

## *Easter: The Mystery of the Future, [lecture](#), 13Apr1908, GA 102*

What is **religion**, fundamentally speaking? It is the **intermediary between the spiritual worlds and mankind** when men are no longer able to experience these spiritual worlds through their own organs of perception. **Religion was the proclamation, the announcement of the existence of spiritual worlds, made for the sake of men who could no longer experience spiritual reality.** Thus was the spiritual life spread over the earth as religious culture in the several ages of civilization, in ancient India, ancient Persia and the rest, down to our own time.

As I have already said, the purpose of **man's descent into a physical body was that he might gain knowledge** of the external world, experiencing existence through his physical senses, in order, finally, **to spiritualize what he thus experienced**, and so **lead it to future stages of evolution.** But at the present time, having plunged deeply into the physical body, and having **already passed the middle point of the Post-Atlantean** civilizations, we are facing a very definite eventuality.

The whole evolution of mankind has a certain strange quality. It **goes forward in one direction until a certain point is reached and then it begins to stream in the opposite direction.** Having streamed **downwards** to a certain point, it turns again **upwards**, reaching the **same stages as on the descent**, but now in a higher form. To-day man stands in very truth before a fateful future, that future when, as is known to everyone who is aware of this deeply significant truth of evolution, **his etheric body will gradually loosen itself again, freeing itself from its submergence in the physical body,** where the things of the physical world are perceived in their sharply outlined forms. **The etheric body must release itself again in order that man's being may become spiritualized and once again have vision of the spiritual world.** Today humanity has actually reached the point when in a great number of individuals, **the etheric body is beginning to loosen.**

A **destiny in the very highest degree** significant is approaching us, and here we come near to the secret of our **own age of civilization.**

We must realize that the **etheric body, which has descended very deeply into the physical body, must now take the path upwards,** carrying with it from the physical body everything that has been experienced through the physical senses. **But just because the etheric body is loosening itself from the physical, everything that was formerly reality — in the physical sense — must gradually be spiritualized.** It will be essential for mankind in times to come to have conscious **certainty that the spiritual is reality.** What will happen otherwise? The etheric body will be freed from the physical body **while men still believe only in the reality of the physical world and have no consciousness of the reality of the spiritual,** which will be manifest in the loosened etheric body as the fruit of man's past experience in the physical body. In such conditions men may be faced with the danger of **losing all relationship to this loosening of their etheric bodies.**

Let us consider the point at which a man's etheric body, which has been firmly anchored in the physical body, begins to loosen from it again and to emerge. Suppose that this happens to a **man who in his physical existence has lost all belief in, all consciousness of, the spiritual world, and has cut himself off from any connection with it.** Let us assume that he descended so firmly and deeply into the physical body that he has been able to retain nothing save the belief that the physical life is the one and only reality. Now he passes into the next phase of human existence. Relentlessly the etheric body emerges from the physical body, while he is still incapable of realizing the existence of a spiritual world. He neither recognizes nor knows anything of the

spiritual world about him. This is the fate which may confront men in the near future, that **they do not recognize the spiritual world which, as the result of the loosening of the etheric body,** they must inevitably experience, but regard it as a phantasy, illusion, vain imagination. And those who have experienced most ably, with the utmost perfection, the physical body, the men who have become the pundits of materialism and are full of fixed, rigid notions of matter, it is they who, with the loosening of the etheric body, will face the greatest danger of being without a single inkling that there is a spiritual world. They will regard everything that then comes to them from the **spiritual world as illusion, fancy, as so many figments of dream.**

If in times to come, **when the etheric body has again loosened itself from the physical,** man is to live his life in any real sense, he must have consciousness of what will then present itself to the etheric body. In order that he may be conscious that what then comes to him is knowledge of the spiritual world, it is essential that realization of the existence of the spiritual world shall be preserved in humanity and **carried through the period when man is most deeply immersed in the material world.** For the sake of the future, the **link between the religious life and the life of knowledge must never be lost.** Man came forth from a life among the gods; to a life among the gods, he will again return. But he must be **able to recognize them;** he must know that in very truth the **gods are realities.** When the etheric body has loosened, he will no longer be able to rely on remembrances of ancient human times. If meanwhile he has lost consciousness of the spiritual world, has come to believe that life in the physical body and things to be seen in the physical world are the only realities, then for all ages of time he must dangle, as it were, in mid-air. He will have lost his bearings in the spiritual world and will have no ground under his feet. He will be threatened, in this condition, with what is known as the **"spiritual death."** For around him there is only phantasy, illusion, a world of whose reality he has no consciousness, in which he does not believe, and so ... he dies! That is the death in the spiritual world. It is the doom which threatens men if, before passing again into the spiritual worlds, they fail to bring with them any consciousness of those worlds.

At what point in the evolution of humanity was attainment of consciousness of the spiritual world made possible for man? It was at the point where man's descent into the physical body was countered by victory over that body, and there was placed before men the **great Prototype of Christ Himself.** The understanding of **Christ forms for man the bridge between the memories of his ancient past and the foreshadowings of his future.** When Jesus of Nazareth had reached the age of 30, the Christ came down into his body. For the first and last time Christ lived in a physical body. And His victory over death — when it is rightly understood — reveals to man what the manner of his own life must be if, for all ages of time, he is to be **conscious of the reality of the spiritual world. That is the true union with Christ.**

