

Kierkegaard

by Nick Cabbiness

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Hebrews 5:13, 14¹

An old man eddies his way up through a steep mountain overhang, his burro– packed heavy– resisting somewhat his master’ s leading step. Following closely, a young lad pulls on the new leather reins of an equally loaded but more youthful burro. A little further back two servants bring up the rear, just getting down from their donkeys in time to scale the more precarious trail in front of them. The sun– facing all of them now– is midway up the morning sky, having some time ago thrust away the cool air.

It is a pagan land they traverse, and they are a day and a half into just over a week’ s journey– three and a half days there and three and a half for the return– with just a few hours set aside for the event. Just what the event entails, and why it necessitates this passage, is something known only to the old man. The previous night around the campfire, Ishaim, the younger servant, had hinted in his boyish talk at discovering the purpose of the journey from his master. Abraham, through his white brow, had only peered at the young servant, breaking off finally with a “We shall all see.” Ishaim had seen his master angry before, but clearly this was not anger; nor was it sadness, he mused, and he even thought he saw a little of the twinkle in his master’ s eyes to which he had grown so accustomed. But no, he could not quite read this curious look.

Abraham pulls now even more vigorously at his old donkey, half annoyed and half amused at the look in the old burro’ s eyes. The ridge they are standing on opens up into a threadbare valley, its more luxuriant apparel having long ago disappeared. Pinkish hot sands thrust and swirl upward as if to welcome them. Abraham, waiting for the others to catch up, looks out across the expanse and makes out the distinct beginnings of Moriah. Moriah, the land of his curious old friend, Melchizedek, king of these parts– a friend, unfortunately, he has no time to visit. Isaac pushes up beside his father, looking in the same direction. Abraham mouths, “Moriah.”

Moriah, what an unlikely land for posterity, though in less than a millennium it would be home to Solomon’ s temple– in another thousand years known as The Skull, near where Jesus would say of this old man, “Abraham saw my day, and was glad.” A few years hence, an apostle to

¹ All Scripture references the New King James Version, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985

the nations would speak of his gospel as having first been preached to Abraham, through whom the blessing would now be poured onto all who had the old man's faith. Faith— they would always have need of faith. In two millennia more, Abraham's children would be scattered, held in prison camps, many incinerated in fiercely hot ovens. Yes, always they would have need of faith— the kind their father Abraham had.

The old man thinks about none of this, however, and had he known of it, it would not have mattered much. The countless grains of sand— symbols of his promised seed— on that day land as grit in his eyes, inconsequential to what is foremost in his heart. Standing directly to his side is the only thing that concerns the old man: his son of promise— Isaac. Here, and only here— 70 years in the making— is Abraham's faith. And could he have spoken that day about faith to all the subsequent generations bearing his seed, he would have spoke of only one thing— Isaac.

But what secrets of faith lie within Isaac? What might an old man teach us who for most of his life just wanted a son? It all sounds so . . . normal . . . so finite. Are we sure that we have the right story?

Johannes de Silentio (Kierkegaard's pseudonym in *Fear and Trembling*²) believed that indeed it was the right story. In fact, so much did he believe in this story that he set aside his whole life to be, as it were, a poet worthy to tell of it, to expound on the subtle inner workings of faith in the breast of this old patriarch (p 26, 30). There was only one problem: he did not understand it. In fact, it seemed the more he admired Abraham's story, the less that he understood it, in particular when God sent the old man into Moriah, having told him: "Take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I shall show you" (Genesis 22:1-2). Here truly were words incomprehensible: the son of promise taken away when just a lad! And by his father's own hand! Yet it was precisely this part of Abraham's story that drew Johannes the most. It was not merely that the old man was willing to obey this bizarre command of God that interested Johannes (though that was interesting enough), but rather how he obeyed it. The question might be put this way: While Abraham followed the dictates of God's command— when he awoke early, as well as waking Isaac, while the donkeys were saddled, while he made his way on the journey, when he sharpened the knife, cut the wood, while he looked into his son's precious eyes— what did he believe?

