pursued him into the daylight. "Take your son, Isaac, your beloved son ..." But God had promised him ... as many as the stars in the sky, or the grains of sand on the beach ... through Isaac.

"Tell me what troubles you," pleaded Sarah, but Abraham would say nothing.

"Is it God?" she asked. Abraham was weak, he nodded. "God wants something of you?" He nodded.

"Well then, why don't you give it to him?"

"It is too hard," he said.

"What is it?"

"A sacrifice."

"You are rich. How can that be too hard?"

"It is to be made far away," he lied truthfully. Sarah snorted.

Abraham then watched bewildered while around him the arrangements were made. Sarah chose two servants to accompany him, packed the food, bundled the wood for the fire.

"Will you be taking Isaac with you? He should learn the ways of his father's God," she said.

"Yes ..." he said and could say no more.

And so Abraham found himself riding for three days, numb with grief.

When they got to the base of the hill, Abraham left the servants, tied the bundle of sticks on Isaac's back, took the fire and the knife, and began to climb. Then Isaac asked, "But Daddy, where is the animal to sacrifice?"

"It will be there," said Abraham.

"You mean God will provide

one?"

"Yes, God will provide...." Abraham stumbled on. Isaac put his small hand in Abraham's, to steady his father.

But God promised, thought Abraham. God promised as many as the stars in the sky. As many as the grains of sand on the beach. Through Isaac. God had promised.

When they reached the summit, they laid out the wood for the fire, and then Abraham took Isaac and tied him on the pile.

"Daddy! What are you doing? Daddy!"

Abraham raised the knife.

"Daddy! Don't! Please Daddy! Daddy!"

Abraham seemed to see himself from a distance. He saw his wide eyes, his tear-streaked cheeks, his sweat-caked hair. He saw his chest heaving.

"Daddy!"

Abraham saw himself look up. Abraham looked himself straight in the eyes. Then Abraham was in his own body again, looking at a ram caught in the brush. Abraham looked into its eyes, and knew that it was the ram he was to sacrifice, not Isaac.

"God was testing me," Abraham told Isaac. "God was testing me," Abraham told his servants. "God was testing me," Abraham told Sarah. "God was testing me," Abraham told the alien people he lived among.

And maybe he believed it.

But there was a child that died on that mountain. Before, Abraham had trusted God with as childlike a trust as Isaac had trusted him. But now Abraham looked deep into the darkness that had hidden God, past the images that had veiled Him, and now Abraham stared God in the face.