

Who Told You That You Were
Naked?
Religious Essays by David E. Teubner

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Email: dteubner@gmail.com
Website: www.KeeneOnline.com/allegory

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Introduction

The title of this book is taken from Genesis, when God asks Adam and Eve where they got the notion that they were naked. Today, many people are still feeling naked and vulnerable in a world they don't understand. The "Good News" is that we should never feel vulnerability before God. I hope to prove my point in the next few pages. Read on.

I've investigated religious ideas for over 20 years and I've now begun to write about what I've discovered. This book contains a number of essays that will certainly provoke thought. I personally believe that "doubt" can be a powerful way to break up our old, fossilized ideas, which might be preventing us from moving forward in life. Without a little bit of doubt, our cup is full to the brim with preconceived notions, and we have little space to let new ideas in.

This little book will introduce the reader to the *allegorical* nature of the Bible. In *allegory*, the reader becomes the main character in their own spiritual drama! This book is meant to initiate you into the mysteries of the spiritual life, even more than you might be today.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I want to open a dialog which will help us move beyond the hypnotic power that our biblical tradition may have had on us, and instead experience, firsthand, the freedom of being a Child of God. The "Good News" is supposed to be good news. Many churches have forgotten this and have instead embraced fundamentalism, with a gloomy view of Christianity. I think that's what has hurt so many seekers of the Way.

I'm indebted to many authors and philosophers, some of my favorites being Alan Watts, Joseph Campbell, Alvin Boyd Kuhn, Stephen Mitchell and Thich Nhat Han. At times I quote these great authors directly; other times it's just their influence, along with years of my own personal introspection, that you're hearing through these pages.

Let this little book bring you to a place of deeper peace and love for yourself and your fellow human being.

David E. Teubner
March 21, 2008



Essay One

Finding Your Treasure

Finding one's treasure isn't always easy. I know how difficult it was for me to pursue such a treasure. For it seemed that whenever I visualized something that I wanted to accomplish or something that I wanted to become, I immediately got a countering impulse telling me to forget about it. This impulse, which I began to call the *Accuser*, was always present. I realized that this Accuser had to be challenged.

Earlier in life, as a young boy of age 4, I hadn't yet developed this Accuser. When I looked out at the world it seemed to receive my joy. I felt large and free inside my infinite universe. I was able to give and receive love freely from the world and everyone around me. The world was safe and I could easily dream. Many that I've talked to have had a similar experience in their youth. We seem to start life with an exuberance and expectancy; then some injury occurs and life becomes tainted, perhaps even frightening. Loved ones now appear too worried or too busy to care for us, or perhaps too critical. At times they react with anger or indifference as we approach them joyfully.

We ask ourselves, "What possibly could be so bad about me to create so much apparent indifference from those I loved the most?" We might begin to think that we'd better hold back a bit. This can be considered our "fall from grace." Figuratively, we enter the *Land of Egypt*, and have tasted the food of the Egyptians. We loose our *Robe of Glory* that once fit us so well. (Search Google.com and read *The Hymn of the Pearl* for some background information).

So I learned to check my joy before I dared share it with the ones I loved the most. I tried to blend in and figuratively "dressed like the Egyptians" to prevent being noticed. I learned to take on their worry and anxiety. This newly established phoniness required a "referee" that now stood guard. I created a "watcher" that kept me in line, keeping my joy and exuberance in check. From then on, whenever I thought I wanted to share my joy with someone, I clamped down on that impulse as quickly as possible. I wasn't going to risk getting my feelings hurt. I felt safer, yet bereft.

It's now obvious to me that when I allow fear to dictate how I behave toward others I suffer unnecessarily.

In my early teens I attended the Lutheran church. I wondered if anyone there was in tune with such subtle feelings. I remember sitting through innumerable sermons about Jesus. Jesus was a man who walked the countryside doing good deeds and teaching people about the *Kingdom of God*. Somehow I felt a certain affinity with the character. He seemed like he was trying to get people to stop doing what I had learned to do so well: to stop holding in the joy; to stop being afraid so much; to stop caring what people think; and to stop believing in other people's ideas of God. I began to listen intently to his parables.