It is possible to think, of course, that Abraham merely went through the motions, stole away all his feelings, felt nothing but numbness— that he merely endured until the whole three day nightmare was over. Had we by chance approved of the wisdom of God's

² Soren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*, trans by Walter Lowrie, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941

command, perhaps we would even have cheered for such an Abraham—after all, he got through, he made it! Johannes, however, would not have joined us in our fanfare, for there was something that suggested to him a quite different Abraham, one who more likely never walked with more assurance of faith, nor felt closer to his God, than on the day he took up the knife. Here, thought Johannes, was a standard bearer; here, worthy of the emulation of all generations, was the father of faith!

Yet of what effect is emulation if we cannot understand what it is that Abraham actually did? What good is a hero for whose heroic deed he can give no account? Therein lay the difficulty for Johannes de Silentio. If he was to be a bard worthy of this type of hero, he would have to on the one hand account for the story's very inexplicability, while on the other peel back the layers for those who could to take a closer look. This was not, Johannes thought, a hero of the type to be vindicated in the end by standards already understood and approved by society at large. Even Agamemnon with the slaying of Iphigenia could be 'understood' by that means (pp 301; 68-70). No, seen in this way, Abraham was no normal hero; rather, inherently shrouded in mystery— he was the knight of faith.

However, to scale a high mountain peak it is probably wise to examine the terrain below, to feel for ourselves the inherent tension between that last bit of dirt and the vertical pinnacle above. The same holds true for the knight of faith. Johannes decided that in addition to our mysterious knight, another— not quite an armor-bearer (for he will be a knight in his own right) yet one less advanced than our hero— would be needed to better help us grasp the peak of faith when we come to it. This knight— the knight of infinity, or the knight of infinite resignation— would probably be the most useful to us in our climb up if he also represented the highest known, or generally understood, level of spirituality. Conveniently, Johannes considered himself to have been a knight of this persuasion. Yet he also made no pretense for truly understanding the knight of faith; but, who knows, perhaps upon finally reaching where the rock arches up, we will all feel inspired.

Let us then begin, but at first, at least, away from the mountain, and a little closer to the village below. It is where the people live, and like most villages, it is also where the people suffer. But for perhaps happier purposes, let us stop at the edge of town, at the local dance. We find to our surprise, however, that no one there is dancing. Johannes observes that "most people live dejectedly in worldly sorrow and joy; they are the ones who sit along the wall and do not join in the dance" (p 51). To courageously and passionately engage life appears beyond this crowd. This place is, however, also where our first knights come upon the scene— the knights of infinity. And in Johannes' extended metaphor, knights of infinity are ones who can dance! They dance and leap and leave the floor with a kind of elevation by which the villagers are only in

awe. The only 'bobble' in their movement, if the villagers care to notice, comes when the knights descend back to the floor. There, the landing suffers the inevitable transition of an exalted state moving into every day life, or 'coming back down to earth,' as they say. However, even this movement is not "ungraceful to behold," according to Johannes, and the very vacillation seems to evidence that there is something distinct and different about them, rendering them in their spiritual state "strangers in the world" (p 52).

We should, however, look more closely at what Johannes means by these 'movements' and why it is they so uniquely characterize the knights of the infinite. On one level 'movement' is a metaphor (as in the dance), but on another Johannes speaks of it in a way that closely associates it with an actual spiritual transaction— in other words, an exchange. But what would they be exchanging? In order to illustrate, Johannes introduces a "definite instance" where a movement or exchange takes place (Later we shall use the same illustration to compare the knight of faith; p 52).

