

# The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric & the Re-emergence of Human Awareness of the Etheric World

*Lecture given March 26, 2010, at the Austin Reappearance Conference by Stephen E. Usher, Ph.D.*

## Introduction

We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Rudolf Steiner's announcement of Christ's imminent Second Coming or Reappearance in the etheric world. The first time Rudolf Steiner made this announcement was on January 12, 1910 in Stockholm, Sweden during a lecture cycle on the John Gospel. Unfortunately no transcript of that lecture exists, though there is a one-page note about the announcement in Marie Steiner's handwriting.

His next lecture on the Reappearance took place January 25, 1910 in Karlsruhe, Germany and a transcript of that lecture exists, which was published under the title "The Event of the Appearance of Christ in the Etheric World." From Karlsruhe he continued to other German and Italian cities, lecturing on the theme until May of 1910. In all, he delivered 17 lectures in 13 cities during this period. He returned to the theme on many occasions during the rest of his life;

and a number of the important lectures have been published under the English title *The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*.<sup>1</sup>

In August of 1910 the first performance of Steiner's first Mystery Drama was produced in Munich. The drama includes the proclamation of the Reappearance by the seeress, Theodora.<sup>2</sup>

## Steiner's Announcement In a Nut Shell

What exactly did Rudolf Steiner announce in 1910? He stated that commencing in the 1930's, human beings—ordinary human beings who had not undergone an esoteric training—would start to have delicate experiences of the etheric world. He pointed to these experiences:

A person might have a vision and discover that what he saw would come true in a few days; in other words, a pre-vision of events to come.

A person about to enact a deed might have a vision of the karmic consequences that would flow from the deed; thus a kind of second chance would be offered to those about to do something with undesirable karmic consequences. Additionally, a person might have a vision of the karmic consequences of a deed just enacted.

A person might see a very delicate etheric aura around other people, animals, or plants.

And, finally, a person might experience the Christ in the form of an etheric angel, an angel who in the moment of the experience would appear to be a physical human being.

A person having the experience of the Etheric Christ would be in difficulties of some kind. He might be very depressed and not know how to manage. Suddenly, a person will be beside him and speak a few words. These will have the effect of completely changing his perspective. His soul disposition will lift and he will see how to go forward with life. Then the stranger will disappear and the person will realize that this could not have been an ordinary human being. In a lecture of 1911 titled "The Etherization of the Blood"<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Steiner described this experience in these words:

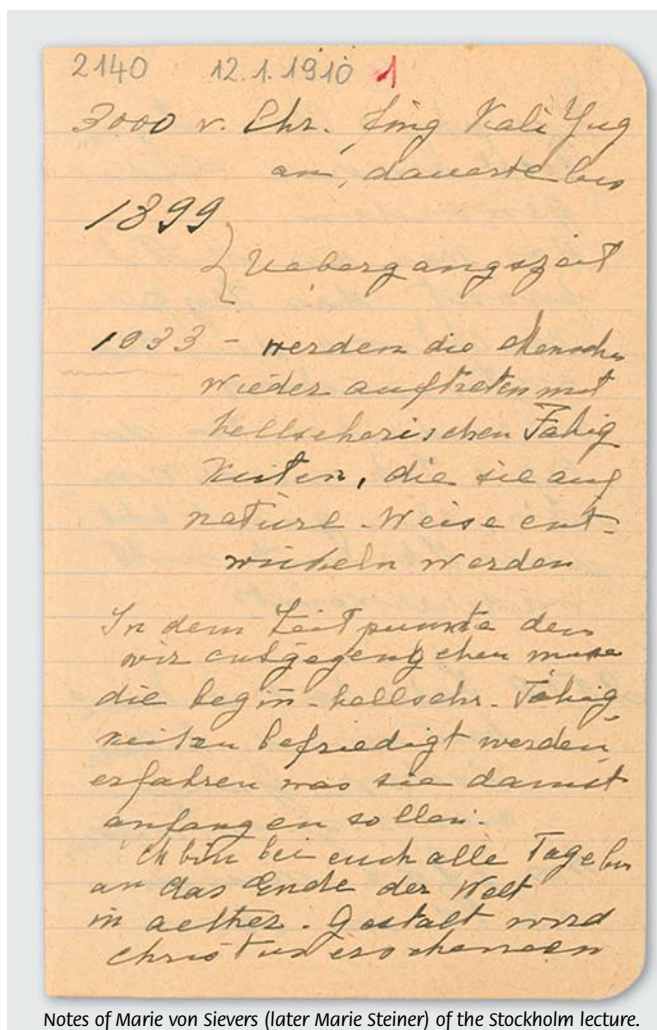
"[H]e may become aware that suddenly someone has come near to help him, to make him alert to this or that. The truth is that Christ has come to him, although he believes that what he

sees is a physical man. He will come to realize, however, that this is a supersensible being, because it immediately vanishes. Many a human being will have this experience when sitting silently in his room, heavy-hearted and oppressed, not knowing which way to turn. The door will open, and the etheric Christ will appear and speak words of consolation to him. The Christ will become a living comforter to men. However strange it may as yet seem, it is true nevertheless that many a time when people, even in considerable numbers, are sitting together not knowing what to do and waiting, they will see the etheric Christ. He Himself will be there, will confer with them, will cast His word into such gatherings."

