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**A CHRISTMAS
CELEBRATION**

DECEMBER 21, 1975

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THE SIGHT AND SOUNDS AND SMELL OF CHRISTMAS ARE IN THE AIR. IT IS A MAGIC TIME...THE SINGING OF CAROLS, THE TRIMMING OF THE TREE, THE CANDLE-LIGHT AND TINSEL, THE SPRIGS OF MISTLETOE, THE LIGHTS AT RADIO CITY, THE SANTA CLAUSES RINGING THEIR LITTLE BELLS ON STREET CORNERS...AND CHRISTMAS CRECHES EVERYWHERE, RETELLING THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND MARY AND THE STABLE OF THE INN OF BETHLEHEM WHERE THERE HAD BEEN NO ROOM...AND THE WISE MEN AND SHEPHERDS...AND THE STAR OF THE EAST....

PURE MAGIC...BUT LIKE ALL MAGIC THERE IS ILLUSION
AND SLEIGHT OF HAND INVOLVED. FOR THE MISTLETOE
MAY BE PLASTIC...SYMBOLIZING THE GIANT FACADE
OF CHRISTMAS THAT HAS BEEN PUT UP LIKE A HOLLYWOOD
SET...TAKEN OUT OF ATTICS AND STORE-ROOMS AND
CAREFULLY ASSEMBLED AT THIS SEASON SO THAT MOST
PERSONS MAY DUTIFULLY AND SLAVISHLY GO THROUGH
THE ANNUAL CHARADE.

THE SONG SINGS, 'PUT ON A HAPPY FACE.' AND THE SUGGESTION IS MADE TO TURN THE CORNERS OF THE MOUTH UP IN A SMILE, AND MAKE YOUR EYES SPARKLE IN JOY. EVEN IF YOU DO NOT FEEL HAPPY, ACT HAPPY, LOOK HAPPY. IT IS A FACADE.

IT IS TRUE THAT ONE BEGINS TO FEEL HAPPY IF HE
ACTS HAPPY...AND THAT, IF YOU GO THROUGH THE MO-
TIONS, YOU TEND TO EXPERIENCE THE CORRESPONDING
EMOTIONS. BUT...SOMETIMES BEHIND THE FACE OF THE
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ CLOWN MAY BE THE
TRAGIC FIGURE OF A PAGLIACCI.

BUT WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES THERE IS A COMPULSION TO
PUT ON THE FACE OF CHRISTMAS.

MIND YOU I BELIEVE IN CHRISTMAS, AND I NEVER FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ERECT THE FACADE YEAR AFTER YEAR, OR TO ENGAGE IN THE CHARADE. BUT THE REASON IT COMES EASY IS THAT I REMIND MYSELF THAT IT IS A FACADE...A GAME WE PLAY...WITH A BEAUTIFUL INNER MEANING...BUT PUTTING UP THE TREE DOES NOT FULFILL THE MEANING...IT IS LIKE UNCOVERING THE ROAD MARKER...IT IS NOT AN END, BUT A POINTER SUGGESTING A JOURNEY.

IF THE CHIEF REASON FOR DOING WHAT WE DO AT CHRISTMAS IS THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT...THEN THE 'ALWAYS' IS VERITABLY IMPRINTED ON THE BAUBLES AND DECORATIONS AND COLORFUL PARAPHERNALIA THAT WE CAREFULLY PACK AWAY IN DUSTY ATTICS TO BE RETRIEVED EACH SUCCEEDING SEASON AS WE DUTIFULLY AND SOMETIMES WEARILY SUCCUMB TO THE ANNUAL FEVER.

ONE MAY FEEL THAT IT IS A MATTER OF BEING LOYAL TO A TIME-HONORED TRADITION, ALMOST AS IF IT WERE LIKE A 'GREAT HISTORIC CREED' OF RELIGION.

BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT THE OBSERVANCE OF CHRISTMAS AS A HOLIDAY WAS NOT ESTABLISHED IN AMERICA UNTIL THE LAST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY?

