



## A READER'S JOURNAL

From Elephants to Einstein, GA# 352

by

Rudolf Steiner

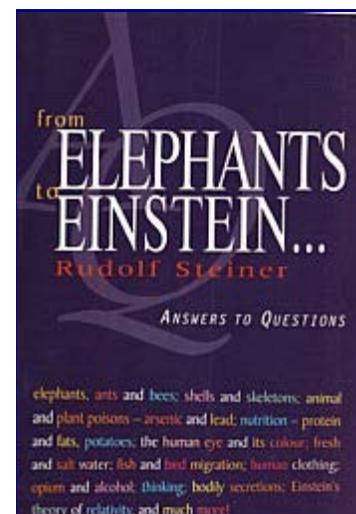
Exploring Our Suprasensory Nature

Answers to Questions

Ten Sessions at Dornach in Jan, Feb. 1924

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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2001



"Where do elephants go to die?" Everyone's heard about elephant graveyards, those places where elephants mysteriously go to die, but who has ever seen one? In answer to a question from one of the workers at the Goetheanum, Steiner responds. He says that due to the thick skin of elephants, when death approaches, they want more earth, of which their skin is most akin, around them, so they withdraw into caves. This is similar to my supposition that the reasons dolphins beach themselves is that they are near death and want to die in contact with the earth. [See my dolphin novel, [The Spizznet File](#).] Those who attempt to *help* dolphins back into the sea are often disappointed to see the same dolphin coming back to the shore again and again. Their efforts may be likened to some well-meaning conservationist going to Africa to pull elephants out of their chosen burial caves before they die in an attempt to help them. Animals know what they are doing, and humans, with all our freedom can do them great harm if we attempt to anthropomorphize them, projecting our human desires upon their lives.

**[page 5] You see, with human beings the situation is that they pay for their freedom by having really very little intuition. Animals do not have freedom, everything about them is unfree. But they have great intuitive powers. As you know, when danger threatens, an earthquake, for instance animals move away, while human beings are caught completely unprepared by such events.**

"An elephant never forgets!" Everyone's heard that and thinks perhaps that elephants have a long memory. Steiner clears this up in an interesting way. Suppose a mosquito landed on your arm and you immediately swatted it — would that be considered an act of memory? No, because it happened so fast. Same with a cow's tails shooing away flies from its body. Now take a sample story that proves the elephant's memory. (from page 6) A young boy throws something at an elephant who was on its way to a drink in the river. Much later when the elephant returned, he kept a large amount of water in his trunk and sprayed it all over the boy. The elephant's thought processes are so slow that spraying the boy with water was the equivalent of brushing a fly away for a human or a cow.

Next Steiner talks about our human bodies, in particular, the human skeleton, how it is enclosed in a tightly fitting sack (the *periosteum*). The skeleton is pure earth stuff, calcium phosphate and calcium carbonate, all covered by a dense membrane. If you get a simple splinter of wood or metal in your finger, it will hurt and fester until it comes out. But here in the depths of your body, the skeleton, there is pure earth stuff that is perfectly content to be there. Why?

**[page 14] Because there where you are dead inside yourself, where the bone appears dead inside its periosteum, spirit is present everywhere. You see, that was the wonderful instinct that made ordinary people, who often knew more than the academics, to see**

**death as a skeleton. For they knew that the spirit was present in the skeleton. And if they thought of a spirit walking about, then it, too, had to be a skeleton. That was exactly the right image. For as long as a human being lives, he makes room in himself for the spirit through his bones.**

This is reminiscent of a popular jazz song that goes, "Ain't no sin to take off your skin and dance around in your bones." The people in Mexico to this day celebrate the Day of the Dead during which they fashion and display all sorts of skeletons. To complete the story on the elephant: the thick skin of the elephant is like a skeleton on the outside of its body, and because of the spirit in that thick skin, the elephant is able to sense when its death is near. (page 14)

Next Steiner tells us about poisons, how mineral poisons are different from plant poisons, and both from animal poisons. First he tells us about naturally occurring arsenic in the Alpine regions, how children grow up eating traces of arsenic and instead of becoming sick, they become robust and rotund with a rosy complexion. (See page 112 for his description of how huge fat children were raised this way in the Hungarian mountains by feeding them arsenic while they were between seven and fifteen.) This is exactly the opposite of the effects of arsenic poisoning which causes the victim to become pale and grow thin. He says that animals and humans can produce arsenic because they have astral bodies; plants cannot because they have only an ether body. The presence of arsenic keeps us awake while the etheric body makes us sleepy.

