

Spiritual Science



Deep Dive Article

Gospel of John as an Initiation Document

...

Source: [FreeManCreator](#)

Introduction

The Gospel of John is not just a text, it is a work of art and composition with not just esoteric meaning but also spiritual forces behind it that can serve as an initiatory pathway. That is, if one uses the verses for deep repetitive meditation and contemplation, it affects one's spiritual development.

It is also a form of early theosophical or spiritual scientific text written in christian symbolic form.

The text is a meditative prayer from the beginning to 'and the darkness did not comprehend it', it should be contemplated in meditation to develop imaginations and gain a living experience of what lies in those words by the power of the soul. Chapters 1 to 12 are experiences in the astral world, chapter 13 and those that follow experiences at the spirit world.

Aspects

- During the Middle Ages a number of Brotherhoods engaged in practical occultism considered the Gospel of St. John as to their Bible and the essential source of Christian truth, and the Gospel was used as an instrument for developing the mystic life of the soul. Such Brotherhoods were the Brothers of St. John, the Albigenses, the Catharists, the Templars and the Rosicrucians. (1906-05-31-GA094)
- The Gospel of St John was written by Lazarus-John, the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'. More info on the individuality and incarnations, see: [Individuality of Christian Rosenkreutz](#) and [Mystery of John](#).

Inspirational quotes

1907-11-20-GA100

The Gospel of John is a book of life. No one who has merely enquired into it with his intellect has understood this book; he alone who has experienced it really knows it.

If a man meditates upon the first fourteen verses day after day for some time, he will discover the purpose of these words. They are really words which, when one meditates upon them, awaken in the human soul the capacity to see the various parts of the Gospel .. as one's own experiences in the great astral tableau. Through these exercises clairvoyance develops in the human being and he can then experience for himself the truth of what is written in St. John's Gospel.

Hundreds have experienced this.

This is also described in o.a. 1908-04-04-GA068A and 1908-05-31-GA103

Overview coverage

Rudolf Steiner covered the Gospel of John (as well as the Book of Revelation) in multiple cycles. We distinguish

- (a) general coverage of its contents, and
- (b) the use of the Gospel as a meditation and initiation document for practical exercises.

Regarding (a) — these are given here as an overview reference, and because they also contain references to (b) — see lecture extracts below

- [1906-GA094](#): 3 lectures in Munich and later in the year 8 lectures in Berlin, plus 3 lectures in [1906-02-GA097](#)
- [1907-11-GA100](#) is a full cycle of 8 lectures in Basel
- [1908-05-GA103](#) in a full cycle of 12 lectures in Hamburg
- [1909-06-GA112](#) is a full cycle of 14 lectures in Kassel
- 1910-01-GA117A called 'the gospel of John and the three other gospels' contains 11 lectures of which 5-6 relate to John's gospel.
- GA068A contains four lectures on the gospel of John, besides many other lectures on the Bible and esoteric christianity. Key lectures are
 - 1906-11-27-GA068A

- 1909-02-28-GA068A called 'the esoteric meaning of the gospel of John'
- 1907-12-14-GA068A

In summary we have in the years 1906-1907-1908-1909 some 48 lectures in the main cycles plus some more in eg GA068A, say for a first 52 lectures. Adding 1910 we can say there's a total of some 60 lectures for study of the Gospel of St John. This is similar to the recurrent coverage of the Book of Revelation by St-John, also with about 60 lectures, see [Book of Revelation#Coverage](#).

Regarding (b)

- GA267 contains practical meditation exercises that Rudolf Steiner have to his students individually, see below for extract and references

Source extracts

1902-02-15-GA087

1904-07-25-GA090A

.. expands on the Gospel of Mark as an special initiation document ('urkunde') that was existed a century before the founding of Christianity. Through the ages these were not written down, but passed on, later they were described in symbolic language that required occult studies for anyone to understand or use them. The process of baptism - suffering - death and resurrection is something that was enacted in the three years by Christ Jesus, but this process had been enacted countless times in the temples of initiation and is thus also a mystical fact. Reference is made to old ages and cultures in India, Middle Asia, Iran, the Egyptian priests and Druid priests. It is this process that was described in this special initiation document, that was also used by the first teachers of christianity, to tell about what happened in the old initiation temples.