One such parable spoke of people as being like the soil. A seed had been planted, yet it didn't always grow as it was intended:

The Parable of the Sower goes as follows:

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear. Matthew 13: 3-9

In the parable, the seeds represent our various talents which lay dormant, yet are full of potential. The environment that the seeds fell into could cause the seeds to flourish or languish. I didn't want to fall prey to worry, which is what was meant by the seed that fell among thorns. I wanted to grow to my full stature, perhaps by thirty-, sixty- or one hundred-fold.

So, being the introspective person that I am, I began to watch my inner life to see what the problem was. What I discovered was that I was living in a *critical universe*. Mythically speaking, this universe had a large, domed ceiling, like Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel*. It seemed to have many colorful paintings on the ceiling. Every significant authority figure was represented on the ceiling of this imaginary room. My parents were painted there and they loomed

the largest. They were rendered as critical, or with their backs turned away, in apparent indifference. My siblings too were rendered, but just partially, not all filled in. How odd I thought. Finally, God was there, appearing as a sublime, ever-watching figure, never sleeping.

As I took this “visual inventory” what astonished me was their critical nature, save for one kindly, elderly couple. I wanted to take a large paintbrush and fix all of these critical images, but it wasn’t going to be that simple. I needed to somehow negotiate a settlement with each of them, one at a time; for the power they possessed was the very power which I had relinquished. It was up to me to stand taller, in order to usurp each of these threatening images, with a bigger, bolder image of myself. I had forged each of these images during my early years and undoing them would require considerable courage on my part. I had to steal the “pearl of great price” from each of the dragon’s mouths, so to speak.

I’m no psychologist, but I knew that maintaining a plethora of critical, judging images inside my head wasn’t a good thing. I wanted to be spontaneous about who I am. I knew that at my core I was basically a happy kid who was looking excitedly toward a fulfilling life. My spontaneous, joyful self was my “treasure” hidden in a field and I’d be damned if I was going to lie down and die without a fight. I was ready to sell all that I had to reclaim it.

In Matthew 13: 44 we read:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

As I began to work on my problem, I discovered that, like it or not, I consulted these *images* all the time. For instance, every time I had an impulse toward joy, I would look up at these images and asked them whether I was worthy of that joy. The answer invariably came back “no.” The answer was always harsh!

It was interesting to find myself always consulting these images. I will now call them “idols.” Why did I feel I needed to consult them? Apparently it was just a defense mechanism that I had cultivated to protect myself.

So I decided to usurp these idols. I attacked the critical “God image” by studying comparative religion and reading everything I could find. I negotiated with critical parental images by writing a loving letter to my parents telling them that I had to get on with my life. And though they didn’t seem to understand it, I felt I had begun my path of personal autonomy and greater self respect. Soon I established a household of my own and began to build friendships that could sustain me. And, funny as this may sound, every positive act of self-assertion began a spontaneous restructuring of those grimacing *Sistine Chapel* idols. Before long they weren’t as grimacing. They were turning from frowns to smiles, or simply evaporating. This had the effect of releasing tremendous amounts of energy that I could now use in whatever way I choose.

As I continued to attack my negative idols, I started a fruitful study of Eastern religions, including Buddhism and Taoism, thanks to a series of audio lectures by the late Alan Watts. I began to accept Alan Watts as my personal mentor. It might sound funny, but I really needed a sense that there was a wiser, older man in my life that I could learn from.

I remember as a kid wanting this wiser, older man desperately. When the TV series called *Kung Fu* first came out, I was so excited because finally, I thought, “here’s a TV show that provides some teaching and shows respect for elders.” I was captivated.

In the 1999 film *The Matrix*, Neo (the hero’s name, which is short for *Neophyte*) receives an unexpected FedEx package while at work. Neo is about to be called, quite literally, to the hero’s journey. As with most heros, he’s cautious, yet at the same time quite eager.

In *The Matrix*, the person on the other end of the phone is Morpheus. Morpheus may represent a spiritual mentor or Initiator, or our own still, small, voice. Morpheus becomes Neo’s guide, or *psychopomp*. A *psychopomp* is the soul’s guide believed to help a person navigate the perils of the underworld. In the case of *The Matrix*, the underworld is this very earth!

Joseph Campbell, the famous writer on mythology, describes the hero’s journey in the following quotation from the book *Reflections on the Art of Living: A Joseph Campbell Companion*: