

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

Buddha and Christ

The Sphere of the Bodhisattvas

GA 130



Christ and Buddha

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In this lecture I want to speak of certain facts which belong essentially to the ethical and moral domain and help us to understand the mission of Spiritual Science in our time.

We are all deeply convinced of the great truth of reincarnation, of repeated earthly lives, and we must realise that this repetition has its own good purpose in the Earth's evolution. To the question, 'Why do we reincarnate?' — occult research gives the answer that our experiences differ in each of the epochs during which we are reborn on the Earth. In incarnations immediately following the Atlantean catastrophe the experiences of the human soul were entirely different from those undergone in later pre-Christian epochs and in our own age.

I need only briefly mention that in the times directly after the Atlantean catastrophe, souls were endowed with a certain elementary clairvoyance in the bodies they then inhabited. This clairvoyance, once a natural faculty in man, was gradually lost, mainly as a result of the conditions prevailing during the Græco-Roman epoch of culture. Since then, man has developed in such a way that great progress has been achieved on the physical plane and during the course of the present post-Atlantean epoch clairvoyance will gradually be reacquired.

We are living in the fifth post-Atlantean epoch of culture, the ancient Indian being the first, the ancient Persian the second, the Babylonian-Chaldean the third, the Græco-Roman the fourth; the sixth and seventh epochs will follow our own. And then another great catastrophe will befall the Earth and humanity, as was the case at the end of the Atlantean epoch.

Occult research is able to indicate the characteristic trend of human evolution in each of these post-Atlantean epochs of civilisation — including the fifth, sixth and seventh. The essential characteristic of our present fifth epoch is the development of intellect, of reason. The main characteristic of the sixth epoch will be that very definite feelings regarding what is moral and what is immoral will arise in the souls of men. Delicate feelings of sympathy will be aroused by compassionate, kindly deeds and feelings of antipathy by malicious actions. Nobody living at the present time can have the faintest conception of the intensity of these feelings.

The sixth epoch will be followed by the seventh, when the moral life will be still further deepened. Whereas in the sixth epoch man will take pleasure in good and noble actions, in the seventh epoch the natural outcome of such pleasure will be a moral *impulse*, that is to say there will be a firm resolve to do what is moral. There is a great difference between taking pleasure in a moral action and the *doing* of it. We can therefore say: our own epoch is the epoch of intellectualism; the essential characteristic of the following epoch will be aesthetic pleasure in the good, aesthetic displeasure in the evil; and the seventh will be characterised by an active moral life.

At the present time only the seeds of what will become part of mankind in future epochs are contained in the human soul and it can be said that all these aptitudes or predispositions in man — intellectual aptitudes, predispositions leading to feelings of sympathy or antipathy aroused by certain actions, to moral impulses — all these are related to the higher worlds. Every moral action has a definite connection with the higher worlds. Our intellectual aptitudes have a super-sensible connection with the astral plane. Our sympathies and antipathies for the good or the evil are connected with the sphere of Lower Devachan; and the domain of moral impulses in the soul is connected with Higher Devachan. Hence we can also say: In our present age it is mainly the forces of the astral world that penetrate into and take effect in the human soul; in the sixth epoch it will be the forces of Lower Devachan that penetrate more deeply into the soul; and in the seventh, the forces of Higher Devachan will work with special strength into humanity.

From this it is understandable that in the preceding fourth post-Atlantean epoch (the Græco-Roman) it was the forces of the physical plane that exercised the strongest influence upon the soul of man. That is why Greek culture was able to produce such wonderful sculptures, in which the human form was given such magnificent expression on the physical plane. Conditions in that epoch were therefore especially suitable for men to experience the Christ on the physical plane in a physical body. In our own, fifth epoch which will last until the fourth millennium, souls will gradually become able, from the twentieth century onwards, to experience the Christ Being in an etheric form on the astral plane, just as in the fourth epoch Christ was visible on the physical plane in a physical form.

