

Introduction to *Turning Points in Spiritual History* GA 60

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In the year 1902, Rudolf Steiner definitely resolved to become the Herald of Spiritual Science, and to proclaim its message to a materialistic world; by so doing he laid himself open to its scorn, ridicule, and enmity. The most gifted and talented man of his time; one who shunned every mark of approbation and willingly renounced every claim to the highest worldly honours, which honours were within his easy reach. This he did, in order that he might devote himself to the consummation of a momentous forward movement, destined to lead mankind to a reasoned and proper conception of spiritual verity. Thus might the impulse given to thought and will, enable humanity to span that dread abyss in which, even yet, Nietzsche (the great apostle of consistent materialistic philosophy) must sink, and with him a countless number of his lesser followers, who can find no way whereby they may save themselves from spiritual dissolution.

To such as these, Rudolf Steiner became at once the saviour and the helper; it was for them and for mankind that he decided upon this altruistic deed, which in itself implied a bold courageous upward sweep in the path of human progress.

This wholly unselfish action, however, called for determination, inflexibility of will, and a moderate and rational apprehension of spiritual reality, permeated throughout with a profound sense of its fundamental substantiality. But here was no worn-out intellectual faculty, no ecstasy, no mystic intoxication with Eastern tinge — austere, resolute and calm, he went his way, ever imparting spiritual enlightenment.

Rudolf Steiner made no concessions when offering spiritual blessings; but on the other hand he never wearied of expounding once again from the beginning, in each city where he lectured, those basic principles upon which he built a solid mental structure, to conform with the demands and claims arising from modern intellectual power and discernment. While insisting upon due and proper consideration, he freely acknowledged the right to challenge and to question. He praised the achievements of Natural Science, and recommended the employment of its methods in the Science of the Spirit. He cursed the ignoramus and the extreme Kantian line of thought, and refused to accede to limits of knowledge already prescribed and confined.

No wonder that the hatred of the spiritual despots of our time, tyrants in many and varied ways, was piled mountain-high — for everywhere he brought that new animating, revivifying life, which would yet become all-potent in the future. He that would bring this life to humanity, must himself endure martyrdom, and stand as if held fast between envy, ill-will, and abuse, on the one hand — and insuperable inertia, or fool-hardy levity, and immaturity on the other. In truth, — a daily torment this bearing up against the ever-breaking waves of an hostile, or an aid-imploring clinging humanity, always in renewed and never ceasing exhausting activity. He who takes that step which anticipates future progress in evolution must bring upon himself such martyrdom; but the power, of love helps enormously in carrying the burden, while the capacity for endurance increases with the measure of the overflowing fullness of work accomplished.

Berlin was the first radiating point from which centre the lecture activities of Rudolf Steiner were spread outwards. The discourses were to serve in opening up a way toward the understanding of all that he purposed to present to the world, under the title of Spiritual Science. That which he gave in less detailed and isolated lectures in other towns in Germany, could be dealt with here in the form of a compact course, having the character of a systematic introduction to Spiritual Science; it was also planned that part of these lectures should periodically recur, even though the public could not be counted upon to respond in large numbers.

I will now give a summary of these discourses which were held at the 'Architektenhaus' (Hall of Architecture) in Berlin; as they are of historical interest. We commenced in a small hall, shortly however to pass on to one of intermediate size, and from there to one still larger. During the last year of the War, the Architektenhaus was commandeered by the War Department, and then the lectures had to be held, partly in the 'Scharwenka-Saal', and partly in the 'Oberlicht-Saal' of the 'Philharmonie' (Philharmonic Hall). When we at last came to the large hall of this latter building, the 'Köthener-Strasse' (Koethener Street) had to be closed to wheeled traffic, because of the enormous concourse of people. Here we found the opposing factions so well organized, that it seemed as if preparations might be afoot, with the object of bringing Rudolf Steiner's public lecture activities to a premature and violent conclusion.¹

From the very beginning Rudolf Steiner had chosen the word 'Anthroposophy', to designate the matter and the theme which was his to impress upon the world; in public, however, he generally used the more simple term, Spiritual Science. After he had decided to give way, under the pressure of Theosophical Circles, and to undertake the leadership of the German Theosophical Society, he did all that lay within his power to win back for the name of Theosophy, that esteem and respect of which it was in danger of being deprived, owing to the want of maturity of that body; and his endeavours in this direction were clearly marked. It is a fact, that the burden thrust upon him due to the misuse of this name, was increased by the

regrettable attitude, and the alienation of certain people; albeit these acts were condemned by many friends. Rudolf Steiner shouldered every burden which fate laid upon him, when by so doing he could serve the spirit; he regarded only the task, and the love to labour, and took no heed of the cold indifference of humanity.