The Gospel of John is truly the occult or esoteric gospel: from the 13th chapter onwards it is impossible to comprehend the contents intellectually, but each individual sentence is filled with occult forces. .. The Gospel of John was therefore used by the rosecrucian pupils as life elixir. From the washing of the feet

onwards, the whole contact has to be lived mystically. If one applies the Gospel to one's whole being and permeates himself with it lively, will have inner experiences and afterwards comprehend a lot that just cannot be understood without this experience. Every person can experience and 'live' every sentence in this mystical way. That is how to consider the position of this great teacher standing in the beginning of Christianity, and the new element was that hereby became public what before was mystery wisdom.

The lecture continues on the importance of devotion ...

1905-06-26

1906-02-12-GA097

*The disciple who wrote down the gospel of John first of all **described something he had himself experienced. Chapters 1 to 12 are experiences in the astral world, chapter 13 and those that follow experiences at the spirit world.** This is highly significant and characteristic of the whole of it. ..*

*.. This is a **meditative prayer from the beginning to 'and the darknesses did not comprehend it.'** When the soul gains living experience of what lies in those words, the powers arise that enable us to grasp the content of chapters 1 to 12.*

1906-02-13-GA097

1906-02-19-GA094

The formula [John] used for meditation stands at the beginning of his gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was a God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without

this Word was not anything made that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

*In these five sentences lie the eternal verities which loosed the spell in John's soul and brought forth the great visions. **This is the form of the meditation. Those for whom the John Gospel is written should not read it like any other book. The first five sentences must be taken as a formula of meditation.** Then one follows John on his way, and attempts to experience oneself what he experienced.*

This is the way to do it; so it is meant.

John says: Do what I have done. Let the great formula, "In the beginning was the Word" work in your souls and you will verify what is said in my first twelve chapters.

*This alone can really help towards understanding the John Gospel. **Thus is it intended and thus should it be used.***

I have often spoken of what the "Word" signifies. "In the beginning" is not a good translation. It should really read: Out of the primal forces emerged the Word. That is what it means: The Word came forth, came forth out of the primal forces. Thus "in the beginning" means: coming forth out of the primal forces.

1906-05-31-GA094

lecture: 'Occultism and the Gospel of St. John'

The role of Christianity in human history is unique. The coming of Christianity represents, in a sense, the central moment, the turning point between involution and evolution. That is why it radiates so brilliant a light — a light that is nowhere so pregnant with life as in the Gospel of St. John. Truth to tell it is only in this Gospel that the full power of the light is made manifest.

It cannot be said that modern theology has this conception of the Gospel. From the historical point of view it is considered inferior to the three synoptic Gospels, as being, in a sense, apocryphal. The very fact that its authorship is said by some to have taken place in the second century after Christ has made certain theologians of the school of Bible criticism regard it as a work of mystical poetry and Alexandrian philosophy.

Occultism has quite another conception of the Gospel of St. John.

During the Middle Ages a number of Brotherhoods saw in this Gospel the essential source of Christian truth. Such Brotherhoods were the Brothers of St. John, the Albigenses, the Catharists, the Templars and the Rosicrucians. All were engaged in practical occultism and looked to this Gospel as to their Bible. It may be said in a sense that the legend of the Grail, Parsifal and Lohengrin emanated from these Brotherhoods and that it was the popular expression of the secret doctrines.

*All the members of these different parent Orders were considered to possess the secret. They were the precursors of a Christianity which should spread over the world in later times. In the Gospel of St. John they found the secret, for its words contained eternal truth — truth applicable to all times. Such truth as this regenerates the souls of all who become aware of it in the depths of their being. **The Gospel was never regarded or read merely as a gem of literature. It was used as an instrument for developing the mystic life of the soul.***

1906-11-27-GA068A

1907-06-27-GA100

In 1907-06-27-GA100 (SWCC) , Rudolf Steiner gives a German version of the key first section.

The purest of Gospels is the Gospel of St. John: it is not only a poetical work, but a book of life, it needs to be experienced. ..

.. Among many books, the Gospel of St. John is the one which indicates the methods by which it is possible to fathom the depths of Christianity. Even when Christianity did not as yet exist in its present form, it was already taught in the Mystery-schools; for instance, in the school of Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of the Apostle Paul. ..

