

The Full Moon in Aries

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On Wednesday, March 27, 2013, at 5:28 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, the moon will be at 6° Libra: precisely opposite the Sun, as viewed from Earth. Although the moon will be in Libra, we refer to the event as the Full Moon in Aries, the sign into which the Sun passed at the Vernal Equinox a week earlier.

Full moons have had religious significance since the dawn of history, and the full moon in Aries acquired special significance as the herald of spring. In Judaism the occasion was chosen to celebrate their forebears' deliverance from Egypt. The seven-day Feast of Passover begins on the evening of the Aries Full Moon. Christian tradition places the Crucifixion on a Friday, which may have been the first day of Passover or the previous day.¹ Christ reportedly rose from the dead the following Sunday. Easter, bearing vernal associations with rebirth, came to be celebrated on the first Sunday after the Aries Full Moon.

Easter is the high point of the Christian liturgical year. It is the culmination of Holy Week, a week of deep introspection that traditionally begins immediately after the principal service on Palm Sunday. This year the Full Moon occurs in the middle of Holy Week, on Tuesday in the Eastern Hemisphere or early Wednesday in the Americas.

Christianity's sacred story, as it has come down to us, relates that Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem to cheering crowds waving palm branches. But within a few days people were conspiring to kill him. On the Thursday of the first Holy Week, Christ presided over the Last Supper and instituted the Eucharist to be an eternal extension of his Incarnation. Before the supper was over Judas Iscariot left to betray him into the hands of the authorities.

Following the Agony in the Garden, in which he submitted his will to that of the Father, Jesus was arrested, given a mock trial, and condemned to death. The following day he was crucified between two thieves. As scripture records, from the sixth hour (noon) to the ninth hour "there was darkness over the whole land."² His defeat at the hands of callous Roman administrators, resentful Jewish leaders, and the forces of darkness seemed complete.

Yet within three days Christ rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene found the empty tomb and then encountered a figure whom, after some initial confusion, she recognized as her risen Lord. Shortly thereafter he appeared to the other disciples and later to "five hundred brethren at once."³ Believers came to understand the meaning of Christ's death: he was the Paschal Lamb (the very symbol of Aries), willingly sacrificed on humanity's behalf. Through the resurrection he overcame death and sin and manifested the Glory of God. The risen Christ ushered in a new era, a new dispensation, a new covenant with his people.

The sacred story took shape over the first decades and centuries of the Common Era. In due course it was anointed by the institutional church and passed into the scriptural canon. But other stories also circulated. The Gnostics were reluctant to believe that a divine Christ could suffer and die. One Gnostic writer claimed that the authorities crucified the wrong man, and in so doing condemned themselves. In this account Jesus proclaimed:

Yes, they saw me; they punished me. It was another, their father, who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. I was another upon Whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height over all the wealth

of the archons and the offspring of their error, of their empty glory. And I was laughing at their ignorance.⁴

Another account acknowledged the reality of the crucifixion but provided a description of the resurrection not found in the canonical New Testament:

[I]n the night whereon the Lord's day dawned, as the soldiers were keeping guard ... there came a great sound in the heaven, and they saw the heavens opened and two men descend thence, shining with a great light, and drawing near unto the sepulcher. And that stone which had been set on the door rolled away of itself and went back to the side, and the sepulcher was opened and both of the young men entered in... [T]hree men come out of the sepulcher, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following, after them. And of the two [the soldiers] saw that their heads reached unto heaven, but of him that was led by them that it overpassed the heavens.⁵

The account continued: "And they heard a voice out of the heavens saying: Hast thou (or Thou hast) preached unto them that sleep? And an answer was heard from the cross, saying: Yea."

These accounts were suppressed by the institutional church. Yet alternative interpretations of Easter surfaced from time to time, and they continue today. Traditional Christians believe that the New Testament account is literally true. Moreover, with Paul, they declare that "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."⁶ Liberals are willing to believe that a worthy man named Jesus was crucified, but they reject notions that he was divine or rose from the dead. Great numbers of people are indifferent to the whole issue and regard Easter as a secular holiday.

Esotericists are by no means unanimous in their own responses. Some, following Gnostic precedents, declare that Jesus did not die on the cross but went to live in India. Others regard the crucifixion and resurrection, if they happened at all, merely as symbols of events unfolding eternally on cosmic realms. Still others find meaning in the traditional Easter story but struggle to reconcile it with esoteric teachings.

