

This Is the Moment: Every Day a Holy Day

Jesse G. Jennings



A Month of Sundays.

I so enjoy the book, *Holy Days and Holidays*, by the late Dr. George Bendall. The well-known religious holidays and semi-secular ones such as Thanksgiving are presented in chapters

drawn from his Sunday talks, but so are Presidents Day, Labor Day, Halloween and Commencement. It's grist for my ministerial mill, as the wheel of the year turns. Eventually a person whose job is to speak to people in the same location over a decade or two may feel the freshness draining out of his or her insights on the various seasonal celebrations that dot our lives. The holidays keep coming around and they can't be ignored. Sometimes two or even three of these can fall in the neighborhood of the same Sunday, and they all warrant a mention because each is meaningful to somebody. Any speaker faced with this task is well-served to spend a lot of time in meditation, and when having come out of it, to pore over a book such as Dr. Bendall's. Between our own inspirations, and those shared by like minds who have come before us, we'll find something to say, and it will surely help.

The book I mention follows a long tradition among metaphysical teachers, of delving into the ordinary to find the extraordinary — the specific application of spiritual principles to enhance the quality of a person's life, using the scenery of daily events to reveal the Presence of Spirit all around us. This practice is aimed at enabling the student to gain a deeper appreciation of why people celebrate anything, whence came those celebrations, and what could be learned from them that is relevant at any time throughout the year.

Christmas and Easter from the Christian calendar have been dealt with at great length by metaphysically writers. Of course, each is so complex, on an infinity of levels from the patently historical to the purely ineffable, that the last word will never be penned about either, nor on the liturgical preparation times of Advent and Lent that respectively usher them in. Each is about Jesus, and what may or may have actually happened preceding him, to him, around him, because of him, and since him. Each is also about his followers then and now, and everyone else too, in the sense that we may say the Divine is forever being begotten in all people, then dies to the attachment to sense-forms of material-

ity, to be resurrected into eternal life that is natural, unconditional, and everyone's entitlement. The stories can be further deconstructed into life lessons from character cameos and sidelong bits of narrative, as in, "When has a star of intuition led you toward something wonderful?" or, "What can be read into the risen Jesus' admonition to 'touch me not?'"

"Holiday" means a day off from work (the British use the word for multiple days off, as we use "vacation). Originally it's a contraction of "holy day." Every day is holy though some are granted more holiness by a religion or a culture or both. A third meaning I didn't know till I moved to the South is, "a spot on the wall that needs more paint on it."

I believe there are holy days that, while they don't need touching up for what they are, do call to us to revisit them, spend more time in their contemplation, so that their color and flavor and texture can be employed in reminding us of who we are. I've selected a few of these, from a selection of Western traditions, that didn't find room in Dr. Bendall's book.

Before getting to them, this: people often inquire about the metaphysical meaning of some person, place or thing. There is no answer to that, and at the same time there are as many responses as there are askers and responders. In our classes the distinction

**"Hold every moment sacred.
Give each clarity and meaning,
each the weight of thine
awareness, each its true
and due fulfillment."**

— THOMAS MANN, *The Beloved Returns*

between a cure and a healing is pointed out. A cure deals with the relief or eradication of symptoms, or effects; a healing, with a shift in consciousness and therefore at the level of cause. A similar distinction ought to be made between an answer and a response. To some things, there are pat answers. Two plus two equals four (in base-ten math, anyway), and it always has and always will. But any question that begins "what is the meaning of..." is set up to evoke a response, and no response is final, nor right, nor wrong. Spirituality, to me, is about aesthetics, or an idea of what is beautiful, valuable, and thus sacred. There's a Bible story where Jacob, using a pillow as a rock, lies down and has his famous dream. When he awakes, he sets up that stone to mark the spot, which he names Bethel, as he himself will later be called Israel (the practice of renaming things is another fertile field for discussion). Jacob does this in commemoration of his new spiritual sense, yet the next person to come along may see nothing more than an upstanding rock.

The sacred and profane coexist; the beholding mind evokes one or the other. The metaphysical meaning of a thing is what it is to you. You may share it, and have others respond, "Whoa! That's ridiculous!" or

they may respond by starting a new religion around your meaning, thus running the risk of missing the point that each of us has our own meaning to impart, and by which to be awestruck.

So think of the below as conversation starters — especially in the sense of *internal* dialogue.