To begin the account, our knight of infinite resignation encounters and falls in love with a princess, one well above his station in life, and one therefore beyond the possibility of his attaining. If he has any friends (and such friends have a knack for appearing at such moments), these "frogs in life's swamp" will have told him that "such a love is foolishness. The rich brewer's widow is a match fully as good and respectable" (p 52). Johannes's advice concerning such meddlers is to let them "croak" all they wish; the true knight of the infinite will not entertain their paltry thoughts. He could never trade-in his love like so much merchandise. At the same time, he utterly disdains any more upbeat offerings such as 'one never knows' and 'perhaps it may happen after all' (p 48). He chooses not to fear the consequences whatever they might be, and even allows the love to "creep into his most secret, his most hidden thoughts, to let it twine in innumerable coils about every ligament of his consciousness," to the extent that "if the love becomes an unhappy one, he will never be able to tear himself loose from it" (pp 52-53). A brave soul! And a rare soul, even though Johannes states that the possibility for such courage is available to all (p 55). Most, however, have chosen to remain seated safely along the wall.

Our knight sports no diverse portfolio, observes Johannes, where risks could be spread out and minimized. On the contrary, he possesses the startling proclivity to "concentrate the whole content of life and the whole significance of reality in one single wish" with the result of pinpointing the "operations of thought in one act of consciousness" (pp 53-54). Such a one would probably have trouble merely asking the princess out for ice cream!

Be that as it may, we see, at the very least, such a knight possesses intensity and focus for his energies difficult for us to

exaggerate. In fact, without this single-minded focus, Johannes refuses to acknowledge there being any knighthood at all. But this is not, as it might appear to be, a description for a certain personality type amenable to knighthood. Johannes allows, for example, that a knight could be male or female, and that their one essential characteristic is to be contrasted only with superficiality and a lack of courage (p 56). But what has all this to do with spiritual movement? Curiously, everything, for what is it to exhale without having first drawn in the deep breath, or to leap in the dance without having first tensed every essential muscle? As fundamental to the 'movement,' therefore, our knight fills himself to the full with desire for the princess.

Next we come to the movement proper. We find that despite his greatest aspirations and courage, this intense, passionate knight has been refused. Here the harsh realities of life come crashing in—personalities in conflict, scenarios ill-considered, circumstances beyond control . . . fiercely hot ovens. The frogs were right. Sitting next to the wall would have been better after all. Peering at him through the window, we see our knight has dismissed everyone and sits alone.

But why would he give up now? If after having disdained all other opinion in the name of his one undying love— one he could never trade nor back away from— why would the knight of infinity be persuaded otherwise now? After all, with the exception of reality setting in, things seemed to have been progressing so nicely. His courage, though perhaps wildly misdirected, was yet admirable. But perhaps he became a practical fellow after all?

Johannes states there is only one thing that could convince the knight of resignation to move from his original position— and that is that he has not moved from it. To face the impossibility of the situation is not for him to finally give in to the frogs; rather, it is for him to see the finite painted eternally. That is, the sheer impossibility of possessing the princess in the finite here and now is, upon facing it, taken as a summons to 'possess' her eternally (pp 545). As ridiculous or delusional as this tact sounds, for the knight of the infinite it satisfies deeply his desire to love the princess (a love that now has a place to go)— in fact, it most likely heightens it in that it is more sacrificial— even as it at the same time lays down all claim to her in this life. Johannes characterizes this movement as having made the impossible possible " by expressing it spiritually The wish which would carry him out into reality, but was wrecked upon the impossibility, is now bent inward, but is not therefore lost, neither is it forgotten" (p 54). It is a 'movement,' then, in the sense of laying down and resigning all ownership to the princess in this life, yet in another sense it is not so much a movement as a recasting of the original desire. But what is transacted or exchanged?— the finite for the infinite (We shall see whether in fact this is a good trade).

