

The Human Mystery of the Magi and the Shepherds

At this time of year as the world prepares for the great Christian festival, a subtle and delicate ray of light seeks to enter into the minds of human beings; a soft and tender voice seeks to be heard deep in our hearts. This is the light of Imagination and the voice of Inspiration and together they seek, on the one hand, to show us how the Divine Christ is revealed in the heavenly heights, and on the other, to sing to us of the peace that shall reign on earth among men if they have the good will to hear His words. But how can the delicate light of Imagination be seen when everywhere our eyes are assaulted by brash neon signs, electric Christmas tree lights and advertisements on television? How can the tender voice of Inspiration be heard over the noise of cars, over music played unceasingly at shopping malls and the loud hustle and bustle of renovating the house to accommodate the relatives?

Rudolf Steiner tells us that it is the challenge of modern humanity to overcome the obstacles of material life and to achieve Imagination and Inspiration through the spiritualisation of the soul, which occurs when the inner world of thought, feeling and will is transformed. The wisdom concerning the transformed soul has always been known in the mysteries. It descended into human evolution as early as Atlantean times into the Sun Oracle, whose guide was Manu, the leading Sun Initiate. There it was known that this spiritualised soul called a Virgin mother, was the substance which, when impregnated by the Holy Spirit was capable of fashioning a centre within itself, a new organ of spiritual thought and perception capable of giving birth to a free spiritual vision and a free spiritual understanding. Long preparation had to occur before humanity was ripe for such development; only a few chosen ones could safeguard this knowledge and when the time was right for this wisdom to leave the Sun Oracle to be disseminated throughout the world it was carried by two groups. Each having only half the knowledge travelled in polar directions: One by way of France and north to Russia carrying the initiation knowledge more concerned with Imagination; the other by way of Spain and south to the Middle East carrying the initiation knowledge more concerned with Inspiration.¹ These became known as the northern and the southern streams. It was the task of these two streams to develop and cultivate these capacities independently, in small esoteric mystery centres, in preparation for a future time when humanity in general would have to develop these faculties in order to come to a relationship to the great Sun being of Christ who had incarnated into world evolution.

You might ask – why two separate streams?

Rudolf Steiner tells us that it is a cosmic law that a higher stage in human development can only occur through the overcoming of polarities.² This law can be seen both in the development of the Cosmos i.e. Saturn, Sun, Moon and Earth³, where separations took place in order that in the future a synthesis could result in higher development: Jupiter (a higher stage of Moon); Venus (a higher stage of Sun); and Vulcan (a higher stage of Saturn). It stands to reason that the same law would apply in the development of the human soul through the above two streams, whose peculiarities enabled its initiates to take up the wisdom necessary for seeing the Being of Christ through Imagination and understanding Him through Inspiration, from two completely different directions. These two streams are represented in the bible in the brothers Cain and Abel.

¹ Sergei O Prokofieff *May Human Beings Hear it the Mystery of the Christmas Conference*, page 315

² Sergei O Prokofieff, *Encounters with Evil*, page 112-111

³ Rudolf Steiner *Occult Science and Outline*

The Northern Stream

The Northern Stream, which moved by way of France to Russia, was known in ancient times as the Stream of Cain. The name Cain (or Kayn) in Hebrew means something *produced* – or a *spear*. We can see by this name the quality of this stream, which seeks to forge into the world like a spear into matter, to produce something that can be offered up as a sacrifice to the spiritual world; in other words, to emerge out of the physical body of matter by overcoming the veil of the outer senses.

Rudolf Steiner tells us that the initiates of this stream sought to reach out and upwards to the spiritual world through a faculty of ‘memory’, a form of pre-natal remembering.⁴ What do I mean by this? They were able to perceive in the cosmos, the starry heavens and also in the minerals and plants, a memory of the reality that they had experienced in the spiritual world before birth.⁵ The wisdom acquired by rising upwards, is related to the 6 Elohim on the Sun. This stream was therefore, known in ancient times as the Sun Stream. It was connected more with the Greeks and the Pagans. Plato a representative of this stream, reached up to the heights with his philosophy, or love of wisdom in order to experience the archetypal forms of the universe. Another representative of this stream was Hiram Abiff who was related to Tubal Cain. As the builder of the Temple of Solomon his task was to transform or shape matter on earth through the fire of enthusiasm, into a substance compatible with Spirit.

Rudolf Steiner tells us that the greatest human representative of this stream was **Zarathustra**.