Epiphany (Christian), always January 6. Its eve is “Twelfth Night,” and it used to start the pre-Lenten carnival season. By tradition, this is when the Magi arrived at Jesus’ birthplace; also in Orthodox churches it marks his baptism and the performance of his first miracle, at the wedding at Cana. From the Greek, meaning “manifestation,” it has entered our language as a common noun meaning a sudden, life-changing realization. To us it may have overtones of the arrival at the miraculous, taking up one’s divine inheritance (as in baptism), and the demonstration of a miracle-minded consciousness, represented by the Jesus’ transmutation of water into wine — or your or my changing of nothing into something, emptiness into fulfillment, weakness into power, etc.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (secular), observed the third Monday in January. For 20 years it has honored the great American civil rights leader. Some states were slow to adopt, arguing they couldn’t afford another annual day off for workers. Interestingly, some individuals have argued that the last thing Dr. King would have wanted by way of honor was for people not to work, since his life’s mission was to help ensure that anybody could live, work and vote in equality. Some ways we may reflect on the occasion are to not only recall Dr. King’s words but apply them in affirming, and acting in, peace, justice, and mutual cooperation. Internally, where are we discriminatory, both toward others and toward unwelcome parts of ourselves?

Chinese New Year (secular and religious), occurs usually in mid-February based on a lunar calendar, where each month begins at the dark of the moon, and the festivities continue until the moon is full. Practically, family reunions are the thing to do. Since Many Chinese families have emigrated to America over extended time, neighborhood gatherings have stood in for reunions. Thus for us all this can be a celebration of our families of choice, the people we have selected, and who have selected us, to be their confidantes and encouragers as we go through life. As with any new year event, it can also symbolize the setting of goals and the spirit of joyous anticipation.

Mardi Gras (semi-secular), also based on a lunar calendar in that it’s the day before Ash Wednesday, whose date is fixed depending on where Easter

falls — and Easter (in Western Christianity) is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal or Spring Equinox. Mardi Gras is French for “Fat Tuesday.” The day is known in the Christian world as Shrove Tuesday, shrove being the past tense of *shrive*, which means to hear confession and offer absolution from sin. Thus one’s confession is made in preparation for Lent. The carnival days beforehand, though, feature great festivities in New Orleans, Veracruz, Rio de Janeiro, and elsewhere, with too many associated traditions to count, with too many origins to authenticate, like exactly what the little plastic baby baked in the King Cake is meant to symbolize. How might we use the day? For fun, of course, and in the most ancient sense of the jester or fool (as in the Tarot): that surprising spiritual power may be found in ecstatic states as much as in solemn ones.

Ash Wednesday (Christian), see above for its calendar placement; the seventh Wednesday before Easter and the first day of the Lenten season. A day of religious duty and the start of a period of renunciation of worldly interests, marked by fasting and solemnity, that builds to a climax on Good Friday, the

“There is never a single, orthodox version of a myth. As our circumstances change, we need to tell our stories differently in order to bring out their timeless truth.”
— KAREN ARMSTRONG,
A Short History of Myth

day of Jesus’ execution. In the Catholic Church, priests use ashes to mark the foreheads of communicants in the form of a cross; the ashes come from the palm fronds blessed and then burned on Palm Sunday of the previous year. For over a thousand years this has been the practice, showing that one was a Christian and in a state of public penance. This day and all of Lent are an opening for us to reassess our values, take stock of what is truly important, and rid ourselves of extraneous clutter in mind and heart.

Purim, the *Feast of Lots* (Jewish), falls on the fourteenth day (in Jerusalem, the fifteenth) of the Hebrew month Adar which in 2007 will be Sunday, March 4. As recorded in the Book of Esther, Haman, the chief minister of the King of the Amalekites, wished to exterminate the Jews and drew lots to see on which day of the month he would do so. His elaborate plan was confounded by Esther, resulting in Haman’s being hanged from the same gallows he had in fact prepared for a notable Jew who refused to bow down to him. The lots cast had yielded the 13th of Adar to Haman; thus the next day has been one of feasting and rejoicing. *Gates of the Seasons: A Guide to the Jewish Year*, a book by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, states, “The

story of Purim is about hunger for power and about hatred born of the Jews' refusal to assimilate and their unwillingness to compromise religious principle by bowing before secular authority... Purim, however, is most of all a happy story — a story of survival and triumph over evil." Put another way, Purim and all similar occasions from every tradition celebrate divine justice. Haman being "hoist with his own petard" represents that hatred comes home to roost, and that there is a corresponding consequence not only for our every action but our every intention.

Outer celebrations begin because someone has an inner awakening to some truth. Then that day or date is marked as being holy. As spiritual archaeologists, we have more digging and sifting to do, because there's always more meaning to be unearthed, and whatever we come up with has value.