In order to understand the nature of development in the sixth epoch of culture, it is well to consider what will be the characteristic qualities of the soul in future incarnations. To-day, in our intellectual age, intellectuality and morality are practically separate spheres in the life of soul. It is quite possible nowadays for a man to be very clever and at the same time immoral, or vice versa — to be deeply moral and anything but clever.

In the fourth epoch the future juxtaposition of morality and intellectuality was prophetically foreseen by a certain people, namely the Hebrews. They endeavoured to bring about an artificial harmony between morality and intellectuality, whereas among the Greeks such harmony was more a natural matter of course. To-day we can learn from the Akashic Chronicle how the leaders of the ancient Hebrew people strove to establish this harmony between intellectuality and morality. They wore symbols, of which they had such profound understanding that if they concentrated their gaze upon them and made themselves receptive to their influences, a certain harmony could be established between what was good in a moral sense and what was wise. The priests of the ancient Hebrew people wore these symbols on their breastplate. The symbol for morality was called Urim, the symbol of wisdom, Thummim.

According to the footnote in the German text of this lecture, Urim = Glanz (Radiance or Lustre) and Thummim = Wahrheit (Truth). Most English books of reference give "lights" and "perfections" as the interpretations, while acknowledging uncertainty. The Septuagint translates them as "manifestation" and "truth". There is no unanimity as to whether the objects in question can be reliably identified, but the biblical references suggest that they were precious stones. Some scholars suppose that they were the twelve stones of the breastplate of the High Priest. What seems to be certain is that on these objects were engraved the names of the twelve tribes and that the High Priest used them as an oracle in order to ascertain the will of God. (See among other biblical references: Exodus 28, 9-30; Leviticus 8, 8.) Robertson Smith wrote in The Old Testament in the Jewish Church: "In ancient times the priestly oracle of Urim and Thummim was a sacred lot; for in I Sam. xiv:41 the true text, as we can still restore it from the LXX., makes Saul pray, If the iniquity be in me or Jonathan, give Urim; but if in Israel, give Thummim. This sacred lot was connected with the ephod, which in the time of the Judges was something very like an idol." See in the Moffatt translation of the Bible I Sam. xiv. 18-43.

— Note by D.S.O. and M.K.

If a Hebrew priest wanted to discover whether a certain action was both good and wise, he made himself receptive to the forces of Urim and Thummim; the result was that a certain harmony between morality and intellectuality was induced. Magical effects were produced by means of these symbols and a magical link established with the spiritual world.

Our task now is to achieve in future incarnations through inner development of the soul the effect that in earlier times was produced by means of these symbols.

Let us think once again of the phases of evolution through the fifth, sixth and seventh post-Atlantean culture-epochs in order to grasp how intellectuality, aestheticism and morality will come to expression in men's life of soul.

Whereas in the present fifth epoch, intellectuality can remain unimpaired even if no pleasure is taken in moral actions, in the sixth epoch, it will be quite different. In the sixth epoch, that is, from about the third millennium onwards, immorality will have a paralysing effect upon intellectuality. The mental powers of a man who is intellectual and at the same time immoral will definitely deteriorate and this condition will become more and more pronounced in the future evolution of humanity. A man who has no morals will therefore have no intellectual power for this will depend entirely upon moral actions; and in the seventh epoch, cleverness without morality will be non-existent.

At this point it will be well to consider the nature of moral forces in individual souls in their present incarnations. How is it that in our phase of evolution a human being can become immoral? It is because in his successive incarnations man has descended more and more deeply into the physical world and has therefore been impelled more and more strongly towards the world of the senses.

The more forcefully the impulses belonging to the descending phase of evolution work upon a soul, the more immoral it tends to become. This fact is confirmed by a very interesting finding of occult research. You know that when a man passes through the gate of death, he lays aside his physical and etheric bodies and for a short time has a retrospective view of his past life on earth. A kind of sleep then ensues and after a few months, or perhaps years, he awakens on the astral plane, in Kamaloka. Then follows the life in Kamaloka, when the earthly life is lived over again in backward order, three times as quickly.

