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**THE CHRISTMAS
PERSPECTIVE**

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THE SIGHT AND SOUNDS AND SMELL OF CHRISTMAS ARE IN THE AIR - HERALDING ONCE AGAIN THIS BEAUTIFULLY STRANGE AND STRANGELY BEAUTIFUL SEASON OF SUCH STRIKING CONTRASTS. IT IS A MAGIC TIME...AND PERHAPS A TRAGIC TIME.

MAGIC BECAUSE OF THE WAY IT TRANSFORMS STREETS AND STORES AND HOMES FROM THE ROUTINE AND PROSAIC INTO A LAND OF FANTASY AND DREAMS AND A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS GLOW.

TRAGIC BECAUSE THE MAGIC IS ILLUSION, AND BEHIND THE FACADE OF TINSEL AND MISTLETOE THERE IS OFTEN A WIDESPREAD LONELINESS AND EMPTINESS...AND FOR OTHERS THE GRIM CHARADE OF GIFT-GIVING, UNDER UNBELIEVABLE PRESSURES OF CONFORMITY AND OBLIGATION AND GUILT.

PHILIP WYLIE SOUNDS A DISTINCTLY "BAH HUMBUG," WHEN HE REFERS TO THE "HOPPED-UP, PRESSURE-LADEN, STATUS-SEEKING, COMPETITIVE DEGRADATION OF CHRISTMAS."

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT, ANYWAY? WHAT IS THE

MEANING OF CHRISTMAS? A COLLEGE PROFESSOR WAS GIVING A WORD-ASSOCIATION TEST, AND SINCE IT WAS IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON, ON A WHIM HE INCLUDED THE WORD "CHRISTMAS." THE STUDENTS WERE BEING ASKED TO WRITE DOWN THE VERY FIRST WORD THAT CAME TO THEM - IN THIS CASE THE WORD WAS "CHRISTMAS." LATER IN GOING OVER THE TEST, THE PROFESSOR DISCOVERED THAT NOT ONE PERSON HAD MENTIONED JESUS. THERE WERE SUCH WORDS AS CHRISTMAS TREE, SANTA CLAUS, CAROLS, GIFTS, CANDLES, HOLLY, MISTLETOE...BUT NOT ONE MENTION OF JESUS.

ASK SOMEONE "WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?" AND "WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO YOU?" AFTER THE PERSON FOCUSES HIS ATTENTION BEYOND THE "SANTA CLAUS SYNDROME" HE MIGHT SAY, "IT IS THE BIRTHDAY OF JESUS."

BUT, IF THERE IS ONE THING DECEMBER 25TH IS NOT, IT IS THE DAY WHEN JESUS WAS BORN. THERE IS NO HISTORICAL RECORD OF ANY OF THE EARLY LIFE OF JESUS...ONLY A VARIETY OF CONFLICTING LEGENDS. WE DO NOT KNOW WHEN JESUS WAS BORN..NOR DO WE KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES. IT IS NOW PRETTY CLEARLY KNOWN THAT THE YEAR OF THE BIRTH IS FOUR OR FIVE YEARS

EARLIER..AND WE DON'T KNOW THE SEASON OF THE YEAR. IF ANNO DOMINI, "THE YEAR OF OUR LORD" FIXES THE CALEDAR TO BEGIN WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS, WE MAY BE COMING TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR 1995 WITH THE NEW YEAR USHERING IN 1996. IT POINTS UP THE RELATIVITY OF TIME.

THE DECEMBER 25TH DATE WAS ARBITRARILY SET BY A NOW OBSCURE CHURCH HISTORIAN IN THE 6TH CENTURY AD, AND WITHOUT QUESTION IT WAS INFLUENCED BY THE ROMAN FEAST OF SATURNALIA, WHICH OCCURRED AT THIS TIME. ROME HAD SEEN THE FUTILITY OF MARTYRING CHRISTIANS TO PUT DOWN THE SPREAD OF THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT, WHICH THEY SAW TO BE A THREAT TO THE EMPIRE. AND SO THEY ADOPTED CHRISTIANITY AS THE STATE RELIGION AS A MEANS OF CONTROLLING IT. AND THIS IS WHERE THE BULK OF THE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS ORIGINATED.