**[page 19] The ether body gives life, the astral body gives sentience. There can be no sentience unless life is suppressed. . . . There you have the astral body, there the ether body. They are always fighting each other. If the ether body wins we get a bit sleepy; if the astral body wins we come wide awake. This alternates all the time in daytime life, but so briefly and quickly that we do not notice it and think we are always awake.**

As an example of plant poisons, he talks about *Belladonna*, the deadly nightshade, among others. And he tells us how to distinguish the effects of mineral and plant poisons: mineral poisons cause retching or vomiting and plant poisons diarrhea. The effects of mineral poisons occur in the stomach and the body tries to get rid of it. With plant poisons, the effect is not noticed in the stomach but far down the alimentary canal in the intestines. Whenever we eat a meal, we ingest small amounts of plant poisons that occur naturally in food. For myself, I have noticed some diarrhea shortly after restaurant meals and wondered about it. It was always short lasting and occurred soon after a meal at a restaurant that I frequented because of its fresh produce and good-tasting food. This information from Steiner helps answer a long unanswered question I had about those simple bouts of intestinal disorder that always disappeared as quickly as they began.

Let's summarize the situation so far (see page 33): mineral poisons cause the physical body to enter the etheric; plant poisons cause the ether body to enter the astral body; and animal poisons cause the astral body to enter the "I". (It actually enters the blood, the system most associated with our human "I" body.) He tells us that in trees, which are plants that do not die between seasons, we find the astral influences concentrated in outside of the tree, its bark. Thus the bark of oaks with its tannic acid is medicinal, as well the popular headache remedy, aspirin, which was first obtained from the bark of willow trees. Concoctions from these astrally influenced portions of the trees will help to counteract or remove the effects perpetrated on the human astral body by a plant poison. In passing he tells us something about coffee. Ever noticed how popular the ritual of taking a cup of coffee after a meal is?

**[page 27 -28] When we take black coffee, the situation is — because plants always have a little bit of poison in them — that with black coffee we throw out of the astral body something that consumes the body because the ether body has penetrated the astral body.**

With animal poisons, it's no longer possible to remove it by vomiting, it must be removed directly from the

blood stream or by an antidote created in the blood stream itself. Thus the typical first aid for snake bite is to remove the blood from the region of the bite. Or to create some immunity in advance by introducing small amounts of the snake poison into the blood. One animal poison that we all have in us is ptomaine, which the dictionary says is an amine that comes from decaying animal or vegetable matter. In our bodies while we live are some small amounts of ptomaine and our etheric and astral bodies consume this ptomaine as it appears. We live because we are dying all the time, our body is being consumed in the process of living, just as our automobiles are propelled by the consumption of the contents of its gasoline tank. When our ether and astral bodies, that consume ptomaine like a BMW does gas, depart, the ptomaine continues to increase until the entire body decays. It is as though our bodies are BMWs that dissolve into gasoline when the drivers abandon them!

If one's "I" body is not working properly, people develop gout or rheumatism. To strengthen their "I" one can give them insect venom, which works the astral body into the "I", strengthening it. Thus simple bee stings have been known to cure people of gout or rheumatism.

In this one lecture that Steiner gave on January 19, 1924, I learned more about poisons than I ever learned going through school and college and sixty years of life. In the next lecture I was going to get an equivalent lesson in nutrition. Protein is the chief constituent of eggs, and Steiner says that to eat too much protein is like having rotting eggs in one's gut. Besides making one susceptible to arteriosclerosis, it also makes one more likely to catch all sorts of infectious diseases. He was saying this almost 75 years ago, and still today folks are going on dangerous high-protein diets all over this country. The ether body converts the protein, the astral body the fats, and the "I" body the sugars and starches. (summary on page 50) The current fad, outside of pushing people to eat more protein, is the eating of fat-free foods. Fats are the easiest food to be converted into energy, Steiner said in some earlier book, which means if someone is eating fat-free foods, they are forcing their body to work harder to obtain energy from other sources. Note below how his acumen on the matter of proper nutrition flies in the face of the best advice of materialist doctors of our time who consider fatty substances anathema to a healthy heart.

