

Festival of Capricorn, London, January 2020

The Choice

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Welcome, friends here at the Lucis Trust library in London and friends out there everywhere in the world to our full moon meditation in the sign of Capricorn. You will be interested to know, if you don't know it already, that the Capricorn full moon occurs today at 7.21 pm GMT which is serendipitously when we shall be deeply involved in our meditation work. So we have a wonderful opportunity to synchronise our work with the Hierarchy this evening.

There are two distinct yet interrelated qualities to Capricorn. On the one hand this sign symbolises and promotes the deepest involvement in the material realms. It is here that the soul, the spiritual self, finds that it has become a complete prisoner of form, chained, like Plato's captives, in the dark cave of illusion. The financier Warren Buffett once remarked that "the chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken". This might be the experience of the personality, yet from a spiritual perspective there is always the possibility of breaking one's chains, turning around, and achieving spiritual freedom. This is the second feature, or gift, that Capricorn bestows. The dense concretion of form makes it easily shatterable. Once shattered and the debris dealt with and left behind, the mountain top of initiation comes into view and the will to achieve new heights on the spiritual journey makes success on this path possible.

In our present time humanity is exhibiting both of these characteristics to a marked degree – a dense materialism on the one hand and a spiritual vision of unity and service on the other. Will an unthinking, addictive and destructive materialism continue to govern the life of humanity, amplifying the continuing misery of many millions of people? Or can we manifest enough of the spiritual Will to turn around so that we can collectively help shatter humanity's chains and together start to climb the mountain top of initiation? This is what the full moon in Capricorn offers us.

Our participation in the cycle of full and new moons is like a rhythmic battering ram of spiritual effort which is helping to break down the old outmoded forms of thought and habit. This is focussed on tipping the balance in favour of a future of right relationships both horizontally within humanity and vertically from the lower kingdoms in nature upwards into the spiritual realm where the already liberated souls of the Spiritual Hierarchy are working to evoke the soul of humanity into a greater expression of service. This is resulting in significantly more people in the world making the discovery that the real meaning and fulfilment of life lies in realisation of the Soul as it manifests the Plan in service to the greater whole of which we are all an integral part.

After these preliminary thoughts we will now sit quietly and let silence reign for a minute or so and then we will sound together the mantram which you have on the card with you. This silence naturally means physical quiet. But more importantly it also means emotional silence, detachment from our desires, and – even more importantly

than that – it means mental silence, the stilling of the incessant thought form making propensity of the concrete mind. When we can achieve this then all that is left is the expectant stillness of a focussed point of loving consciousness. This is the true stillness of a realised unity in which we can together experience the truth that matters – that at the centre of all our lives is the reality of the love of the soul – the one soul that lives in each and all.

The revelation that comes with this is of the urgent intensity of the spiritual Plan for us and our world and the fact that it is us – you and me and all like minded people around the world – who have to get to work together and help materialise the Plan. As the saying goes: ‘If not me, who? If not now, when? So now let us together generate the tension of silence on every level of our being.

I know O Lord of Life and Love about the need;
Touch my heart anew with love, that I too may love and give.

OM

These days there is a common misapprehension that the meaning of the word ‘myth’ is that it is something that it is not true. We need to counter this by asserting the contrary. A myth is something that is especially and eternally true. It embodies and radiates truth in the language of symbols. This reveals truth as a progressive unfoldment of reality in a way that didactic words on their own cannot. What’s especially important to understand is that a myth cannot be confined to a single meaning or to a single historical event or episode. The fact is that myths are true for all time and for all people. And beautifully, because of their symbolic nature, they can be understood in many different and appropriate ways by people according to their particular point of attainment on the evolutionary path.

We, humanity, have been given many myths to help us understand and develop and unfold our true nature. Some, such as the Labours of Hercules, can be usefully understood as symbolic signposts for the tasks and challenges of the spiritual path. Others have a more universal application. I think it would be very helpful at this time of Capricorn when we have been recently celebrating the birth of Christ to have a go at exploring some of the symbols of the Christian myth.

Once we have peeled away the materialistic slant and glamourised distortion that our culture gives it, deeper meanings start to shine through. For example, once we have taken down the tinsel, coped with the excessive indulgences, and risen above the mawkish sentiments of conventional Christmas, we find the most extraordinarily powerful depiction of the birth of the soul as the destiny of humanity. As a myth, we know that this is something that hasn’t happened just once: it has happened to many millions of people and eventually will happen to everybody. That great European mystic of the 14th century, Meister Eckhart, understood this very well when he said: “What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the Son of God fourteen hundred years ago and I do not also give birth to the Son of God in my time and in my culture?”

