

Wind on the Water

A Viewsletter To Encourage
Unitarian Universalist
Theology and Spirituality

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Gnostic Adam and Eve

A Gnostic Christian version of the Adam and Eve story goes as follows:

The goddess Eve took pity on Adam. She came down to liberate Adam, taking on material form and becoming the human Eve. When the angels of the creator god attacked her, she left the material body of Eve and hid in the tree of knowledge. The creator god warned Adam and the material Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge lest they should die, but the goddess Eve was not defeated. She sent the snake to instruct the material Eve and through her Adam. They ate of the tree of knowledge and were liberated from the creator god.

The Gnostics interpreted scripture allegorically rather than literally. In the Adam and Eve story, they tended to interpret Adam as a symbol of the soul or of consciousness; Eve as spirit; their story as describing the process of spiritual growth; and their marriage as representing wholeness. This positive interpretation of the story reverses conventional interpretations: the snake is a liberator; God, the creator god, who threatens them with death if they eat of knowledge, is an inferior deity from whom soul and spirit must be liberated.

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The Fall and Salvation

How we view the world influences which stories we think are worth telling, and the stories we tell influence how we view the world, and that again tells us how we should live our lives.

Our most important stories are *The Fall and Salvation*. Even if you didn't grow up Christian, you no doubt know them: Adam, the first man, disobeyed God, and so he, and with him all humans, were exiled from the Garden of Eden to a world where we must labor for a living, where we know good and evil, and where we die. Then God sent his son who sacrificed himself on the cross to save all people from Adam's sin.

The stories say that the Fall was caused by human action. All humans are fallen, except some are saved by the self-sacrifice of a savior.

Robert Reich says that Americans define themselves by four fables with liberals and conservatives differing mainly in the morals they draw from them:

We are *the Benevolent Community*, the saved, Americans, people helping each other.

Then there is *the Mob at the Gates*, foreigners and perhaps the underclass, the Fallen, whom the liberals would like to help and the conservatives would like to discipline.

There is *the Triumphant Individual*, the individual working out his or her own salvation by success in the world.

The Loss of Eden

When God made Adam in the Garden,
Alone and wellaway!
He spent his days in learning what is,
That this and that and every fruit is--
So do we all, I say.

When God told Adam, "Name the beasts,
Nor e'er their value weigh!"
He romped with colts and puppies new,
With lion cubs and cobras too--
In youth we play, I say.

When God made Eve from Adam's ribcage,
For solice sweet away!
He lost his peace in sharp desires,
As puberty brings quickest fires--
So feel we all, I say.

When God drove Adam out of Eden,
To work his life away!
He left the only home he'd known
To clear new fields of briar and stone--
So do we all, I say.

Joe R. Christopher
Stephenville, Texas, 1991

There is *the Rot at the Top*, the powerful people who nevertheless are fallen and are holding back individuals from becoming triumphant and the community from being benevolent. Liberals tend to think the rot is mostly in business; conservatives think it is mostly in government.

The Fall, continued

You can see in these stories a reflection of the general American division between the Winners and the Losers. We torture ourselves with fears we might be losers.

The problem with identifying the saved with our benevolent community is that we don't feel like we're saved.

So how do we react to not feeling saved?

One reaction is a hatred of our supposedly saved community. For example, the Weathermen faction of the SDS had a meeting in the 60's where they agreed that all white male babies should be killed since white males were *The Problem*. Most in attendance were white males.

Or consider the whites who try to pretend they are Native Americans, or who move to ashrams, or try to become anything which isn't what they were, because they already know that whatever they were, they weren't saved.

Another reaction is to seek personal salvation through lottery tickets, new age fads, ancient wisdom, Oriental wisdom, modern psychology, meditation, or if that's too slow, psychoactive drugs; or we seek salvation through a successful career, through falling in love, or through being born again.

Since in the story the Fall was caused by human action, some of us think we have found the cause and can effect a cure.

Some seek to cure childhood trauma in psychotherapy.

Some seek to recover from alcoholism in twelve steps - or recover from a childhood in the family of an alcoholic - or just a dysfunctional family - or a relationship with an alcoholic - or any substance abuser. Actually, everybody has something to recover from.

Some have decided it is society that

causes the Fall and they seek to root out the ills of society. They join together to combat racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, the ruling class, private property, pollution, poverty, war, ignorance, corruption, and a multitude of conspiracies.

Mixed with the search for salvation is the story of the savior who by self sacrifice brought salvation to others.

This political season you can observe many self-nominated leaders offering to be saviors, to "wear the projection" as Jungians might say. However, the fit is not perfect, because they are not offering to "take up the cross," but only to "wear the crown." Nevertheless, we usually manage to crucify our presidents' reputations.

We do not merely look for a savior, we often choose to be a savior. A recall once a woman mentioning with a wry smile that she had earlier that day gone to a man's apartment to save him. The other women present smiled the same wry smile and sympathized. Over time I've come to suspect that nearly every heterosexual woman in our society has at some time tried to redeem a man through love. When I mentioned this suspicion to a woman, her smile was somewhat wistful. "Yes," she said, "it made my life meaningful for a while."

Others don't sacrifice themselves for an individual, they devote themselves to a cause or an institution. It helps if the cause receives frequent air time on TV - the importance of the cause gives importance to the life of the savior.

When we aren't trying to be saviors, we try to convince someone else to be. "Save me from loneliness, or lack of love, or needing to earn an income. Or save our Church by becoming an officer or pledging big bucks."

Life can be better or worse, sometimes a lot better or worse, but no matter how good it is, you will not recognize it as salvation.

You can try to save others, and it may give your life meaning for a time, but whatever you do for others, it will not be salvation, and the end for you is burn-out and resentment.

Wouldn't life be easier without the romance of salvation?

For Reflection

You may not often hear the stories of the Fall and Salvation told in their original form, but you can hear them told in innumerable variations all the time.

When you hear how wonderful someone's life is, recognize the Saved. When you hear stories of corruption and oppression, recognize the Fall. When you hear of success and turning life around, recognize Salvation. When you hear of a leader, political or spiritual, recognize the Savior. Notice how our political and social discussions divide people into Us and Them, the Saved and the Fallen.

Notice how these stories elicit your emotions; notice their power.

Adam meets his soul

From a psychological perspective, the story of Adam and Eve is a story of a boy growing up. Infancy is paradise, but as we grow and become independent, as we gain will-power and self-control, as we grow in knowledge and learn to judge ourselves, as we become sexual - symbolized for Adam by the phallic serpent, by the female side of him that arose while he was asleep, and by the round fruit - so we lose our childhood paradise; we must work for a living; we know we must die.

In the Jungian interpretation, Eve is not a person, but a component of the psyche, the Anima, the female soul in