



Solstice and John the Baptist Day: World Breathing and the I AM

Summer Solstice this year will be on June 20 near midnight Universal Time. The Sun will then just step into the stars of Gemini, the Twins (actual constellation, not tropical sign). Four days later on June 24 is the day of John the Baptist. In this article I will look at both of these within the context of the cycle of the year, the breathing of the Earth, and the “I” experience in its relation to our current world situation.

At solstice we are reminded of the life and being of our Earth, our Mother. Rudolf Steiner describes the cycle of the year in the life of nature as a breathing process of the Earth, which includes the Earth soul and spirit. In this sense does he connect one year of the Earth with one inhalation and exhalation. He relates this to both a one-day human experience of inhalation in waking and uniting with our body and sensory consciousness and exhalation in sleeping in which our soul and spirit expand into the cosmos of the divine world. One can also look at birth and death as a similar breathing. At death we expire, exhale until what is called “cosmic midnight” when we begin inhalation towards our next earthly life in a physical body and our birth into waking consciousness. For the Earth soul and spirit, Summer solstice is the full exhalation point of the year. The Winter solstice is the full inhalation point. In summer the Earth soul is fully exhaled and expanded into the heights of the cosmos, akin to our full expansion to the midnight hour in the life between death and rebirth. In winter the Earth soul is drawn fully inside, contracted into the Earth. This image of our breathing Earth, expanding to the periphery and

contracting into the center offers other images, particularly relevant to the two central current world events, both of which are in some sense characterized by breathing.

Perhaps the most frightening thought for most people of the Covid 19 pandemic and the symptom that sends people into hospitals is difficulty to breathe. The very sick cannot breathe and are intubated onto respirators to save their life. Suffocation evokes great dread and fear. In fact, I have heard people say that it's not the dying but the suffocation that is most frightening about Covid 19. But the fear generated by Covid 19 is our fear of death because in our times with our materialistic world view that expiration is the end, not a transition to the ongoing life outside physical existence.

In the current protests over the horrible death of George Floyd by police officers, we also have this central image of breathing. George Floyd was suffocated and was pleading "I can't breathe" to the officer kneeling on his neck. In the protests the signs carried and chants in the crowd repeat this, "I can't breathe", as a representation of the suffocation of oppression and subjugation that black people have lived with in America. So first we have the one continuing global experience of social isolation and separation created by the pandemic fear of death. Then arises a second global experience triggered here in the USA by the rage over the wrongful murder of George Floyd and the oppression of human dignity it represents. The two central soul experiences of these two events are fear and rage. Fear with the pandemic. Rage with the George Floyd protests.

What is the experience of fear? We inhale, sometimes sharply, and contract inwardly in fright. Our blood streams towards the center of our body as we turn white with fear. We can even shiver with the cold of fear. Fear evokes images of winter, darkness, contraction, inhalation, isolation. Rage is the opposite. We exhale violently and expand, even explode, in our feelings and will, outwards in all directions. Our blood streams to the periphery. We become red and hot with rage. Rage can boil over into acts of destruction when it is uncontrolled. So, in this polarity we have something like a taught rubber band effect. It is almost as if the shrinking and contracting of the pandemic stretched our souls tight in one direction of contraction, setting up an intense release such as we have seen in the rage of protests around the globe, some of which took on violent and destructive acts. George Floyd was not the first black person killed unjustly by police, yet his death unleashed a world torrent and a generational cry for justice. Is it possible to see any causal relationship between these two forces at work? Might the crisis of isolation, of being thrown back onto ourselves in our aloneness, have been the fuel for our outrage against the suppression of our human freedom, of our human dignity, which found full release in the inhumanity of George Floyd's killing. This is in no way to make less of the plight of black Americans and their unique position in a systemic history of oppression. It is only an observation of the dynamic that has been taking place.

These two current experiences carry both hopeful and harmful consequences. In the confinement of the pandemic, with the absence of the busy-ness of life and all the distractions that keep us occupied, people have perhaps had the time and inner space for deep questions about their lives, about who they are, about what is meaningful in life. Perhaps some have even had a kind of existential epiphany leading to an awakening to a new sense of self and purpose not so determined by external factors, but out of themselves inwardly. On the other hand, the pandemic has shown how quickly and easily people will submit to the authoritative voice of science and government for "their own good". It gives one pause to observe what happened globally in a matter of weeks. It is shocking to see how quickly the entire world has fallen into lock step behind the authoritative papacy of the science of pandemic management. Even intelligent reasonable alternative views on how best to address the pandemic are considered "dangerous" and blocked on social media platforms. It has happened before in world history. It is

important to be fully awake and observe events objectively. The question to ask is what has been the underlying deeper purpose and consequences of this restriction in social connection. Is there an intelligence behind this?