**[page 37] For the middle body, the chest region, for proper nutrition of the heart, chest, and so on, it is therefore absolutely necessary to take in fatty substances.**

Protein, like eggs that have rotted, produce a stink unless digested, and that protein is consumed by the ether body which prevents the rotting of protein similar to the way it prevents the rotting of the human body which proceeds as soon as the ether body leaves upon death. Fats do not rot, they become rancid. Rotting confronts our senses with a smell, and rancidness more with a taste. Taste is more of an inward condition than smell, it doesn't happen unless we bring the substance into direct contact with our body for ingestion. That is the function of our middle body, everything that has to do with awareness, and that is the function of the astral body. The astral body takes in the air through the middle of our body, the chest, and with that air it counteracts the rancid tendency of the fats, and if that is not done, we would continually have "rancid eructations" of our own fats. (page 39) If one is not able to digest all the fats, they go rancid, leave an unpleasant taste in one's mouth, and one develops diseases of the stomach and intestines. Arsenic, which, as a mineral poison, taken in small amounts, is able to strengthen the astral body which then keeps the fats from going rancid.

The third food he mentioned above was carbohydrates, sugars and starches. Another fad diet that has made its rounds in recent years involves carbohydrates. What happens when we eat sugars or starches? They turn into alcohol in the body, they ferment basically speaking. Potatoes are mostly starch, but quickly turn into sugar in the process of digestion. (One type of beets is made directly into refined sugar.) The eating of too many potatoes, Steiner tells us, is bad for the head because of the effort required by their "I" to combat the fermentation of the sugar the body creates from the starch of the potatoes.

**[page 44] People who eat too many potatoes and have to make a terrible effort in their heads to cope with potato fermentation therefore tend to be weak in the head. It is mainly the middle parts of the brain that grow weak, leaving only the front parts which**

**make little effort to prevent potato fermentation. It is actually due to the fact that potatoes have come to be widely eaten in recent times that materialism has developed, for this is produced in the front part of the brain.**

A popular name for people who spent their time in brain-numbing viewing of popular TV show is "couch potatoes." Add to the effects of the weak-brained TV programs the weakening effects on the brain of the french fries and potato chips that are de rigeur for the inveterate couch potato, and you have a recipe for creating a mass feeble-mindedness in society. A harbinger of this evolution of consciousness appeared some fifty years ago when the children's game called Mr. Potato Head was created. Once more the common folk illustrated a deep knowledge of which scientists seem completely unaware. Mr. Potato Head was a set of lips, eyes, teeth, glasses, ears, nose, and moustaches with which one could create a full human being out of a potato! Exactly what we had begun to do with our dietary habits back in the 1950s, turn human beings into potatoes! And materialists, also, as Steiner astutely points out.

**[page 45] One thing you can see from this is that the science of the spirit we work with here recognizes the true nature of materialism. Materialism does not know anything about the world of matter; the science of the spirit recognizes the potato in particular as the real creator of materialism. . . . And people must clearly understand that if they eat too many potatoes their midbrain will wither away and it is even possible that their senses also suffer from eating too many potatoes.**

Undoubtedly Steiner's warnings about potato consumption seemed quaint at the time and went largely unheeded. But we have the wisdom that only time can bring, seventy-five years of experience, and his predictions as to the effects of excessive potato consumption are still blithely ignored, even though we can verify that the effects he predicted have all come about. Particularly noticeable is that it is fat people, or overweight people, that line up for large french fries at the fast food outlets and always order diet soft drinks.

**[page 46] Let us assume someone eats too many potatoes even as a child. Later in life you will very often find that such a person never knows when he has had enough, because his sense of taste has been ruined by potato consumption, while someone who has not eaten too many potatoes will know instinctively when he has had enough. This instinct, which is largely connected with the midbrain, is thus ruined by excessive potato consumption.**

In the next lecture, Steiner answers questions about the color of eyes and those who make diagnoses from inspecting people's eyes. In it he tells us how the colors of eyes, blue, black, and brown arise from the differential processing of iron and sulphur, how the eye's job is to excrete the light it receives into the brain, much as the colon excretes waste products from our body, how our eyes are the organ of our "I" body, and thus much can be read from examining one's eyes. But he cautions that one must relate what is found in someone's eyes to their previous life history to make sense of it properly; thus using a book of iridology to make eye diagnoses of others would be ill-advised.