Rudolf Steiner explained that the Etheric Christ has the only etheric body that can appear as a physical body. Moreover, He can appear simultaneously to 10, 100, 1000 people all around the globe. "[Christ has] the only etheric body able to work in the physical world as a human physical body works. It will differ from a physical

body in this respect only, that it can be in two, three, even a hundred, a thousand places at the same time."<sup>4</sup>

In the 1910 lectures Rudolf Steiner stated that the Reappearance would start during the years from 1930 to 1940 and that



Notes of Marie von Sievers (later Marie Steiner) of the Stockholm lecture.

it would be particularly notable in the years 1933, 1935, and 1937. From a small number of occurrences in the beginning, the experience would come to ever more people over the course of the next 2500 to 3000 years.

It is important to note that Christ came only once in a physical body and will never again appear in that form.

## The Evidence 100 Years After Steiner's Announcement

As 100 years have passed since Steiner's pronouncement, we may well ask if there is evidence that people have encountered the Etheric Christ in the manner predicted. As a matter of fact there are numerous accounts. When I have lectured about the Reappearance over the last few years, it is not uncommon for a member of the audience to tell of an experience of the Etheric Christ, either his own or that of some acquaintance. During the late 1970s two Swedish Researchers posted ads in newspapers, asking for people who had experienced the Christ, to write the experience down and send it to them. They published their findings, which unfortunately have never been translated into English.<sup>5</sup>

A caveat in interpreting peoples' accounts is in order. Some people tell, for example, how they met Christ in a dream or perhaps in a daytime vision. Such accounts are not consistent with Steiner's prediction for he says, specifically, that in the moment of an awake encounter, the person will believe he is meeting a physical human being. But then, by the way the being departs, he realizes it could not have been an ordinary physical person.

One of the most remarkable accounts I have come across<sup>6</sup> is from a Danish author, Hans Heltoft, who wrote about his experiences in a Gestapo prison during the 2nd World War in the Copenhagen newspaper *Morgenbladet*.

"In a musty cellar are five hundred prisoners of all nationalities busy plaiting mats. An overseer came in and for some groundless reason cudgelled a Russian to death and went on beating the lifeless bloody heap. Every blow was felt on our own bodies by we prisoners ... 'It is enough', cried a Polish prisoner, beside himself. 'It is enough', we all repeated in a hollow voice. ...' In that same moment Jesus entered the cellar. I do not belong to the church and have never seen Jesus before. And still I knew him and noticed also that the others recognized Him... His whole impression simply went beyond our usual world of understanding. The one thing that is clear to me today, is that this Jesus was something that I cannot describe and yet at the same time was an ordinary man. And, in spite of standing outside the church, I must say: 'It was the very greatest thing that we had experienced and indeed could experience.' And now the following happened simultaneously with the entrance of Jesus: The musty cellar-space was quite transformed...above the cellar there settled a color with shades of bright red and blue which spread out to a sphere which gave one the feeling of peace...the space to the ceiling seemed to me to be so large that a complete barn could have been built inside...Jesus did not look at us...he gazed only at the battered man at his feet. His countenance rayed out a love that cannot be expressed in words...He bent over the Russian and gently kissed his bleeding, swollen cheeks. The man that we held for dead opened one eye; the other was stuck together with blood. When he saw Jesus his maltreated countenance lit up in childish joy. With a

great effort he stretched out one hand towards Jesus, who took it in both his hands while he bent forward a little. It was so indescribably beautiful that we others stood there involuntarily with a quiet smile—the warden too. The Russian collapsed and the unspeakably beautiful expression over the whole abused figure vanished. Jesus softly laid the hand of the Russian back again on the body and went out of the cellar. Forthwith everything was as before."

## A Refresher On Steiner's Spiritual Scientific Investigation of the Mystery of Golgotha

This refresher must be brief and incomplete.<sup>7</sup> Probably the most important point to understand is what actually occurred at the Baptism. Just prior to the Baptism the Ego of the great initiate, who had lived as Jesus of Nazareth and who had perfected the body as a vessel, left the body of Jesus. This happened during a conversation with his mother during which his ego left on the stream of his breath. The initiate's last deed was to give the body—consisting of physical body, etheric body and astral body—an impulse to walk to the river Jordan where John was baptizing. When John baptized Jesus there resounded from the heavens these words: "This is my beloved Son. This day have I begotten Him." According to Rudolf Steiner this is the correct translation of the Greek words usually rendered "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased."

When I first read Steiner's explanation about 37 years ago, I was a student at the University of Michigan and I wanted corroboration. My search at the enormous graduate library turned up an edition of the *New Testament* that contained a footnote stating the passage could be rendered "This day have I begotten Him." So Steiner's interpretation was supported by at least one biblical scholar!

According to Steiner, the significance of the Baptism is this: the great Solar God, the Logos of the Sun, or Christ took possession of the body and lived in it for 3½ years. This body had been prepared by 6 times 7 generations of Hebrews who followed elaborate dietary laws and migrated according to star patterns guided by the great spirit, Jehovah, in order to perfect a blood strong enough to withstand the presence of a macrocosmic god. The founder of the ancient Persian civilization, the original Zarathustra, already knew of this God around 6,000 BC and named him the Ahura Mazda or the Great Aura. While the ellipsoidal, microcosmic aura of a human being is about twice as high and four times as wide as the physical body, the aura of Ahura Mazda was as great as the outspread light of the sun.

The 3½ years of Christ's life in a physical body ended with his dying on the cross at Golgotha. According to Rudolf Steiner's spiritual scientific research, when the blood flowed from the wounds of Christ and permeated the earth, the entire earth aura changed.