THE FEAST OF SATURNALIA WAS A SEVEN DAY PERIOD OF CELEBRATION. HOUSES WERE DECORATED WITH LAURELS AND EVERGREENS. WORK WAS SUSPENDED, SCHOOLS WERE CLOSED, NO PUNISHMENTS WERE INFLICTED, NO WARS WERE FOUGHT. AND...FATHER SATURN CAME DOWN FROM THE NORTH POLE WITH TOYS FOR THE CHILDREN. SOUND FAMILIAR?

SO DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A STRANGE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN THE PIOUS OBSERVANCE OF THE HOLY DAY OF CHRISTMAS, AND A HAPPY HOLIDAY OF FAMILY GATHERINGS AND THE EXCHANGE OF GIFTS, WHICH TOO-OFTEN BECOME A HOLLOW DAY THROUGH THE PASTE-ON PIETY OF PLASTIC TREES, AND EGO-FULFILLING HOME AND YARD DECORATIONS.

THERE IS A GREAT DELUSION THAT WE HAVE KEPT CHRISTMAS WHEN WE HAVE SIMPLY ENAGED IN AN ANNUAL CHARADE. THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS THE ORNAMENTS AND GARLANDS WILL BE PACKED AWAY IN ATTICS AND STORE-ROOMS FOR ANOTHER YEAR..AND STORES WILL MAKE A QUICK TRANSITION TO JANUARY WHITE SALES. WE ONCE HAD A NEIGHBOR WHO WAS-VERY INNOVATIVE. SHE COVERED THE WHOLE DECORATED TREE WITH A SHEET OF PLASTIC AND SIMPLY CARRIED IT DOWN TO THE BASEMENT AND NEXT YEAR BROUGHT IT UP, REMOVED THE PLASTIC, AND VOILA - INSTANT CHISTMAS!

THE NATIVITY STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS, THE
BABE IN THE MANGER IS WHAT JOSEPH CAMPBELL
WOULD CALL A "MYTH." ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL
IN PRACTICAL MEANING. IT DEALS WITH THE
AWAKENING IN CONCIOUSNESS TO THE SON OF GOD

SELF, NOT SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO, BUT A DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE DEPTH WITHIN YOU.

SO THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS MUST INVOLVE US WITH THE DYNAMICS OF THE LIFE OF JESUS AND THE APPLICATION OF HIS TEACHING - NOT JUST THE ROMANTIC TRADITION ABOUT HIS BIRTH.

THEN WHAT IS THE POINT OF DECEMBER 25TH? THE POINT IS ~~WE~~ HAVE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE FOR A BRIEF SEASON IN WHICH THE TRANSCENDENT LEVEL OF MANKIND IS AT ITS ZENITH. THIS SPECIAL SEASON EACH YEAR MAY BE AN IMPORTANT OUTLET FOR THE SPIRITUAL FLOW INTO THE WORLD, SO THAT THE BALANCE IS TIPPED AWAY FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT. AS SOMEONE HAS SAID, "IF THERE WERE NO CHRISTMAS, WE WOULD HAVE TO INVENT ONE."

CHRISTMAS IS LIKE AN OASIS IN A STRIFE-TORN WORLD, AND WHEN WE HEAR SOMEONE ASK, "WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO?" WE CAN LOOK UP IN CHILD-LIKE WONDER, AND SAY, "LOOK WHAT IS COMING INTO THE WORLD!"

IT IS OFTEN SAID, "CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN."

YES, AND FOR THE LITTLE CHILD WITHIN THE HEART OF EACH OF US. ELIZABETH AKERS ALLEN:

"BACKWARD, TURN BACKWARD, O TIME IN YOUR FLIGHT. MAKE ME A CHILD AGAIN JUST FOR TONIGHT."

I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT AT OUR HOUSE OLGA AND I BECOME CHILDREN AGAIN FOR A FORTNIGHT. WE LOVE CHRISTMAS AND ALL ITS SYMBOLS AND TRADITIONS...AND WE MANAGE TO ADD A FEW TRADITIONS OF OUR OWN. WE HAVE FUN PUTTING UP THE TREE...AND IT USUALLY REMAINS UP THROUGH ALL OF JANUARY....FOR AFTER THE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS ARE OPENED..THE CHRISTMAS PRESENCE REMAINS.