The same is true with the eruption of rage and the righteous calls for justice after the killing of George Floyd. On the one hand one can perhaps see a growing awareness of the dignity and value of each human being, which can be signs of a growing recognition of our shared humanity and an outcry against the unjust treatment, not only of black people, but all people who are not able to realize the free unfolding of their potential. Yet on the other hand, the rage can lead to increased hatred and division, a further separation that leads us away from a growing movement towards a world brother/sisterhood. Violence, hatred, and destruction fuel chaos and chaos breeds fear. Fear and chaos pave the way for a welcoming of authoritarian control, again, for our own protection.

I bring these images of breathing, of fear and rage in their negative potential for greater division as well as their positive potential, in order to bring us towards a greater knowledge of who we are as human beings. Choices lie ahead. But the question is out of what, or who, will the choices be made. And this brings us to our theme of Summer solstice and John the Baptist.

In the past decades there has been a growing scientific awareness of the Earth as a living Being. One significant step in this direction was the Gaia hypothesis (first formulated in an article in 1972) by James Lovelock, scientist and environmentalist and Lynn Margulis, an evolutionary theorist. The basics of the theory were that all living organisms interact with their environment to form a self-regulating, complex system of life which sustains and perpetuates healthy conditions on Earth. In that same year, the crew from the Apollo 17 spacecraft, took what became an iconic photo of our Earth from space, which became known as “the Blue Marble” (see cover image). This photo took on a significant role in our world perception. We seemed to awaken to our beautiful planet in a new way, as this living being, we call home. Of course, this modern awakening one could say was really only a re-awakening in a scientific framework to what all earlier cultures instinctively understood about our Mother, the Earth who has been known by many names.

However, this modern awareness of our Mother Earth, is only an awareness, though full of care and love as it may be, of the physical biological body of the Earth. Perhaps there is a kind of awareness also of the “life” realm of the Earth, yet it is defined by the physical/biological measures. Much of the new science on biodiversity, the “biome” of the Earth and the “microbiome” of our body, as articulated quite well by Dr. Zach Bush, are still materialistic explorations of this life realm which seek to understand the whole by analyzing the particles.

From spiritual science we can broaden our understanding to the whole Being of the Earth beyond the physical body. We can become aware not only of the physical body of our Earth, but also a more complex understanding of her life, her soul, and even her spirit. Just as the human being is composed of a physical body, a life or etheric body, a soul, and a spirit, so too is the Earth.

In addition to a physical body and a life body which reveals itself so clearly in the seasonal cycle of the year, our Earth has a soul. What is this soul of the Earth? It is the totality of all sentient beings on Earth, which includes not only the animal and human soul kingdoms, but also those sentient beings of the Earth which compose the non-physical elemental world. Alongside biodiversity and “life” diversity, the Earth has a complex soul life, a world Soul or astral body.

To spiritually understand Summer Solstice (as well as Winter Solstice and the Equinoxes) and John the Baptist Day, we must also include not only the Earth Soul, but also the Earth Spirit. What then is the Earth Spirit and how does this connect with solstice and John the Baptist's Day? The life body of our Earth is what we experience in time, in rhythms. This manifests in the seasonal cycle of the Sun and Earth weaving together in time. Thus, at solstices and equinoxes we experience these nodal points in time, transitional points in the life of Earth. The soul body of our Earth was the domain of festivals, bringing art, music, dance, and song as well as spiritual ritual...shared soul community life. In ancient times these usually centered around nature, either the solstices/equinoxes or the cross-quarter times in the life cycle of the year. The ancients still possessed the feeling and knowledge that their spiritual life was intimately bound up with these relations of the spiritual Sun and the Earth soul as revealed in nature.

These ancient festivals, particularly in their ritual aspect, arose out of a true spiritual life. In our modern times, we have almost extinguished even the idea of soul, though we use the word regularly. All soul experience in science is increasingly defined as chemical/neurological processes in the brain. The spirit has suffered an even worse fate. It is either relegated to religion or as a kind of abstract concept, used often but little understood. Even religion no longer clearly distinguishes between soul and spirit. In fact, Rudolf Steiner points out that as early as 869 AD the Catholic Church in the 8th Ecumenical Council of Constantinople essentially eliminated it, deciding that the human being was composed of body and soul, with the soul having some spiritual attributes. This became part of Church dogma and teaching.