The whole approach is actually quite impressive. For example, some time later, if while out walking, we stumble upon our knight some evening, we will not find him pining away for the princess. We will find, on the contrary, a kind of detachment that has been working itself into his demeanor— not the tough guy, ' I don' t need her' reactionary detachment— but rather a wholesome and healthy attitude, one that is characterized by peace and reconciliation with existence (p 56). That is remarkable in any case, but especially in this one where our knight has not protected himself at all, has not, as the frogs wished him to, to simply forget her, but rather has since the very beginning given himself completely over to the princess' s keeping. And so we watch him walk away, his "gate gliding and bold," the townspeople all admiring his detachment and aloofness (p 49). Indeed, his ' leap' seems only to have improved.

Yet for all of that, Johannes' s descriptions could in some manner be seen as more psychological than spiritual, and though it might be that a healthy psyche is the result of a healthy spirit, it is for the spiritual that we first enlisted our knight. Is there, in our knight of infinite resignation, any true spiritual content? Of course, our interest, as was Johannes' s, concerning these knights in the first place is because we seek to know what faith is, if it indeed matters, and what an old man can teach us about it (in all fairness, Johannes is quite convinced this old man has a lot to teach us). But let us pursue that path sharply, and not be easily satisfied or swayed from our goal.

We may as well say, however, that Johannes is fully convinced of the knight of infinity' s spiritual content. And though he is not willing to call what they do ' faith' as such (an important point as we shall see), he is at the same time very inclined towards seeing these knights' way of life characterized fully as spiritual. For example, the resultant "peace" we referred to earlier for the knight of infinity Johannes also depicts as a kind of gain in "eternal consciousness" (p 59). Apparently, by the act or movement of resignation, one' s "eternal validity" would echo back, overriding any temporal concerns or designations (p 57). Johannes sums up the whole experience nicely:

Love for that princess became for him the expression for an eternal love, assumed a religious character, was transfigured into a love for the Eternal Being, which did to be sure deny him the fulfillment of his love, yet reconciled him again by the eternal consciousness of its validity in the form of eternity, which no reality can take from him. (p 54)

In this measure, at least, the ' exchange' appears likely to have been worth it for our knight.

Presumably, then, the more experiences of resignation the knight of infinity goes through (it could be for many things, not only princesses) the more his sense of the eternal grows. This trait more than any single thing seems to define who the knight of infinite resignation is— one who by experience after experience has learned to opt for the eternal each time. After years, they grow so other worldly the eternal probably is more real to them than the temporal. Johannes acknowledges different levels of knights of resignation, some so artistic, he says, that the bobble in their descent back to the ground is greatly minimized (p 52). In fact, one could imagine after sufficient time the bobble simply disappearing altogether and the knight of resignation becoming at long last a knight of faith. Curiously, this depiction is not at all how Johannes characterizes the knight of faith (as some highly advanced knight of infinity). He says the very area of supposed congruency— their spirituality— is in fact where they differ the most. But to understand this more fully, let us first encourage our knight of faith to enter the scene in the same way as had the knight of infinite resignation. Or in other words, can a knight of faith dance?

According to Johannes, however, there is reason to believe that the knight of faith, in place of standing out as different and unusual among the villagers, would probably be mistaken, at least at first, for one of those seated against the wall. But little do those sitting there realize (while they watch the knights of infinity perform their great elevating leaps) that next to them is the greatest dancer of them all: “. . . able to come down in such a way that the same second it looks as if one were standing and walking, to transform the leap of life into a walk, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian— that only the knight of faith can do” (p 52). No bobble there!

But after having observed the potential growth curve for the knight of infinite resignation— one characterized by seemingly enormous advances in spirituality— how is it that the knight of faith bypasses them (or does he)? To help answer this question, let us again bring in the princess story and watch closely our knight of faith.

Curiously, at least at first, there is no difference (p 57). Just as with the knight of infinite resignation, the knight of faith falls for the princess who is exceedingly above him in class and station. Like the knight of infinity, too, he is captured completely by the princess' s charms, and allows his love to grow unchecked and unbounded. With equal focus and intensity, he drinks in this great love. There is no reason to believe, by the way, that the knights of faith have a special knowledge of women or a more skilled way of approaching them. Nor does the princess somehow catch wind of it being the knight of faith that is seeking her hand and invite him to ice cream! No, knights of faith are

normal, maybe too normal. And just as with most normal guys, he too is refused by the princess.