Those who immerse themselves into the first words of the Gospel of St. John from the standpoint of esotericism, experience that they become within them a quickening force. But the Gospel of St. John must be applied as it was originally intended to be applied; and we must have the **patience to take the first sentences of the Gospel of St. John again and again as a subject of meditation**, and to let them pass every morning before our soul. They will in that case have the power to draw out of our soul deeply hidden forces. But we must of course have a correct translation of these words expressed in German word-characters, they must more or less express what the original text contained. In a translation which is as faithful as possible, let me now show you that the real life of the spirit is indicated in the words of the Gospel of St. John.

the English translation below is of the German lecture text given by Steiner

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was a God. This was from the very beginning with God.

All things came into being through Him, and except through Him, was not anything made that was made.

In Him was the life, and the life became the light of men. And the light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not the Light, but a witness for the Light; for the true Light which lighteth every man had to come into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, but the world did not comprehend Him.

To each man He came, even to the I-men, but these individual men, these I-men, received Him not.

As many as received Him could manifest themselves through Him as children of God. Those who confided in His name are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have heard His teaching, the teaching of the only Son of the Father, filled with devotion and truth."

and follows and explanation of the stages of the Christian initiation

*I could now tell you many things of how you would have to immerse yourselves in each chapter of St. John's Gospel. Let me only give you one example — **how you would have to use the chapters from the thirteenth chapter onward**, if you were a true disciple of Christian Initiation. What I am telling you in words, has occurred in fact .. to render it more comprehensible, I will clothe it in the form of a dialogue, giving you an idea of what took place between teacher and pupil.*

1907-11-20-GA100

The Gospel of St. John is a book of life. No one who has merely enquired into it with his intellect has understood this book; he alone who has experienced it really knows it.

If a man meditates upon the first fourteen verses day after day for some time, he will discover the purpose of these words. They are really words which, when one meditates upon them, awaken in the human soul the capacity to see the various parts of the Gospel, such as the marriage at Cana in chapter two, the conversation with Nicodemus in chapter three, as one's own experiences in the great astral tableau. Through these exercises

clairvoyance develops in the human being and he can then experience for himself the truth of what is written in St. John's Gospel.

Hundreds have experienced this. *The writer of St. John's Gospel was a great Seer who was initiated by Christ Himself.*

1907-12-14-GA068A

on the gospel of John

1908-04-04-GA068A

on the gospel of John comments on its use as a meditation book

*The gospel of John is therefore not just a book as any other, **it is a book of initiation; a book that should be brought to live in one's soul.** It is in the first place a book of meditation, and each human soul who wants to be a pupil of Christ has to live oneself into what is described there and go through them himself.*

...

The gospel of John is the cornerstone of the teachings of Christianity.

1908-05-19-GA103

All that we have been trying to present in the language of Esoteric Christianity, deep mysteries of existence familiar to those who were "servants of the Logos in the earliest times," all this is presented unequivocally in sublime, clear-cut verses in the Gospel of St. John. One must, however, translate these first words in the right way, in conformity with their meaning. Properly translated, these words give the actual facts which have just been presented. Let us bring these facts again before our souls, in order that we may fully comprehend their value.

- *In the beginning was the Logos which was the archetype of the physical human body, the foundation of all things. All animals, plants and minerals appeared later, for the human creature alone was present upon Old Saturn. In the Old Sun stage, the animal kingdom was added, in the Old Moon stage, the plant kingdom and upon the Earth the mineral kingdom appeared.*
- *Upon Old Sun, the Logos became Life and upon the Moon, it became Light; then when the human creature became endowed with an ego, the Logos as Light confronted him. But he had to learn to know the nature of the Logos and learn in what form It eventually would make its appearance. First there was the Logos which became Life, then Light, and this Light lives in the astral body.*
- *Into the human inner being, into the darkness, into the ignorance, the Light shone. And the meaning of life upon Earth is this: that Man should overcome this darkness of the soul, in order that they may recognize the Light of the Logos.*

The first words of the Gospel of St. John are incisive, although, perhaps, very difficult to understand, as many may say.

But should the most profound mysteries of the world be expressed in trivial language? Is it not a strange point of view, a real insult to what is Holy when one says, for example, that in order to understand a watch one must penetrate deeply into the nature of the thing with the understanding, but for a comprehension of the Divine in the world, the simple, plain, naive human intelligence should suffice?

