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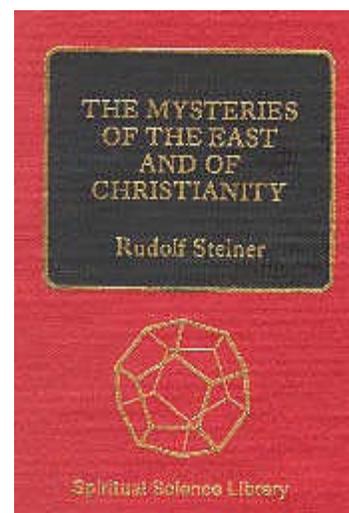


A READER'S JOURNAL

The Mysteries of the East and of Christianity, GA#144

by
Rudolf Steiner

4 Lectures in Berlin, February, 1911 Preface by
Bernard J. Garber
Introduction by H. Collison
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2010
Chapter: Spiritual Science



In the Preface we are given a passage of Steiner's introduction to these lectures by Guenther Wachsmuth, which is a different translation of the text on pages 7 and 8 of this book. Rudolf Steiner spoke in German, so either translation in English is usable, but I prefer to share his speaking about reincarnation and the Mysteries from this translation. He deals with an often neglected aspect of successive incarnations: that the world we arrive in has changed between them.

[page I, Preface] Just as the evolution of man in the various regions and in these successive periods of human life takes on different forms, such is the case also with everything that we designate as 'the system of the Mysteries.' We do not pass in our soul through successive lives on earth meaninglessly, but for the reason that we experience something new every incarnation and can add this to what we have united with our soul life in the preceding incarnations. The visible external world has in most cases completely changed its appearance when we enter again through birth into the physical existence of the human being, after having passed through the spiritual world between death and this new birth. For reasons, therefore, easily understood, the nature of the Mysteries, the principle of initiation, must change in successive epochs.

Another aspect that Garber writes about is how Steiner describes the right way of thinking about our brain. He says, in effect, that materialistic science, which claims that thinking proceeds from the brain, has placed the cart of the physical brain before the horse of thinking. Rightly understood, it is thinking which pulls along the brain, helping it to evolve over the ages to match the evolution of thinking(1). Right thinking in this lifetime prepares in us the ability to mold our brain in future incarnations. Hard, materialistic thinkers in this lifetime will become weak thinkers in their next lifetime. Garber quotes Steiner:

[page III, Preface] Thus all activity of the brain is the result of thinking — not the reverse — even in the course of history. The brain has been plastically molded by thinking. If only such thoughts are formed as are customary at the present time, if thoughts are not permeated by the wisdom of the Spirit, then the souls of human beings who occupy themselves today only with materialistic thinking will not be able in later incarnations rightly to mold their brain, since their forces will no longer be able to take

hold of the brain, having become too weak.

One reads of ancient people who took long travels to visit places for inspiration and to learn of various Mysteries. There was a time, when if one wanted to learn of the Delphic Oracle in Greece, one had to visit the site itself, or to learn of Egyptian mysteries, one had to visit Egypt, but that is no longer true in our time. Now one has only to travel within oneself. As Collison says in the Introduction on page 5, "Wisdom now has less of a local character — formerly one had to travel to places of Initiation."

When a man achieves an ability for direct knowing, of being able to perceive in a flash what must be done, it is difficult for him to explain the situation to others.

[page 13] Then perhaps he is asked by those about him: "Why should we do that?" To be sure, when he can appreciate the other person's point of view he will always be able to account for this from the stage on which he is standing and where he sees as it were in a flash what has to be done, and take his stand beside the other, where he forces himself to follow the train of thought of ordinary life in order to show what proof there is for what he sees through in a flash. This rapid comprehension of widely varying and complicated circumstances of life is that which appears as a phenomenon accompanying the faculty of rising above personal opinions and views and standpoints.

What makes Rudolf Steiner so valuable a lecturer is that he does the process described in the passage above so very well. It has often been reported that Steiner would custom-shape his lectures for the specific individuals who showed up in his audience, clearly he did this so that he could stand alongside them both to speak to them in ways they would understand and about subjects foremost in their minds at the time.

In a remarkable passage below, Steiner reveals what happens to the amoral or immoral, those who are amoral by omission or immoral by commission⁽²⁾, when they spend time between their death and a new birth. They become agents of destruction acting upon the physical world.