Death means that the etheric body, the carrier of life, which makes organic and biochemistry possible, separates from the physical body and the latter begins to follow the laws of inorganic chemistry and *rigor mortis* and decay set in. By Easter Sunday two things had happened. First, the earth inside the tomb opened and the physical body of Christ was received into the depths of the earth. Steiner's spiritual scientific research reveals that the earth not only opened to receive the body but it shook in such a way as to neatly fold the burial garment. He tells

that this movement of the earth represented a rare manifestation of the working of the Father God. Second, Christ reassembled an etheric body that was specially densified and rose from the dead. When Doubting Thomas touched the wound of Christ, he actually felt the densified etheric. Rudolf Steiner explained this by observing that to heal a wound the etheric body puckers around it. Because the etheric body had densified, Thomas was able to feel the etheric puckering that had formed around the lance wound in the side of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

At the Ascension, Christ lifted into the clouds and into the earthly atmosphere where he has dwelt ever since in the etheric form of an Angel. He appeared in this etheric form to Paul at Damascus. And, indeed, Paul's experience was a precursor of the experience human beings can have in our time, the experience of Christ in the etheric that is also known as the Second Coming of Christ.

The Second Coming, which commenced during the 1930s and continues until about 5000 AD, can be described as the awakening of humanity to the Etheric World at the hand of Christ in His Etheric Form.

This means transforming our understanding of the earth itself. The generally accepted view of our planet is that of materialistic geology and astronomy. The earth is thought to be a dead body with an iron core around which rotates a molten mass. Above the molten mass are the earth's crust and the earth's surface upon which human, animal, and plant life run their course. The rotation of the molten mass around the iron core generates an electric field about the earth. According to accepted materialistic theory the earth originated from accretion from the solar nebula about 4.54 billion years ago. This accepted picture concerns activities in dead matter.

Rudolf Steiner argues the materialistic picture of the earth's origin is not correct. In the lecture "Buddhism and Pauline Christianity"<sup>9</sup> he claims that a new understanding of the origin will arise that contemplates not dead material and the point centered forces known to physics, but rather the plant world and etheric forces that are not point centered but work in planes.<sup>10</sup> The new understanding will arrive at a picture of a primordial etheric earth composed only of plants with pure etheric forms, i.e. non-material. Slowly, these etheric plants condensed to warmth and then to air forms. They directed their roots to the earth's center and their leaves and blossoms toward the sun. Further condensation led to increasingly dense conditions of materiality, that is liquid and finally solid forms. This, according to Steiner, will become recognized science in the future. The plants, he explains, preceded minerals just as coal was once plant life. The plants give the earth its form and they give off the substance from which minerals originate. When man is able to receive the growth forces of the plant kingdom, he will be released from the forces that now hinder him from beholding the Christ.

### **Three Paths to Etheric Experience: The Old Atavistic Clairvoyance, The New Natural Clairvoyance, and Modern Imaginative Consciousness**

In the 1910 lectures on the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric, Steiner explained that ordinary people will begin to experience higher sight. They will begin to have perceptions of the

etheric world and will meet the Etheric Christ. This becomes possible because these people attain what Rudolf Steiner calls the "New Natural Clairvoyance."

This clairvoyance arises of itself in the course of human evolution. Many of the 1910 lectures sketch a long horizon of human development, describing four periods or ages: the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, and the Dark Age or Kali Yuga. During the Golden and Silver ages mankind was endowed with the old atavistic clairvoyance where, in a kind of enhanced dream awareness, men could look into the spiritual world. But for this old clairvoyance to function it was necessary that people have only a dull consciousness of self. With their limited self-awareness people could dream in a kind of ecstasy of spiritual realities and spiritual beings. The old atavistic consciousness diminished in the Bronze Age and slowly came to an end for most human beings around the middle of the Kali Yuga, which lasted some 5000 years.

The receding atavistic clairvoyance coincided with a gradual shrinking of the etheric body, particularly around the head. In the early ages—Golden and Silver—the etheric head extended way beyond the physical head and this made it possible for the etheric head to be in deep connection with the etheric environment.<sup>11</sup> As time progressed the etheric head shrank and reached the point where it coincided with the outline of the physical head, whereupon the old atavism was lost and the possibility of developing wide-awake self-consciousness came about.

The last two thousand years of human history have revolved around acquiring and stabilizing a strong sense of self in the security of the sense world. But the Kali Yuga ended in 1899 and a new Age of Light has begun. This means that the etheric body is beginning to loosen again. The loosening will be a gradual process manifesting, at first, in a small number of people. Then, over the course of time, it will become reality for many. Some of those who experience this loosening will awaken to the etheric world through the New Natural Clairvoyance and will be able to experience those phenomena, enumerated above<sup>12</sup> that are associated with the Second Coming.

But modern people do not have to wait for the natural loosening. It is possible to take one's spiritual development in hand by practicing certain exercises of soul and spirit. These exercises are organized according to the laws that govern the germinal potential for higher sight that lies in every human being.<sup>13</sup> Practicing these exercises rigorously can lead to a much more comprehensive unfolding of supersensible perception than that of the New Natural Clairvoyance. It should be noted, however, that the speed of such self-engendered development is dependent on a person's individual karma.<sup>14</sup>

Rudolf Steiner explains these exercises in many books and lectures.<sup>15</sup> The exercises lead to enhancing consciousness to states above that normal to human beings of our time, the consciousness of the senses and the intellect bound to the senses. The enhanced consciousness that arises from systematic practice enables the awakened seer to perceive the etheric world and the etheric body of living entities and much more. Rudolf Steiner designates the first enhancement "Imaginative" consciousness, and he defines what he means by this quite precisely in a number of his works. In particular, he asks his readers not to confuse the term with the normal dictionary meaning of the word. In the same spirit he speaks of a second and third en-



hancement of consciousness. Above “Imaginative” is “Inspired” consciousness and above that is “Intuitive” consciousness. To fully behold the etheric world and etheric body requires the first two enhancements.

