

# people of the Stream



## The Samaritan Woman at the Well — John 4:10

Surprised that Jesus, a Jew, asks her for a drink, she asks, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”

Instead of speaking of literal water and thirst as she is expecting, Jesus redirects her attention to deeper spiritual truths. So he shifts the conversation from physical water to spiritual nourishment: *If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.*



## The Stream

just next to nowhere  
ever full, ever empty  
a fountain overflowing  
bestowing much water and thirst

but beware this stream that runs unseen,  
for its water blinds the pilgrim's eye  
to view the past as dust  
while taste and smell it corrupts  
until reality tastes only of wonder  
and love is all that's left to drink.

tony macelli

“The water that comes from the well of tears comes from within ourselves, and is drawn up from our very own depths. But the water that rains down from above is a true grace of God.” — *Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle, 1577.*

“In the spiritual life, there is no such thing as an empty space. As soon as one point is vacated, something else immediately flows in to fill the void.” — *Thomas Merton, No Man Is an Island, 1955.*

“You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.” — *Rumi, The Essential Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks, 1995.*

“The water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark. The small truth has words which are clear; the great truth has great silence.” — *Rabindranath Tagore, Stray Birds, 1916.*

“As the waters of the rivers flow into the ocean but cannot make the vast ocean overflow, so flow the streams of the sense-world into the sea of peace that is the sage.” — *Bhagavad Gita, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, 1944.*

# People of the Stream

Life often starts by beckoning us toward the immediate: physical needs, tangible goals, a sense of purpose rooted in the world around us.

Yet, just as the Samaritan woman at the well found herself invited beyond literal thirst by a simple encounter, so too are we. Jesus, speaking to her of "living water" in the Gospel of John, signals that our deepest thirsts are not for what we can hold or taste in a fleeting moment. Our thirsts are for something far more enduring—something that flows continually, filling and nourishing us in ways we may not always see but can often feel with our intuition.

## **1. Encountering the Stream: A Call Beyond Physical Thirst**

Imagine that, in the middle of your day, you find yourself beside a well, like the Samaritan woman.

But instead of hearing words about water as a quick relief, you sense an invitation to something deeper—a quenching beyond what this world can offer. This moment shifts from the simple to the sacred, from immediate needs to spiritual sustenance. Teresa of Avila, a mystic who knew the land-

scape of the soul well, describes this beautifully. She says there is water we draw from our own depths, a "well of tears" reflecting our own efforts, our striving. But the water that rains from above? Ah, that is pure grace, given freely by God.

The truth is, we each have our own encounters with these moments of unexpected depth. Whether in prayer, in nature, in compassionate encounters with person or animal, or in sudden moments of peace, we can come to recognize that there's something waiting for us beneath the surface. This deeper "living water" doesn't merely satisfy our minds; it fills our spirits, inviting us to drink freely from an endless source.

## **2. The Nature of Spiritual Space and Fullness**

As the contemplation deepens, we discover that spiritual life, unlike our physical world, does not leave any space empty. Thomas Merton once observed that in the spiritual realm, "as soon as one point is vacated, something else immediately flows in to fill the void." In other words, as we create inner space by setting aside our usual preoccupations and fears, grace moves in to occupy it. Think of a stream that's constantly replenished. Just as it flows uninterrupted, so too can our inner life be sustained by grace when we allow it to permeate our being.

This isn't a one-time tank fill-up; it's a continuous, life-giving flow. Each time we pause in contemplation, we are opening channels within ourselves, making room for God to pour in peace, love, and joy. Then, our actions no longer need to be driven by external motivations or anxieties. Instead, they become natural extensions of the fullness inside us.

## **3. The Ocean Within: Discovering Divine Identity**

In contemplating this flow, we come closer to understanding our identity. The poet Rumi offers a striking image: "You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop." This isn't mere word-play; it's a profound mystical truth. Inside each of us lies a spark of the Divine, an entire world of presence, wisdom, and love. Just as the ocean contains all rivers, we too contain within ourselves the boundless potential to connect with God.

Tagore, another lover of the mystical life, said that "the water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark." This quiet depth is our own potential, our own invitation to seek the silent yet profound truth within. As we tap into this truth, our identity shifts. We are no longer small seekers; we are vast expressions of God's own being, each moment reminding us that we are not separated from God, but forever joined.

#### **4. Streams into the Sea of Peace: Detachment and Union**

So, what happens when we encounter this vastness within? Detachment—yes, but not in the lonely, ascetic sense. Instead, it is a gentle setting aside of anything that clings too tightly, anything that binds us to the surface world. The Christian anonymous classic “The Cloud of Unknowing” speaks of a cloud of forgetting. The Bhagavad Gita paints this in a beautiful metaphor, saying that rivers flow into the ocean but do not make it overflow. Just so, when the soul is immersed in the peace of God, worldly concerns lose their ability to overwhelm it.

In Christian mysticism, this path of detachment is not about ignoring the world but rather about allowing our senses to lead us inward. The world no longer pulls and pushes; instead, we find that everything external is a reflection of the Divine, leading us back to the source. What we may then realise is that such a process will have also led us to a profound unity with all things.

#### **5. The Unseen Stream: Faith and Trust in the Invisible**

The poem “The Stream” describes a stream that runs unseen, whose water blinds the

pilgrim’s eye, making the past look like dust and turning reality into pure wonder. This image speaks to a stream that exists beyond our senses, flowing quietly beneath the surface. In contemplation, we are invited to trust this invisible stream—to let go of what we see and to embrace the invisible currents of grace.

Faith, then, is the quiet strength to know that this unseen water is at least as real as any physical river. In choosing a trusting faith, we let go of the need to understand or control every aspect of our journey. We allow ourselves to be carried by the flow, trusting that it leads us to our truest home in God.

#### **6. Transformation of Desire: From Need to Love**

At the heart of this journey, we find that our deepest thirst is not for what we thought we needed. Instead, it is a desire to be filled with Divine love, a love that’s as natural as breathing, as essential as water. The ultimate drink of the contemplative life is love—pure, selfless, and overflowing.

When love becomes our only nourishment, action naturally flows from it. We no longer act out of duty or ambition; we act because love propels us outward. It fills us, and from that fullness, we naturally extend kindness,

compassion, and peace. Action, then, is not an effort but an outpouring of this deep, inner stream.

#### **7. Embracing the Stream in Daily Life**

And so, the invitation of “The Stream” is not exactly to change what we do, but to change where it comes from. We are invited to go beyond the superficial waters of the world and drink deeply from the stream that flows unseen, the stream that brings us peace and quiet inner joy, the Maltese *hena*.

As we let this stream guide us, our lives transform—not through grand gestures, but through simple moments of awareness, gratitude, and love. We become vessels, filling and emptying, like a stream whose source never runs dry. In this way, contemplation leads us into a life where action and being are one, where each moment is an expression of Divine grace.

Let us, then, be people of the stream, letting our hearts fill and overflow with the goodness that comes from within. Here, in this place of quiet fullness, we find that all we need is already here.

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