**[page 62] Most people tend to think: if I see little black dots in the iris then one thing or another must be the case in the body. It is, however, important to know not only about the person's present life. Particularly if one wants to look at such things in order to discover the causes of illness one must go through such a person's whole life with him; one must make him remember what he did on one occasion or another in his childhood. What we see in the iris may thus point to a number of things. And it requires extremely complex knowledge to draw any conclusions from this.**

But, being too complex for a simple presentation is not sufficient cause to deter an entrepreneur seeking to profit from others' gullibility by publishing a pamphlet or book on how to do iridology or eye diagnosis, like "Eye Diagnosis for Dummies" or "Iridology for Idiots."

**[page 64] But when it comes to those eye diagnosis pamphlets, we cannot speak of good will, only of a desire to make money. So you always have to say to yourself with such things: a good truth may be at the heart of some endeavour, but it is exactly the best truths, gentlemen, that are most abused by the world.**

In the next lecture we get a short course in the water cycle of the Earth. He tells us that water makes up the Earth's circulation, just as blood makes up our body's circulation. There is a closed flow of water from the source of rivers to the sea and back. The rivers are like our arteries and the equivalent of our veins is the salt beds that flow back under the river beds. Our human bodies are filled with salt water primarily, some 85% by weight, and the oceans of the world contain most of the salt water of the Earth.

**[page 71] The springs that flow with fresh water are open to the cosmos and are like our eyes . . . whereas the body of the earth, or rather the innards of the earth, are the salty oceans.**

As a trained physicist who knows a little about geology, I can tell you, dear Reader, that I cannot for the life of me figure out how a stream of salt returns under the bed of a large river from its mouth to the head of the river, but I must also admit that I know of salt water filled strata that underlie the surface of the Earth. In drilling for oil, one must learn to distinguish on well logs the difference between oil bearing formations and saltwater bearing formations. When wells have depleted the oil and gas from a formation, that fact is invariably signaled by the arrival of salt water to replace the extracted petroleum deposits. There's a lot of saltwater down there in the Earth, and I'm willing to take Steiner's word on what it's doing down there where nobody's looking.

He tells us that the migration of salmon occurs because the salmon go into salt water to fatten up and into the fresh water to reproduce. They alternate between taking in the earthly influences in salt water to taking in the astral influences in fresh water. Plus there's a correlation, he says, between bird migrations and salmon migrations. For birds, they get the astral influences for reproduction in the northern climes and the earthly influences to develop muscle tissue in the warmer climes.

**[page 76] The migration of salmon in water is just like the migration of birds in the air, except that salmon move to and fro between salt water and fresh water, and the birds in the air move to and fro between the colder and warmer regions.**

Later in this lecture he talks about sleeping on one's left side as being aligned with the Earth while sleeping on one's right side as aligned with the heavens. (page 78)

In the next lecture, Steiner gives us a dissertation on our clothing, how it was designed, where the idea of a belt came from, where various headdresses came from, how medals first came to be used, and why we use different colors in our clothing designs. One example is the use of the garter and the reason for the curious "Order of the Garter."

**[page 100] And you see if the nature of the human being is truly recognized, one will know, for instance, that a special power actually relating to thinking lies in the crook of the knee. And the crook of the knee was therefore adorned — we can no longer decorate it specially today because it is covered by the trouser tube. This later became the Order of the Garter in the way I have described.**

In describing flags he mentions how the heraldic animal on the flag was chosen to represent the group soul of the people. This brought to mind for me how colleges and universities today use animals as mascots to represent, in effect, the group soul of the institution with its extended family of alumni and friends. Why do we hang pictures on a wall? He asks and answers his own question, saying that we used to paint on the walls behind altars pictures of what people should think of when they stood before the altar. Now we buy pictures and hang them to achieve a similar effect today. With tattooing, however, the pictures tattooed on one's body affect one's life most strongly while one is asleep. Formerly clothes were indigenous to a

region and suited the climate, but due to the migrations of peoples all over the world, this is no longer the case. And finally he describes how wine must be grown in regions where the sun shines a lot and cautions us about wine-drinking.