MYTH RE; THE ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE. ON A STORMY CHRISTMAS EVE A FORESTER AND HIS HOUSEHOLD GATHERED AROUND A CHEERFUL FIRE. THERE WAS A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR, AND OPENING IT THEY FOUND A LITTLE CHILD, COLD AND HUNGRY AND ALL-BUT-EXHAUSTED. HE WAS WELCOMED, WARMED AND FED, AND LITTLE HANS INSISTED ON GIVING UP HIS BED TO THE STRANGER. IN THE MORNING THE FAMILY WAS AROUSED BY THE SINGING OF A CHOIR OF ANGELS, AND LOOKING AT THEIR GUEST THEY SAW HIM TRANSFIGURED, FOR HE WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE CHRIST CHILD. HE BROKE OFF

A BRANCH FROM A FIR TREE AND SET IT ON THE HEARTH. AND HE SAID, "SEE, I'VE GLADLY RECEIVED YOUR GIFTS AND THIS IS MY GIFT TO YOU. HENCEFORTH THIS TREE SHALL ALWAYS BEAR ITS FRUIT AT CHRISTMAS TIME, AND YOU SHALL ALWAYS HAVE ABUNDANCE. AND SO FOREVER AFTER TILL NOW, TREES HAVE BEEN DECORATED COLORFULLY AS A VITAL PART OF THE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION.

I HAVE DISCOVERED AN INTERESTING OCCURRENCE IN THE ISRAELITE'S EXODUS FROM EGYPT. THEY HAD JUST EXPERIENCED THE EPIC CROSSING OF THE RED SEA. IN EXODUS 22-25 "...THEY WENT THREE DAYS AND FOUND NO WATER. AND WHEN THEY CAME TO MARAH, THEY COULD NOT DRINK THE WATER BECAUSE IT WAS BITTER; THEREFORE IT WAS NAMED MARAH. AND THE PEOPLE MURMURED AGAINST MOSES, SAYING "WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?" AND HE CRIED UNTO THE LORD, AND THE LORD SHOWED UNTO HIM A TREE, AND HE THREW IT INTO THE WATER, AND THE WATER BECAME SWEET."

THIS MAY HAVE BEEN THE FIRST REFERENCE TO POLLUTION IN HUMAN HISTORY. AS WELL AS THE FIRST ANTI-POLLUTION TECHNIQUE, IN THE FORM OF A NEUTRALIZING HERB.

THE PLACE WAS CALLED MARAH (MET. MEANS BITTERNESS). THE THREE DAYS WITHOUT WATER SYMBOLIZES A PERIOD OUT OF THE FLOW OF LIFE. ONE CAN SURVIVE A WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE IF WE KEEP OURSELVES IN TUNE WITH THE INFINITE. WHEN IT SAYS, "THE PEOPLE MURMURED AGAINST MOSES" IT IMPLIES THAT THEY WERE POLLUTED IN THE CREATIVE LIFE STREAM, BY ENGAGING IN IMPURE, REBELLIOUS, ERROR THOUGHTS, AND BRINGING ON THEMSELVES TROUBLE, SICKNESS, AND MISERY.

THE LORD, HERE, REPRESENTS THE LAW, THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE IN ACTION. IT IS NOT A PERSONAL GOD, VINDICTIVELY LAYING TROUBLES ON THE PEOPLE. MOSES REPRESENTS THE UPWARD REACH IN EACH OF US, LEADING US TO OUR GOOD. WE HAVE OUR TIMES IN THE WILDERNESS GIVING RISE TO BITTER EXPERIENCES OF LACK AND ILLNESS. BUT IF WE TURN TO THE MOSES FACTOR, WE WILL BE GUIDED IN THE FORM OF A TREE TO THROW INTO THE WATERS TO MAKE IT SWEET. THEN IN THE STORY OF THE ISRAELITES, READING ON BEYOND THE MARAH EXPERIENCE, IT SAYS, "THEN THEY CAME TO ELIM, WHERE THERE WERE TWELVE SPRINGS OF WATER AND SEVENTY PALM TREES, AND THEY ENCAMPED HERE BY THE WATER."

THIS A REALIZATION OF THE FULLNESS OF LIFE AND
A VICTORY OVER SELF-LIMITATION, AN EXPERIENCE
OF PEACE.

