

Stable Consciousness

You know the scene. It's everywhere this time of year – from tiny carved ornaments, to mantle collections, to lawn decorations, to living drive-through vignettes. I'm referring to the nativity scene.

The nativity scene: begins with the basics of a baby Jesus, mother Mary and father Joseph in some form of a humble stable in the presence of animals – sheep, donkey, cows, a dove, etc. Then we add a few shepherds, 3 wise guys and top it all off by an angel or two hovering above the whole assemblage. All the creatures and people (often kneeling) are focused on the feeding trough in which a swaddled baby lies glowing with some supernatural light. I have several such collections from various countries and it became a bit of a quest of mine to increase the collection each year until I realized I was running out of room to display them all.

The nativity is the central religious image associated with Christmas like Santa is in the secular image for Christmas. We all know the story of how the nativity scene is created through the mash up of three gospel stories. It is sweet to see the tiny baby so revered and adored by lowly and exalted adults and animals, but for most of us – let's face it – the nativity is at best simply another traditional Christmas decoration like the twinkling deer or snowmen

on our lawn or the stockings we hang on the fireplace mantle. It has no more meaning or relevance. But what if....and you know I was going to go there....what if it has more than a literal meaning. What if it has a deeper meaning, a symbolic meaning, a mythological/metaphorical meaning that we are missing?? What if? Well, this morning I'll suggest to you a 'what if'.

In my world, the world of esoteric Christianity, the nativity is a concentrated visual representation of the spiritual journey toward enlightenment and attaining a “stable consciousness”. How’s that? Let me explain by separating the parts of the scene into each of their symbolic meanings. It is my belief that the spiritual goal of each of us in life is to birth the “Christ” within. By that I mean: birthing the Christ consciousness and our true essence of pure love and service. The Christ consciousness – separate from the historic Jesus of Nazareth – is an awareness of the connectedness of all life, the spirit of compassion, peace, goodwill, and a higher purpose of serving humanity’s evolutionary journey. Eastern philosophies may call this enlightenment, attaining bliss or nirvana. The little baby lying in the bed of straw is the potential in each of us to attain this state of consciousness. It is born not just at Christmas time, but each day and each moment we remain in the ‘now’ and in the expression of unconditional love.

Mary and Joseph represent more than an equality of the sexes on the spiritual journey and certainly more than simply an ideal Jewish family structure. They also can represent the masculine and feminine energies within each of us individuals. They can represent the right and left hemispheres of the brain, which correlate to the receptive/creative (feminine) right side of the brain and the active/logical (masculine) left side of the brain. When these two hemispheres come into balance and our brain activity crosses freely between them we can access and nurture the “child” in the center of them. The “child” to which I refer is the pineal gland. For our science loving folks I’ll note that the pineal gland can be found by slicing a brain in half-lengthwise. Pushing aside the thalamus and behind the third cerebral ventricle sitting right above the superior colliculus sits the pineal gland. It is the only structure of the brain that doesn't exist as a pair. What does the pineal gland have to do with Christmas, Christ consciousness, or enlightenment? It would appear, a great deal.

A study at National Taiwan University in 2008 suggests that there is a correlation between meditation and activation of the pineal gland in the brain. fMRI brain scans were made of seven females and nine males practicing the Chinese "original quiet sitting technique." In the first phase of this technique the meditators sit chanting mantras and practicing visualizations. After this, they sit in silence for the rest of the meditation. The study

found that peoples' brain patterns changed during meditation: alpha and beta wave activity decreased, while theta brain wave activity increased, during the phase of deep meditation.

The pineal gland was most active during the initial phase in which the subjects were vocalizing mantras. According to the results of the study, the pineal gland shows activation during the silent recitation of a mantra or other specific religious phrase (left hemisphere) and mental imagination of receiving spiritual energy (right hemisphere). Although the distinct internal process is still unknown, pineal seems to have certain or special functions here. These special functions also have some interaction with the inner body which cause the pineal gland to produce melatonin, regulating the circadian rhythms (wake/sleep patterns) and creating the relaxed state of sleep in an awake brain. The blood pressure lowers, the heart rate decreases, and breathing slows.