In Persian times Zarathustra was able to look with lucid clarity through the veil of the senses to the vision of the Sun’s physical aura, which to him reflected a *memory* of the spiritual reality of the great Sun being Ahura Mazda or Ormuz – the Cosmic Christ. This lucid clarity was also capable of seeing how the Divine Sun Wisdom was reflected in physical nature, i.e., in mineral substances and in the plant world. Both of these abilities to ‘see’ by overcoming the obstacles of the senses, in cosmic terms, are related to the faculty of *Imagination* – the ‘beholding’ of spirit. This is Persian duality - the ability to ‘Imagine’ the above and the below, the good and the evil, the light and dark, in perfect equilibrium.⁶ It is also a peculiarity of this stream that its leaders and representatives are the bearers of higher spiritual individualities who do not incarnate in the flesh but work in that personality in order to achieve their aims. These leaders, we are told by Rudolf Steiner, were forced out of their own being, so to speak, by these higher individualities residing within them, and this caused them to unite with the fire of the macrocosm – or spiritual space.⁷

This stream continued on into Egypto-Chaldean times and its highest initiates were now so spiritually constituted that as the **Magi** they were capable of seeing with Imaginative faculties of higher ‘vision’, the ‘Gold Star’, that is, the light of their spiritual master Zarathustra as he descended toward his incarnation in Bethlehem.⁸ They knew that Zarathustra, the greatest representative of this stream, had a momentous task – as Jesus of the Matthew Gospel he would prepare the Physical and Soul sheaths for the incarnation of the Cosmic Christ into earthly evolution.

We can place before our souls the tender picture of the three Magi, as they stood reverently before the glorious ‘light’ of their newly incarnated master Zarathustra. Their gifts were a reflection of all the wisdom these three men had gathered in the past and that was alight in their souls as a

⁴ Sergei O Prokofieff, *Encounters with Evil*, page 110, Rudolf Steiner, *The Search for the new Isis the Divine Sophia*, lecture III

⁵ Rudolf Steiner Dornach December 25, 1920

⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *The Search for the new Isis the Divine Sophia*, Lecture III

⁷ Sergei O Prokofieff – May Human Beings Hear it – The esoteric Archetype of the Original Council.

⁸ Rudolf Steiner Dornach December 25, 1920

‘memory’: Myrrh corresponded to the mysteries of the will; Frankincense to the mysteries of feeling; and Gold to the mysteries of thinking.

As time passed, this knowledge of the Magi drew inward, contracted, and became the ‘dry, geometrical – mathematical’ world of thought that the modern man draws out of his soul.

The Southern Stream

The southern stream carried the wisdom necessary for understanding the Christ Mystery by way of Spain to the Middle East. This stream was known as the Abel stream. The name Abel (Ay-bel) is of Hebrew origin, and its meaning is ‘breath vapour’, illustrating the connection of this stream with ‘Inspiration’ and with Jehova who breathed into man the Spirit, or the forces of the Ego. For this reason the Southern Stream is known as the Moon stream. This stream was concerned with mystical immersion of the Ego into the human soul, in other words the penetration through the veil of inner experiences of the soul, the microcosm, to an understanding of spiritual worlds.

Rudolf Steiner tells us that the initiates of this stream were able to descend into the soul to experience the will forces and by way of these, the forces of the Earth’s depths. The initiates of this stream reached the spiritual world from the other side, that is, from above downwards.⁹ Such journeys are depicted often in literature e.g. Dante’s journey to hell, Faust’s journey to the mothers, Orpheus’ journey to find Eurydice – these are but a few examples. The initiates of this stream penetrated through the soul’s fabric to experience the same spiritual world as the Northern stream, albeit from the opposite side.

The faculties necessary for this ability to enter into the soul’s depths were developed in the time after death.¹⁰ Rudolf Steiner tells us that the forces for the building up of these faculties are youthful faculties: i.e., they are potentially germinal and they are akin to the forces of growth in a child. They are thus connected not with *memory* of past experiences, as in the Magi, but with prophecy or the *foretelling* of the future, and are therefore connected with the Hebrew Prophets. Such a consciousness is able to use what it gains from the spiritual world through immersion into the depths of the soul to transform spirit into a substance compatible with the world of Matter. This stream is related to the will and the heart. Solomon was a member of this stream. He was in possession of ‘the calm waters of wisdom’, which gave him the knowledge of the dimensions and proportions of the Temple of Solomon but not the ability to build it. For this he needed Hiram Abiff from the Cain stream. Aristotle was another initiate of this stream.¹¹ Aristotle was an archetype for future humanity because he could, through an exact scientific outlook, enter into the details, into the depths of the soul forces in human beings and animals.¹²