It is a very bad thing for present humanity that it has reached the point of saying, when reference is made to the profoundness of religious documents: why all these complicated explanations? It should all be plain and simple. However, only those who have the good intention and good will to plunge down into the great cosmic facts can penetrate into the deep meaning of such words as those at the very beginning of the most profound of the gospels, this Gospel of St. John, words that are in fact a paraphrase of Spiritual Science.

Let us now translate the introductory words of this Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was a God (or divine). This was in the beginning with God. Through the same all things were made and save through this Word, nothing was made.

In It was Life, and Life became the Light of men.

And the Light shone into the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not.

How the darkness, little by little, comes to an understanding of the Light is recounted later on in the Gospels.

1908-05-31-GA103

This is an important lecture also referenced on other topic pages, to be read in full as the below is just a short extract.

By continually meditating upon passages of the Gospel of St. John, the Christian pupil is actually in a condition to reach initiation without the three and a half day continued lethargic sleep. If each day he allows the first verses of the Gospel of St. John,

- *from "In the beginning was the Word"*
- *to the passage "full of devotion and truth,"*

*to work upon him, they become an exceedingly significant meditation. **They have this force within them, for this Gospel is not there simply to be read and understood in its entirety with the intellect, but it must be inwardly fully experienced and felt. It is a force which comes to the help of initiation and works for it.** Then will the "Washing of the*

*Feet," the "Scourging" and other inner processes **be experienced as astral visions**, wholly corresponding to the description in the Gospel itself, beginning with the 13th Chapter.*

The Rosicrucian initiation, although resting upon a Christian foundation works more with other symbolic ideas which produce katharsis, chiefly with imaginative pictures. That is another modification which had to be used, because mankind had progressed a step further in its evolution and the methods of initiation must conform to what has gradually been evolved.

1909-02-28-GA68A

is called 'the occult/esoteric meaning of the gospel of John'

The following verses are discussed: John

- 1,1 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God
- 6,48 – I am the bread of life
- 8,58 – Jesus said to them "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM"
- 10,30 – The Father and I are one.
- 14,10 – Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works
- 15,1 – I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower
- 15,5 – I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.

1909-07-01-GA112

1909-11-06-GA068A

is called 'the higher meaning of the gospel of John'

1910-01-15-GA117A

concludes with:

.. the Gospel of John has the power to convey the Christ Impulse. The more we read and contemplate the Gospel of John, the more we will be filled with the glowing spiritual fire that Christ Jesus talked about.

1921-09-29B-GA343

from the synopsis: A new understanding of the Bible: experiencing language and the start of St John's Gospel.

Now there is a question about new commentary regarding the Bible, in fact, how one can arrive at a new Bible text.

*You see, the thing is like this, one will first have to penetrate into an understanding of the Bible. Much needs to precede this. If you take everything which I have said about language, and then consider that the Bible text has originated out of quite another kind of experience of language than we have today, and also as it was experienced centuries before in Luther's time, you can hardly hope to somehow discover an understanding of the Bible through some small outer adjustment. To understand the Bible, a real penetration of Christianity is needed above all, and actually this can only emerge from a Bible text as something similar for us as the Gospels had once appeared for the first Christians. In the time of the first Christians one certainly had the feeling of sound and some of what can be experienced in the words in **the beginning of St John's Gospel** which was of course experienced quite differently in the first Christian centuries as one would be able to do today.*

***"In the primal beginnings was the Word"** — you see, today there doesn't seem to be much more than a sign in this line, I'd say. We come closer to an understanding when we substitute "Word," which is very obscure and abstract, with "Verb" and also really develop our sense of the verb as opposed to the noun. In the ancient beginnings it was a verb and not the noun. I would like to say something about this abstraction.*

*The verb is quite rightly related to time, to activity, and it is absurd to think of including a noun in the area which has been described as in "the primal beginning." It has sense to insert a verb, a word related to activity. What lies within the sentence regarding the primal origins is however not an activity brought about by human gestures or actions, because it is the activity which streams out of the verb, the active word. We are not transported back into the ancient mists of the nebular hypothesis by the Kant-Laplace theory, but **we will be led back to the sound and loud prehistoric power. This returning into a prehistoric power is something which was experienced powerfully in the first Christian centuries**, and it was also strongly felt that it deals with a verb, because it is an absurdity to say: In the prehistoric times there was a noun. We call it "Word" which can be any part of speech. Of course, it can't be so in the case of St John's Gospel.*