After he is refused, he faces the very same impossibility and precisely in the same manner as the knight of the infinite, he acknowledges the finite impossibility fully: there is, in fact, no way for the princess to be his. Up until this moment, it would be very difficult to tell any difference between the two knights and their experience concerning the princess. Both have loved, both have lost. And because both are human beings, in addition to being knights, loneliness and misery stand knocking at their doorstep. Why would it be any different for them than for anyone else who has answered this door? Yet, in case we have forgotten, the first knight (of the infinite) has in himself done an amazing thing. He is not a fool and knew full well that upon opening and releasing the full range of human feeling within himself, that all could come crashing down. He did not listen to the nay-saying frogs, though their words would have especially stung in the freshness of the princess' s refusal. He did not listen, but he honestly wondered if he did not yet belong along that dance floor wall, seated with the defensive posture. But no— he did not in bitterness of soul lash out at God and at life. Rather, he moved the “ wish . . . wrecked upon the impossibility” into the hand of the Eternal (p 54).

All of this, and in addition our first knight walks away unscathed, without a hint of bitterness in his soul, loving both God and princess anew (albeit eternally). Is that not of itself amazing and a far cry above misery' s wall? Yea, we smile heartily at this knight' s leaps! Yet it is to the knight of faith that we have turned our gaze. But up until even this very moment everything is precisely the same! Stepping back momentarily, we may have expected some varying behavior among the two knights even at this point. Should not, for instance, the knight of faith be somewhat wiser concerning princesses than his less advanced friend? And wiser might mean, for example, not opening up one' s entire being to nearby princesses? Yet Johannes has no room for such wisdom, and takes as fundamental to any real encounter with God (and therefore life), a human fully engaged. As he mentions in his preface and elsewhere, anything else is but a “ sale.”

In the second case, we might also think, based on previous observations, that the very activity which had become the source and seedbed of spirituality for the knight of the infinite (namely resignation) would somehow be inappropriate for the knight of faith (at least in its expression). Knights of faith, we recall, fit in with the boys! Johannes elaborates on this point at length when he attempts to imagine himself fortuitously encountering a knight of faith on the road (pp 49-52). And though he supposedly has some good idea of what a knight of faith is like, he is continuously thrown off in the encounter from his expectations (Whether Johannes [remembering that he is a knight of infinite

resignation] is actually thrown off or is merely anticipating others being thrown off would be a matter interesting to consider). At each moment Johannes attempts to spy out the unusual— anything that would reveal the incommensurability of this man with everyday life. Yet it is useless— this knight appears more worldly-minded than the worldly (not in an immoral sense of course)! He certainly enjoys it more, free as he is from their misery. Yet Johannes is careful to note, though he cannot detect in any way reminiscent of the knight of the infinite (and that therefore it must become known in some other way), that infinite resignation is indeed taking place:

This man has made and every instant is making the movements of infinity. With infinite resignation he has drained the cup of life' s profound sadness, he knows the bliss of the infinite, he senses the pain of renouncing everything, the dearest things he possesses in the world, and yet finiteness tastes to him just as good as to one who never knew anything higher, for his continuance in the finite did not bear a trace of that cowed and fearful spirit produced by the process of training; and yet he has this sense of security in enjoying it, as though the finite life were the surest thing of all. (p 51)

We have therefore apparently identical movement for the knight of faith with regard to resignation as with the knight of the infinite, yet with the added feature that such resignation does not in any obvious sense ' spiritualize' the experience for him.

