

Wind on the Water

A Viewletter To Encourage
Unitarian Universalist
Theology and Spirituality

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Reflection For Christmas

At this time of the dark of the year, all of life is drawn inward. We, too, are drawn into ourselves, and if we find there the humility of a lowly stable, perhaps, deep within us will occur a great mystery of the birth of a child. Not a physical child born of passion, but a spiritual child, born of virginal innocence and purity. Our deepest nature rejoices at this birth, for it holds the greatest promise of life: spirit reconciled to flesh, unconscious to conscious, symbolic to physical, the divine to the ordinary.

Yet this new spirit will find danger. The old habits have power and fear this child. They may seek to destroy it.

In our simplicity, we gaze in awe; in our wisdom, we offer nurturing gifts. For the wise know that in this lies the hope of the world -- that divine love may be born and flourish in each human heart.

Mary-Allen Walden December, 1984

Try to relax...

In December, people often run themselves ragged. There are just too many things to do for Christmas: the decorations, the tree, the parties, the baking, the meals, the cards, the presents, the charitable work, the concerts, the videos, the worship services,

You will be much happier this year if you and your family think through the activities early; calculate how much time, energy, and money you can

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comfortably allocate; and choose to do only those that will give you and yours the most peace and pleasure for your limited resources.

Spiritual Intensives

The major goal for a spiritual intensive in December is to get through it. It may be difficult or impossible to meet in late December because of all the scheduling conflicts caused by the Christmas season. In scheduling activities, it may be necessary to take time out of what you were working on to do something related to Christmas -- people may have no attention for anything else.



If you want to start a spiritual intensive, December is the worst possible time because people do not have the attention or energy to devote to it. January is, however, one of the best possible times. People are suddenly left with time on their hands; New Years resolutions call for turning their lives in new directions; and the dark and cold is giving them cabin fever. A little preparation in early December could help you get an intensive going in January.

Remember, the most important thing in forming a spiritual intensive is to gather a group of people who can trust and respect each other. One way to find such people is for a core group to get together and by consensus offer invitations to others to join. The risk of this method is that it tends to exclude newcomers, impoverishing both the newcomers and the intensives, but it does lead to a great chance of success. If you use this method, please try to compensate for its bias.

For Reflection: Santa Myth and Cult

Start from the assumption that there is a separate Santa Claus religion. Reflect on the following questions:

How does the Santa Claus religion keep peace with the Christian religion?

Is Santa Claus a god?

Are there fundamentalists, agnostics, and atheists in the Santa Claus religion?

What are the family rites associated with this religion? Are there prayers and sacrifices? How does the poem



“‘Twas the night before Christmas”
sanctification
these rites?

What are the rites associated with this religion among adults, e.g. at office parties and social clubs?

What images are represented in the iconography (in cardboard and pressed plastic decorations, for example)?

The names of the children of a god sometimes indicate attributes of the deity (e.g. the god of war having children Fear and Terror). Which of the names of the eight reindeer give attributes of Santa? (“Donner” and “Blitzen” are German for “thunder” and “lightening.”)

At Christmas time, many people try to make sure everyone is cheerful. Is this a part of the Santa religion?

Are there hymns to Santa?

Materialism

There is a problem with materialism as a theory of reality. We would want a theory of reality to be useful, and materialism isn't. The material properties of things are a relatively small part of what we understand about them. Most of the properties we ascribe to objects are interaction properties -- how we interact with objects is more important than any properties inherent in them. Here is an example derived from the book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980. Imagine you are holding a toy gun.

Since it is a toy gun, it is not a real gun, so how can we recognize it as a gun at all? Well, what makes something a gun?

There are perceptual properties -- it looks like a gun.

There are motor activity properties -- you hold it like a gun.

There are functional properties -- a real gun ejects bullets from the end of the barrel, a toy gun doesn't.

There are historical functional properties -- a real gun was built to eject bullets, a toy gun wasn't. If the gun we're imagining was, then it wouldn't be a toy gun but a broken gun.

There are symbolic properties -- cylinders that eject things explosively from their ends have a special significance for men.

There are purposive properties -- a real gun has the purpose of poking holes in cardboard from a distance, a toy gun has the purpose of helping children to pretend to poke holes in each other from a distance. If the purpose of our imaginary gun were to make people think we will poke holes in them from a distance, then it wouldn't be a toy gun but a fake gun.

There are material properties -- a real gun has a barrel and chamber made of metal, our imaginary gun has them made of plastic.

Notice how little of what we say about this object has to do with the object's physical properties, and how much has to do with how we use it. Materialism emphasizes the wrong thing, and hence is not very useful.



The Moral Level

The book, *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens, may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the moral level of response to symbols.

At the moral level, the symbol seems to show you your own life; it seems to talk directly to you. This is accompanied with a sense of insight and often with emotion. When the emotion is strong, it will be felt in the body. The meaning will often be hard for you.

So it was with Scrooge. He was visited by the three spirits, who showed him the devastation of his life. Their message, never explicitly stated, was this: “You must change your life.”