**[page 116] Wine is therefore produced not by something earthly, but exactly by something from beyond the earth, the sun principle, something that is beyond the earth. People need to be altogether very cautious about taking things that come from beyond the earth.**

We have all seen the following in some movie or another. A man who is guilty of a crime has a person look fixedly into his eyes and he suddenly begins to confess. Here Steiner explains how that happens after he tells us such a story in which a man looked fixed into a woman's eyes without saying anything and she eventually confessed all.

**[page 136] The thing is like this. The man had quite a piercing look. When people have the usual kind of eyes, they talk to people but do not really impinge on them that much. When someone's gaze grows fixed and penetrating, then this magnetizes the ether body of a person, as we might put it. And in the ether body is our conscience. When the ether body is properly integrated in the physical body, well, you know, a person will immediately suppress any such things as soon as it rears its head. But if the ether body is magnetized by such a look, it becomes loosened. And when someone has something on his conscience, this also comes loose, rises up and worries the astral body and the I. The result is that people make confessions they would not otherwise make if their ether body has been loosened.**

In this new century when cant and spin prevail over content, it seems that the fast-talking pitchmen on television are making money hand-over-fist selling some product or the other. It is as though their very talk is intoxicating to hear and watch. Here's Steiner's sober prose in praise of sober prose over intoxicating cant. One can see immediately the wisdom of the three day contract cancellation clause — it allows one's I to inspect the story and the deal that the astral body has bought hook, line, and sinker, and to make a reasoned decision in freedom to keep or cancel the contract.

**[page 138] And, you see, this intoxicated style is to be found everywhere today. People are no longer concerned to make an effect with what they say, but use words that will overwhelm others. Here we see the beginnings of the wrong kind of influence. For when someone writes the way I am endeavouring to write, this influences the I, which has its own free will. When one writes in an intoxicated style this influences the astral body, which does not have such freedom but is unfree. It is possible to influence the astral body especially by saying things one knows people want to hear.**

If we were amazed to hear that the eye is an organ of excretion, then it should not come as too much of a shock to hear that the brain is also an organ of excretion. Materialist scientists claim that thinking comes from the brain, but to Steiner's view the situation is quite the opposite: thinking goes to the brain in the form of excretion.

**[page 147] For thinking activity is not a function of the brain but consists in the brain being excreted, secreted out of our thinking. The higher up you go in the human being, the more is the human being secretion.**

In the vernacular, someone who has done something dumb is sometimes accused of having "Shit for brains." Rightly understood, our brains are the manure resulting from the thinking process. If you examine the initial fetal tube of the human, the brain appears as accumulation at the top of the spinal cord and continues to grow like toothpaste being pushed out the top of its tube into the convolutions we see in the adult brain which resemble so much pushed-up toothpaste filling our skull. A skull, which is, in effect, the top vertebra of our spinal column expanded to hold the pushed-up manure resulting from our thinking.

In answer to a question about looking at urine samples to determine if a person is sick, Steiner tells us about the disease process known as diabetes. He talks once more about how potatoes are converted into sugar and how the sugar is converted into energy which warms the body.

**[page 152] Again the astral body must function properly if this is to happen If it does not function properly . . . the vegetable sugar will not be transformed properly into human sugar but go directly to the kidney. There the sugar is eliminated and the person develops diabetes. The sugar content of the urine will tell you that the person is sick.**

One thing struck me in the above passage, "the astral body must function properly". What does a person act like whose astral body does not "function properly"? I believe that they would not raise their voices, hardly get angry, and thus be all sweetness and light most of the time. And, they would likely contract diabetes. This seems to apply to the several people I know who have diabetes, they all have sweet-sounding voices and pleasant dispositions. Of course, I may be wrong about this, having such limited data to draw on.

This book is full of information on such a variety of issues that a review can scarcely give but a hint at the scope of the answers that Steiner provided to the workers during February of 1924. Answers that would be well worth the study of those today living over seventy-five years later.

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