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE EARLY PILGRIMS NOT ONLY FROWNED UPON A SEASON OF 'MAKING MERRY' BUT THAT IT WAS AGAINST THE LAW. IN 1659 THE COLONY OF MASS. PASSED A LAW THAT READ, 'WHOSOEVER SHALL BE FOUND OBSERVING ANY SUCH DAY AS CHRISTMAS EITHER BY FORBEARING OF LABOR, FEASTING, OR IN ANY OTHER WAY, SHALL BE FINED FIVE SHILLINGS.'

FOR MANY YEARS PEOPLE WHO REFUSED TO WORK ON CHRISTMAS EITHER WENT TO JAIL OR PAID FINES.

AND LOOK AT US NOW!

ASK THE QUESTION, 'WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN?'
AND THE AVERAGE PERSON, IF HE CAN GET OUT OF THE
SANTA CLAUS SYNDROME, MIGHT SAY, CHRISTMAS IS
THE BIRTHDAY OF JESUS!

ONE THING DECEMBER 25TH PROBABLY IS NOT... IS
THE DAY JESUS WAS BORN. THERE IS NO HISTORY OF
THE EARLY LIFE OF JESUS... ONLY A VARIETY OF
CONFLICTING LEGENDS. THE DATE, DEC. 25TH, WAS
ARBITRARILY SET BY A NOW OBSCURE CHURCH HISTORIAN
IN THE 6TH CENTURY AD, AND WITHOUT ANY QUESTION
THIS DATE WAS INFLUENCED BY THE ROMAN FEAST
OF SATURNALIA WHICH OCCURRED AT THIS TIME.

EVERY YEAR WE HEAR THE SLOGAN, 'LET'S PUT CHRIST
BACK INTO CHRISTMAS!' AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
~~OR CHRIST~~ A PLASTER-OF-PARIS BABE IN A CRECHE..
OR A PAINFUL FIGURE ON A CROSS?

IT IS SAID THAT CHRISTMAS IS TOO COMMERCIAL...
BUT COMMERCIALISM IS NOT WHAT IS WRONG WITH
CHRISTMAS. IT IS STILL COMMERCE WHETHER IT IS
THE MANUFACTURE AND SALE OF BIBLES OR ALTARS
OR CRUCIFIXES OR CRECHES... OR ITEMS FOR GIFT-
GIVING LIKE WATCHES OR NECK-TIES OR SCARVES OR
TINKERTOYS.

THE PROBLEM WITH CHRISTMAS IS NOT MATERIALISM...
BUT A FALSE SPIRITUAL INVOLVEMENT. THE THREE
WISE MEN, THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM, AND THE BABE
IN THE MANGER, THE MYSTERY AND THE MIRACLE...
THESE MAKE IT TEMPTING AND EASY FOR US TO FORGET
WHAT THE WHOLE THING IS ABOUT. FOR THEY DEAL
WITH SOMETHING OF ANOTHER DAY AND ANOTHER WORLD
THAT IS TOTALLY IRELEVANT TO OURS.

AND WE CAN ENGAGE IN IT, USE THE THEME FOR DECO-
RATIONS, SING THE CAROLS, DRAMATIZE THE STORIES,

PASTE IT AS A FACADE OVER OUR EVERYDAY LIVES...
AND NOT REALLY GET INVOLVED IN IT.

THE WHOLE STORY OF THE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM ON THAT
NIGHT OF NIGHTS HAS BEEN SENTIMENTALIZED...AND
THUS MADE UNREAL. LIKE A MOVIE THAT WE WATCH
FOR AN HOUR...HAVE A GOOD CRY OVER...AND THEN
GO OUT INTO LIVES OF DRABNESS AND ROUTINENESS...
NOT THE LEAST BIT CHANGED BY THE EXPERIENCE.

WE DON'T KNOW WHEN JESUS WAS BORN...OR REALLY
VERY MUCH ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES...AND WHEN WE
UNDERSTAND HIS MISSION, IT IS NOT REALLY THAT
IMPORTANT.