Mother's Day (secular), the second Sunday in May. Ann Bendall points out her husband George's notes on this observance unfortunately were lost. The day was created by Anna Jarvis of Philadelphia in 1907. Soon after West Virginia

began recognizing it, and in 1914 President Woodrow Wilson officially proclaimed it (Father's Day became official 52 years later). Though identified as secular, there's not a house of worship in America that doesn't pay it some heed, in part because women make up the majority of the practicing religious in America. But only in part. All of us have or have had mothers in our lives. It's a day set aside for recognizing the gift of motherhood, that ideally goes beyond taking her to lunch. It can also be a time to consider the feminine aspect of Deity, and in oneself regardless of gender: nurturing, guiding, protecting, and unconditionally loving.

Independence Day (secular), the fourth of July, on which date the Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776. Ratifying the Constitution took a whole lot longer, which signifies it's a whole lot easier to declare oneself free than to decide what to do with that freedom. This holiday is in Dr. Bendall's book; I just have a thought or two to add to his. There are freedoms *from* and freedoms *to*. Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated four of these: *to* speak freely and practice one's own religion, and *from* want and fear. Religious Science being a teaching of inner freedom, it's useful to realize that we're both free to do and to not do. Freedom of speech, for instance, suggests the right to dissent. Less obvious is the right to chime in with support. Freedom of religion offers us the opportunity to change our faith and practice if we want; more subtle is the freedom we have to practice our faith in the face of every circumstance.

First Day of Ramadan (Islam), its date is again based on a lunar calendar, and it occurs in 2007 in the Western Hemisphere on Thursday, September 13. Ramadan is month-long time of daylight fasting that commemorates the revelation of the *Quran* to Muhammad. After dark each day Muslims may eat, pray, and visit friends. Other prohibitions on behavior exist in support of the food fasting, and the spiritual good that the fast does for one can still be undone by lying, slandering, bearing false witness, breaking promises, greed, or covetousness. To the customary five daily prayers said by Muslims, a sixth is added, and some spend their entire nights in prayer. The evening of the twenty-seventh day of the month is especially sacred, marking the night of Muhammad's revelation. The fast is ended with a celebration called *Eid al-Fitr*, or the "fast-breaking," where gifts are exchanged and, of course, people eat heartily. Ramadan to the non-Muslim (or the "global spiritualist") may symbolize many things, among them how the Divine reveals Itself through us as It did into the *Quran* and the other sacred scriptures of the world, and indeed through all communication; the power of a long and committed spiritual discipline to make us notice our inner processes; and the specific power of a fast, whether from indulgence in sense-dulling actions, harmful thoughts, or anything to which we've become beholden or addicted.

As I say, these fasts and feasts are from Western traditions, and only there are only a handful of them at that. So many are connected to nature, through the phases of the moon and the changing of the seasons. Earlier Pagan celebrations informed many of these holidays, and all of them came into being by noticing and attaching significance to things, be they events, documents, or moms. Every day of the year is a celebration of many things in many cultures. Every nation has her own, alongside the religious observances of its people. All honor this or that on the surface, and all are open to interpretation by the inquisitive soul seeking guidance in life. When anyone overcomes, learns, and evolves, all of us do. From quiet introspection to "glorious and triumphant" beholding of the results of that quiet work, the rhythm of life pulses through all people.

So in my work as a minister, I try to touch on some of the above, along with Kwanzaa, Gay Pride, and a couple that are unique to the state where I live, most notably "Juneteenth" (June 19) when the slaves in Texas finally received word of the Emancipation Proclamation. Here also, we set aside the Solstices and Equinoxes for music and celebration, as these are times that bridge all apparent divisions between people. Now I have a suggestion, that may be timely, or redundant. You decide!

As Religious Scientists, we sort of play the hand the year deals us, in terms of the seasons and their reasons. Perhaps it's time for our own holiday. In January, 1977, when I was very new to this teaching, a few of us ordered a cake with the circle-and-v on it and set up at a local disco to celebrate Ernest Holmes's birthday and the fiftieth anniversary of the Science of Mind as an institution. It felt really special to be a part of something like that. Maybe the annual Gathering is actually our holiday, or maybe Asilomar, yet not everyone can attend these (so they're more like our *Hajj*.) I propose a date in August, when the fewest holidays already occur, and before school starts, when all of us can pause from our labors, do some affirmative prayer, eat, sing, dance, and startle ourselves with the prospect of having established a tradition that will live on forever. Then someone not born as yet will have the opportunity to say, "There's a new way of looking at all this"...to which Dr. Bendall would respond, "How new? As new as you want to make it. As new as the new ideas you have. As new as the new opportunity to exercise the most precious gift of all: the gift of choice."



Copyright © 2007 by Jesse G. Jennings.
All rights reserved.

This article first appeared, in a slightly different form, in the August 2007 issue of "Science of Mind" magazine.