WE CAN'T OVERLOOK THE FACT

IN A WORLD WHERE THE ATMOSPHERE IS POLLUTED
LITERALLY AND FIGURITIVELY, CHRISTMAS CAN BE
THE ACTIVITY OF GOD MOVING THROUGH THE MINDS
AND HEARTS OF PEOPLE IN A BEAUTIFULLY SPONTA-
NEOUS WAY. USING THE CHRISTMAS TREE AS A
SYMBOL OF A HEALING HERB THAT WE CAST INTO THE
POLLUTED WATERS.

BACK INTO CHRISTMAS.

AND AS YOU ERECT AND DECORATE YOUR CHRISTMAS
TREE, THINK OF THE ORNAMENTS AND STRINGS OF
BEADS AND ANGELS AND STARS AS REALIZATIONS OF
TRUTH THAT YOU HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND. YOUR
CHRISTMAS TREE IS YOUR GIFT OF LOVE TO THE
POLLUTED STREAM OF THE WORLD, YOUR BLESSING
FOR PEACE. AND THE STRINGS OF LIGHTS ON YOUR
TREE REPRESENT YOUR CIRCLE OF LIGHT WITH WHICH
YOU SURROUND THE WORLD.

AS YOU EXPERIENCE THE DAYS LEADING UP TO
CHRISTMAS DAY, DON'T LET THE CRIES THAT
CHRISTMAS HAS BECOME TOO MATERIALISTIC GET TO
YOU. DON'T BECOME A SCROOGE. AND IF SOMEONE

SAYS, "CHRISTMAS IS TOO COMMERCIAL," YOU CAN SAY, "IF YOUR CHRISTMAS IS TOO COMMERCIAL, IT IS YOU WHO HAS COMMERCIALIZED IT." THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE BUYING OF GIFTS, AND CERTAINLY WE CAN'T OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT AS BUSINESS PROSPERS, WE WILL ALL BENEFIT FROM A HEALTHY ECONOMY. OF COURSE THERE IS COMMERCIALISM INVOLVED...BUT IT IS STILL COMMERCE WHETHER IT IS THE MANUFACTURE AND SALE OF BIBLES OR BAUBLES.

EACH YEAR WE HEAR THE CRY, "LET'S PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS." BUT THE NEED IS TO PUT OURSELVES BACK INTO CHRISTMAS...SEE IT AS A BEAUTIFUL SEASON OF LOVE AND SHARING, OF PULLING OUT ALL THE BEST STOPS IN OUR NATURE, AND PRACTICING SEEING WITH THE CHRISTMAS PERSPECTIVE, BEHOLDING PEOPLE IN THE LIGHT OF THE DIVINITY WITHIN YOU AND RELATING TO THE DIVINITY IN THEM.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHRIST ISN'T LIMITED TO ONE DAY...IT BELONGS TO AN ORDER OF LIFE NOT YET ATTAINED, A GLIMPSE OF THE HUMAN RACE THAT IS YET TO BE.

CHRISTMAS IS MORE THAN A DAY OF OUTER CELEBRA-

IF YOU HAVE A NEED
TION. IT IS CHRISTMAS WHENEVER AND WHEREVER
THE HUMAN HEART, EMPOWERED BY THE CHRISTMAS
PERSPECTIVE, IS MOVED TO THE EXPRESSION OF
UNSELFISH LOVE.

AND PRAYING FOR AIR / ALL THE AIR WE
ARE / PRAYING FOR THINGS FOLLOWS FOR A
VISUALIZATION, SELECTING AND DECORATING OUR
CHRISTMAS TREE OF THE MIND. OUR GIFT OF
PEACE TO THE WORLD.

NEGATIVE STATE.

REMEMBER GOD WORKS NOT FOR YOU BUT THROUGH YOU
NATURAL / SO IF THERE IS A NEED / SOMETHING
SOMETHING WITHIN YOU. / WORK TO ESTABLISH YOURSELF
OF THE PRESENCE / THAT IS PRESENT AS A PRESENT
OUR LESSON LAST WEEK / OF THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESENT
AT THE STILL POINT WITHIN / AND IF YOU CAN / THE PRESENT
FLOW / YOU WILL HAVE A STATE OF BEING / OF BEING
PRODUCING IDEAS / OF CREATING IDEAS / OF CREATING IDEAS
NEEDED / TO ENABLE YOU TO LIVE YOUR LIFE