[page 31] It is a fixed law that is evident here. The seer perceives how souls that have passed through the Gate of Death and whose previous disposition was towards slackness of conscience or unconscientiousness in their dealings, for a certain period between death and a new birth make themselves into servants who must cooperate in bringing about diseases, illnesses, and untimely deaths into the physical sense-world.

[page 33] . . . they will have as souls to be servants of the god or gods of Opposition, those gods who place particular obstacles in the path of evolution. And these again are the spirits who are under the rule of Ahriman.

Where does this slackness of conscience come from? In another book, Steiner relates how the age of maturity in our time is 27 years old. That age has decreased to its present levels from a high of 55 or so during ancient times in India. Back then, an old person was revered and respected and sought out for advice. Why? Because, regardless of what a person did, when a human reached the age of 55, they were automatically more intelligent and wiser than a 40-, 30-, or 27-year-old person. Today the age of automatically wiser is 27-years-old and a person reaching that age is smarter than a 25-, 20-, 15-year-old person. What happens after the age of 27 today? If the person does not study further and coasts along in the work place, enjoying a busy job, and afterward lots of leisure time and ease, that person gets older, but not smarter, and at age 55 is not any smarter or wiser than at age 27.

Steiner is a seer and it is from his own personal experience that he reports what a seer can see, but he also knows that what he sees is true because his own perceptions match those of other seers in so many ways. An example of this was that he was able to head up the German Section of the Theosophical Society because what he taught from his own seer-ship matched that of the age-old teachings of the Society.

[page 31] To take another example, we can look at that which the seer learns when he turns his attention to a quality that is very widespread among men — the desire for ease and comfort. This desire for ease and comfort is really more widely spread than one generally thinks. People indulge far more in indolence than one realizes. Men are indolent in their thinking, indolent in their manner and behavior. And particularly indolent do they appear when they are required to alter their thinking or their habits. If men were not so ease-loving in their innermost souls it would not so often have happened when the necessity arose for learning anything fresh, that they resisted it. They struggled against it because it is uncomfortable to have to unlearn anything.

When I was taking Philosophy 101 in college, a farm boy in our class during some discussion mentioned that he had noticed, as had many other farmhands, that if one dug postholes for a fence during a full moon, there was always more dirt left over than if one dug the same postholes during a new moon. We debated the merits of his observation and even proposed that we put it to the test, but that was impractical, so it has remained an unanswered question in my mind, up until now. Steiner mentions the tale of Gustav Theodor Fechner who studied the Moon and came to the conclusion that more rain occurs around the Full Moon than around the New Moon. Steiner says, "There were many people who wanted to prove their scientific learning by laughing at Gustav Theodor Fechner and his studies of the Moon." (Page 37) A test was made by a famous botanist, Schleiden, and Fechner. Their wives captured water for their laundry once a month, Schleiden's wife was asked to capture her water during the New Moon and Fechner's during the Full. Fechner's wife had more water every month! I postulate that the reason for more dirt being left over during the Full Moon than other times of the month was due to the extra rain which falls on average near the Full Moon — the extra moisture in the soil leading to a greater density and thus a reduction in the amount of compaction it could withstand when placed into a posthole. Therefore more dirt would be left over during a Full Moon post-holing expedition.

[page 38] Thus, I might say in an ironic fashion, a decision was reached, to which, however, we attribute no great importance now. Later, however, it will emerge that everything — sunlight, sun-heat and also the other stellar influences — will make their influence felt on the plant world.

As we go through grades in school, the arithmetic we learn in grades 1-4 we use in higher grades, the algebra we learn in grade 8, we use again in high school and college, and so on, what we learn at early grades we use again in a repetition of learning at other levels. It should come as no surprise that similar repetition occurs at all levels in the evolution of the cosmos and of humanity.

[page 66] Everything that appears at a certain time in the evolution of humanity, in order to bring this evolution forward, must in a certain sense contain a kind of repetition of what has gone before. In every later epoch the earlier experiences of humanity must again appear, only in a fresh form. We know that it was especially the sentient soul which was concerned in the third post-Atlantean epoch; the intellectual or rational soul in the fourth or Greco-Roman; and that in the [fifth period] in which we ourselves are living, it is the consciousness soul that should come especially to its development.