The loss of the distinction between soul and spirit is one of the great tragedies, even if necessary, for our evolution towards freedom. For it is only the spirit which brings truth. As Christ tells his disciples, foreshadowing the Whitsun experience, "I will send to you the Spirit of Truth." – the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). So, what is this Spirit? The Spirit is what brings about in us our next stage of development, from consciousness or spiritual soul to Spirit Self. It is the true "I", which is the same as the Christ "I" in us. This takes us into the great mystery of the Individual "I" experience and the Universal World "I", and brings us to Summer Solstice and John the Baptist's Day and the evolution of this "I" experience.

In the lectures titled, *The Cycle of the Year*, Rudolf Steiner presents how the Earth "breathes" during the cycle of the year. As stated earlier, from Summer to Winter it is inhaling and from Winter to Summer exhaling. In ancient times this exhalation at Summer solstice was a uniting of the Earth Soul with its Spirit in the periphery of the great Sun. It was then that humanity, through ritual acts, was able to experience the true "I" outside of them, in the periphery. Rudolf Steiner describes this summer experience as the time of "enlightenment" for the ancients. The human being could "receive the Light", in other words could encounter the higher "I" in this union with the heights, with the cosmic Sun Ego.

From *Festivals and their Meaning*, Lecture V:

Let us remind ourselves how in midsummer, the time we now know as St. John's, the people became aware under this ancient Mystery influence of a certain relationship to their ego, an ego which they did not yet consider as exclusively their own, but which they viewed as resting in the bosom of the divine-spiritual. These people believed...that they approached their "I" at midsummer, although throughout the rest of the year it was hidden from them...each man was enabled in a certain sense to meet his "I" in the universe..In that period man felt the "I" perceptively as having a real connection with the entire cosmos, with the whole world. Steiner continues with an important point relevant for today by describing how ancient humanity's experience of the relationship of his "I" to the cosmos was "something which was deemed to be the very center of the most ancient moral conception of the world..he was to absorb into himself the moral impulse."

Then towards the end of this lecture, Steiner makes the profound statement which directs us to the present and the new "I" experience.

Naturally everything was changed when the great event of Golgotha entered in.

What changed? What was once outer, became inner. What was once an experience guided by the Mysteries, of the true "I" in the heights above, became the seed force for the experience of the true "I" within. The moral impulse which was previously "absorbed" from the heights, the ego experience which was received from the cosmic Universal "I" above, at Golgotha, entered into the Earth and united with it and with the human being. The magnitude of this turning point cannot be under stated.

So how do we bring Solstice and John the Baptist Day into a relation to our world now out of this transition?

First let us look at the being who was John the Baptist, to whom this festival time belongs. We know from the Gospels that Elizabeth, the mother of John, and the mother of Jesus were cousins and visited frequently with each other during their pregnancies. John was six months older than Jesus, thus the calendar dating of John's Day, six months prior to Christmas. John was born at summer solstice. Jesus was born at winter solstice. One born at the time described above, at the full exhalation of the Earth soul and its union with the higher cosmic "I". The other born at the full inhalation of the Earth soul when it was most removed from the cosmic experience of the heights, when the Earth soul was enclosed within the body of the Earth. So, who was the being of John and what was his ego experience in that incarnation preceding Golgotha?

Jesus stated that John was the reincarnation of Elijah. In the Old Testament book First Kings, Chapter 19, a story about Elijah is told which is revealing about his spiritual evolution, the evolution of his "I". We are told that Jezebel, the Queen and wife of King Ahab, sought to kill him. (One cannot go into this in this present article, but interesting parallels exist between Jezebel and Herodias, the wife of King Herod, who did have John killed.) So, Elijah fled into the wilderness (the aloneness) where he remained for 40 days not eating or drinking (just as Jesus immediately after the baptism by John went into the wilderness for 40 days) and he prayed and sought the Lord. It describes this seeking for the Lord in the telluric forces of nature, as Moses had found the Lord in the guiding cloud by day and fire cloud by night, and in the burning bush. The story goes that in Elijah's seeking the Lord a mighty wind arose, but the Lord was not found in the wind. Then a mighty earthquake came but he found not the Lord in the earthquake. Then a fire but he found not the Lord in the fire. The Lord could not be found in the elements. But then it is written, "after the fire a still small voice". Here we have Elijah finding the Lord with an inner experience, the "still small voice" of the Lord. Here is a transition from hearing the voice of the Lord in nature to hearing the voice of the Lord within. Then he incarnates as John the Baptist. Yet this incarnation is before the event of Golgotha, before the union of the I AM with the Earth. So, what is John's experience after the "still small voice" but before the union of the Christ Ego with the Earth? In the Matthew gospel he is described by Jesus as the greatest of any man born of women, "yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." This kingdom of heaven is the new spiritual kingdom out of the new Christ ego forces to be established in the world. In the prologue of the John Gospel, John is named as a "witness to the light". John describes himself as "a voice crying in the wilderness", which is also translated as "in the aloneness". John's mission was to proclaim to the people, "Repent", which literally means, "turn around" and can be translated as "change your thinking" for the time has come. John is the one who "prepares the way" for the new which is to come. He is still one guided