At the beginning of life in Kamaloka a very significant experience comes to every individual. In the case of most Europeans or, speaking generally, of men belonging to modern civilisation, this experience takes the following form. — At the beginning of life in Kamaloka a spiritual Individuality shows us everything we have done out of selfish motives in the last life, shows us a kind of register of all our transgressions. The more concretely you picture this experience, the better. At the beginning of the Kamaloka period it is actually as though a figure were presenting us with the register of our physical life. The important fact — for which, naturally, there can be no further proof because it can be confirmed only by occult experience — is that the majority of men belonging to European civilisation recognise Moses in this figure. This fact has always been known to Rosicrucian research since the Middle Ages and in recent years it has been confirmed by very delicate investigations.

You can gather from this that at the beginning of his life in Kamaloka man feels a very great responsibility towards the pre-Christian powers for having allowed himself to be drawn downwards, and it is an actual fact in occult life that it is the Moses-Individuality who demands reckoning for the wrongs committed in our time.

The powers and forces which draw man upwards again to the spiritual world fall into two categories: those which draw him upwards on the path of Wisdom, and those which draw him upwards on the path of Morality. The forces to which intellectual progress is mainly due all proceed from the impulse given by a great Individuality of the fourth post-Atlantean epoch who is known to you all, namely Gautama Buddha. It is a remarkable discovery of spiritual investigation that the most penetrating, most significant, thoughts conceived in our present epoch have proceeded from Gautama Buddha. This is all the more remarkable inasmuch as until the days of Schopenhauer — therefore by no means long ago — the name of Gautama Buddha was almost unknown in the West. This is very understandable, for when Gautama Buddha was born as the son of King Suddhodana, he rose from the rank of Bodhisattva to that of Buddha, and to become a Buddha means that the Individuality concerned does not incarnate again on Earth in a body of flesh. The Bodhisattva-Individuality who became Buddha five or six centuries before the beginning of the Christian era has not since incarnated, nor can he incarnate, in a physical body. But instead he sends down his forces

from the higher worlds, from the super-sensible worlds, and inspires all bearers of culture who are not yet permeated by the Christ Impulse. Consciousness of this truth was demonstrated in a beautiful legend written down by John of Damascus in the eighth century and well known throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. It is the legend of Barlaam and Joshaphat, which relates how he who had become the successor of Buddha (Joshaphat is a phonetic variation of 'Bodhisattva') received teaching from Barlaam about the Christ Impulse. The legend, which was subsequently forgotten, tells us that the Bodhisattva who succeeded Gautama Buddha was instructed by Barlaam and his soul was fired by the Christian Impulse. This was the second impulse which, in addition to that of Buddha, continues to work in the evolution of humanity. It is the Christ Impulse and is connected with the future ascent of humanity to Morality. Although Buddha's teaching is in a particular sense moral *teaching*, the Christ Impulse is not teaching but actual *power* which works as such and to an increasing degree imbues mankind with moral strength. (I Corinthians IV, 20)

In the fourth post-Atlantean epoch the Christ Being who descended from cosmic heights had first to appear in a physical body. In our fifth epoch the intense consolidation of intellectual forces will make it possible for man to behold the Christ as an etheric Figure. This is even now beginning in our century. From the thirties to the forties of this century onwards, individuals will appear who have developed in a way that will enable them to see the etheric Form of Christ, as at the time of Jesus of Nazareth they saw the physical Christ. And during the next three thousand years the number of those able to behold the etheric Christ will steadily increase, until in about three thousand years, reckoning from the present time, there will be a sufficient number of human beings on the Earth who will need no gospels or other such records, because in their own life of soul they will have actual vision of the Christ.

