

# SYMPOSIUM

## VALENTIN TOMBERG AND THE BODHISATTVA OF THE 20TH CENTURY

BERLIN, 31ST OCTOBER – 1ST NOVEMBER 2009  
RUDOLF STEINER HOUSE, BERLIN

The opening lecture of the symposium on Saturday morning – *Do we need a Bodhisattva?* – was by Michael Frensch, who, on the basis of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science, provided a background of concepts for understanding the meaning of the term *Bodhisattva*. Michael Frensch pointed out that Rudolf Steiner had held many lectures to clarify the mission of the Bodhisattva who had incarnated as Jeshu ben Pandira, the teacher of the Essenes about 100 BC, known as the *Teacher of Righteousness*. Jeshu ben Pandira, according to Rudolf Steiner, had incarnated as the Bodhisattva-successor of Gautama Buddha. This Bodhisattva has incarnated in almost every century since then, and in about 2500 years time will become the next Buddha, known as the *Maitreya*, the Bringer of the Good. Rudolf Steiner emphasized that Jeshu ben Pandira reincarnated in the twentieth century as a great Bodhisattva individuality in order to fulfill the lofty mission of proclaiming Christ's coming in the etheric realm, beginning around 1933. In Rudolf Steiner's own words concerning the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Jeshu ben Pandira in the twentieth century: "*He will be the actual herald of Christ in his etheric form*" (from a lecture about Jeshu ben Pandira held in Leipzig on November 4, 1911). On this account he is sometimes referred to as the *Bodhisattva of the twentieth century*, although it was also pointed out that there are other Bodhisattvas – altogether twelve Bodhisattvas in service of Christ – who incarnate upon the earth from time to time (perhaps also in the twentieth century, *as well as* the incarnation in the twentieth century of the Bodhisattva Jeshu ben Pandira who will become the Maitreya Buddha). In the early part of the afternoon Trygve Olaf Lindvig held a lecture on the spiritual biography of Valentin Tomberg. He presented his view that Valentin Tomberg's previous incarnations might possibly include the incarnation as Jeshu ben Pandira around 100 BC and also a still earlier significant incarnation as a great teacher of the Egyptians. Toward the end of his lecture he pointed to Valentin Tomberg's *magnum opus*, *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*, as a metamorphosis of the Tarot of the ancient Egyptians, which was known as the *Book of Hermes* (or the *Book of Thoth*, whereby Thoth = Hermes). According to Trygve Olaf Lindvig, *Meditations on the Tarot*

can be seen as presenting a metamorphosis *through the Christ Impulse* of the earlier teaching given by Hermes to the ancient Egyptians.

Trygve Olaf Lindvig's presentation was followed later in the afternoon by Robert Powell's talk *Kashyapa and the Proclamation of Christ in the Etheric. The Activity of the Bodhisattva in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*. Robert Powell drew attention to the following statements:

(1) Friedrich Rittelmeyer's own record of a conversation with Rudolf Steiner: "It was in the summer of 1921. End of July or beginning of August. The conversation came around to whether the Bodhisattva is now incarnated on the earth. Dr. Steiner said: If we live another fifteen years, we shall be able to experience something thereof."

(2) Walter Johannes Stein's diary note of a conversation with Friedrich Rittelmeyer about the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Jeshu ben Pandira in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "Rittelmeyer said: In August 1921, Dr Steiner said concerning Jeshu ben Pandira: If we live another fifteen years, we shall be able to experience something thereof. Jeshu ben Pandira was born at the beginning of the century."

(3) Adolf Arenson's remark made in a lecture held in Stuttgart, Germany on March 30, 1930 and repeated on April 28, 1930 in Dornach, Switzerland: "...concerning a supposed statement of Rudolf Steiner. To a question as to how things are with regard to the coming Bodhisattva, Rudolf Steiner is said to have answered: The Bodhisattva was born at the beginning of the century and is looking with interest at the development of the Anthroposophical Society."

