

# Desert Plants

A quarterly journal devoted to broadening knowledge of plants indigenous or adaptable to arid and sub-arid regions, to studying the growth thereof and to encouraging an appreciation of these as valued components of the landscape.

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## Editorial

**The Goodness of Plants.** The dictionary defines an oasis as a fertile green spot in a wasteland or desert (see cover). Just imagine the joy of Moses when, after wandering over the sands of the desert, lost, tired, thirsty and hungry, suddenly the Oasis of Midian came into view! With such a scenario, the goodness of plants is easy to appreciate. In the present issue of *Desert Plants*, in the article on *Aloe vera*, *Plant Symbolism and the Threshing Floor*, we explore not only the Bible, but also writings of the ancient Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans in search of the meaning of a symbolic plant in relation to light, life and good. Persons who have grown *Aloe* and consider it an old friend will perhaps be a little surprised at the uses and symbolism of the plant suggested in this article!

Actually, we feel that *all* living green plants represent good! For, after all, don't they provide us the oxygen which our bodies need? Indeed, photosynthesis is the one great process which reverses the loss of oxygen in the air from all forms of oxidation—fire, volcanic eruption, rust, decay, and respiration of living organisms. Although we require oxygen, we have no external source of it to supply our earthly system. To make matters worse, all of man's normal activities use oxygen. As we live and breathe we use oxygen. If we build a fire for warmth, we use oxygen. If we cook our food, we use oxygen. Even the rust and corrosion on our metal utensils takes precious oxygen from the air. And as our garbage and wastes decompose, they too consume oxygen from the air!

Although no new oxygen is added to the earth, energy from the heavens, in the form of light, does come to earth to drive the machinery of the green plant to combine two of the most abundant and simplest substances on earth (air and water) to form sugar and oxygen through photosynthesis to satisfy our needs! And when air and water are used as raw materials, the green plant uses only the *rusted carbon waste* (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the air in the photosynthetic process!

We daresay that a human being could not think of a more favorable process than photosynthesis if that person could think for a thousand years! Not only does photosynthesis provide us our critical oxygen, but, as we well know, also the sugars which are the building blocks for all the organic molecules on which we depend for food, fiber, shelter, medicine—indeed all of our earthly goods.

With this issue of *Desert Plants* we suggest that the Aton symbol devised by Pharaoh Akhenaton in ancient Egypt, *a sun with sunrays ending in hands touching the earth*, was actually a symbol for photosynthesis, acknowledging the active manner in which good from the heavens breathes life on the earth! We believe that Akhenaton is misjudged when it is said that he worshipped the god of the sun. Actually, the *Aloe* article in this issue of *Desert Plants* paints him as a true monotheist in the sense of Moses. (This is not meant in any way to detract from the importance of Moses.) Although Egyptologists have indeed believed that Akhenaton was the Priest of the Sun God Re at Heliopolis before becoming Pharaoh, by the fifth year of his reign, he was obliterating even the mention of Re on monuments in favor of Aton! What could have caused the Priest of Re at Heliopolis to have eventually rejected even Re in order to espouse the concept of one true God who fed the earth through photosynthesis? Although we do not really know, there is some interesting circumstantial evidence. There is one very ancient document which shows that another famous person had a connection with Heliopolis before the rise of Akhenaton to power: in Genesis 50:7-9, we learn that Jacob's son Joseph, who had the coat of many colors and was sold into slavery in Egypt, married an Egyptian girl, Asenath, *daughter of the Priest of Re, the Sun God at Helipolis!* To learn more about ancient beliefs in light, life and good, read the article on *Aloe vera* in this issue.—F. S. Crosswhite