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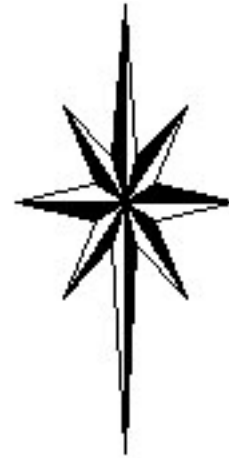
Peace be with you.

Yes, it is Christmas, the birthday of the Prince of Peace. And yes, we humans yet manipulate one another to realize our competing socio-politico-religious fantasies. Fantasies? We each can never perceive reality as it is. "It" is all in our heads. WHAT!??

It is common knowledge in neuroscience that we filter our experience via our respective nervous systems. Family, state, church, culture, genetics and our own input condition these nervous systems. This conditioning forms a conceptual overlay to what that we experience. The Moslem in Indonesia perceives a Christmas creche differently than a Roman Catholic in the Vatican, much the same as for a Buddhist in Burma or a Hindu in India. Hence, Christmas means different things to different people. For some it is a moment of celebratory remembrance; for others, a shallow commercial event.

Please, let us pause for a moment to reflect upon Equanimity. Wikipedia* defines Equanimity "(L.: *ἀνιμίτας* having an even mind; L. *aequus* even animus mind/soul) is a state of psychological stability and composure which is undisturbed by experience of or exposure to emotions, pain, or other phenomena that may cause others to lose the balance of their mind."

In a Hindu sense, "Equanimity" does not refer to a state of mind, rather it describes our real nature. A sense of attachment is always individual and operates at the level of our (individual identities or egos. ...by renouncing our limited identity, we can reveal our true nature. When we are aware of our true nature, the individual ego does not operate anymore, hence the outcome is equanimity. When one is fully



Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give you.
(John 14:27)

May the Peace
of the Christmas Season
be with you and yours

aware, one does not become attached to the world, rather one acts as a "witness" or "seer". The world is apparent and unfolds in front of our awareness, but due to lack of clarity, we identify with the body and the mind and become finite and limited. The only unchanging reality is pure awareness."*

In a Jewish sense, we find this dialogue from Rabbi Chaim Vital: A rabbi requests from a Kabbalist, "Master, explain your words (concerning Equanimity)." The Master replied, "If there are two persons - one of them honors you and the second insults you - are they equal in your eyes or not?" The rabbi said to the Master, "No my master. For I feel pleasure and satisfaction from the person who honors me, and pain from the one who insults me. But I do not

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take revenge nor bear a grudge." The Master said to the rabbi, "My son, go in peace. For until such time that you have attained equanimity, until your soul does not feel the honor of the one who honors you and the embarrassment of the one who insults you, your consciousness is not ready to be connected to the supernal realm, which is a prerequisite to meditation. So go and surrender your heart even more, a true surrendering, until you have attained equanimity. Then you will be able to meditate (in the Kabbalist Tradition) ."

In a Christian sense, Equanimity may be described "as evenness of mind, neither elated nor depressed." In Christian philosophy, equanimity is considered essential for carrying out the theological virtues of gentleness, contentment, temperance, and charity."*

In a Buddhism sense equanimity becomes "Neither a thought nor an emotion, it is rather the steady conscious realization of reality's transience. It is the ground for wisdom and freedom and the protector of compassion and love. While some may think of equanimity as dry neutrality or cool aloofness, mature equanimity produces a radiance and warmth of being."*

In an Islamic sense, given surrender and acceptance, "a Muslim would experientially behold that everything happening is meant to

be, and stems from the ultimate wisdom of God; hence, being a true Muslim can therefore be understood to mean that one is in a state of equanimity.*

And in a Baha'i sense, " 'Abdu'l-Baha offers a perspective aimed at cultivating equanimity. He wrote: "Grieve thou not over the troubles and hardships of this nether world, nor be thou glad in times of ease and comfort, for both shall pass away. This present life is even as a swelling wave, or a mirage, or drifting shadows. Could ever a distorted image on the desert serve as refreshing waters? No, by the Lord of Lords! Never can reality and the mere semblance of reality be one, and wide is the difference between fancy and fact, between truth and the phantom thereof. Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye."*

In short, a healthy mind is a still or silent mind.

The Human Condition suggests that we attach ourselves to what we like and dislike. Internally we attach to how we think (I'm right / You're wrong), feel (drawn to / repulsed by) or emote (care / apathy; joy / sorrow). Likewise, externally we attach ourselves to

people, places, things, or events. When everything completes itself, we come to realize that underpinning our lives is nothing but fear - in all its many forms. We fear losing what we have, not having what we want; succeeding or failing; living or dying once born - fear that another (mother/father?) does not love "me" anymore. All of this occurs on the screen of Life - in our own heads, neuronal systems.