As far back as the year 1900 he drew the attention of various literary societies in Berlin to his efforts in furthering the cause of spiritual revival; this he did, in the beginning, through lectures upon Goethe's fairy-tale of *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. From October, 1901, to March, 1902, he spoke concerning *German Spiritual Life in the Nineteenth Century*. The impulse to thought thus created was continued by means of a series of lectures during 1902 to 1903 entitled *Zarathustra to Nietzsche*, treating of the evolution of man's spiritual life from the oldest times to the present day. It was Zarathustra who gave the initial impulse to that current of thought which urged humanity to call upon the active power of the spirit, that through its aid it might strive to overcome all that is material, and thus cause the physical element to become subservient to its needs.

Rudolf Steiner drew attention to the task allotted to German patriotism in the totality of human spiritual evolution, as the bearer and upholder of the 'Principle of True Self' (Ich-Prinzips), so deeply merged in all that is of the spirit. He stated that the true 'Ich', the Ego (endowed with the soul's achievements) must be made both the receptacle and the radiating point of the divine essence. He pointed to the hidden choked up stream of German spiritual life, which although predisposed within itself, was thrust aside by a materialistic culture, and the new imperial idea of Might and Power. He recalled with sorrow and anxiety those words of Nietzsche's — 'Extirpation of the Spirit from Germany, in favour of the Empire', and declared that what Germany awaits, and what it would so gladly welcome, is the beneficence and the blessings of the Spirit. Already at that time Rudolf Steiner spoke quite unequivocally regarding the necessity of clearly differentiating between the Western and the Eastern spiritual paths. Humanity owes, indeed, a great and inestimable debt of gratitude to the Orient, for the gift of that wondrous knowledge which has come to it from the East.

The Mystery of Golgotha forms a 'Turning-Point'. Mankind with its eyes upon modernity can never hark back to those conditions which were there before that decisive juncture, that divine source of knowledge and of upward progress; the world must learn to understand the need for the transient darkness and the gloom.

It is during that period when, by slow degrees, the personality is striving to cast aside its earthly factors and to detach them from all that is real and of the spirit, that it must learn to know itself, must grasp its essence; it dare not become obdurate, and thus descend to dust and annihilation. The very act of forcing a way through the material quality brings about the moment when it shall realize it is once more upon the further shore. Hence, the personality which has indeed made ready

to pass through death's portal and onward to resurrection, finds, at last, that it is again in the true Ego, the veritable 'I' — a spiritually conscious and individualized member of the cosmos — a part of the whole, and yet 'I'. Once freed from all earthly nature, the material element falls away, even as an amputated limb from the human organism. When truly at one with the great cosmos it expands beyond all previous limitations, outward into the realms of the spirit. It was in order that such things might come to pass — yes — that man's freedom and self-determination could be won by effort and by travail, that the Mystery of Golgotha — God's own sacrifice — was needful and must be consummated.

No power on earth can ignore this fact nor stem the tide of evolution. Happenings which appear at first sight to be hindrances and restraints, do but serve to aide us in our onward progress. The power to differentiate between good and evil is the first step toward man's freedom; the narrow confines imposed upon him by materialism have placed him in the position of being unable to grasp the meaning of this earthly life, and to realize his true personality; but now he must rise above his limited conceptions and the achievement lies in the province of his conscious will. The Deity has, as it were, relinquished the guidance, and the control. Man must decide whether the Divine Will shall quicken within him or whether he shall give himself over to disavowal and negation. Here, then, humanity comes upon a new 'Turning-Point', and its present task is to make ready, so that it may be met with open eyes, and not blindly and in ignorance. Such was the work to which Rudolf Steiner found himself committed.