The meditation of receiving spiritual energy can cause correlated pineal activation and show clear brain imaging observed by fMRI, supporting the speculation that the pineal plays an important role in the intrinsic awareness which concerns spirit or soul. That's why the pineal is spiritually considered to be:

1. The seat of the soul
2. A portal to another existence

3. A connection to divine guidance
4. The telepathic power point
5. A gate that leads to inner realms and spaces of higher consciousness

“ Recent studies are showing that meditation can result in stable brain patterns and changes over both short and long-term intervals that have not been seen before in human beings and suggest the potential for positive neuroplastic changes by intentionally utilizing such practices. Science and spirituality converge.

Back to the symbolism of the nativity – we can ascribe the qualities of the brain hemispheres to Mary and Joseph and the qualities of the pineal gland to the child in the manger. Having a Christmas “stable consciousness” then, can be achieved through meditative practices. The calming result of meditation practices is something we all can benefit from especially during the chaos of this season. If this nativity interpretation seems like a stretch, I find it is less of a stretch than accepting the gospel stories literally.

So what about the other characters in the manger scene? Using some of Carl Jung’s symbolism, the animals in the crèche may represent our basic animal nature and our emotional nature. The Shepherds were the most basic of human professions of the time,

they are *merely* shepherds – hard working yet uneducated, humble and simple. The mundane level of our daily life and our physical body may be represented by the shepherds. The wisemen were mystics and astrologers from another country. They were learned men of their time in the analytical and interpretive ways of studying the stars. In those times, astronomy and astrology were one and studied as a science. These wisemen may represent our educated, intellectual, mental self.

So, now we have represented in the nativity: our physical (shepherds), emotional (animals), and mental (wisemen) nature all coming into alignment as we seek enlightenment and that balanced – stable consciousness – through the pineal gland. The angel or angels remind us that other entities wiser or holier than ourselves are present to oversee, guide, encourage and celebrate our progress. I'll restate this in another way.

When we are in a full and deep meditative state and all the 'bodies' or natures of ourselves are aligned here's what we might expect:

Our physical body experiences relaxation, healing energy in the form of melatonin flows, revitalization increases and stress is reduced.

Our emotional nature experiences an increase in LOVE - Lots of Vital Energy (the acronym -LOVE). We feel more positive and optimistic about life, our unconditional and compassionate heart opens and a sense of goodwill emanates.

Our mental nature knows peace. A new clarity may emerge along with spontaneous serenity.

And spiritually, we may experience a surge in creativity – music, art, solutions to problems – may come unexpectedly. Inspiration may flash and new concepts, realizations, or insights may be conceived.

When all four of these aspects of our nature come into alignment through meditative practices and the stimulation of our third eye (the pineal gland), we are in the manger, a higher consciousness is birthed, and we are experiencing what I call 'stable consciousness'. Does this make sense....even if you don't agree with it?

OK, now try explaining this to a child. Are they ready or even capable of understanding it? No. So, like all other mythological stories, we share this one in simple, even concrete, terms. We give them something visual and tangible to "grasp" as we emphasize the beauty and love present in greeting newborns. We teach them that they are valuable and that they have great potential to grow up and become a great leader even though they – like the

swaddled infant – have very humble and unassuming beginnings. We teach them that animals are to be trusted and that there is a family of people who gathered around and celebrated their birth just like the shepherds and wisemen did. Which version or meaning is right? Both, in my world. We teach children what they can understand. The challenge I've found over and over in the Christian churches is that they/we are very good at teaching the basics of the faith like one would learn in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. But, instead of going on to more expanded and deeper spiritual teachings, the same basic curriculum and stories are started over again every three years with the same meanings offered. It's no wonder that so many of you and our young adults today have left the church.

Today I lit the candle for love. Love nurtures the warmth of human relationships; love is a beacon of direction as we navigate our complex world; love is the light of truth and knowledge gained through interaction with the unknown; love promotes universal peace; and love gives us the courage to discover the unfamiliar. May we courageously and with open hearts, venture into new experiences of expanded consciousness by whatever we call it. May we proceed on our journey toward Christmas with greater expectancy. Amen – blessed be.