Therefore, with respect to our princess story, the knight of faith, as surely as the knight of infinity, makes the resigning movement! Yet the outward difference of expression in the two knights presses this matter of resignation. It appears not only to be a question of expression or style (how we deal with our pain, for instance), as it is one of understanding what spirituality means to each of them. Why is the knight of infinity holding up this eternal view of the princess, we ask again? We ask the question once again because the difference in expression between the two knights is usually billed in connection only with the knight of faith having the additional movement, the movement of faith (which we have not discussed yet), and that it alone is the true difference between the two. Yet this overly simplistic approach appears to overlook the fact that the second movement in some way still has motivational roots in the first (Johannes says, for instance, that one cannot bypass resignation and still arrive at faith), and that any explanation for the difference in the two knights must take into account not only faith but resignation as well (pp 48; 57). Johannes puts it this way: " He [the knight of faith] constantly makes movements of infinity, but does this with such correctness and assurance that he constantly gets the finite out of it, and there is not a

second when one has a notion of anything else" (p 51, emphasis mine). If the knight of faith makes the movement of resignation more 'correctly,' so that it always leads to finiteness and faith, what would it mean to make the movement less correctly? It would mean to make the movement as the knight of infinity does! It may even mean a stunted, stillborn, spiritualized version of what was only ever meant to be a finite, faith-filled one.

The statement is rather strong considering our earlier accolades concerning the knight of the infinite, yet we can really only 'get at' the knight of faith if we both appreciate what has come before him as well as to realize what failure necessitates him. Resignation at this point appears to be like a bottle with two necks, one for real drinking and one perhaps for nothing other than recycling our spit. Perhaps the movement of resignation was only ever meant as a wineskin to faith, and never as a separate compartment for a thing called 'spirituality,' however illuminating. But let us not be too hard on our knight of infinity just yet, at least not until we uncover what it is that ails him.

As an initial way of doing just that, let us allow our more advanced knight the pleasure of officially beginning the second movement, that is— faith. The last we knew, the princess had just refused him, and he had begun that movement within infinity, the very one that renounces all claim to the princess, yet does so in such a manner as lands him squarely in the finite. He says, "I believe, nevertheless, that I shall get her" (p 57). And he does! But what do we do with this? Johannes will not allow us to say that the knight is merely lucky, or that he just hangs around long enough till the princess feels sorry for him. He gets the girl— the girl! But what has this to do with spirituality?— maybe nothing; with God?— maybe everything. But before we throw a parade in his honor, perhaps we should look a little closer at how the knight of faith performs this amazing feat.

Johannes de Silentio spends much of Fear and Trembling decrying his difficulties of understanding and actually becoming a knight of faith, yet he, as a knight of infinite resignation keeps attempting to find a way into that elusive yet honored place. In all fairness, he provides us with several hints, yet perhaps it might be illuminating for us to overhear some of his difficulties as well:

For my part I can well describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them. When one would learn to make the motions of swimming one can let oneself be hung by a swimming belt from the ceiling and go through the motions (describe them, so to speak, as we speak of describing a circle), but one is not swimming. In that way I can describe the movements of faith, but when I am thrown into the water, I swim, it is true (for I don't belong to the beach-waders), but I make other

movements, I make the movements of infinity, whereas faith does the opposite: after having made the movements of infinity, it makes those of finiteness. (p 48)

He comments elsewhere:

But . . . when I have to think of Abraham, I am as though annihilated. I catch sight every moment of that enormous paradox which is the substance of Abraham's life, every moment I am repelled and my thought in spite of all its passion cannot get a hairs-breadth further. I strain every muscle to get a view of it— that very instant I am paralyzed. (p 44)

What is the source of this frustration and 'paralysis' for him? If we can answer that, then perhaps we can begin to understand what it is that ails our knights of infinity, and which excludes them from faith.