From the time of the sentient soul when humans were beginning to understand the cosmic forces coming from the stars through the twelve signs of the Zodiac, there came into being King Arthur and his Round Table of twelve knights, each knight representing one of the signs. These knights carried out purges in the sentient world of monsters and giants which represented the purification of the human astral body. In the Legend of Arthur and his duty-bound knights we have preserved for us a vivid image of the purification we each must go through in our own astral body if we are to progress as full human beings of the fifth period.

[page 68, 69] . . .those [cosmic] forces during the fifth period inspired certain persons; so that in the dawn of the fifth period there were persons who, not exactly through their

training but through certain mysterious influences which operated, became the instruments, the vehicles of cosmic influences issuing from the sun and moon during their passage through ,the Signs of the Zodiac. Such Mysteries as could then be won for the human soul through these individuals constituted the repetition of that which was once experienced through the sentient soul. And the persons who expressed the transit of the cosmic forces through the Signs of the Zodiac, were those who were called" The Knights of King Arthur's Round Table." There were twelve of them, and they were surrounded by a number of other men, but they themselves were the principal knights. The other persons represented the starry host; into them flowed the inspirations which were more distantly distributed in cosmic space; but into the twelve knights flowed the inspirations which came from the twelve directions of the Zodiac. And the inspirations which came from the spiritual forces of the sun and moon were represented by King Arthur and his wife Guinevere. Thus in King Arthur's Round Table we have the humanized Cosmos. What we may call the pedagogical high school for the sentient soul of the West, proceeded from King Arthur's Round Table. Hence we are told — and the legend here refers in pictures of external facts to inner Mysteries which were taking place in the dawn of that period in the human soul — how the Knights of King Arthur's Round Table wandered through the earth and slew monsters and giants. What is here presented in external pictures points to those efforts which have been made with the human souls who were to advance in the refining and purifying of those forces of the astral body which expressed themselves for the seer in those pictures — the pictures of monsters, giants and the like. Thus everything that the sentient soul was to experience through the later Mysteries is bound up with the conceptions of King Arthur's Round Table.

This is no easy matter to comprehend, but if we follow Steiner's presentation to the end, we find the Round Table Legend representing the evolution of Man's sentient soul, the Grail Legend that of our intellectual soul, and the Parsifal Legend that of our consciousness soul. Whatever attraction these legends have yet today stems from these underlying connections, which for non-Initiates remain unconscious, but nevertheless very real.

[page 73] Thus the Secrets of the Grail referred to the permeation with new wisdom of the intellectual or mind-soul.

[page 79] . . . and all that finds expression in the figure of Parsifal, this ideal of the later Initiation, in so far as this later Initiation is dependent upon the consciousness soul, represents the forces which must especially be made our own through that which we call the consciousness soul.

Our consciousness soul must come to deal with the vacuity of modern materialistic thinking, which uses its sharpened rational thinking to arrive at such concepts as the "heart as a pump", "motor neurons", and worst of all, "the brain as the origin of thoughts". Treating the brain as the origin of thought is the most materialistic of all the concepts being taught to our children in standard schools today, schools which rightly understood, should be called substandard(3). What would educators do if they understood their prominent mode of teaching our children today will lead these children inexorably to become imbeciles in successive incarnations?

[page 81, 82] That which man has been learning for some time, that which is considered the right thing to give to a child and to instil into it, and that which is taken as the foundation of the newer education, is not to be judged merely in accordance with the fact that someone who considered himself clever says he understands things and they are absolutely true; but everything is to be judged according to how it affects the soul and fructifies it, and what impressions it produces upon it. And when a person becomes

cleverer and cleverer in the sense in which it is the fashion today to call people clever, he develops within his soul forces which perhaps even in this incarnation make him very capable of dominating the conversation where one wants to live materialistically or monistically, but then certain vital forces which ought to be within the human organism wither. And when such a soul has taken into itself only these extraordinary dregs of modern education, it lacks in the next incarnation into which it enters the forces for properly building up the organism. The more understanding, the "cleverer" one is in an incarnation with regard to the time which we are approaching, so much the more imbecile is he in a later incarnation. For those categories and concepts which relate only to sense-existence and to such ideas as hold external existence together, set up such a configuration in the soul as may be ever so fine intellectually, but which loses the intensive force for working on the brain and for making use of the brain. And to be unable in the physical body to make use of the brain means to be imbecile.

