

## **The Life Changing Possibilities of Baptism**

Many people are not aware that there is an importance of making a life changing commitment mentioned in nearly every religious philosophy? This is the idea of being renewed, becoming a new person or being born anew. The symbolism of being reborn is partially fulfilled through baptism. It symbolically contains most of the events of actual birth which is reminiscent of our humble primal beginning.

We are dry land creatures, and while we might live near the water, gaze at it in awe, play on it, drink it; we can not live in it without taking enough of our environment with us, into its depths, to sustain life. When we are submerged we are as one dead, or at least approaching death. Yet, as a symbol for amniotic fluid it is also reminiscent of the mother. When submerged in the baptism ritual we are as a child ready for birth. Coming up out of the water and taking the first breath (symbolically drawing in the spirit of life), drenched in the symbolic remains of the previous state of being, and aided by the minister (representative of God on earth) is the reenactment of an individual's personal birth not to mention the primal rising out of the sea. He or she is renewed, ready to live the new life. This symbolic act triggers a primal memory in the psyche that can result in changed behavior for a normal and well adjusted individual. For someone with abnormal psychic development, that is, with severe psychoses or neurosis, it can trigger anti-social behavior by the psychotic individual's weak ego. On the other hand a highly neurotic individual with super inflated ego can develop behavior that alters the process of civilization (e.g. Hitler, and many (not all) religious fundamentalist leaders) or at least family unity.

Baptism by sprinkling with water in a Christian Church is symbolic of the profound complete immersion described above. This method of renewal can be profoundly primal but it requires a much more in depth catechism to assure that the baptized person experiences the symbolism which leads to the emotions and

life transforming nature of the ceremony. While infant baptism might have an importance to the parents, family, friends and church community there is no cognitive awareness by the child. Therefore very little benefit can materialize in the child. It is only after the child has developed his or her own ego or self awareness that the benefits of renewal can be realized. Thus, John may have believed he was renewing Jesus to the simpler, more fundamental and ancient Jewish way, reminiscent of the return to the promised land from the exile and the exodus. But, to Jesus there was a personal transformation or rebirth into a purity fostering his movement toward the individual's closeness with God and responsibility for salvation through living a peaceful and God filled life. Awareness by the baptized is the key to the idea of renewal. The symbolic act of rebirth should be repeated as often as an individual feels it is necessary for spiritual growth and strength. All human beings know that they make mistakes. The chance to correct mistakes is a normal human desire and is part of every religious path.

In the Rig Veda (10.9.8-9) of the Hindus, it speaks about washing away sin. This is part of the notion of receiving divine grace by bathing in the Ganges River. Here again, the symbolic nature of water is drawn upon to fill the bather with the understanding that by washing away he or her sins a new start is possible. It is commonly accepted and well known that the Ganges is one of the most polluted rivers in the world, yet the water has the power to renew the believer. Not only does the believer have the spiritual benefit of the power of the river, but also the river is renewed in the devotion of the bather.

Very often when one visits a Theravada Buddhist Temple and attends a ceremony where the monks give the congregation a blessing, it is by way of sprinkling with lustral water. Here the water becomes the symbolic gift of life given by Buddha through his sermons. The idea of renewal is presented in Buddhism as it is written (Lotus Sutra 3) which states that a follower of Buddha is his child, having been born from the mouth of Buddha. Is not everyone who

hears the message of a path, and is transformed at the spirit level, actually a child of the message, a renewed person, when they choose to live the new life?

This idea is supported in the legend of the Tao Te Ching where it is said that Lao Tzu gave the book of Tao and Te to the gate keeper (symbolic gate of understanding) of the state of Chou, in which he lived and worked as keeper of the royal archives, prior to leaving the world (the known civilized world). The symbolism of the verses being given to the gate keeper, to allow the gates to be opened for his departure, is that understanding and knowledge can be found through the observation of nature with an opened mind (see Jonathan Star, Tao Te Ching, - introduction p1.). In this great legend of the Tao both Lao Tzu and the gate keeper become new people as Lao Tzu is allowed to travel into the great unknown to the West of the walls and a new way of looking at the world is revealed to the people. The act of looking at the world in a new way renews a person. Perhaps a legitimate question at this point would be, how may a person of conviction and certain knowledge become renewed. Especially if it requires a person to question his or her complete set of understand.

The desire for cleansing and renewal is based in one's emotions. It often is accompanied by the awareness that "things" are just not right with the world. It may also occur late in life when all the answers do not satisfy all of the questions. Things that seem so right when one is twenty begin to dull in certainty as wisdom allows a view of the "big picture." For the person renewed by observation, feeling, intuition, and spiritual revelation, the time for baptism is at hand. In reality the ceremony of baptism is simply the renewed individual's public statement to the community that he is attempting a new path in life. He or she is asking for a fresh start based upon new personal spiritual awareness.

Where two or more people of the Sempiternal Harmony can meet and share ideas, they should baptize each other in a formal way that honors the precepts and respect for each other. This ceremony is simply a way for them to

join in the spirit and pledge their spiritual support to each other. Yet in reality, for us of the Sempiternal Harmony every morning is a fresh start. We baptize ourselves with prayer, meditation and reading world scriptures. The prayers are for the understanding of our place in the universe. The meditation is quiet open mindedness that allows us to view nature. Reading the scriptures of the world helps us know and respect a little more of our fellow earth citizens. Through this practice, awareness of the divine nature within us all can become manifest in our outward daily life. By living a life of peace, simplicity, gentleness and respect for the divine nature of others we fulfill the ancient request of God, to know and love our Divine parent.

May the Divine peace settle in your soul.