A shorthand way to think of Imaginative consciousness—which is obviously an oversimplification—is as follows. It is possible for most people to visualize pictures in their minds, e.g. geometric figures, images, sounds, smells, textures, etc. Creating a clear visualization takes strenuous mental effort. Suppose now that a person exerts all his effort to create a mantric image. Next try to conceive that the image, once placed clearly before the mind’s eye, begins to be shaped by a force coming from behind the image. It is as if another being begins to take hold of the image and remold it. As this happens the person suddenly merges onto the two-dimensional plane of the image that has taken on a life of its own. He is then experiencing the Imaginative enhancement of consciousness.

## The Etheric World is Manifest in the Plants

With this enhanced consciousness a person can begin to experience the etheric world. But even before achieving this state it is possible to form concepts of the etheric world by observing its manifestations in the world of the senses. Rudolf Steiner directs us to the world of plants, which he says manifest the etheric world in the physical world:

“[T]he physical becomes visible for us in the mineral world. In the world of the plants the physical has already become invisible, for what we see is really the etheric made visible through the agency of the physical. We would not, of course, see the plants with our ordinary eyes if the invisible etheric body did not carry within it little granules (an overly simplified and crude expression, to be sure) of physical matter. Through the physical the etheric form becomes visible to us; but this etheric form is what we are really seeing. The physical is, so to speak, only the means whereby we see the etheric.”<sup>16</sup>

In the plant we see the rhythmic character of the etheric world as the plant goes through its cycle of contractions (e.g. seed) and expansions (e.g. leaf) as described by Goethe in his poem *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. We also see the relation of the etheric to the Sun as the plant lives and unfolds in the sunlight.

The time property of the etheric also manifests in the plant. As an example of this time relationship consider the simple philodendron plant. Each successive leaf grows from the stem of the one before. First, there appears a slight thickening along the stem with a little point close to where the leaf grows out of the stem. This thickening of the stem then breaks loose from the stem and looks like a very delicate green spear. The spear then

begins to unfold into a tender leaf. This new leaf’s stem grows longer so the new leaf extends beyond the one out of which it grew. Then a new thickening appears on its stem. If we think—illustrative purposes—of the new leaf as the present moment then its whole history, its past, can be seen behind it. So we can think of the plant as showing time spread out in space. It is interesting to contemplate how



Bust of Ahriman bust by Robert Miller of the Austin Waldorf School, for the first scene of *Portal of Initiation*.

long that process of unfolding leaves stretches back in time!

## The Processes of Water Also Manifest the Etheric World

The etheric world also manifests is activity in all the watery, liquid conditions of the sense world. “The Etheric” says Rudolf Steiner “is at work in the aqueous processes of earth. All in the mighty drop of water earth—in the sea, in the rivers, the rising mists, falling drops, cloud formations- in all this, etheric currents are working. Here weaving ether is revealed in pictures to strengthened consciousness. Everywhere behind this weaving water the cosmic imagination is weaving.”<sup>17</sup>

It is in the nature of the etheric to shape itself into a drop and, as Rudolf Steiner states above, the oceans of the earth resemble a “mighty drop.” The drop, both in the tiny sphere of rain and the mighty ocean, are images of the etheric world itself. The human etheric body, if it were free to follow its own tendency, would have a drop shape too, but the forces inherent in the physical body constrain the human etheric body to resemble the physical body. When death severs the bond between physical and etheric bodies the etheric expands into the cosmos in an ever-growing drop shape.

The ocean rhythms and mists also help us approach the idea of the etheric world. Spending a few days—with sensitivity of soul - within hearing of an ocean; listening to the relentless rhythm of the waves and tide; being regularly enveloped by sea mist; through all this the soul can slip into the sea mystery

of the etheric. Ocean vastness and depth begin to whisper the language of the world etheric ocean.

In ancient Finland, in the time of the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, man still possessed the old atavistic clairvoyance. Three gulfs of the sea encroached on the Finnish land: the Gulf of Riga, the Gulf of Finland, and the Gulf of Bothnia. The great dragon of the sea sent his host of elemental beings through these gulfs and over the Fins like a great sea mist. The old Fins leaned through their atavistic clairvoyance of this dragon and learned, thereby, the ancient wisdom:

“The sea here makes inroads into the land and forms the Gulfs of Bothnia, Finland and Riga. But if we want to see through to the spiritual counterpart of the physical appearance, we have to take together what can be seen when we make as it were a transverse section of Nature. Down below is a great mass of water; up above is air. Man breathes the air; and that world of sea below is a great and mighty being that is only differently formed from what we are accustomed to—a mighty being spreading itself out over that entire region. With this being the men of an earlier time had a particular and quite special connection. We talk of Folk-spirits; but Folk-spirits have as instruments for their work the elemental beings that manifest in countless ways. They are organized like an army, for the purpose of working right into the etheric body, that by forming the ether body they may so form man in his physical body that this physical body may become a fitting instrument for his special mission on Earth. ... [I]f we want to understand what is there in reality, let us return to the sea-dragon that is a kind of inspirer of European humanity—pushing his way over from the Atlantic Ocean to be the inspirer of European humanity. In this dragon is contained, when we survey the totality of his elemental beings, everything that is spiritual in European humanity. If we were able to understand him fully, this dragon, we would be able to give ourselves up entirely to him, and would then all be clairvoyant.”<sup>18</sup>

Rudolf Steiner proceeds to clarify that it is not the task of modern humanity to return to the old atavistic clairvoyance. Rather the task was first to develop a firm self-awareness in the sense world and second, in our time, to reawaken to the etheric world through the New Natural Clairvoyance or Imaginative Consciousness while retaining modern ego consciousness.