Rudolf Steiner tells us that the most prominent human initiate of this stream was **Gautama Buddha**. Gautama Buddha’s initiatory path relied primarily on his own individual development. He was a Bodhisattva made mortal, that is, he was not a human being permeated by a higher being (as in the case of the Magi), he was the incarnation of a higher being.¹³

Buddha’s initiation entailed sitting beneath a Bodhi-tree, which is the Astral inner image of the nervous system,¹⁴ the brain and the cerebellum.¹⁵ In a meditation lasting several days he penetrated to what existed below his purified Astral body, to his bodily inner life (his organs), his Etheric body. The Etheric body, or body of time, was projected into the outer astral world and this

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Rudolf Steiner Lecture Dornach December 25 1920

¹¹ Sergei O Prokofieff, *The Heavenly Sophia and the Being of Anthroposophia* page 168-169

¹² Rudolf Steiner *ibid*

¹³ Rudolf Steiner, *East in Light of the West, Christ and the Bodhisattvas*

¹⁴ Rudolf Steiner *The Gospel of St John Third Lecture*

¹⁵ Rudolf Steiner *Foundations of Esotericism XII*

allowed him to see his former incarnations. This is a descent into the will forces. This stream of Buddha became, at the turning point in time, the Shepherd stream, and is depicted in the Luke gospel in connection with the Luke Jesus. Buddha's path of love and compassion are transformed at this time into a path of moral conscience and feeling, which is experienced by the Shepherds in the field. An inner moral law that is exemplified by the Hebrew people and especially Abraham who had the task of working to prepare the human physical sheath *for the future* bearer of the Cosmic Christ. The physical element, which Rudolf Steiner tells us, is directly related to the mysteries of life after death and to the life of will. This is reflected in the soul as consciousness of morality or conscience or, once again, a moral law which is understood in cosmic terms as *Inspiration – or the breathing in of spirit*. It was inspiration that enabled the Hebrew prophets to reach back into former incarnations to strengthen themselves in such a way as to be able to see into the future - prophecy.¹⁶

We can imagine the tender picture of the **Shepherds** sleeping with their heads close to the earth, feeling how in the depths of the world soul a 'feeling' was arising in response to the descent of the Christ Being towards the earth. They became one with the rhythms of the spiritual world from which the resounding choir of Angels sang their majestic tones announcing the birth of the Nathan child, the Jesus of the Luke Gospel. These rhythms and tones were *inspired* into their souls and having penetrated them reached down into the depths, addressing the forces of their moral will directly, bidding them to obey unquestioningly.

As time passed, this inner knowledge of the Shepherd moved outward and became the modern materialistic perception of the world of nature – Natural Science.

Rudolf Steiner tells us that these two streams came together in the one being: the Jesus of the Mathew Gospel and the Jesus of the Luke Gospel who were united in Jesus of Nazareth.

Northern Stream - Cain/Magi - Zarathustra - Matthew Jesus	} Jesus of Nazareth
Southern Stream - Abel/Shepherds - Gautama Buddha - Luke Jesus	

The Zarathustra Ego left the body of the Matthew Jesus and entered into the physical body of the Luke Jesus in which resided the Nathan Soul. This occurred when the Luke Jesus was twelve years of age. This unification of the two streams Magi (Zarathustra Ego) and Shepherd (Nathan Soul) provided a vessel, a 'Grail', for the incarnation of the Cosmic Ego of Christ at the baptism in the Jordan. This was an archetype for the future task of humanity. The individual human being would one day unite both streams in the one human being, that is, Imagination and Inspiration would awaken in the one human being to enable both a vision and an understanding of Christ to become wisdom in the soul.

Rudolf Steiner tells us that since the mystery of Golgotha there has been an interchange of tasks belonging to the two streams.¹⁷ This means that a past inner experience must unite with an outer one, and a past outer experience must unite with an inner one. This initiatory path, which has been in preparation in the esoteric mystery centres since Atlantean times, has become an exoteric path available to all human beings through the work of Rudolf Steiner and Spiritual Science.¹⁸

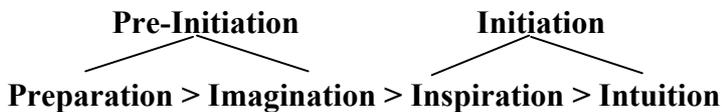
¹⁶ Rudolf Steiner *Lecture Dornach 25 December 1920*

¹⁷ Rudolf Steiner *The Search for the new Isis the Divine Sophia*

¹⁸ Rudolf Steiner *Christmas Lectures, 1920, Dornach*

But what is Initiation?

