

Wind on the Water

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A Viewletter To Encourage
Unitarian Universalist
Theology and Spirituality

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The Minotaur

In the days when Minos was contending for the kingship of Crete, he prayed to Poseidon to give him a bull to show he had the favor of the gods. He promised he would then return the bull by sacrifice. A magnificent white bull galloped from the waves. When Minos saw it, he could not bring himself to sacrifice it, but sacrificed a lesser animal instead, turning the bull loose among his breeding cows.

For revenge, Poseidon caused Pasiphae, Minos' wife, to burn with sexual desire for the bull. She went for help to Daedalos, who constructed a hollow wooden cow, stretched over with cow hide, in which Pasiphae hid while the bull mounted her. Nine months later a child was born with the head of a calf - the Minotaur. Daedalos was commissioned to construct a labyrinth so intricate that no one could find his way out. There the minotaur was placed. Every nine years seven

boys and seven maidens, a tribute extracted from Athens, were forced into the labyrinth for the Minotaur to devour. The bull itself, finding no other cow so satisfying, broke loose and ravaged the Cretan countryside.

Our difference from the sects about us is whether faith or character is the one thing needful. We maintain that it is character which alone can make saints or sinners and therefore it is character which [Unitarian] Christianity regards as supremely important.
Rev. E. S. Gannett, 1843

The bull may be taken to symbolize power or authority. It came from beyond Minos himself -- from the gods, or we would say, from the consent of the governed. Minos promised to sacrifice the bull, to offer his power to the service of those from whom it came, but two transformations overcame him. First, he desired to have the bull, to use the power for his own purposes. If we identify Pasiphae with Minos, we see Minos desired union with the power. Or treating Pasiphae as separate, her conjugal relations with both Minos and the bull identifies Minos with it; Minos wanted not to have power, but to be it.

The consequence of this attempt to identify with the gift of the gods was the creation of two monsters, one outer and one inner. The outer monster was the bull ravaging the countryside, the power of Minos oppressing Crete.

The inner monster was the Minotaur,

part human, part beast. A house, or apartment, or cave, or labyrinth can be a symbol for the mind. It was there the Minotaur was released to devour youths, who symbolize life, hope, change, and the future.

You may notice a similarity of the bull to the Christian concept of grace, unmerited divine assistance. The Greek myths tend to look clearly at spirituality, warning of the dangers and the consequences of mistakes. The warning here is of the consequences of thinking you are deserving of grace, of trying to own the gifts, and worse, trying to identify yourself with them, imagining they are innate to you.

I Ching

At this inward time of year, consider improving your techniques of introspection. As a method of achieving clarity, learn to consult The I Ching or Book of Changes, the Chinese wisdom book. The best version is translated by Wilhelm and Baynes [Bollingen Series XIX, Princeton Univ. Press, 1967].

You ask the I Ching a question. Traditionally you ask, "What would be the consequences of [some course of action]?" (Mary-Allen, on the other

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I Ching, from page 1

hand, usually asks simply, “What should I be aware of now?”) Then, with the question in mind, you toss three coins six times. In each group of three coins, you count heads as 3 and tails as 2 (or vice versa if you wish), which will give you numbers from 6 through 9. For each throw, draw a line, creating six lines. Stack them from the bottom up. Here are the lines for the numbers:

6 -- x --
7 -----
8 --- ---
9 ---o---

Six and eight are broken lines; seven and

nine are unbroken. Six and nine are changing lines; seven and eight are unchanging.

Look up the resulting hexagram, the stack of six lines, in the table at the end of the book. (The table only shows unbroken or broken lines, not changing lines.) It will give you the number of the hexagram to look up. Read the text for the hexagram; it is supposed to speak about the situation out of which the question is asked. If it makes sense, then read the text associated with each of your changing (6 & 9) lines from bottom (first) to the top (sixth). These are supposed to speak to you about the proposed action. Then change the changing lines: broken becomes unbroken; unbroken, broken; or if you prefer: 6 becomes 7; 9 becomes 8. This gives a new hexagram. Look it up. Its text speaks of the possible consequences of the action.

What if the readings don’t make sense? Perhaps the question is unclear. Perhaps it assumes too much. Try asking a series of simpler questions. Often the meaning will come to you

later.

How does it work? Here is a rationalist’s answer: The toss of the coins is random, but the readings are not; they are the results of millennia of work. They do not represent knowledge, but wisdom - ways of looking at life.

If you ask about a course of action, you will be confronted with ways of viewing the current situation, the proposed action, and the possible consequences - ways you probably haven’t considered.

If the reading doesn’t make sense to you, you will think further about the question and your assumptions. If you ask what you should be aware of, your mind will look for patterns and possibilities in your life.

On the other hand, Mary-Allen, who is not a rationalist, does not know how the I Ching works. She says it’s a mystery like most everything else.

Spiritual Intensives

January is a good time to start spiritual intensives, now that people have time again and they have resolved to make changes in their lives.

There are two forms of intimacy: tête-à-tête and shoulder-to-shoulder. In their meetings, spiritual intensives tend to provide tête-à-tête intimacy. For shoulder-to-shoulder intimacy, the members of the intensive need to work on some project together, some hands-on activity with a goal to accomplish.

As a suggestion, now that the glamour of Christmas is past and the need is great, provide a meal at a shelter for

the homeless.

As a suggestion of a text to be read and discussed together in your meetings, consider the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, composed of three plays, the *Agamemnon*, the *Libation Bearers*, and the *Eumenides*.

Costs

You hear someone say, “I want to have a baby,” and you think, “Yes. But do you want to raise a child? Do you have any idea of the time it takes? The exhaustion? The distractions? The anger and the worry? It is not only pride and love.”

And you hear someone say, “I want to experience spiritual enlightenment,”

Strength

Mary-Allen Walden suggests the following metaphor: A pianist needs strong fingers. It is not that a pianist plays solely with her fingers; that produces very bad technique. Rather, she feels the energy flow all the way from the back down through the arms and hands and into the keys. But the fingers must be strong enough to channel that energy.

And so it is with spirituality. It is not as if the energy is totally yours; it seems to flow through you, but you must be strong enough to channel it.

Spirituality is often associated with personal transformation, but you are not undergoing transformation all the time. Between times you must strengthen your character so that you can contain and channel the energy. Indeed, a person who seems always to be undergoing transformation almost certainly needs greater strength to complete it.