*In even further times in the past, things were even more different. They were so that for certain beings, for certain perceptions of beings one had the feeling that they should be treated with holy reserve, one couldn't just put them in your mouth and say them. For this reason, a different way had to be found regarding expression, and this detour I can express by saying something like the following. Think about a group of children living with their parents somewhere in an isolated house. Every couple of weeks the uncle comes, but the children don't say the uncle comes, but the "man" comes. They mean it is the uncle, but they generalise and say it is "the man." The father is not the "man"; they know him too well to call him "man." **In this way earlier religious use of language hid some things which they didn't want to express outwardly because one had the inner reaction of profanity, and so it was stated as a generalization, like also in the first line of St John's Gospel, "in the beginning was the Word."** However, one doesn't mean the word which actually stands there but one calls it something which has been picked out, a singular "Word." It was after all something extraordinary, this "Word." There are as many words as there are men, but children said, "the man," and so one didn't say what was meant in St John's Gospel, but instead one said, "the Word." The word in this case was Jahveh, so that St John's Gospel would say: "In the primal beginnings was Jahveh," so one doesn't say "God," but "the Word."*

*Such things must be acquired again by living within Christianity and what Christianity has derived from the ritual practice of the Old Testament. **There is no shortcut to understanding the Gospels; a lively participation in the ancient Christian times is necessary for Gospel understanding.** Basically, this is what has again become enlivened through anthroposophy, while such things have in fact only risen out of anthroposophic research.*

We then have the following:

In the primordial times was the word — in primordial time was Jahveh — and the word was with God — and Jahveh was with God.

In the third line: And Jahveh was one of the Elohim.

This is actually the origin, the start of the St John Gospel which refers to the multiplicity of the Elohim, and Jahveh as one of them — in fact there were seven — as lifted out of the row of the Elohim. Further to this lies the basis of the relationship between Christ and Jahveh.

Take sunlight — moonlight is the same, it is also sunlight but only reflected by the moon — it doesn't come from some ancient being, it is a reflection. In primordial Christianity an understanding existed for the Christ-word, where Christ refers to his own being by saying: "Before Abraham was, I am" and many others. There certainly was an understanding for the following: Just as the sunlight streams out of itself and the moon reflects it back, so the Christ-being who only appeared later, streamed out in the Jahveh being. We have a fulfilment in the Jahveh-being preceding the Christ-being in time.

Through this St John's Gospel becomes deepened through feeling from the first line to the line which says:

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

Even today we don't believe a childlike understanding suffices for the words of the Bible, when we research the Bible by translating it out of an ancient language until we penetrate what lies in the

words. Of course, one can say, only through long, very long spiritual scientific studies can one approach the Bible text. That finally, is also my conviction.

1921-10-03A-GA343

on John's Gospel between Gnosticism and Montanism; see [Gnosis and gnostic teachings#1921-10-03A-GA343](#)

Discussion

Words of practice

A lifelong practitioner of exercises writes (2020):

As regards the Gospel of John, I strongly recommend the following; meditate it one verse per day (Steiner's advice to a student). I did it myself and have done it 3 times now. Each time takes roughly one whole year - but by meditating each word and making it come alive in that way, you will find that it comes alive for you like watching a film, but even more livingly. I cannot recommend it strongly enough.

In GA267 p 205 gives Archive no 3223-3226 [the below is just an extract]

It is necessary to meditate every morning, throughout one year, in the following way:

- *1st month: complete immersion for half an hour in the words of the gospel of John 1:1 and 1:2*
- *...*
- *12th month: likewise, 1:14*

[this is complemented with additional meditations afterwards, in a similar fashion, on the first book of Moses (Genesis)]

The designated length of these and all the exercises should not be governed by the clock but by the feeling of time we acquire. The content of all biblical texts that belong to the above meditation must as far as possible be transformed into an image and conceived pictorially. For instance, in 1:1-2 of the Gospel of St. John, picture a mighty sphere within which all substance is in motion so that it forms itself in accordance with the wise meaning of the 'divine Word' resounding through it. My lectures contain the building blocks of esoteric Christian tradition, which can guide the soul in transforming biblical words into the right, authentic images. As far as possible, adhere to these foundations.

...

[continued]

Furthermore, GA267 gives, in section A-9 (p 189-201), additional 'exercises with meditations on the Gospel of St. John'

⋮

Read & Write



kennethmdouglass.com