(4) Thomas Meyer, in his book *Die Bodhisattvafrage (The Bodhisattva Question)*, (Pegasus: Basel, 1989), indicates in footnote 114 on pages 246-247: Walter Vegelaun (1880-1959) was the stenographer who, from 1903 onward, recorded over 500 of Rudolf Steiner's lectures, including the cycle of lectures held in Bern, Switzerland in September 1910 on *The Gospel of St Matthew*... Shortly before his death [in 1959], in Berlin in October 1958 he communicated to a visitor (among other things) the following: "It was in Bern where Rudolf Steiner spoke concerning the [20<sup>th</sup> century incarnation of the] Bodhisattva [who was incarnated about 100 BC as Jeshu ben Pandira]. The members were eager to know what Rudolf Steiner really meant as to who he is. They consulted with one another and sent a chosen representative, Günther Wagner, to ask Rudolf Steiner about this. And he received the answer: *I am not him*. Following this, on the first evening in Berlin Rudolf Steiner summarized all that had taken place in the preceding months. And he also referred to the lectures in Bern. In so doing, he broke off his description and said with an undertone in his voice, 'By the way, I would like to add in parentheses to all those who are ever ready to come up with incarnations in their fantasy, that I – in my individuality – have nothing to do with Jeshu ben Pandira.'" This private and important communication, which was written down by the person who received it and can be regarded as trustworthy, was made available to – and was gratefully received by – the author [of this book, Thomas Meyer]. Words in brackets [ ] added by RP.

(5) The statement of Keith Harris in his book *The Virgin* (Western Shores, 2009) concerning the law of esoteric brotherhood. According to this law, which holds among esotericists if an esotericist discovers something, a later esotericist will always acknowledge a discovery or research finding made earlier by another esotericist. Applied to the Bodhisattva of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose task is to help lead human beings to the experience of Christ in the etheric realm, this individual in his 20<sup>th</sup> century incarnation

holds the key to the *portal* opening to the experience of Christ in the etheric realm. As Keith Harris points out, recognition of the Bodhisattva, whom Keith Harris clearly identifies according to his own research (on page 11 of *The Virgin*) is of vital significance in order to find the portal leading to the Etheric Christ. (Keith Harris was one of the participants at this symposium.)

(6) Robert Powell indicated that Rudolf Steiner laid great emphasis upon the coming of the Bodhisattva in the twentieth century and therefore it behooves us to clearly identify this individual, especially because of the great importance of encountering Christ in the etheric – this being the mission of the Bodhisattva: to help us find our way toward this encounter with Christ in his spiritual form in our time. Rudolf Steiner's indications listed above concerning the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Jeshu ben Pandira: birth at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emergence during the 1930's probably within the context of the Anthroposophical Society – see (1), (2) and (3) above – and proclamation of Christ's coming in the etheric realm, all together can be taken as a basis to help in the process of identification of the Bodhisattva in his 20<sup>th</sup> century incarnation.

(7) Against the background of these indications summarized above, the extraordinary occurrence of the reproduction of two pages of Valentin Tomberg's seven lectures held in 1938 concerning the reappearance of Christ in the etheric (published in 2006 as an Afterword to Valentin Tomberg's *Christ and Sophia* by Steiner Books) that were ascribed to Rudolf Steiner and for years circulated within the Anthroposophical Society as the most profound revelation by Rudolf Steiner concerning the Etheric Christ is a fact belonging to the history of the Anthroposophical Movement.

Someone who received a copy of the transcription of these seven lectures made an excerpt of two pages from them. He or she typed the following heading:

*“About the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric”*

from a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, Stockholm, 1910 –

notes given to Wilhelm Rath by his stepmother prior to her death.

[This heading and the two pages from Valentin Tomberg's lectures were photocopied onto one sheet of paper (front and reverse), which was then circulated. Here is the content of these two pages:]

*Let us briefly consider the steps that the Christ will take in the space available to him because of the karma of the Mystery of Golgotha for humanity—the karmic result of humanity's past behavior toward him.*

I.

*Humanity judged Christ: now he has the possibility of judging humanity. Judgment by Christ does not mean retribution, however, since the Christ must bring an end to the principle of retribution in the world. Christ's judgment means that he will awaken conscience; he will be able to work spatially and take steps that awaken the conscience of human beings.*

II.

*The first inkling of Christ's return in the etheric will be a wave of elemental feelings of conscience. Feelings of shame will seize people with elemental power. A consuming power of shame will arise in the soul, and people will not know its source. Thus we can say that Christ's appearance in the etheric will be heralded by the blushing red of human shame. People will experience an overwhelming force of disappointment in the values*

*they have treasured as "truth" and "beauty." In a sense, people will have to reassess all the values in their souls. In the state of Kamaloka, one has to experience a re-evaluation of life's values, owing to the rays of World Conscience; now people will have to experience a re-evaluation of all their values in life, because they will experience those values through the effect of Christ, who will weave through horizontal space.*

III.