We must therefore clearly understand that in the fourth post-Atlantean epoch men were only capable of beholding the physical Christ; He therefore came in a physical body. In our own epoch and on into the third millennium, they will gradually grow capable of beholding the etheric Christ. He will never come again in a physical body.

If we bear in mind the fact that when a man of the present age who unites himself more and more deeply with the Christ Impulse passes into Kamaloka and is called to account by a figure personifying a moral force — by Moses — we shall understand how a transformation of the Moses-figure can be brought about. For what does Moses show us when he confronts us with the register of our sins and transgressions? He shows us what stands on the debit side of our Karma. For a soul of our epoch it is of great significance that through the inspiration of Buddha the doctrine of Karma can be comprehended, but that the reality of the working of Karma after death is revealed to us by the Old Testament figure of Moses.

As the influences of the super-sensible Christ pervade the souls of men to an ever-increasing extent, the figure of Moses will be transformed after death into that of Christ Jesus. This means that our Karma is linked with Christ, that Christ unites with our Karma.

It is interesting to realise that in the teachings of Buddha, Karma is an abstract matter, having an impersonal character. In the future incarnations of men, as Christ comes into ever closer connection with Karma, it will acquire the quality of *being*, of potential life.

Our earlier stages of evolution, our lives in the past, may be related to the words: *Ex Deo nascimur*. If we direct our development in such a way that after death, instead of Moses we meet Christ with whom our Karma is then united, this is expressed in the Rosicrucian Christianity that has existed since the 13th century, by the words: *In Christo morimur*.

Just as Buddha-hood can be attained only on the physical plane, the qualification for meeting Christ in death can likewise be acquired by the human soul only on the physical plane. A Buddha is first a Bodhisattva, but he rises to the rank of Buddha during a physical incarnation and it is then no longer necessary for him to return to the Earth. Understanding of Christ in the sense just explained can be acquired only on the physical plane. Hence during the next three thousand years men will have to acquire in the physical world the power to behold the super-sensible Christ, and it is the mission of the Anthroposophical Movement to create, first of all, the conditions which make understanding of Christ possible on the physical plane, and then the power to behold Him.

In the age when Christ works in the world of men as the etheric Christ it matters not whether we are living in a physical body or between death and a new birth, if on the physical plane we have acquired the power to behold Him. Let us suppose, for example, that because of his earlier death a man had no opportunity of beholding Christ in his present etheric Form. Nevertheless, if during his life in the physical world such a man had acquired the necessary understanding, vision of the Christ would be possible for him between death and rebirth. A man who keeps aloof from spiritual life and acquires no understanding of Christ will remain without such knowledge until he can acquire it in his next incarnation.

What has just been said will indicate to you that as humanity lives on through the fifth, sixth and seventh epochs of civilisation the Christ Impulse will gain increasing power on the Earth. We have heard that in the sixth epoch, intellectuality will be impaired through immorality. The other aspect is that a man who has paralysed his intellectual faculty as a result of immorality must turn to Christ with all the greater strength in order that Christ may lead him to morality and imbue him with moral strength.

What I have told you has been investigated particularly closely by Rosicrucians since the 13th century but it is a truth that has at all times been known to many occultists.

If it were to be asserted that there could be a second appearance of Christ on Earth in a physical body, according to occultism that would be equivalent to stating that a balance works more efficiently if it is supported at two points instead of at one. In very truth the three years' duration of Christ's life on Earth in the body of Jesus of Nazareth constitutes the fulcrum of Earth evolution; and just as there can be only one point at which the beam of a balance is attached, so too there can be only one fulcrum of Earth evolution.

The *teaching* of moral development is not the same as the *impulse* for such development.