FOR JESUS DID NOT COME TO PROCLAIM HIMSELF BUT
MAN...NOT TO TELL US OF HIS DIVINITY...MAKING
HIM THE GREAT EXCEPTION: BUT TO TELL US OF OUR
DIVINITY, AND TO SHOW IN HIS OVERCOMING THE
GREAT EXAMPLE OF THE 'I AM' REACHING ITS FULL
PERSONAL EXPRESSION IN MAN.

*How to celebrate Jesus
But Christmas celebrates you*

THUS THE GREAT EVENT IN THE LIFE OF JESUS WAS
NOT HIS BIRTH, BUT THE AWAKENING THAT TOOK PLACE
WITHIN HIM DURING THE YEARS OF HIS GROWTH...THE
DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE DIMENSION IN MAN.

CHRISTMAS THEN SHOULD CELEBRATE THE DIVINE DIMEN-
SION IN MAN...LOOKING TO HIS DEMONSTRATION...BUT
COMMITTING ONESELF TO A PERSONAL MANIFESTATION.

AND AS THE POET SINGS:

'THOUGH CHRIST A THOUSAND TIMES IN BETHLEHEM
BE BORN,
IF HE'S NOT BORN IN THEE, THY SOUL IS ALL
FORLORN.'

THUS, THOUGH THE LEGENDS AND PROPHECY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT DEALT WITH THE HOPE OF A MESSIAH TO COME...IT WAS ERRONEOUSLY THOUGHT THAT THIS HOPE WAS FULFILLED IN JESUS...RATHER THAN BEING REVEALED THROUGH HIM. THE TRUE HOPE WAS NOT JESUS, BUT THE CHRIST SPIRIT THAT HE REVEALED IN HIMSELF AND FORETOLD AS BEING IN ALL PERSONS.

SO CHRISTMAS BEGINS IN PROPHECY...AND CARRIES THROUGH THE MANGER OF BETHLEHEM...BUT IT IS NOT FINISHED THERE. IT IS AN UNFINISHED STORY THAT MUST BE RESOLVED INTO COMPLETION BY AN EXPERIENCE WITHIN EVERY PERSON.

CHRISTMAS THEN IS A TRUE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRIST SELF, THE EXPRESSION OF THE VERY HIGHEST CONSCIOUSNESS THAT MAN IS CAPABLE OF REALIZING.

THE CELEBRATION MUST ENTAIL THE EMULATION OF JESUS AND THE APPLICATION OF HIS MESSAGE...

WHICH, IN ESSENCE, SAYS: 'IF ANYONE SAYS, 'I LOVE GOD,' AND HATES HIS BROTHER, HE IS A LIAR!'

NOT A MASK - BUT UNMASKING

SO IT IS NOT THE MERCHANTS WHO ARE TO BLAME FOR ANY SUPPOSED LOSS OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS... IT IS THE 'BELIEVERS', THE 'SPIRITUAL PEOPLE', WHO MISTAKE FORM FOR SUBSTANCE, PRAYERS FOR PERFORMANCE, WORSHIP FOR PRACTICE, SENTIMENTALITY FOR THE COMMITMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

SO IT IS NOT OUR FALSE COMMERCIALISM THAT PREVENTS IT, BUT THE JINGLE OF BELLS, CALLING US TO SENTIMENTALITY, AND SEDUCING US FROM THE YEAR-ROUND TASK OF BROTHERHOOD AND LOVE.

WALT WHITMAN WAS ACCUSED OF EGOTISM OR SACRELEGE, WHEN HE SANG IN LEAVES OF GRASS, 'I CELEBRATE MYSELF.'

BUT IT MAY BE THAT HE WAS CLOSER TO THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS THAN MOST PERFUNCTORY 'CELEBRATIONS'...THROUGH THE FACADE AND THE CHARADE. "... INVENT ONE" - (BE SELF)

IN OUR SEABURY RETREAT...WE ARE PROBING OUR INNER FEELINGS ABOUT CHRISTMAS AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE IDEA OF THE DIVINE DEPTH WITHIN.

WE ARE LOOKING AT OURSELVES, A LA DICKENS 'CHRISTMAS CAROL' -- IN THREE FRAMES:

- ▶CHRISTMAS PAST
- ▶CHRISTMAS PRESENT
- ▶CHRISTMAS FUTURE.