*Because Christ was scourged in the past, another step in space is now at his disposal karmically. Christ will not only awaken human conscience, but also inwardly touch people. Just as he received the blows of scourging, he will likewise be able to reach, touch, and move people. He will touch those who are in despair and instill comfort and courage in them. This moving touch is a consequence of the scourging, and it will cause courage to flow for a new effort of creativity. Some will say: We'll begin afresh, because everything we have created thus far will not stand up to his light. To a certain extent, the first day of creation must begin again within the human kingdom. People will not gain the courage for this out of themselves; rather, they will gain it from the inner touching that comes from the Christ as the karmic consequence of the scourging he experienced.*

IV.

*And because Christ was crowned with thorns in the past, he will give tasks to individuals and groups of people and show them how to serve his work. He will crown people with duties of love. We know that there are certain concepts of "duty" that exist in the world. Nevertheless, "duty" will eventually lead humankind to catastrophe, because everything evil that enters the world will, in fact, be pursued by people out of a sense of duty. When he returns in the etheric, however, Christ will assign tasks of love to people and groups, whereas the notion of "duty"—a giant with feet of clay—will fall and be shattered into a thousand fragments. Instead of duty, there will be a love for one's task.*

V.

*In the past, Christ had to carry the cross on which he would be crucified; now Christ will heal people's infirmities when he reappears in the etheric; there will be a healing of destinies. Those who carry their crosses will have the strength to carry them – through the healing of soul and body.*

VI.

*At the Mystery of Golgotha, when Christ was crucified, he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). These words contain what he seeks to accomplish in space and what was granted to him as the karmic consequence of the crucifixion—that people might become conscious of what they do. The karmic result of the crucifixion will not be to bind human beings as though they were crucified, but to open their eyes. A new clairvoyance will be awakened through Christ, so that human beings will be able to see and know what they do. This is karmic clairvoyance—seeing karma. When people act today, they do not know the karmic consequences of that act. In the future, however, people will know what they are doing. Karmic clairvoyance is Christ's answer to the crucifixion, which took place because people did not know what they were doing. These are the karmic steps of Christ in space; their cause goes back to when he was a man and had to walk the path of suffering to which human beings had condemned him. Thus Christ changes the negative into the positive. The return of Christ*

*in the etheric is his response to the way he was treated when he lived among humankind as a man.*<sup>1</sup>

These two pages attributed to Rudolf Steiner circulated far and wide. For many years they were read and believed to be Rudolf Steiner's words. Even Rudolf Grosse, who at the time (about 1980) was the head of the Anthroposophical Society founded by Rudolf Steiner, believed that these two pages were authentic and read them out at the culmination of a lecture he held for teachers of religion at a conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. This fact deserves to be mentioned, as it indicates the source from which Valentin Tomberg spoke – the same source as Rudolf Steiner.

On Saturday evening Günter Röscher discussed these seven lectures by Valentin Tomberg. His talk was entitled *Christianity and the Idea of Sacrifice. Regarding Valentin Tomberg's lectures "The Four Sacrifices of Christ and the Appearance of Christ in the Etheric."* Günter Röscher compared the content of these seven lectures by Valentin Tomberg with the content of Rudolf Steiner's book *Esoteric Science – An Outline*, whereby he carefully noted some (apparent) contradictions between these two contents. What came through – without being explicitly stated in his lecture – is that Valentin Tomberg's seven lectures represent a Christianizing of the stages of evolution described by Rudolf Steiner in *Esoteric Science – An Outline*. In the space of this report, it has to be borne in mind that the summary given here of the talks by the four speakers is obviously greatly abbreviated and therefore cannot possibly do their lectures justice.

The symposium continued on Sunday morning with three workshops, whereby the participants divided into three groups. The workshops were led by Günter Röscher, Trygve Olaf Lindvig, and Robert Powell. The workshops were followed by a summary of their content presented to the entire group that reconvened after the end of the workshops. In the space of this brief report, it is not possible to go into the content of the three workshops. Before closing, there was a lively discussion regarding the possible title for the next Valentin Tomberg symposium planned for the end of October 2010, again in Rudolf Steiner House in Berlin.

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<sup>1</sup> Valentin Tomberg, *Christ and Sophia. Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Steiner Books: Gt. Barrington/MA, 2006), pp. 393-394.