Rudolf Steiner tells us that Initiation is achieved through preparation, which leads to Imagination but it only begins when there is an awakening of Inspiration and then continues on to Intuition. The initiatory steps are:



- **Preparation:** Involves the study and practice of Spiritual Science as it is found in *Occult Science* and *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*. This study and practice is the foundation for the Meditative processes of the Magi and Shepherds. Meditation is a *conscious forgetting* of the physical world and physical consciousness through selfless thought and selfless perception that leads to Imagination.
- **Imagination:** Is a *conscious dreaming*, a remembering of the past working of the spirit. This is experienced as Shadow Images of a past reality or Being - the *past* thoughts of the being - a preparation for Inspiration.
- **Inspiration:** Is a *conscious perception* of the Soul reality of a Being (laws and rhythms) or the taking part in the *present* creative in-breathing and out-breathing (Word) of the Being, which leads to a communication and understanding through the harmony of breath and blood. This is a preparation for Intuition.
- **Intuition:** Is the *conscious uniting* with the Will of the Being, becoming one with what lives in the Being as a potential for *future* creation.¹⁹

Rudolf Steiner tells us that ordinary thought and perception result in a dying process. Red blood, that is, Oxygenated blood must enter the brain and the senses for ordinary thought and perception to occur. The product of this interaction of blood and nerves is a depletion of Oxygen and the creation of carbon dioxide, as a poison that must be expelled. Through ordinary thought and perception the ego knows itself. We can call this dying process an egoistic process. As we see above Meditation is the selfless forgetting of ordinary thinking and perception, and it is this selflessness of the ego that redeems this dying process.

There are two kinds of Meditation:

- Where there is a concentration on certain thoughts and pictures over a long period of time.
- Where there is a concentration on the outer world of nature

In each case there is a selfless devotion of attention, all inward experience, on the one hand to the building up and spiritual 'energization' of mental thought and picture activity, and on the other to the observation of nature, the gestures of the seasons, the weather, the spiritual nature of plants, minerals, of human beings and animals.

In both cases this vital thinking and living perception do not create 'poison' in the blood but free the human being from this dying process.

¹⁹ Rudolf Steiner 18th May 1924

But how does Meditation unite Magi and Shepherds?

The old Magi who once rose up out of their souls to experience an Image of what was a remembered reality of spirit, in our modern times must take this knowledge of the heights and descend with it into the soul's depths – into inner meditative thought. The outer 'light' of Cosmic knowledge, the Cosmic Image, must now through Meditation, selflessly unite with the inner warmth of the heart and the fire of will, the individual Karma of the human being. This unification of 'light' and 'warmth' now makes an old Magi into a new Shepherd, that is, the Imaginations previously won through an atavistic or dulled consciousness can now unite with the wide-awake warmth of heart to give rise to Inspiration.

The Old Shepherd who once descended into the depths of the soul to unite thought with the breath and the blood to experience the past workings of individual Karma, must now take this knowledge out of the self, that is the Shepherd must rise up selflessly with the knowledge gained through an inner 'warm' piety of heart and an inner morality, and unite it with the 'light' of knowledge that enables a perception of the Image of the Cosmos, the spirit in outer nature. This unites what was previously won, the Inspirations gained through an atavistic dulled consciousness that was connected to the breath and blood with what is now acquired by a selfless wide-awake pulling away from the breath and the blood, a conscious experience of Imagination.

But meditation is only one aspect. It leads to the further development of Magi and Shepherd. However for a true unification to occur meditation must be accompanied by spiritual exercises (Knowledge of Higher Worlds) which together with meditation brings what was once experienced by the Magi and Shepherd in an atavistic sense as we have seen, into an awakened and controlled state appropriate for humanity which can lead both Magi and Shepherd from modern Imagination to modern Inspiration.

Spiritual exercises create the possibility for an awakening of:

- The 'Dream' consciousness in the human being that exists in the 'feeling life' and is related to 'memory'. This means that the Imagination that was once Atavistic in the old Magi (Ecstatic Vision) can through thought be made conscious in the new Shepherd.
- The 'Sleep' consciousness in the human being, which is akin to the 'life of will' and is related to 'Karma' in the human being. This means that the Inspiration that was once Atavistic in the old Shepherd (Mystical Immersion) can now through selfless perception be made conscious in the new Magi.