To achieve modern self awareness, the atavistic clairvoyance had to pass away in the course of time as explained above. This separated man from knowledge of the etheric world or world of life. It confined him to the world of dead and shattered forms, but it gave him the possibility to become a self-conscious being, i.e. a being that can “know that he knows” in the sense this thought is developed in Steiner’s *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. In the old consciousness man dreamed; dreamed of the ancient dragon and his wisdom in the rhythmic movements of the etheric world. Though he saw and grasped much in that ancient time he was not self-aware. He bought self-awareness at the cost of his awareness of the life world, the cosmic etheric ocean in which he is still embedded unconsciously.

The new task of mankind is to reawaken to the etheric world through the development of a modern clairvoyance, Imaginative consciousness that can operate simultaneously with wide-awake self-awareness.

## Etheric Manifestations in the Human Organism

The working of the etheric body of a human being manifests in a number of ways in the sense world if we understand what we perceive. One manifestation is in sweat and secretions. Every secretion indicates the workings of the etheric body. Note that as in outer nature these manifestations are in the watery or liquid element. Even more striking is Rudolf Steiner’s observation that the feeling life of the soul rides on secretions, i.e. secretions are the physiological basis of feelings. So the feeling life of the soul has as its basis etheric activities that manifest in secretions. This idea, of course, goes against accepted notions that feelings—and all other aspects of soul life—are based on the nerves.

Steiner also connects the feeling life with the blood circulation and the heart, which is a fluid system that he sees as a manifestation of etheric activity in the body.

Here is a passage where Steiner relates bodily secretions to activity of the etheric body and the life of feeling:

“It can become visible when a person sweats—when a person sweats the etheric body becomes visible [manifests] outwardly...Generally speaking, then, there is very little external expression of the etheric. Inwardly, on the other hand, it is experienced all the more, namely in feeling. The whole life of feeling, inwardly experienced, is what is living in the etheric body when this body is active from within, so that one experiences it from within. The life of feeling is always accompanied by inner secretions. To [clairvoyant] observation of the etheric body in the human being it appears that the liver, for instance, sweats, that the stomach sweats—that every organ sweats and secretes. The etheric life of the human being lives in secretions. The whole life of feeling, inwardly experienced is what is living in the etheric body when the ether body is active within us. The life of feeling always is accompanied by inner secretions. For the seer: the liver sweats, the stomach sweats, every organ sweats and secretes. The etheric life of human beings lives in process of secretion. Around the heart, around the liver there is a cloud of sweat, all is enveloped in mist and cloud.”<sup>19</sup>

In this next passage Steiner indicates that the heart and circulation are an image of the etheric body:

“What really do the blood circulation and the heart mean to us? They are the etheric world condensed; they are the densified forces of the etheric world!”<sup>20</sup>

He goes on to make the remarkable observation that the heart with the blood circulation have densified or entered material form as far as necessary for human evolution, and that they have already begun to dematerialize back into an etheric condition, a topic we shall discuss further.

## Imaginative Perception of the Etheric World

Rudolf Steiner’s collected works—over 360 volumes—are filled with descriptions of his experiences in Imaginative and higher states of consciousness. In particular, he gives many pictures of the etheric world. He explains that all living things—plants, animals, and human beings—have an etheric body in addition to their physical body. In his basic writings Rudolf Steiner describes the etheric body of the human being as resembling the physical body, particularly above the waist. Below, the etheric body merges with the etheric body of the earth. To each

physical organ there corresponds an etheric organ. These etheric organs have characteristic forms but at the same time are fluid and shape shifting. The physical organs can be pictured as condensations out of the etheric ones, like ice out of water. From certain perspectives of enhanced consciousness, the etheric body appears to have a color resembling young peach blossoms, though Steiner emphasizes that the actual imaginative color is not to be found in the sense world. The etheric body is composed of the four types of ether—warmth ether, light ether, chemical or tone ether, and life ether. On all sides the etheric body is linked to the surrounding etheric world and there is a continuous exchange of currents and forces with this surrounding environment.

He speaks of “[O]ne’s own etheric organism grow[ing] together ... with the etheric cosmos ... the confluence of his etheric nature with etheric weaving and pulsing of the cosmos...”<sup>21</sup> Then we feel our connection with cosmic space, with the planets and the stars, just as from the consciousness of our physical body we feel ourselves connected with quartz crystals, cabbages, and rabbits. When a clairvoyant learns to live in her etheric body she leaves the realm of gravity and enters the forces of lightness or levity,<sup>22</sup> whose activity can be observed, for example, in the force that allows the sap to rise in trees. Levity forces are, of course, not recognized by modern physics, but then again modern physics has no explanation of how a large, heavy volume of sap ascends hundreds of feet in a great tree every spring.