We ignore these soul forces to our own peril and that of our children. Unless we come to understand that our thoughts work upon shaping and forming the brain, the soul forces we bequeath to our next incarnation will be inadequate to work upon our brain, and we will become soft-headed and incompetent.

The materialists who claim the heart is a pump cannot explain how the circulation of blood precedes the development of the heart. I have seen a movie clip of the so-called beating heart in a fetus at a time when the heart was merely an enlarged area in the blood stream. Yes, it was pulsing, but this nascent heart was not capable of pumping, in my opinion, it was merely acting as a tiny hydraulic ram which interrupted the blood flow as to facilitate the oxygenation of the blood by the turbulence created. Another example, the eye was formed by the presence of sunlight which had to precede the existence of the eye. The irritation caused by sunshine impinging upon the eyes led to the creation of a sensory organ to perceive what the light contained. If we had some equivalent means of viewing the evolution of the brain over aeons of time, we would notice brain being built up by thoughts, just as the eye was built up by the presence of sunlight.

[page 82, 83] If what the materialists maintain were the truth, namely, that the brain does the thinking, then one could certainly give them some comfort. But this assertion is not true; it is as false as the other assertion that the "center of speech" has created itself. It has created itself through the fact that men learned to speak, and hence the center (or agent) of speech is the result of speech. Similarly all cerebral activity even in history is the result of thinking-not the other way about. The brain is plastically modeled through thinking. If only such thoughts are developed as are usual now, if the thoughts are not permeated by the wisdom of the spirit, then the souls which only busy themselves today with thinking about material things, in later incarnations will no longer be able to be too weak.

In this next passage, I came to a full realization of an understanding which had been developing over the decades since I took a degree in the most materialistic science of all, physics, an explanation for why I could not work simply as a physicist for very long! After a decade or two of working as a physicist, I began an earnest search which eventually led me to Rudolf Steiner books and lectures, and the answers I was seeking for the cause of my own seeking I found in his writings.

[page 83] A soul which to-day is merely occupied with, let us say, calculating debit and credit, or busies itself with the usages of commercial and industrial life, or only absorbs the ideas of materialistic science, is only filling itself with thought-pictures which gradually in later incarnations darken the consciousness, because the brain like an un-plastic mass (as today in the case of softening of the brain) would no longer be capable of being affected by thought-forces. Hence for him who looks into these deeper forces of human evolution, everything that can live in the soul must be permeated by the spiritual comprehension of the world.

Our unconscious contains the dead forces of our soul. Gradually my experience of those dead forces in my soul, though I could not call them that at the time, led me on a life-long search which continues to this day, this very second, as I tap these keys. Only through infusing my consciousness soul with spiritual knowledge have I found the relief I was seeking. Friends ask me, "Why do you not use your physics?" I answer them now, "I do use my physics, it is the foundation of everything I do." But you see, one can not worship in the foundation of a church, the foundation is cold stone. One can only stand atop the foundation to worship within a church. To understand the spiritual world without a solid understanding of the physical world can lead to spiritual inflation and religiosity instead of true knowledge. To understand the physical world without grasping its spiritual underpinnings creates a philosophy as dead as stone.

[page 84] That is part of the fruits of the newer Mysteries; those are the important and significant results which must be appropriated from the present-day Mysteries, which are an after-effect of the Grail Mystery. But unlike all ancient Mystery-wisdom it can really be understood by the generality of people. For gradually the unconscious and dead forces of the soul and of the organism must be overcome through a strong permeation of the consciousness-soul with spiritual knowledge, i.e. with a knowledge that has been understood and grasped spiritually, not a knowledge that is built up on authority.

[page 85] The more present-day man looks into himself and tries to exercise honest self-knowledge, the more he will find how strife is raging within his soul, which is a conflict within the intellectual or mind-soul. For self-knowledge is a thing which is more difficult in this connection today than many people think, and will in truth become more and more difficult.

This lecture by Rudolf Steiner speaks directly of my own search, my own seeking, in a way which convinces me that he also went through such stages in his own life. Yes, you may be thinking, but few people bother about such seeking or searching today. Steiner would agree with you, especially when talking about scientists.