Actually the myth of the birth of the sun God born to save his people was widespread in antiquity and the various stories have many threads in common. For example, the name Mary means matter, and refers to the material world. It is matter that nurtures the inner life in the darkness of the form and then eventually gives birth to it as consciousness, as the Soul. Similarly, the name of the mother of the Buddha was Maya. This also connotes the material world with the added bonus of understanding that it is the subject of distorted perception and values – of illusion in other words. Both Christ and Buddha were born when their parents were on a journey, symbolising the treading of the spiritual path from materialism to a spiritual world view.

In the Christian Christmas myth, we have the shepherds looking after their sheep. These are surely symbolic of the teachers and leaders of the people in the sign of Aries the Ram becoming aware of the appearance of the good shepherd – as Christians later called the Christ – who would not only sum up spiritual achievement to that point, as the “perfect lamb”, but would also symbolically herald the then new age of Pisces by choosing fishermen as his disciples.

Then there is the lovely story of the three wise men – astrologers, as some translations of the Bible have it. This can be viewed from many perspectives. T S Eliot wrote a poem about it called “The Journey of the Magi” and has the kings grumbling about the difficulties and privations they were experiencing on the way. But at the end he interestingly makes a point about linking the birth of the soul to dying, dying to the past and to things as they used to be, for he writes:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Thus he poignantly pictures the difficulties humanity has in letting go of the old, of dying to the old in order to embrace the new. This is the process we are rather unsuccessfully navigating at the present time as we leave the familiarities, the comfort zones, as well as the tragedies of Pisces, and discover both the blessings and difficulties that will be our journey through Aquarius.

A more positive perspective on the meaning of the three Kings emerges when we discover a deeper level to the story. For those on the spiritual path, the three kings represent the three vehicles of the personality – the physical/etheric, the emotional or astral, and the intellect. As we all know, the preliminary stages of the path are involved with the purification of all aspects of the personality so that the soul can sound through the form and radiate its essence into the surrounding environment. This is actually what persona means – to sound through – from the Latin “per sonare”.

The gifts that the three kings have to offer symbolically describe the purified personality vehicles offering themselves to the soul for use in service. The king representing the physical/etheric offers the gift of gold – purified substance. The king representing the emotional nature brings frankincense which demonstrates the transmutation of desire into aspiration as the burning incense rises towards the

heavens. The king who represents the intellect brings myrrh whose “bitter perfume” perfectly portrays the duality of the intellect which not only has the priceless gift of discrimination and analysis, but also the curse of the realisation of aloneness, of the unbearable feeling of an unbridgeable separateness and apartness. As we eventually discover, this can only be overcome, healed even, by linking with the abstract mind and the intuition where unity and wholeness hold sway.

So out of this mythological beginning emerged the life, death and resurrection of one who has given his name to the spiritual life of Western civilisation. This, as we all know, has had both beautiful moments of spiritual revelation and achievement, intermingled with periods of unutterable cruelty and depravity. In practical terms it seems to have become a vehicle to take its adherents through the difficult process of perceiving the spiritual goal of union with the Soul and diligently working at the essential processes of purification which we associate with the probationary path in order to achieve that union. That it has at times gone down the byway of excessive materialism and riches is unfortunately true. That it has gone down the authoritarian path of imposing purification rather than evoking self-initiated efforts is also sadly true. The motto seems to have sometimes been: ‘Be lenient with yourself and ruthless with others’ rather than being tolerant of others’ shortcomings and ruthlessly strict with yourself, as it should be.

Nevertheless, I think we can see now a mature Christianity emerging from the recognition of past mistakes and attempting to atone for them, and re-realising its essential preferential focus on the poor and needy rather than being a supportive bastion for the rich and powerful. For this is what it became after the emperor Constantine adopted it as the official state religion of the Roman empire in the 6th century. This appears to be a position it has largely maintained over the intervening centuries, although there are numerous examples where the contrary holds true. We can think of the dissenting Christians who, recognising the corruption of the established churches, started to chart their own course of spirituality, often at great personal cost. The Quakers spring immediately to mind as one notable example among many. So also do the 19th dissenters who were the main pioneers of much needed social reform – the abolition of slavery, prison reform, the abolition of child labour, and so on.