Johannes begins his book with the following quotation: "What Tarquinius Superbus spoke in his garden with the poppies was understood by his son, but not by the messenger" (p 21). In the prelude, four times over Johannes describes the potential confusion of the message to a child being weaned away from his mother's breast (pp 27-29). In the very same section, first scenario, Abraham attempts to explain to Isaac as they climb the mountain, what is to happen to him. It does not work. He does not understand, though Abraham is tender and fatherly. Again, Johannes spends all of Problem III explaining why it was ethically defensible for Abraham not to have told Sarah, Isaac, and the servant, Eleazar, about his purpose to Moriah. The potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication appears to be great in this book. Even Abraham seems to have had the potential for misunderstanding what God had spoken when the command came to go to Moriah. According to Johannes, the scenario could have gone like this:

So all was lost— more dreadfully than if it had never come to pass! So the Lord was only making sport of Abraham! He made miraculously the preposterous actual, and now in turn He would annihilate it. It was indeed foolishness, but Abraham did not laugh at it like Sarah when the promise was announced. All was lost! Seventy years of faithful expectation, the brief joy at the fulfillment of faith. Who then is he that plucks away the old man's staff, who is it that requires that the old man himself shall do it? Who is he who would make a man's gray hairs comfortless, who is he that requires that he himself shall do it? Is there no compassion for the

venerable oldling, none for the innocent child? That glorious treasure which was just as old as faith in Abraham' s heart, many, many years older than Isaac this fruit was now to be plucked away prematurely and remain without significance. (p 34)

More than any of us, perhaps, the old man had reason to misunderstand the message. " Yet Abraham believed, and believed for this life" (p 34). How did he know? With words as direct, tactless, and harsh as any ever spoken, what gave Abraham the ability to ' understand' this command and still believe?

Lovers have a language, one that usually cannot be understood outside the circle of their intimacy; it is built upon a history– one made up of many details. To most others their communication sounds insipid, perhaps even absurd. The knight of infinite resignation knows a communication of love, but in contrast to lovers it lacks the history of tiny details:

I am convinced that God is love, this thought has for me a primitive, lyrical validity. When it is present to me, I am unspeakably blissful, when it is absent I long for it more vehemently than the lover for his object. But I do not believe. This courage I lack I can well endure living in my way, I am joyful and content, but my joy is not that of faith and in comparison with that it is unhappy I gaze only at my love, and I keep its virginal flame pure and clear Faith is convinced that God is concerned about the least things. I am content in this life to be married to the left hand, faith is humble enough to demand the right hand– for that this humility I do not deny and shall never deny. (pp 44-45)

We uncover, then, finally why our knight of infinity must always reach towards the infinite in exchange for the finite. That transaction is his safest bet. Though he can experience a life with peace and joy and even love in some sense, the eternal is a bedrock that will not disappoint, will not, that is, within the world of the eternal. And of course, he is right, yet our knight of faith longs for the finite as well as the eternal. To watch God come through in the visible, as well as the invisible, brings love home in a whole new way, and makes one " a guiding star for the anguished" (But then it also opens the door for the possibility of disappointment, great disappointment. Many would talk him out of it. But he hears a love language, one built from many experiences, one even heightened by what others consider absurd. But like a young child he trusts– yea he even is humble enough to demand . . . a princess or a son.

"When the child must be weaned, the mother blackens her breast . . . [she] has stronger food in readiness, lest the child should perish. Happy the person who has stronger food in readiness!" (pp 2829)

* * * * *

The old man walks up the mountain beside his son, Isaac. He carries a torch in one hand, and a knife in the other. Ishaim watches from below, trying to wipe from his brow the ominous heaviness in the air. Abraham gazes at his son as they walk up, and Isaac feels his father's eyes upon him. The old man watches him carrying devotedly the very wood of his demise. It is late afternoon, and the sun beats down hard upon them.

"My father!" Isaac suddenly cries out. Abraham says, "Here I am, my son." "Look, the fire and wood, but where is the lamb?" he asks, his eyes earnest and wide. The old man looks deeply into his son's eyes. There are no words. Then he suddenly says, "My son, God will provide . . . the lamb." Isaac sees the love in his father's eyes, and he knows . . .