The Human Condition unfolds as a Hall of Mirrors. We like this person, detest that person. We forget that beauty exists only in the eye of the beholder. We forget that we can only know what we know of ourselves. We project onto others what we like or dislike about ourselves as we perceive only our conception of reality. We turn-on to this event or person and turn-off to that event or person. We forget that what we dislike in another images/ contains what we essentially dislike in our own self. For example, if an entertainment, sports or political personality evokes dislike, hate, or contempt, then that personality in that moment becomes our Teacher.

The Teacher portrays that we have the capacity to or act in the same way and do not admit it to ourselves. We project our own self hate onto the other. We have the opportunity to remember in Equanimity that we

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each are very flawed human beings.

(By the way, once we accept fully a disliked trait as our own (possible) dynamic as well, then that dynamic does not bother us any longer. We can accept without resistance the situation and ourselves just as the moment unfolds with neither praise nor blame. We can experience joy or sorrow, respected or dis-respected without rancor. We then act accordingly with a minimum of prejudice and get out of our own way or the other's. Mercy and Forgiveness becomes a desired option - not only for our own self, but also for the other..)

How and what to do? Be aware in the moment that whatever we are perceiving (thinking, feeling, hearing, touching, seeing, emoting) images who we are in that moment and that is exactly what we what in that moment. We can only know what we are. Accept first of all: "I want this thought (feeling or emotion)." Stay with the feeling-thought, sense it in as many of its aspects as possible - its nooks and crannies. We then uncover its hidden truths for ourselves. The thought may even dissipate. Eventually, we "see the light" and can forgive our self for our own blindness. In this forgiveness, we can then "let it go" and be that Peace we always are. Mercy abounds.

Merry Christmas.
Peace and Joy!
+Robert OSB

Christian Equanimity

The Rule of St. Benedict counsels to always keep death & God before one's eyes & enjoy life. Thus, there will be no surprises when we die & meet our Maker. Thus, a call resides to awaken to Equanimity. The following is by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat at spiritualityandpractice.com.

“Equanimity practice enables us to see things as they are and, at the same time, not be attached to certain outcomes. It gives us the kind of perspective Jesus was recommending when he advised us to consider just look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field

Equanimity practice is usually associated with the Eastern religious traditions Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism. We hadn't thought of equanimity as a Christian practice until we read about it in Benedictine Sister Mary Margaret Funk's book *Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life*. One of the Catholic sisters in her monastery practiced *Lectio Divina* (a slow and meditative way of reading the scriptures) with Paul's letters and discovered what she calls St. Paul's 'Practice of No Preference.'

She looked at Philippians 4:11-13 where he writes, 'Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the

secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.'

Paul reviews his life and decides he does not need to show a preference for any person, state, or thing over another. He has no preference for plenty and abundance. He has no aversion to hunger or want. He is content with whatever he has because all that matters is his life in Christ.

One of the best ways to get away from being driven by your desires and aversions is to use affirmations. Here's one that is right in sync with St. Paul's Practice of No Preference: Start off the day by stating, 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me.' This is an energizer that will tame your early rising desires for a day and your aversion to being disappointed when you don't get what you want; it affirms that God is the source of your equanimity.

'Nothing can separate me from God' is another affirmation that can help you stay calm, balanced, and centered, especially in times of difficulty. And this one will really help you be like the mountain: 'God is with me and all is well, no matter what happens..'"

Listen and attend with the ear of your heart -St. Benedict

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Peace and Joy!

How to Detach from a Belief—Why?

How to detach from a belief and experience freedom and peace of mind? Use a centering meditation taught by Tarthang Tulku in his *Hidden Mind of Freedom*:

"Working with thoughts (beliefs) by opening them as they arise can bring many pleasant feelings, which—without attachment—also become our meditation. We can even go into the thoughts that judge other thoughts, and, embracing this judging mind, become united with it."

"By relying on the light of awareness you can see that the difficulties you face are manifestations of your own concepts. Going deeply into your thoughts, you will see how you create your experience, how you alone are the judge who determines heaven and hell, good and bad."

"Whatever experience arises, stay with it, expand it, and heat it up. If you remain within the intense

core of the experience, the meditator unites with thoughts and emotions, and everything dissolves. Then awareness grows powerful and one-pointed. As thoughts and emotions are increasingly included within this field of awareness, they become more useful. Instead of being a cause of frustration or confusion, they become agents of well-being. . . "

And why?

A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt. He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one." The grandson asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?" The grandfather answered, "The one I feed. (Thank you Michael Butler)

May all beings be happy.
Amen.

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And thank you. May many blessings be to you and yours now and forevermore. Peace and joy!

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