In the Anglo-Indian theosophical movement there was a certain risk attached to the revival of the Yoga-Exercises by the uninitiated, for these were suited to another period, and a differently constituted human organism. Again, in reviving the mysticism of the Middle Ages lay a danger that there might be a turning away from true life, and an increased egotism in a soul which had yielded itself to selfishness. Both these currents of thought failed to take into consideration the requirements of the times and the laws of evolution. The future and the salvation of humanity lies in the understanding of the real significance of the Mystery of Golgotha, and in extending and strengthening the power of human consciousness in order that it shall advance beyond the narrow limits of man's present intellectual powers, and not in its repression and constraint. Those who opened their hearts to words such as these, were certainly not to be found among the celebrities of science; they were modest, unassuming people, knowing of no course which they might follow that was suited to the times, and who, therefore, gave themselves over to the study of Oriental Wisdom, in that form in which it was presented by the Theosophical Society. These people approached Rudolf Steiner with a request that he should become the teacher and leader of their association; but he definitely declined to consider their appeal. Never, so he said, would he do otherwise than point out the difference between the two paths, and advocate the necessity for the development of Western methods, suitable to modern requirements. No longer can there be a

mere reaching back, in order to obtain primeval wisdom; forward progress must be made with true regard to all that has been acquired since those ancient times, through intellectual achievement, and must in future follow that path marked by history, wherein the essentials of development in the unfolding of the human spirit are clearly indicated.

Although the wisdom of the East deserves our warmest feelings of admiration and wonder, nevertheless, the fundamental principle underlying its historical onward progress does not appear as a vital factor; this element must now be introduced by the West, to which task it should regard itself as directly committed. The Mystery of Golgotha is the central point, that mystery which is neither recognized nor understood by the Orientals nor by the New-Theosophists. As far back as the Autumn of 1900, I have heard such words from the lips of Rudolf Steiner, when harassed by the importunity of ardent followers of the Theosophical school of thought. Those who listened with understanding, fully realized that here, indeed, was an inflexible will, and the expression of an urgent historical need. One could not help but wonder that people really existed, who would attempt adverse argument and persuasion. It was, however, on account of this attitude that Rudolf Steiner gave a course of interesting lectures on *Mysticism at the Beginning of Modern Spiritual Life*, which were followed, in the Autumn of 1901, by others entitled *Christianity as a Mystical Fact*.

Soon after the commencement of these discourses, I had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the most distinguished among the Theosophical Leaders. I had joined the Theosophical Society and was requested to undertake some special work at Bologna, the representative of the Anglo-Indian movement having founded a branch in Italy. In the spring of 1902, during a period of three weeks, I translated from English into Italian the lectures of the Indian Theosophist, Jinarajadasa, who has since been nominated as the future President of the Theosophical Society. While thus engaged, I frequently found it difficult to write and to voice the ideas which I had to express, concepts that were oft-times entirely at variance with my own inner reasoned feelings. I stood aghast before the sentences, so material was their essence and their spirit. At such times, my thoughts would hark back to the words of Rudolf Steiner, regarding the vital difference between Western and Eastern mysticism; but I knew that the truth and the solution lay in the Christ-Mystery, of which he had both inner knowledge and understanding. Veritable primeval wisdom contains the heart and principle; while in the ever onward progress of man's evolution are found the metamorphoses — death and resurrection — where, then, is the point of juncture? — IN THE CROSS — and it is Rudolf Steiner who reveals its secret.

About this time a memorable incident occurred, namely, the German Theosophists invited me to go to Berlin, in order to take over the work of their retiring representative. After some hesitation I decided to accede to their request. Shortly

after this event came the joyful news that Rudolf Steiner had yielded to the pressure of the Theosophists, and had accepted the directorate of a new section which was about to be formed; this he had done, however, under the specific condition that he should introduce into the movement that current of thought which he himself advocated. There was indeed universal rejoicing; and the General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in England — a good German scholar — who highly esteemed Steiner's two works — *Mysticism at the Beginning of Modern Spiritual Life* and *Christianity as a Mystical Fact* — expressed himself as completely in accord with the new programme. This illustrious scholar, Dr. Bertram Keightley, who is Professor at the University of Lucknow, has since that time, become a member of the Anthroposophical Society.

Thus it was that the work began, envired by the activities of the Theosophical Society and undertaken with the greatest loyalty in respect to that body. The subject matter of the public lectures delivered at the Architektenhaus in Berlin in 1903 was as follows:

1903,	19 March.		Theosophy, and the onward progress of Religion. (The Tower of Babel.)
	26	"	The Cardinal Teachings of Theosophy. (Reincarnation and Karma.)
	2	April.	Theosophy, and the Modern Scientific Spirit.