more from the old prophet visionary stream. Yet it is John who recognizes who Jesus is and has the task of facilitating the incarnation of the Christ into Jesus. It is he who says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This could be understood as, Behold the One (the true cosmic I AM) who takes away the sin (which is separation from the divine) of the world. Steiner in other lectures goes on to describe the further work of John from the spiritual world after his beheading in relation to the work and task of Jesus and the disciples and then further to the great mystery of the relation of John the Baptist to John, the beloved apostle. So, what can this tell us about John the Baptist Day? At this time, we are brought clearly to a recognition of the transition from the old way of receiving enlightenment, from the cosmic heights, to the new way of enlightenment, since the union of the I AM with the Earth.

As an astrosophy student, I will add another element to the old and new of John's Day. At summer solstice, and then of course at John's Day, the Sun enters the stars of Gemini, the Twins. The task of a new star wisdom is to bring to the stars the fruits of this union of the Christ with the Earth as it unfolds in human evolution and thereby ultimately "create a new heaven". In previous articles I have articulated the current planetary activity in this Gemini/Archer vertical zodiacal axis of the solstices and their relationship to humanity's "identity crisis". So, I will not repeat that, but it has to do with these times particularly now and our struggle to realize our true humanity. This then relates to what has been said about the polarities of fear/cold/Ahriman and rage/hot/Lucifer and the place of the Christ-I in this dynamic, which is archetypally presented in Steiner's sculpture of the Representative Human. This is also a new imagination for the constellation of the Twins, with the "I" between the polarities. Let us look further into Gemini. In its pre-Christ meaning, as the Gemini symbol indicates, it pictures a world above and a world below. The twins Castor and Pollux were one heavenly and one earthly. It carries in the old way a picture of hierarchy, spiritual and earthly, the above and the below. It represents the old hierarchy of early spirituality, in which the training consisted of a path of ascent to the spiritual heights, which then bestowed on one authority and rulership. Priests, kings, magi all had ascended in spiritual development and their position was one of a rank above the ordinary human as a guide to them. This then degenerated over time, particularly after Golgotha and this transition. The true spiritual legitimacy which was once an authentic and proper authority faded away, but the form of hierarchical authority remained as a form of power and might, expressed in Romanism in Law and order and in the Church, which took on Romanism. This continues even today in our social forms. There are many other examples one could go into, but in general, Gemini once carried this hierarchical form of ascent as the path to the divine and therefore to spiritual authority. As the earlier quote states, since the mystery of Golgotha all of this has changed. A great inversion took place in humanity when the higher became the lower, became human, as a servant. It was a cosmic gesture of sacrifice. The whole principle of authority was inverted. As Christ said to his disciples, "Greater love has no man than that he lay down his life for his friends." The archetype of this new principle is the "washing of the feet", the true act of love out of freedom. The ancient above/below hierarchical form of Gemini has been upended. The new relationship to the divine is one of brother/sisterhood, of service and sacrifice. This new fraternal relationship is the picture of Pisces, the Fishes. In our time, solstice, the vertical axis, is in Twins/Archer. The horizontal/middle axis, the axis of heart and hands, at Spring, at Easter is in Pisces, which is the constellation for our cultural age, defining our task as human beings. Ahriman seeks power without love. The Christ brings sacrifice and service through love.

Rudolf Steiner frequently calls on us to create "new" festivals out of the new spirit in the Earth, the new relationship to the divine. What then can the John Festival be in our times? I am reminded of the verse given by Rudolf Steiner in which he describes what is said above. We have moved from the stars (or cosmos) speaking to humanity (our guidance from above) to a "silence" of the stars/cosmos, which has

led us to freedom. But he goes on. In the silence, the human being, out of the new ego forces instilled in the Earth through Golgotha, must learn to speak to the stars, to the cosmos. Of course, the event of Golgotha did not instantly and for all people bring about a reversal and an awakened consciousness of the new Christ ego force in us. This is at its beginning in our consciousness even though it is present in every human being and in the Earth itself. But for those who consciously strive to live out of this new Christ "I", this festival can be a time where we do not gaze through the window of the solstice/John Days in expectant seeking of enlightenment from above. Rather can it be a festival where we offer to the cosmos what our enlightenment on Earth can bring to the divine cosmos of beings and where we meet the true "I" in our brothers and sisters on Earth as the task for our Piscean age.