Steiner depicts being in the etheric world in these words: “With imagination he lives in the etheric world. He feels himself as alive in the etheric world as otherwise he has felt in his physical body. But he feels the etheric world more as a sum of rhythmic processes, a vibrating in the world ether, which, however he is certainly in a position to interpret in ideas and concepts. Man senses events of a universal nature in the etheric-imaginative experience; he feels supersensible, etheric phenomena. In inspiration he feels not only such supersensible, etheric facts merging into each other, metamorphosing and taking on all manner of possible forms, but now, through inspiration, he senses how in this etheric, billowing world, in this rhythmically undulating world, as if on waves of an etheric word-ocean, real beings are weaving and working. In this way one feels something reminiscent of the sun, moon, planets and the fixed stars, and also of things on the physical earth, for example, the minerals and plants, and all this is bathed in the cosmic ether. ... While here in the physical sense world we perceive only the exterior of everything, there we recognize it in its essential, spiritual existence. We also attain a view of the inner nature of the human organism, as well as the form of the separate organs, lungs, heart, liver and so on. For we see now that everything that gives form and life to the human organism originates not only in what surrounds us and is active in the physical cosmos, but also proceeds from the spiritual beings within this physical cosmos.”<sup>23</sup>

From another perspective, looking into the etheric world gives this impression:

“And what would we sense if, just as we look out into the physical world with our physical body, we look into the etheric world through the etheric body? What would we behold then? We would see the past of all things spread out before our physical eyes—the actual past, from which this physical world arose.

We would see, in the spirit, the images of what was—of what made the present possible.”<sup>24</sup>

This next description portrays in a wondrous manner the etheric body with its light, tone, and life ethers:

“[T]he etheric body is woven of light and sound and life and partakes not only of life on the earth but of the life of the cosmos. The etheric body glows through the physical body. The etheric body breathes light and it gives it out. And when it gives light out and confers the light on us we live by means of the light. It breathes in light. When it breathes light in, it uses the light up and changes it to darkness, and then can receive sound into this darkness, the sounds of the worlds that live in the harmony of the spheres, and can receive it into the impulses of life. As we receive physical nourishment so does the etheric body breathe light in and out. As we use up oxygen and make CO<sub>2</sub>, so the etheric body uses up light, shooting it through with darkness, so it appears in color. So the etheric body shows itself to clairvoyance as waves of color. And whilst the etheric body prepares the light for darkness and thereby carries on the inner work of breathing, it lives in that it receives the sound of the worlds and changes the sound into life of worlds.”<sup>25</sup>

It is worth noting that this passage is given dramatic portrayal in the seventh scene of Rudolf Steiner’s first Mystery Drama, *The Portal of Initiation*. The scene takes place in the Spirit World and the three soul forces - Philia, Astrid, and Luna- describe light, tone and life ether in beautiful poetic language.

As we are beginning to see, the Etheric world and etheric body of the human being are complex and multidimensional, and can be viewed from many perspectives. At first these perspectives can be confusing. For example, at times Rudolf Steiner describes the etheric body as if it were in space. On other occasions, he states that it actually is a “time body” extending back in time to the point when it was formed prior to birth. Earlier we illustrated this fact with a sense perceptible philodendron plant. But the sense perceptible plant form is not actually a time body because the growing point at the end of the youngest leaf is really not “the present moment” of the plant; the whole plant is in the present moment in each moment. But from certain clairvoyant perspectives the etheric body really does show its whole past, and time really does spread out before such beholding as space. To spiritual perception one’s own etheric body presents its entire growth history. Simultaneously, the seer beholds the period of embryological development, the changing teeth, and puberty with all its adolescent trials etc. If through a shock, the etheric body is momentarily separated from the physical body and the person retains consciousness, then he will see his entire life pass before him as a great tableau. There are many reports of seeing this tableau from people who came close to dying.

## The Development of the Human Etheric Body From Its Formation Until the Onset of Adolescence<sup>26</sup>: The Formation of the Etheric Heart

To clairvoyant vision the etheric body of a small child looks like an image of the universe.

“It is a universe in the form of an image. In its circumference it has something like stars, and in its lower part something reveals itself that is more or less an image of the earth. It even



contains a kind of image of the sun and moon. It is extraordinarily significant that we, in our descent into earthly life, draw together forces from the universal ether and thus take with us, in our ether body, a kind of image of the cosmos. If one could extract the ether body of man, at the moment when he is uniting himself with the physical body, we should have a sphere which is far more beautiful than any formed by mechanical means— a sphere containing stars, zodiac, sun and moon.”

These configurations are already there in embryological development. During early childhood they fade a little but remain to the 7th year. With the change of teeth the stars begin sending out rays—having previously been more star like. Between 7-14 these rays shine into a center situated at the physical heart. The star rays actually build up a center around the physical heart. As the center takes form the stars become pale and what has come together into a ball-like formation around the heart becomes vivid and alive. The physical heart is suspended with its blood vessels in the center of this etheric structure.

The stars draw inward and disappear; the etheric body itself remains but is less differentiated at the periphery. At about puberty the ball like etheric structure becomes the child’s own etheric heart. Before that he had a provisional etheric heart from heredity. Now he has his own etheric heart. This whole process can be compared to what happens physically when the childhood teeth are replaced with the new teeth.

Spiritually it is a very significant development because the etheric heart is the organ of destiny.