Look Backward

NOSTALGIA

Sense of Humor

WE SUGGEST THAT YOU LOOK BACK IN YOUR MEMORY TO OTHER CHRISTMASSES...ESPECIALLY AS THEY IMPINGE UNTO THE PRESENT EXPERIENCE...REFLECT ON YOUR CHILDHOOD ATTITUDES ABOUT CHRISTMAS, SANTA CLAUS, RECEIVING GIFTS, ETC. WITHOUT JUDGING, LOOK AT THESE YEARS OF YESTERDAY, AND BRING THEM INTO THE CONTEXT OF TODAY'S EXPERIENCE.

THEN...CHRISTMAS PRESENT...LOOK AT YOURSELF TODAY, THE DEMANDS AND PRESSURES, THE INNER CONFUSIONS AND DOUBTS. BE WILLING TO ADMIT TO THE FACE AND FACADE...AND THE CHARADE WE ARE PLAYING.

REALIZE THAT THESE ARE THE MAKINGS FOR A HAPPENING...BUT BE WILLING TO LET IT HAPPEN... COMMIT YOURSELF TO LETTING IT HAPPEN.

IT IS INTERESTING THAT THE WORD 'PRESENT' (NOW) ALSO CONNOTES 'GIFT'. SO WE MIGHT THINK OF THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTMAS GIVING.

THE WORD 'PRESENT' IN BOTH CONNOTATIONS, COMES FROM ROOT MEANING, BEFORE, NEAR, AROUND.

SO, WE WANT TO ENGAGE IN GIVING COMPLETELY IN THE PRESENT...GIVING WITHOUT STRINGS, GIVING THAT MAKES NO FUTURE OBLIGATIONS FOR RECIPROCATON OR APPRECIATION...AND CARRIES OVER NO SENSE OF OBLIGATION FROM THE PAST.

'HE GAVE ME SOMETHING LAST YEAR, SO I MUST GIVE HIM SOMETHING THIS YEAR...ETC.'

LET THE GIVING BE 'INNER CENTERED', PURELY A 'NOW' EXPERIENCE OF 'GIVING WAY TO THE FLOW' OF OUR OWN CHRIST SELF,

THEN IT BECOMES A TRUE CHRISTMAS PRESENT, A 'BIRTH GIFT', FOR THE GIFT ITSELF DEMONSTRATES THE GIFT OF OUR DIVINER NATURE.

NOT PUTTING ON -
BUT UNMASKING

STORY OF 'MAN WHO MISSED CHRISTMAS. LAST TO LEAVE OFFICE. WALKED OVER TO MASSIVE SAFE, SPUN DIALS. DOOR OPENED. WALKED IN TO DEPOSIT SOME IMPORTANT THINGS...DOOR SWUNG SHUT...HE WAS TRAPPED. NO WAY OUT UNTIL OPENED TOMORROW BY STAFF.

THEN IT DAWNED...TOMORROW WAS CHRISTMAS...SOMEONE WOULD MISS HIM, HE THOUGHT. BUT WHO? HE WAS UNMARRIED, LIVED ALONE. HAD BEEN INVITED TO SPEND CHRISTMAS WITH BROTHERS FAMILY...BUT CHILDREN GOT ON HIS NERVES...AND EXPECTED GIFTS.

HAD INTENDED TO SIT AT HOME AND LISTEN TO SOME NEW RECORDINGS HE WAS GIVING HIMSELF. SO...NO ONE WOULD COME, BECAUSE NO ONE IN ALL THE WORLD WOULD MISS HIM, NO ONE NEEDED HIM...NO ONE.

DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, CLERK OPENED SAFE...NO ONE SAW HIM STAGGER OUT, LEFT AND TOOK CAB HOME. SHAVED, CHANGED, RETURNED. NO ONE SAID ANYTHING. HE HAD VANISHED DURING CHRISTMAS AND NO ONE KNEW

SO...HE MADE SOME NEW COMMITMENTS. RESHAPED HIS LIFE. NEXT CHRISTMAS...A DIFFERENT PERSON. SHUT SAFE CAREFULLY. THEN WENT OUT SINGING ON WAY TO BROTHERS HOUSE...ARMS LADEN WITH PRESENTS. BACK ON HIS DESK...WAS A CARD PASTED...THAT READ: 'TO LOVE PEOPLE, TO BE INDISPENSIBLE SOMEWHERE, THAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE, AND THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS.'