Before the Event of Golgotha the Bodhisattva who was the successor of Buddha was present on the Earth in order to prepare for that Event and give teaching to those around him. He incarnated in the personality of Jeshu ben Pandira [See *Jeshu ben Pandira*, two lectures given by Rudolf Steiner at Leipzig on November 4th and 5th, 1911, and references in his later cycle, *The Gospel of St. Matthew.*], one century before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus we must distinguish between the Jeshu ben Pandira-incarnation of the Bodhisattva who was the successor of Gautama Buddha, and the incarnation at the beginning of our era of Jesus of Nazareth who for three years of his life was permeated by the cosmic Being we call the Christ.

The Bodhisattva who incarnated in Jeshu ben Pandira and in other personalities too, returns again and again, until in about three thousand years from now, he will attain Buddha-hood and as Maitreya Buddha live through his final incarnation. The Christ-Individuality was on the Earth in the body of

Jesus of Nazareth for three years only and does not come again in a physical body; in the fifth post-Atlantean epoch He comes in an etheric body, in the sixth epoch in an astral body, and in the seventh in a mighty *Cosmic Ego* that is like a great Group-Soul of humanity.

When a human being dies, his physical, etheric and astral bodies fall away from him and his ego passes over to the next incarnation. It is exactly the same with the planet Earth. What is physical in our Earth falls away at the end of the Earth-period and human souls in their totality pass over into the Jupiter condition, the next planetary embodiment of the Earth. And just as in the case of an individual human being the ego is the centre of his further evolution, so for the whole of future humanity the Christ-Ego in the astral and etheric bodies of men goes on to ensoul the Jupiter-existence. We therefore see how starting from a physical man -on Earth the Christ gradually evolves as Etheric Christ, as Astral Christ, as Ego-Christ, in order, as Ego-Christ, to be the Spirit of the Earth who then rises to even higher stages together with all mankind.

What are we doing when we teach Spiritual Science to-day? We are teaching what Oriental wisdom so clearly proclaimed when the Bodhisattva who was then the son of King Suddhodana, attained Buddha-hood. In those Oriental teachings was expressed the realisation that it was the task of the next Bodhisattva — who would eventually become a Buddha — to spread over the Earth the knowledge that would reveal Christ to men in the true light. Thus the Bodhisattva who incarnated in Jeshu ben Pandira and again and again in others, became the great Teacher of the Christ Impulse. This is indicated very clearly in the legend of Barlaam and Joshaphat, which tells how Joshaphat (i.e. the Bodhisattva) is instructed by Barlaam, the Christian teacher. The Oriental occult teachings call this Bodhisattva the 'Bringer of the Good' — Maitreya Buddha. And we know from occult investigations that in this Maitreya Buddha the power of the Word will be present in a degree of which men of the present time can as yet have no conception. It is possible to-day through higher clairvoyant perception of the process of world-evolution to discover how the, Maitreya Buddha will teach after three thousand years have passed. Much of his teaching can also be expressed in symbolic forms. But to-day — because mankind is insufficiently mature — it is not yet possible to utter words such as those that will come from the lips of the Maitreya Buddha.

In the Eightfold Path, Gautama Buddha gave the great intellectual teachings of right speech, right thinking, right action, and so on. The words uttered by the Maitreya Buddha will contain a magic power that will become *moral impulses* in the men who hear them. And if there should be a gospel telling of the Maitreya Buddha, the writer of it would have to use words differing from those used of Christ in the Gospel of St. John: "And the Word was made *Flesh*." The evangelist of the Maitreya Buddha would have to testify: "And the Flesh was made *Word*."

The utterances of the Maitreya Buddha will be permeated in a miraculous way with the power of Christ. Occult investigations show us to-day that in a certain respect even the external life of the Maitreya Buddha will be patterned on the life of Christ. In ancient times, when a great Individuality appeared and was to become a Teacher of humanity, signs indicating this showed themselves in the early youth of the child in question, in special talents and qualities of soul. There is however a different kind of development in the course of which a complete change in the personality becomes apparent at a certain point in his life. What happens is that when this human being has reached a certain age, his ego is taken out of his bodily sheaths and a different ego passes into his body. The greatest example of this is Christ Jesus Himself, of whom in his thirtieth year the Christ-Individuality had taken possession. All the incarnations of the Bodhisattva who will become the Maitreya Buddha have shown that in this sense his life will resemble that of Christ.