In the spring of 1904, also in the Architektenhaus, Rudolf Steiner spoke concerning certain subjects which contained within them the germ of his later pioneer work in social and pedagogical spheres; these were included under the title, *Psychic Teachings in Theosophy*, as follows:

1904,	16 March.	I.	Body and Soul. How can we study the life of the Soul? Religion, Science, and the Soul Question.
	23	"	II. The Soul and Human Destiny. What are Desire and Suffering? What is Destiny? Has man earned his fate? Optimism and Pessimism. Genius and Insanity.
	30	"	III. Soul and Spirit. Immortality. Hypnotism and Clairvoyance. Spiritual Healing. Education in the light of Spiritual Cosmic Conception.

Another series of lectures took place in Vereins Haus, at 118 William Street (Wilhelmstrasse), Berlin; in these discourses Rudolf Steiner endeavoured to throw light upon that border-land existing between the perceptual and superperceptual worlds; a subject which has claimed the attention of science and in which lie concealed so many dangers for the uninitiated. The dates and titles of these discourses are given below:

7 March.	Theosophy and Somnambulism.
11 April.	The History of Spiritualism.
9 May.	The History of Hypnotism and Somnambulism.

Regarding the above, I find among my notes the following entry: 'The two latter themes were subsequently used as subject matter for lectures which were held in the "Architektenhaus" from April onwards, every second Monday in the month; a further series which took place in the same building during the autumn of 1904, were especially directed towards the development and extension of the scientific rudiments of Theosophy.' The subjects were:

1904,	29 Sept.	What does man find in Theosophy to-day?
	6 Oct.	Is Theosophy Unscientific?
	13 "	The Elements of Theosophy I.
	20 "	The Elements of Theosophy II.
	3 Nov.	Theosophy and Tolstoi.
	10 "	The Elements of Theosophy III.
	17 "	The Elements of Theosophy IV.
	1 Dec.	Theosophy and Nietzsche.
	3. "	Is Theosophy Buddhist Propaganda?
	15. "	The Elements of Theosophy V.

In the spring of 1905 Rudolf Steiner set forth and expounded his views before various Faculties; his introductory lecture held on 4th May, was on *Schiller and the Present*; those which followed were:

1905,	11 May.	The Theological Faculty and Theosophy.
	18 "	The Juristic Faculty and Theosophy.
	25 "	The Medical Faculty and Theosophy.
	8 June.	The Philosophical Faculty and Theosophy.

A series of lectures which were started in October, 1905, commenced with '*Haeckel, "The Riddle of the Universe" and Theosophy*'. It was indeed essential that Rudolf Steiner should take Haeckel as the starting-point for these discourses, because he was of opinion that in virtue of the outstanding nature of his achievements in the sphere of natural science, Haeckel was worthy and entitled to become a decisive spiritual power in our present philosophical outlook, [would he but apprehend and acknowledge the divine spirit latent within his works — and at this point lay the parting of their ways (Ed.)]. On the other hand, Steiner repudiated entirely the claims made by the courageous and ingenious Haeckel, who was already venturing to encroach and become active in the domains of Philosophy, and the formation of world opinion. Here must the bolt be shot and the mischief averted. This Rudolf Steiner did with the greatest energy and consistency, but it did not prevent him from expressing himself in words conveying the warmest appreciation whenever he could perceive the positive element in Haeckel's works.

Never have I found this side of Rudolf Steiner's nature rightly understood; people always seemed wilfully to regard it as inconsistent that the same man should at one time praise, and at another find fault; but this he did with whole-hearted enthusiasm on the one hand, or with merciless severity and logic on the other, the while, however, he never allowed his personal feelings to influence either his praise or his censure. He rose above all such bias, and was ever delighted to observe productive and creative capacity in others. He enraptured those who heard him when he expressed his approval through the warmth of his approbation; but, when he made reference to that which was harmful and pernicious, he evoked surprise by the unexpected keenness and rigour of his demonstrations and reasoning. He ever maintained the greatest affection for Ernest Haeckel, and it was a delightful experience to be present when these two met — the youthful freshness of Haeckel, his elasticity of tread — the waving of the broad-brimmed, wide-awake hat — his beaming childlike blue eyes — all in one who judged by years, should have been already numbered with the aged. Haeckel was no mere philosopher, but a man of deeds with a penetrating flashing glance as of one profoundly observant. He was

ever moved by an impetuous warmheartedness, his true being filled with loving patience and tolerance; he was a factor in the world's history, and his influence will continue to be felt in days yet to come.

Notes for this page:

1. This is no exaggeration, for about this time, and at Munich, an attempt was actually made upon his life by the Communist Party. [Ed.]

Source: <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA060/English/GC1987/index.html>



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