THEN - CHRISTMAS FUTURE...THE COMMITMENT FOR THE FUTURE. CHRISTMAS IS AN UNFINISHED STORY. WHY NOT WRITE THE STORY?

Dream ~ Christmas Eve

TODAY...REFLECT IN A KIND OF CHRISTMAS DREAM...ON THE KIND OF CHRISTMAS YOU WOULD LIKE TO EXPERIENCE...THE KIND OF PRESENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE...THE KIND OF INNER POTENTIALITIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO UNFOLD.

PROJECT YOURSELF IN IMAGINATION TO THURSDAY MORNING. WRITE A DIARY OF THE DAY AS IF IT HAD HAPPENED YESTERDAY...DEALING WITH ALL FACETS OF YOUR LIFE...FINANCES, RELATIONSHIPS, HEALTH, WORK-LIFE, ETC.

THIS IS CHRISTMAS FUTURE...WRITE IT IN THE FORM OF A PROCLAMATION FOR YOURSELF. PUT IT IN A GAY-COLORED ENVELOPE...OR WRAP IT IN A BERIBBONED PACKAGE...AND PUT IT ON THE CHRISTMAS TREE...OR SOMEWHERE WHERE IT WILL BRIGHTEN UP YOUR PLACE.

AND THEN...ON CHRRISTMAS MORNING...OPEN IT AS YOUR SPECIAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT. AND TAKE TIME TO READ IT OVER CAREFULLY AND PRAYERFULLY. IT CAN BE A VITAL MEANS OF GIVING CONTINUITY TO THE FACE OF YOUR CHRISTMAS.

AND EVEN MORE...TO MAKE STRUCTURE BEHIND THE FACADE...AND TO MAKE THE DREAM REAL.

AND SO...WHEN YOU EVENTUALLY DISSEMBLE THE FACADE
WHEN YOU TAKE THE TRIMMINGS OFF THE TREE AND
CAREFULLY PACK THEM AWAY...WHEN THINGS HAVE BEEN
PUT BACK IN THEIR NON-CHRISTMAS PLACES...

IT IS LIKELY THAT SOMEONE WILL MAKE THE REMARK:
'WELL, IT'S OVER UNTIL NEXT CHRISTMAS!'

THAT IS THE TIME TO REMEMBER THAT THE REAL CELE-
BRATION IS NOT OVER...IT HAS JUST BEGUN. IF SOME-
THING REALLY HAPPENED DURING THE CHARADE, THEN
YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED A SYMBOLIC BIRTH OF THE
CHRIST WITHIN YOU...AND IT WILL INFLUENCE YOU
OVER AND OVER AGAIN THROUGHOUT THE YEAR...YOUR
LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.

LEARNED TO
BE YOURSELF

"IF EVERY DAY WERE CHRISTMAS,
HOW DIFFERENT LIFE WOULD BE,
IF NOT ONE DAY BUT ALL THE YEAR
WERE RULED BY CHARITY.

HAD WE THE FAITH IN MIRACLES
A CHILD HAS CHRISTMAS MORN,
EACH DAY WOULD BE LOVE'S MANGER
AND CHRIST WOULD BE REBORN.

IN US AGAIN TO CHANGE AND HEAL
OUR OUTWORN WARS AND WAYS -
HAD WE A CHILD'S OR SHEPHERD'S GIFT
FOR WONDERMENT AND PRAISE!

YET EVERY DAY IS CHRISTMAS
WHEN WE HAVE LEARNED TO LIVE
BY LOVE'S LAW, LEARNED NOT HOW TO GET
BUT ONLY HOW TO GIVE:
AND LIKE A CHILD CAN WONDER..AND LIKE A CHILD CAN
BUT HAVE THE GROWNUP WISDOM TO GIVE OURSELVES
PRAY
AWAY."