For the established churches things changed radically after the second world war with new pathways in an expressed spirituality, and a theology that began to better reflect the reality of the soul, the living, risen Christ. A momentous change began with Pope John XXIII’s initiative to hold the second Vatican Council (1962-65). And then there was the rise of liberation theology in the second half of the 20th century particularly affecting Latin America where many, like archbishop Oscar Romero, paid the ultimate sacrifice as they devoted their ministry to the most poor and marginalized. As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, the church then started to become what its founder had originally intended – a radical organism to promote peace, spiritual wellbeing, and social and political justice.

The present Pope Francis is clearly piloting his church onto a better course, choosing that name for his papacy in honour of the 12th century saint of Assisi who, to use his words, was “the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation”.

This is a course of service, of social justice, and a course which has acceptance and forgiveness at its heart. He is making a restatement of spiritual values, promoting ecumenical engagement, rapprochement with Judaism and Islam, and interfaith dialogue particularly with Buddhism. In one of his earliest off-script remarks to a gathering of about 5,000 journalists he memorably said: “How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor.”

I think these thoughts help us understand what the Tibetan means when he says that Christianity is a bridging religion. It is like an antahkarana through time. It takes the particular experience of the individualised soul, travelling over the centuries, through the valleys of mistakes and suffering, of doubt and purgation until it becomes anchored in the glory and universality of truth and oneness.

An interesting marker of the deep change and growth that is occurring in Christianity is how the image of the risen Christ is beginning to supplant the conventional object of devotion – the man Jesus tortured to death on the cross. Coventry Cathedral contains a most beautiful example of this in the huge tapestry by Graham Sutherland that hangs behind the high altar. I remember when this was originally unveiled particularly as it created a deep controversy.

Just after the war the Tibetan asked in the book “Problems of Humanity”: ‘Will the churches have the vision and the courage to let the bad old ways go and turn to the people with the message that God is Love, proving the existence of that love by their own lives of simple loving service?’ It seems to me that the churches are now beginning to give a positive answer to this question. Returning to our theme at the beginning of the need to help humanity shatter its chains. Surely here in the religious life of humanity is an example of just such a shattering with its accompanying resurrection of the human spirit, and grasped opportunities to serve.

On the subject of service, we are all aware that this year the Capricorn period has marked a special opportunity for the New Group of World Servers. Every seven years there occurs a week long intensification of the spiritual energies which, with the help of all aspirants and all knowers, magnifies and enhances the work of servers and serving groups everywhere in the world, as they concentrate on their specific fields of responsibility and interest. The achievement of the work of these servers over the years and especially in the present time can be gauged by many great success stories. We can think of the progress made in so many areas of need sponsored by the millennium development goals. And now the sustainable development goals are continuing with new understandings of what is needed and what is possible. We can think especially of the great work of so many groups alerting humanity to the looming environment crisis and the need to radically alter our life styles to offset the alarming trends manifesting in the natural world of pollution, of massive species extinction, of global warming.

These examples of service and progress have all been powered by a spiritual vision of humanity growing into an era of good relationships. Coupled with the sense of responsibility, ever the hall mark of the Soul, this has evoked world service initiatives that continually try to meet world needs as they arise.

Interestingly one of the indicators of their success is the fact that they have also evoked a corresponding resistance from groups and individuals who do not appear to have the interests of humanity as a whole at heart. These seem to be concerned with retreating to former status quos in order to frustrate human advancement. They stir up fear. They thrive on division and falsehood. They create barriers of misunderstanding between people. They ridicule science when it conflicts with their financial interests. They denigrate the judiciary when its judgements conflict with their political ambitions. They undermine the work of the United Nations except when they can turn that organisation to their own selfish purposes. We need to recognise them for what they are, but we mustn't overly focus on them. Let us instead realise the answer to all our problems is to manifest the Christ spirit in our own lives and in our group lives with soul-inspired thoughts, loving hearts and various programmes of practical action.

To go back to the beginning again, we need to focus on giving birth to soul in our present time. Humanity is Mary now. The soul which is already finding tangible expression in many of us and which is latent in all of us has to be evoked into one great serving organism that will bring light and love and understanding to humanity and to our planet.

How could Christ be born in you
If seed were not already there?
How could Christ not live in you
When what you really are you share?
How could Christ not die with you
When you are brave enough to dare?
And how could Christ not rise in you
when you are dead and risen too?