### **Etheric Streams From Heart to Head: the Etherization of the Blood.<sup>27</sup>**

As blood passes through the heart some of it is transmuted to etheric blood. This blood is said to be etherized. An Anthroposophical medical doctor once stated that the blood in the heart moves in a kind of vortex and at the top of the vortex the etherization takes place.<sup>28</sup> This etherized blood then streams from the heart to the head.

This streaming etheric current plays an extremely significant role. It makes it possible for human beings to think about things that do not concern them directly.

“Unless these streams of ether were to flow continuously from the heart towards the head, however much we tried to think about the world and to know about it, we should be quite unable to make use of our brain as the instrument for thought. As an instrument for knowledge the brain would be completely useless if it were only to function as physical brain. We have to resort to occultism to learn how the brain would work today if it were left to itself. The human being would only be able to think thoughts connected with the inner needs of his body. For example, he would be able to think, “Now I am hungry, now I am thirsty, now I will satisfy this or that instinct.” If he were entirely dependent upon his physical brain man would only be able to think thoughts connected with his own bodily needs, he would be the perfect egotist.”<sup>29</sup>

These currents are indirectly related to the pineal gland. “They continually lave the pineal gland, which becomes luminous, and its movements as physical brain organ respond in harmony with these etheric currents emanating from the heart.”<sup>30</sup> By way of the pineal gland the etherized blood reacts upon the brain. This enables the brain to know something about

the outside world beyond egotistical concerns.

In “Etherization of the Blood”<sup>31</sup>, Rudolf Steiner poses the question: Does there exist a macrocosmic counterpart to the microcosmic etherization of the blood in the human heart? To answer this question he points to the Mystery of Golgotha and tells how the blood that flowed from the wounds of Christ entered the earth and etherized in the course of time. This is the macrocosmic parallel. “This blood must not be regarded simply as chemical substance, but by reason of all that has been described as the nature of Jesus of Nazareth, it must be recognized as something altogether unique. When it flowed from His wounds and into the earth, a substance was imparted to our earth which, in uniting with it, constituted an event of the greatest possible significance for all future ages of the earth...” This special blood etherized and exists in homeopathic dilution in the etheric body of the earth. It is possible for the etherized blood of Christ to unite with the etheric stream in the human body that runs from heart to his head. For this to happen the individual must “unfold a true understanding of what is contained in the Christ Impulse.”

In “Etherization of the Blood” it is stated that through slowly assimilating the content of spiritual science the stream flowing from heart to brain will be fired and this will enable people to understand the Second Coming, which is occurring in our time. Apparently, this union of the Christ etheric blood stream with the human etheric blood stream enhances our capacity to grasp what is not an immediate egotistical concern so that human understanding can advance from natural science to the spiritual science of the etheric world. “[I]n our present age it is important that man should learn to understand that the knowledge contained in spiritual science must be received and gradually be able so to fire the streams flowing from heart to brain that anthroposophy can be understood. If this comes to pass, individuals will be able to comprehend the event that has its beginning in the twentieth century; the appearance of the etheric Christ...” Note here the issue is not experiencing Christ in the etheric, but of comprehending that this stupendous event is occurring.

### **The Formation of Memory and Etheric Currents: The Light Ether Prayer of Risen Christ**

The etheric current flowing from heart to the head is not only connected with the capacity for unselfish thinking about the world, but also with the faculty of memory. Memory formation also makes use of a second etheric current that arises not from the heart but from the lower part of the breast, the lymph vessels and other organs. This current collects around the pituitary gland. The working of the two currents makes memory possible.<sup>32</sup> This comes about from a tremendous etheric tension arising between the pineal gland and the pituitary gland, a tension that arises as a result of the forces in the two currents. Steiner compares the tension to that of opposing electric fields. This tension imprints the memory picture into the etheric body. Speaking in the sense of Steiner’s *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, the thinking activity links a concept with a percept resulting in a mental picture, e.g. I see a black and white animal grazing in the field and link the sense percept with the concept “grazing Holstein cow.” The tension between the two currents imprints the memory picture into the etheric body.

Light Ether, one of the four ethers, plays a special role in the process of memory creation.<sup>33</sup> Memories are carried in a person's light ether body, i.e. in the light ether component of the etheric body, which Steiner designates the Light Body. The tension that arises between the two glands apparently impresses a unique movement into Light Body, a unique movement or dance for each mental picture. To remember means that the Light Body re-dances the unique dance.

Rudolf Steiner explains that the Risen Christ—prior to the Ascension—taught this mystery of the Light Body to his intimate disciples and told them that they needed to awake to awareness in their etheric body while outside the physical body and from there behold their own Light Body. But Satan or Ahriman works against the possibility of such etheric vision by darkening our consciousness when we step out of our physical body. Rudolf Steiner points to a passage in the *Pistis Sophia*—one of the few Gnostic texts that survived destruction—where the Risen Christ teaches the disciples a prayer to help them achieve this state of awareness:

“Oh, you powers in the Spiritual World, let me step into the light world and behold in the Light my own Light Body. And let not Ahriman's power over me be so great that I am unable to behold what takes place in my own Body of Light.”

