

Daily Meditation 12-16-24

Solstice, Hanukkah, Advent--Great Comings & Certain Tensions

Good morning.

In this morning's daily meditation, we're talking about Solstice, Hanukkah and Advent, Great Comings and Certain Tensions. Coming is because it's Advent.

Advent is a Latin word for coming, a coming. And of course, Christians are looking forward to a great coming, a reminder of the birth of Jesus, that we call Christmas. And with all that follows from that, his story, his teachings, and the promise that humans are capable of being God-like, that is to say, compassionate. And that, if we were that way, the kingdom of God, the queendom of God, would happen here on Earth, which was his prayer, after all, that we call the "Our Father" prayer.

And of course, that vision is expressed by many spiritual leaders, from all the world's spiritual traditions. And of course, I point out how Solstice, which is far older than Hanukkah or Christmas, because humans have always been struck by the wonder and awe of the change of seasons. And how part of this is an aesthetic experience. A lot of it is about survival itself. Because obviously, you cannot grow crops in the cold and the darkness of the Northern Hemisphere in the winter time. And of course, Solstice represents the end of winter, or really the high point of winter, the beginning of the Sun's return. For that very reason, it has been an object of ritual, ceremony, for much of the existence of Homo sapiens. Very likely of all of our cousin hominids as well.

And I point out that Hanukkah, which is, of course, the Jewish celebration in this season of darkness, is a celebration of light. And it is in many ways a political celebration or political remembrance. Because the miracle was said to occur when the Jewish people, who were under-manned in a minority time, were carrying on a fight in the time of the Maccabees. And special a candle burned for days. And of course, that miracle is remembered by the lighting of the candles during the Hanukkah season.

And I share a current statement from a Rabbi, a woman Rabbi, Cat Zavis in Berkeley, about the meaning of Hanukkah for our time. And as she points out,

"The rabbinic tradition reframed Hanukkah as a holiday of spiritual renewal, concerned about the dangers of revolutionary challenges to the oppression of empires." The oppression of empires. Let us be alerted to that. "As we celebrate, we aim to uplift the spirit of liberation, while exploring nonviolent paths to freedom."

So one of the gifts of the Hebrew Bible and of the Jewish people, is this constant reminder of how liberation is an historical event. It happened with Exodus in the liberation from the oppression of the

Pharaohs, for example. And many other moments of liberation and intervention, if you will, to free the people. And of course, this yearning for freedom is applicable to all humans in human history, including today's situation with Gaza, and other groups that are being oppressed. So it's a universal, it's an archetypal promise.

But what I want to stress is that the cosmological meaning of Solstice, meaning that the season shifts because the Earth and the Sun are in a changed relationship. And of course, this happens on Solstices, winter and summer, and in the Equinox, spring and fall. So there is this profound connection between the human heart and what's going on up in the heavens with Father Sky, the relationship of Mother Earth and Father Sky. This is all cosmology, and this excited the peoples of old to build amazing monuments such as Newgrange in Ireland, which is designed so that the Sun on December 21st shines down this shaft, so it's a connection between the sky and us humans on Earth. And of course, Stonehenge too was designed around the relationship to the seasons, and therefore to the sky.

And, when the Christian church in the fourth century came up with the idea that Christmas should be celebrated December 25th, that was a direct response to the great rituals and celebrations of the Solstice. And Christianity attached its own meaning to that celebration, namely that the light of Christ was entering in the dark time of the year. And of course, all that has archetypal and universal meaning.

But also, as I point out, the fourth century when Pope Julius declared that Christmas was December 25th, the reminder of it would be that that was a century when Constantine the Emperor became a Christian, and wanted to steer the Empire more in the direction of Christianity, than in the direction of the ancient Roman gods and goddesses.

So there was politics all wrapped up, and history all wrapped up in cosmology. But what's exciting today is that the new science, the new discoveries from science, which is being talked about as Cosmo-Genesis, the fact that "the cosmos" is not a noun, but a verb, and it's continually in process. So this new cosmology is bringing science and cosmology together.

So it's bringing human history together, that we're learning the cosmos is itself historical. So we don't have to separate history from cosmos. We don't have to say, for example, that the Jewish people pushed the history dimension, and the liberation of Exodus and all these movements and Hanukkah, separately from what's going on in the cosmos. So it can bring together the power of ritual, which is always when it's healthy, but cosmos and psyche bring that power together with history itself. That's cosmos and history coming together, and we call it Cosmo-Genesis. Cosmos is not just sitting there. It's been unfolding for 13.8 billion years.

Part of the unfolding is the arrival of the humans, and part of the arrival of the humans is the spiritual teachers that we've been gifted with. Among them, of course, the Jewish tradition and the Jewish prophets, and Jesus is part of that tradition.

So that point of view of Advent, from a word meaning “coming, has a special meaning in our time. And especially when you look around and see, on the one hand, the great beauty of the universe through the Webb telescope and so many other stories we’re receiving from science, but also the degradation of the planet, and the degradation of democracy that we’re also living through. So we look for energy, we look for visions that can carry us to a better version of humanity. And that is what we are waiting for. That’s the great coming that we are looking forward to at this time.

Thank you. We’ll see you next week.