In none of the incarnations of the Bodhisattva is it known, either in his childhood or youth, that he will become a Bodhisattva. Whenever the Bodhisattva becomes Buddha there is evidence that at the age of 30 or 31, another individuality takes possession of his body. The Bodhisattva will never reveal himself as such in his early youth, but in his thirtieth or thirty-first year he will manifest quite different qualities, because another Being takes possession of his body. Individualities who will take possession of the personality of some human being in this way and will not incarnate as children, are, for example, individualities such as Moses, Abraham, Ezekiel.

So too is it in our present century in the case of the Bodhisattva who later on, in three thousand years time, will become the Maitreya Buddha. It would be so much occult dilettantism to assert that this Being would be recognisable in his early years as the Bodhisattva. It is between his thirtieth and thirty-first years that he first reveals Himself through his own power, without having to be proclaimed by others. He will convince the world through his own power and it would be well to realise that if the Bodhisattva were alleged in some quarters to be revealing himself in a human being under the age of thirty, that very fact would be evidence of the fallacy of such a statement. Claims of the kind have frequently been made. For example, in the 17th century a certain individual proclaimed himself to be an incarnation of the Messiah, of Christ. His name was Sabbati Zewi and hosts of people from all over Europe, from Spain, Italy and France, made pilgrimages to him in Smyrna.

It is certainly true that in our time there is a rooted disinclination to recognise genius in human beings. But on the other hand, mental laziness is very prevalent, with the result that people are only too ready to acknowledge some individual as a great soul, merely on authority. It is important to-day for Anthroposophy to be presented in such a way as to be based to the smallest possible extent on belief in authority.

Much that I have said today can be substantiated only by means of occult investigation. Yet I beg you not to give credence to these things because I say them, but to test them by everything known to you from history — above all by what you can learn from your own experience — and I am absolutely certain that the more closely you examine them, the more confirmation you will find. In this age of intellectualism, I do not appeal to your belief in authority but to your capacity for intelligent examination. The Bodhisattva of the 20th century will not rely upon any herald to announce him as the Maitreya Buddha, but upon the power of his own words; he will stand on his own feet in the world.

What has been said in this lecture may perhaps be summed up as follows. —

In our period of evolution, two streams of spiritual life are at work; one of them is the stream of Wisdom, or the Buddha-stream, containing the most sublime teaching of wisdom, goodness of heart and peace on Earth. To enable this teaching of Buddha to permeate the hearts of all men, the Christ Impulse is indispensable. The second stream is the Christ-stream itself which will lead humanity from intellectuality, by way of aesthetic feeling and insight, to morality. And the greatest Teacher of the Christ Impulse will in all ages be the successor of that Bodhisattva who incarnates again and again and who, in three thousand years from now, will become the Maitreya Buddha. For the statement contained in Oriental chronicles is true: that exactly five thousand years after Gautama Buddha attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the Maitreya Buddha will incarnate on Earth for the last time.

The succession of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas has no relation as such to the cosmic Being we call Christ; it was a Bodhisattva — not the Christ — who incarnated in the body of Jeshu ben Pandira. Christ incarnated in a physical body once, and once only, for a period of three years. The Bodhisattva appears in every century until his existence as Maitreya Buddha.

The mission of Anthroposophy to-day is to be a synthesis of religions. We can conceive of one form of religion being comprised in Buddhism, another form in Christianity, and as evolution proceeds the more closely do the different religions unite — in the way that Buddha and Christ themselves are united in our hearts.

This vista of the spiritual development of humanity brings home to us the necessity of the impulse of Anthroposophy as a preparation for understanding the progress of culture and happenings in the great process of evolution itself.

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