PROSPERITY IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT REQUIRES PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL
PRINCIPLES / IT CALLS FOR A CENTERING OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE UNIVERSAL
FLOW / EVER-REMINING YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF AN
INFINITE AND ETERNAL ENERGY / FROM WHICH ALL THINGS PROCEED / IT MEANS
IDENTIFYING YOURSELF AS A CHILD OF THE UNIVERSE / FULLY ENTITLED TO
TOTAL SUPPORT FOR ALL THE WORK OF YOUR MIND AND HANDS / IT CALLS
FOR LIVING AND THINKING AND WORKING AS IF YOU FULLY BELIEVE THAT
THE WHOLE PRODIGAL UNIVERSE OF CREATIVITY AND SUBSTANCE / ARE PRESENT
IN EVERY PROJECT OF YOUR WORK AND EVERY TRANSACTION OF YOUR INVESTMENTS
AS YOUR NEVER-FAILING RESOURCE / IT IS TO LIVE UNBROKENLY IN
A PRODIGAL UNIVERSE.

IF YOU HAVE A PRESSING NEED/FOR INCREASED PROSPERITY/.REMEMBER
THIS VERY STARTLING INSIGHT./ YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GET MORE SUBSTANCE,
FOR ALL THE SUBSTANCE IN THIS PRODIGAL UNIVERSE IS PRESENT RIGHT
WHERE YOU ARE./ AND YOU DON'T NEED TO PRAY FOR MONEY...AND YOU
SHOULDN'T. / IT MAKES ABOUT AS MUCH SENSE AS STANDING OUT OF DOORS
AND PRAYING FOR AIR./ ALL THE AIR YOU WANT OR NEED IS WHERE YOU
ARE./ PRAYING FOR THINGS FOCUSES YOUR ATTENTION ON LACK./ GOD CAN'T
FILL LACK. / PAUL SAYS, "AND GOD SHALL FILL EVERY NEED OF YOURS ACCORDING
TO HIS RICHES." / BUT GOD CAN'T FILL LACK./ A NEED IS A VESSEL
TO BE FILLED. / LACK IS A STATE OF MIND./ YOU NEED TO CORRECT THAT
NEGATIVE STATE.

REMEMBER GOD WORKS NOT FOR YOU BUT THROUGH YOU./ ABUNDANCE IS
NATURAL./ SO IF THERE IS A NEED,/ SOMETHING IS BLOCKING THE FLOW/.
SOMETHING WITHIN YOU. / WORK TO REESTABLISH YOURSELF IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS
OF THE PRESENCE/ THAT IS ~~PRESENT~~ AS LIMITLESS SUBSTANCE. / RECALL
OUR LESSON LAST WEEK/ OF THE "MYSTER OF THE SILENCE", CENTERED
AT THE STILL POINT WITHIN, / YOU WILL FEEL YOUR ONENESS WITH THE CREATIVE
FLOW. / YOU WILL HAVE ~~AS~~ SPONTANEOUS ~~OUT~~POURING OF CREATIVE, SUCCESS-
PRODUCING IDEAS, / OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT, / AND OF THE RESOURCES
NEEDED / TO ENABLE YOU TO EXPERIENCE "ABUNDANT LIVING."

PROSPERITY IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT REQUIRES PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL
PRINCIPLES./ IT CALLS FOR A CENTERING OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE UNIVERSAL
FLOW, / EVER-REMINING YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF AN
INFINITE AND ETERNAL ENERGY / FROM WHICH ALL THINGS PROCEED, / IT MEANS
IDENTIFYING YOURSELF ~~AS~~ A CHILD OF THE UNIVERSE, / FULLY ENTITLED TO
TOTAL SUPPORT FOR ALL THE WORK OF YOUR MIND AND HANDS. / IT CALLS
FOR LIVING AND THINKING AND WORKING / AS IF YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT
THE WHOLE PRODIGAL UNIVERSE OF CREATIVITY AND SUBSTANCE ~~ARE~~ ^{ARE} PRESENT
IN EVERY PROJECT OF YOUR WORK AND EVERY TRANSACTION OF YOUR INVESTMENTS,
AS YOUR NEVER-FAILING RESOURCE. IT IS TO LIVE CONSCIOUSLY IN
A PRODIGAL UNIVERSE.