[page 85, 86] The difficulties of this inner life may perhaps never occur today to those persons who see true knowledge and true cognition in external scientific occupation. But a soul that takes this impulse towards knowledge seriously and worthily is in a different position when it obtains a true insight into its inner being. This soul seeks perhaps in this or that science, seeks and seeks, seeks also in life, seeks to find some reconciliation between all that manifest in human life. After some searching it thinks it knows a little. But then it seeks further. And the more it seeks with the means which the times provide the more does it frequently feel torn in pieces, the more does it feel itself drawn into doubt. And the soul that, after having absorbed the education of the period, own to itself that with this education of the age it can know nothing, this soul is frequently the one the exercises the most earnest and the most worthy self-cognition.

In the image of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, we find the modern equivalent of Parsifal and Amfortas, the competent doctor of healing and the wounded, hurting, and angry man. We must each go through the wounding of the Amfortas in ourselves in order to come to know the Parsifal in us.

[page 86, 87] Thus one who approaches the nature of modern Mysteries must really feel that he is so confronting himself, that he must endeavor to become such a one as strives after the virtues of Parsifal, and yet one who knows that through all the modern circumstances that have been described he is something different, because he is a man of the newer age — he is the wounded Amfortas. The man of these modern days carries this double nature within him: the aspiring Parsifal and the wounded Amfortas. Thus must he feel in his self-cognition. From these there flow forth the forces which from this duality must be brought to unity, and which should bring man a little further in the world's evolution. In our intellectual soul, in the depths of our inner being, there must be

a meeting between the modern man — Amfortas wounded in body and soul, and Parsifal the cultivator of the consciousness-soul.

Steiner suggests at the end of Lecture 4 in February, 1914 that he may later speak in "clear terms — if that may be — of what the nature of the modern Mysteries discloses concerning the entity of the modern person, concerning the dual nature which man bears within him: concerning Amfortas and Parsifal." Any one who doubts that the Legends of the Round Table, the Grail, and Parsifal hold important lessons for all of humanity should take another look, take a deep draught of these legends and allow them to work upon one's soul, so that the wounded Amfortas within can speak up and call upon one's own Parsifal to ask, "What ails you, Uncle?"

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Footnote 1. This is one of several physiological mistakes of materialistic science, among which are regarding the heart as a pump, and demanding that our limbs have motor neurons through which the brain effects motion. In reality the heart is a hydraulic ram driven by circulation to facilitate mixing of oxygen and blood, and we have only sensory neurons which report the presence and position of our limbs when we will them to move. If we cannot sense the limbs, they will not move, and scientists are using a circular logic fallacy when they claim the presence of motor neurons.

October 22, 2013 Update: I received a link to this [enlightening article](#) which says, among other things,

In 1932, Bremer of Harvard filmed the blood in the very early embryo circulating in self-propelled mode in spiralling streams before the heart was functioning. Amazingly, he was so impressed with the spiralling nature of the blood flow pattern that he failed to realize that the phenomena before him had demolished the pressure propulsion principle. Earlier in 1920, Steiner, of the Goetheanum in Switzerland had pointed out in lectures to medical doctors that the heart was not a pump forcing inert blood to move with pressure but that the blood was propelled with its own biological momentum, as can be seen in the embryo, and boosts itself with "induced" momenta from the heart. He also stated that the pressure does not cause the blood to circulate but is caused by interrupting the circulation. Experimental corroboration of Steiner's concepts in the embryo and adult is herein presented.

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**Footnote 2.** One can easily test this by asking oneself, "Have I infringed upon someone's life or the non-procreative derivatives of someone's life?" Non-procreative derivatives exclude children and includes every form of thought and idea expressed orally or in writing (primary property) and all secondary property (things acquired in the course of one's life). This test for immoral action is based upon the life's work of Dr. Andrew Joseph Galambos. See [Sic Itur Ad Astra](#) at <http://www.doyletics.com/arj/siaa1rvw.htm>.

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Footnote 3. A salient exception is the Waldorf and Steiner Schools which balance the material and spiritual aspects of life rather than taking a one-sided materialistic approach to education. It is no wonder that materialistic skeptics assail these school systems with every trick of argument they can muster, up

until now.

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