

Michaelmas: The Festival of Human Becoming by Stephen Spitalny

Michaelmas is midway between the summer and winter solstices, during harvest season. It is part of the autumn equinox and many paintings picture Michael holding a sword in one hand and a balance scale in the other. The celebration of Michaelmas commemorates the archangel Michael and the archetype that Michael represents. This archetype has appeared in the mythology of many cultures for centuries. Ancient Indian writings describe Indra. The Bhagavad-Gita speaks of Mithra. The ancient Babylonians tell of Marduk, who slew Tiamat the dragon and created heaven and earth from his body. In the Old Testament stories, Daniel names Michael as leader and guide of the Israelites. In the Book of Revelations, Michael battles the dragon.

There are many examples, too, of human beings acting out of a Michaelic impulse; the Greek myth of Perseus, the English St. George, and the American legend of John Henry to name a few.

We all have our own dragons, our own lower, less noble aspects. The Michaelic archetype is of overcoming or transforming these "dragons" through intelligence, courage and strength. Michael displays the activity that is the essence of the human being—self-development. We, as human beings, have the possibility of personal transformation. Our egotism, greed and selfishness can be overcome as we evolve as individuals. Michaelmas is a reminder of the possibilities in the developing human being as we strive toward our full human potential.

Our world today is full of dragons. One of them is materialism—the reducing of everything to what is tangible, measurable and observable, and seeing the human being merely as a physical body. Michael reminds us that we also have a spiritual nature—our human spirit that is striving toward the future. The realm of the spirit is where true freedom reigns. We are connected to the material world through our senses, our outer perception. We are connected to the spirit through our inner activity—our thinking, contemplating, praying and meditating. Human beings can strive to gain access to this sphere of Michael and ask for guidance. Michael waits for us to reach out; he does not beckon or command.

The archetype of Michael gives a picture of strength, courage and clarity of thought: strength to kindle our inner fire, and iron will to keep on working on ourselves. These go with the courage to enter the abyss of our own soul, and the clarity of thinking to know what must be transformed.

The iron-filled fruits of nature are ripe as the days grow shorter and the plant world seems to die. As the sunlight decreases, can we keep our inner light alive, maintain our balance, and harvest the fruits and gifts of our own and each other's development?

Waldorf Education echoes the essence of Michaelmas. Each and every one of us has a gift to bring to the world. Can we learn to recognize and have interest in each other's gifts, and encourage each other toward our full potentials? Being human is not merely being made up of physical qualities related to skin and bones, but is essentially the process of individual inner transformation leading humanity toward its future evolution. Overcoming our antipathy and self-centeredness, and meeting each human being with interest and recognition as fellow human beings creates inner equilibrium; this is what Michaelmas celebrates. It is a festival of what is truly human.

Michael stands as the herald of our age. He is a cosmopolitan being who values human beings from diverse backgrounds coming together to build bridges that connect them to one another beyond race, creed, sexual preference, gender, economic status and nation. It is possible that this bridge building may lead to the development of inclusive communities, from local neighborhoods to the global world.

Michaelmas festivals are held to inscribe into the human soul a feeling of union and community, both with fellow human beings and the natural world. The festival of Michaelmas is a looking ahead to the future, and it celebrates our process of human development. Our Waldorf school communities celebrate Michael to remind us of the potential of human becoming which is up to each one of us.