## Conclusion: Christ Sees Us

We have completed a journey through some of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual scientific research concerning the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric and the re-awakening of humanity to the world of life, the etheric world. No doubt forming a connection with these complicated thoughts is challenging. But they will lead us to a deeper understanding of the Christ who is aware of every single human soul at all times. To conclude let us contemplate this mantra:

“Christ knows us. To a soul that sees our Spiritual Science in the true light, to a heart that feels it in its true significance, I can impart no more esoteric saying: The Christ Is Seeing Us.”<sup>34</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, Spring Valley, New York, 1983.
2. The term “Mystery Drama” refers to the “mysteries” that were places of initiation in the ancient world. Steiner wrote four mystery dramas. The first, *The Portal of Initiation*, was written and performed in 1910. Three more plays followed in 1911, 1912, and 1913 and each was premiered during an August conference in Munich. The plays depict the lives of a group of students of esoteric knowledge.
3. Included in *Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*. (See note 1)
4. From “Etherization of the Blood,” contained in *Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*.
5. The German translation was published under the title *Sie Erlebten Christus* by Gunnar Hillerdal and Berndt Gustafsson, Pforte Verlag, 2002.
6. Available in English in Rudolf Steiner's *Millennium Prophecies* by Heinz Herbert Schoeffler, MD, Goulden Books, The Chapel, Treligga, Delabole,

Cornwall PL33 9EE, England.

7. For a full picture of Rudolf Steiner's discoveries regarding the life of Christ see his lectures on each of the Gospels (one volume per gospel) and *The Fifth Gospel*.
8. To add to the complexity it should be noted that Christ rose from the dead in His densified etheric body and also in what Rudolf Steiner calls the phantom. This is the form principle of the physical body that had been damaged by the Fall of Man that resulted from interference in Earth evolution by Luciferic beings. One of the great deeds of Christ during his 3½ years in a physical body was to overcome the corruption and re-perfect the human phantom. So Christ rose from the dead in both a densified etheric body and the perfected phantom. See *From Jesus to Christ* by Rudolf Steiner.
9. In *Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*; one of the 1910 lectures.
10. Rudolf Steiner and his students used projective geometry to capture aspects of the workings of etheric forces. See *The Plant Between Sun and Earth* and *The Science of Physical and Etherial Spaces*, George Adams, Olive Whicher, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer.
11. The heads of animals still extend way beyond their physical heads. In some lectures Steiner describes the enormous etheric extension of the head of a horse.
12. See section titled “Steiner's Announcement in a Nut Shell.”
13. See “The Psychological Foundations of Anthroposophy,” (lecture of April 8, 1911) in *Esoteric Development*, Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, 1982.
14. Steiner states that cases of the old atavism have lingered on as well, so it takes some discernment to distinguish between old atavistic clairvoyance and the new natural clairvoyance.
15. The primary work on this topic is *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*.
16. *The Mystery of the Trinity*, Rudolf Steiner, July 28, 1914, GA 214.
17. *Anthroposophy, an Introduction*, GA 234, Feb 1. 1924.
18. *Die Zusammenhang des Menschen mit der elementarischen Welt*, GA 158, Lecture of November 14, 1914, available in typescript from Rudolf Steiner Library.
19. *Mystery of the Trinity*, July 18, 1922.
20. *Wonders of the World*, August 25, 1911.
21. *Philosophy, Cosmology, Religion*, Sept. 7, 1922.
22. *What Is Anthroposophy*, July 21, 1923.
23. *Philosophy, Cosmology and Religion*, lecture of Sept. 8, 1922.
24. *What Is Anthroposophy*, July 21, 1923.
25. Lecture of Oct. 2, 1916, GA 171. Available as manuscript from the Rudolf Steiner Library.
26. *The Human Soul In Relation to World Evolution*, May 26, 1922, GA 212
27. “The Etherization of the Blood,” Oct. 1, 1911, in *Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*; lecture of August 25, 1911 in *Wonders of the World*; lecture of March 23, 1911 in *Occult Physiology*.
28. Dr. David Brill in a lecture given in the 1990s in Spring Valley, New York.
29. August 25, 1911, *Wonders of the World*.
30. August 25, 1911, *Wonders of the World*.
31. Oct. 1, 1911, *Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*.
32. March 23, 1911, *Occult Physiology*.
33. GA 165 lecture of Jan. 2, 1916. Not available in English
34. Lecture of Nov. 1, 1915, GA 254 unavailable in English. The verse is published in *Verses and Meditations*.





# Evolving News

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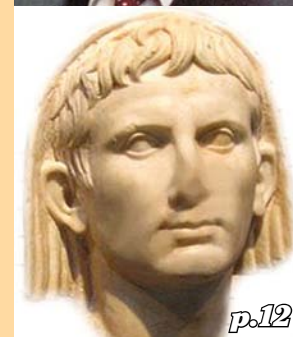
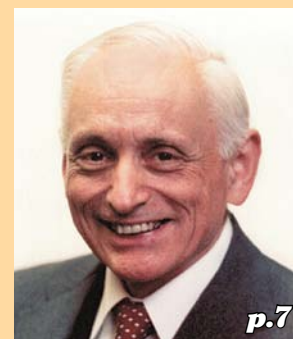
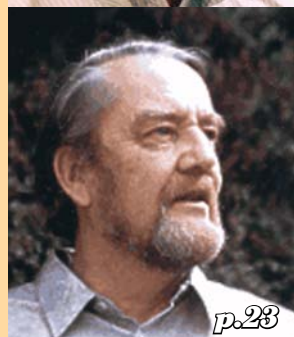
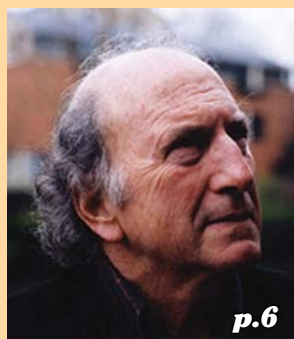
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