This brings us to the present world situation. We can think of our Earth as a being of physical body, life body and soul/astral body, but also now consider our Earth with a Spirit. It is that spirit which once hovered above, in the greater Sun, guiding from the heights, but is now in the Earth, as it is in us. The spirit of the Earth is the Christ "I". And where do we find this Spirit? In each other. The true spirit of the Earth is found when our true "I" recognizes and communes with the true "I" in our fellow human beings. It gives a concrete reality to what Christ says: "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I AM." Or when he says, "as you do to the least of my brethren, you do it unto Me." As individuals in the world, our physical bodies are each different. Our life bodies, our vitality, our health are each different. Our souls each have their own passions, drives, thoughts, consciousness. But in our true I, in our spirit, we are One though we are also individual. This is the eye of the needle; to go through individual ego hood to come to a new union with the Universal Ego in freedom.

What does this tell us for the current world situation? The challenge in our times is the failure to recognize this because we have lost the true meaning of what is Spirit and therefore of what is the Self, or the I. For most of humanity, the self is a blend of race, gender, career, family role, etc. This is the individualized garment, or even one can say "how" we experience ourselves in the world in one particular place and time, one incarnation. It is not actually the "what" of our Self. That "what" is a purely spiritual entity, not of space and time, which returns again and again into a different individualized self-garment. So, people in our time, without an understanding of the spirit, of karma and reincarnation, of the true nature of the "I", are caught up in identifying with external forms of ego hood, with the garment. We can see this now in the rise in what is called "identity politics", which is a kind of new tribalism, where individuals find their self by what group they identify with. For without a recognition of the truly spiritual in the world, this is all we have. We fall back on genetics, biology, ethnicity, race, ancestry, gender, nationalism...any number of tribes or biological factors to define our "I". Whereas the true "I" is universal. We all share in it together and find it in each other. Only by recognizing this "I", the true Spirit, can we ever truly "change our thinking", can we ever truly know that truth which sets us free, can we ever create new social forms for a "new normal". In the polarities we are experiencing now, the cold of separation/isolation/social distancing and the hot of rage and protests over inhumanity to our brothers and sisters, it is important not to get lost in either pole. A key for doing this is to always hold to the greater "mission" or purpose of our human becoming which is in our Spirit, our "I". That purpose is to become the hierarchy of freedom and love. The adversaries will seek to undermine in a myriad of ways, this core purpose and goal. So, in each situation we can follow this "spine" or guiding principle of our humanity and always ask the questions: Is this attacking my spiritual freedom? Is this attacking my capacity for love? If we find our Spirit, our true Self, in the other, is then this shutdown into isolation essentially an assault on our Spirit-I by preventing human communion? Technological communion is not a solution but a furthering of a kind of merger of human consciousness with the machine. Is the outrage and protest leading us to further division, hatred and tribalism or is it

leading us to a greater awareness and capacity for love for all humans and the Earth? This is where human choice out of spiritual wakefulness must take place.

*Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.*

*Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake...
But will you wake, for pity's sake?*

Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners*

As a brief footnote: There is a solar eclipse on this solstice as the Sun enters Gemini. A New Moon (also in Gemini) is coming between Earth and Sun and casting its shadow on the Sun, or blocking the light of the Sun from streaming to the Earth. Rudolf Steiner describes solar eclipses as *safety valves...they serve the purpose of carrying out into space in a Luciferic way, the evil that spreads over the earth, in order that evil may work havoc in a wider, less concentrated sphere.*

From Willi Sucher on Steiner:

He said it was always known in ancient times that the beings moved in the opposite direction of the shadow. In times of Sun eclipses, the shadow of the Moon falls upon the Earth and there is a movement from the Earth along this shadow-funnel out into the cosmos. Certain demonic beings, shadow beings, darkness beings, move from the Earth out into the cosmos and create further havoc in the cosmos... It is of no use to be frightened; the best thing that we can do is to put positive thoughts out to meet it. These shadow beings create havoc as long as they are not checked by human awareness.

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