Thought – *awake state* – Control of thoughts/Open minded-ness

Feeling – *dream state* – Positivity/Equanimity

Will – *sleep state* – Control of Will/Balance of daily tasks

We can see how Meditation and spiritual exercises together unite the Magi and Shepherd old and new and in doing so, are a path to the spiritualization of the Astral body (Virgin Mother), which creates the conditions necessary for a descent of the Holy Spirit.

What does this mean?

Rudolf Steiner tells us that our higher 'Spirit' is the Holy Spirit, which in our times resides outside of us. We fashion this spirit into a form suitable for our being through every thought that

passes out of us with the breath that we exhale.²⁰ That means that whatever the soul has accomplished in meditation and through spiritual exercises, all that allows the Magi to become new Shepherds and the Shepherds to become new Magi – that which creates the Virgin Mother the spiritual soul - is exhaled and this can fashion the outer Holy Spirit. This exhalation of the spiritual soul that lives inside the human being is connected with the outer Holy Spirit through the process of Imagination. Imagination inside us, fashions the spirit outside us, according to the soul's level of development. We must imagine that we are fashioning outside of us the shape and form (Imagination) of a sword, which will fit into what we are creating inside of us - the scabbard of the soul. In spiritual terms this scabbard is the Etherised blood, that is, the spiritual aspect of the blood. This fashioned Holy Spirit, which is the product of Imagination outside of us, however is only the first step. The next step is that it must be 'inspired' by the soul. But the soul has to discard these imaginations that is, the soul must allow the sword to enter into the scabbard where it is no longer visible.²¹ When this fashioned Holy Spirit is 'inspired' by the soul and enters into the spiritual aspect of the blood, the scabbard, the Etherised blood purified of karma,²² this Spirit now becomes individualised as Spirit Self.

Imagination > The fashioning of Holy Spirit through Exhaled air
Inspiration > The in-breath of Spirit fashioned by Imagination

This spirit Self in the Etherised blood of human beings can now fashion an Etheric Heart, a Grail or vessel where human Etherised blood can commune with the Etheric blood of Christ.

The entrance of the Holy Spirit individualised as Spirit Self fashions little by little the Etheric Heart Organ, the heart Sun that through Imagination can see the light of Christ and through Inspiration can hear His Word. Such was the knowledge disseminated by the great Sun Oracle through two world streams, The Magi and Shepherds, which became one at the turning point in time.

As we approach the great Christmas festival our hearts and minds are drawn to Palestine to what is depicted for us so vividly in the two gospels of Matthew and of Luke. They reach out through space and time to bring us a new message: Matthew points to the heights where the Etheric Christ is even now manifesting in the Astral world and he tells us 'You Shepherds of old become new Magi, unite what you once heard in the depths of your hearts and wills with the star that manifests in the heights before your very eyes - His light!' and Luke wishes to speak to us of the depths where the Word of Christ resounds in majestic tones in the soul of human beings, he tells us, 'You Magi of old become like new Shepherds, unite what you once saw in the heights, the gold star that announced the greatest event of world evolution and unite this with the warmth of your hearts and your wills to what resounds there - His word!'

This is a time when we must celebrate the Christmas festival anew. We must prepare to take up our task of finding our own personal connection to Magi and Shepherds so that we can begin to develop in our selves these faculties of perception and understanding.

The significance of the birth of the two Jesus Children in Bethlehem will then become a living experience, it will warm our hearts and enlighten our heads so that our virgin souls can give birth through conscious willing to a Jesus of Nazareth, a vessel, a heart organ, that is able to unite our soul substance with the substance of Christ. Then as Shepherds and Magi we shall see how the Divine Christ is revealed in the heavenly heights, and we shall hear the chorus of angels resound with an understanding of how peace shall be on earth among men of good will who chose to hear Him.

²⁰ Rudolf Steiner Lecture Berlin, 2nd October, 1906

²¹ We can liken this to the eye – the eye must be selfless, that is, it must not see itself if it is to see the outside world.

²² This is why we must 'let go' of the Imaginations, we must inspire them if we are to rise to the level of Inspiration.

We can now understand this aspect of the Foundation Stone Meditation better:

At the Turning point of Time
The Spirit-Light of the World
Entered the Stream of Earthly Being.
Darkness of Night
Had held sway;
Day-radiant Light
Poured in the souls of men;
Light that gives Warmth
To simple Shepherds Hearts
Light that enlightens
The wise Heads of Kings (Magi)

O Light Divine
O Sun of Christ
Warm thou
Our Hearts
Enlighten Thou
Our Heads,
That good may become
What from our Hearts would found
And from our Heads direct
In Conscious Light-filled
Willing