Christian esotericists are challenged to reconcile scriptural accounts of the first Holy Week with awareness that the Master Jesus and the Christ were distinct entities. Esotericists, drawing upon teachings stretching back to the first century Gnostic Cerinthus, assert that the Christ is a divine or semi-divine individuality who overshadowed his disciple Jesus during the three-year Palestinian ministry. The precise nature of their relationship may be a mystery beyond our comprehension, but the Christian doctrine of the hypostatic union was certainly not unjustified.⁷ On the other hand esotericists assert that the relationship was temporary: it began with the baptism in the Jordan and ended with the crucifixion, after which the Jesus and the Christ took distinct paths. The Christ, whom we also know as the Lord Maitreya or the Bodhisattva, is the World Teacher and head of the vast Second Ray Ashram in the Planetary Hierarchy, with global responsibility for religion and education. The Master Jesus is head of the Sixth Ray Ashram, with special responsibility for Christianity.

Once we accept the distinction between Jesus and the Christ, three questions inevitably arise: who died on the cross; who, if anyone, "rose from the dead"; and who appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other disciples? The Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul answered the first question thus: "It was the Master Jesus who 'died' and entered into the tomb, thus climaxing His long series of incarnations and ending – by destruction – the hold of matter on the spirit."⁸

The second question is an important one, since we regard the physical body and the other vehicles of the lower quaternary as temporary sheaths, and physical death as in no way affecting the life of the "real" human entity. For us the resuscitation of a corpse would serve little purpose. To people whose consciousness was focused on material existence, however, it might have demonstrated the reality of ongoing life.

The Tibetan referred to “the story of the resurrection in which the Master Jesus arose out of the tomb.” But he stated emphatically: “the Christ did not rise out of a rocky sepulcher and reassume His discarded body.” Rather, the Tibetan interpreted resurrection to mean “rising to an original state.” Thus the resurrection was the “far more important event [in which] the Christ passed through the seventh Initiation of Resurrection and returned back to His original state of Being – to remain there throughout all the eternities.”⁹ Jesus, by contrast, attained the fourth initiation through his suffering and death on the cross, and went on to attain the fifth initiation as Apollonius of Tyana.¹⁰ Hence we call him the Master Jesus.

Anthroposophist and stigmatic Judith von Halle provided an interesting insight into the third question. Endowed with the ability to view historical events with more than clairvoyant vision, von Halle described the scene when the “gardener” asked Mary Magdalene “Whom seek ye?”:

He asked her this question as a teacher of initiation asks his pupil. With this question He asked her if she was seeking *Jesus* or *Christ*. But initially she was only looking for Jesus of Nazareth, her beloved teacher in his physical body. But as Christ then touched her heart (in the Gospels this is when He called her by her name) she reacted immediately, so filled with love and so overwhelmed ... that she forgot everything... At the moment of “reunion” everything was forgotten; she believed He was by her again as before. She fell down before Him full of love and wanted to kiss his feet.¹¹

The Tibetan confirmed that the Jesus was indeed the one who “appeared to Mary, weeping outside the door of the sepulcher.” But “except in this one brief episode” it was “the Christ Who is indicated as appearing after the resurrection.”¹²

Jesus’ appearance to Mary was probably in his astral body, perhaps still bearing material from his etheric body, which formed a wraith. Christ’s appearances to the disciples were more likely in a *mayavirupa*. Fifth- and higher-degree initiates are believed to be capable of manifesting a *mayavirupa*, which has a measure of solidity but is not subject to normal physical laws.¹³ It is worth noting that esoteric teachings on the *mayavirupa* correspond closely to descriptions of the *sōma pneumatikon*, or “spiritual body,” in the writings of Paul.¹⁴

The distinction between the Master Jesus and the Christ, and the notion that the hypostatic union was only temporary, are stumbling blocks to a synthesis of beliefs among traditional Christians and esotericists. Yet most Christians could affirm with the Tibetan that the Easter Festival “is the festival of the risen, living Christ ... the Expression of the Love of God.”¹⁵ While they and esotericists might have different perceptions of what was entailed, they could agree that Christ’s incarnation changed the world.

Most traditional Christians would not recognize the Christ as “the Teacher of all men and the Head of the Spiritual Hierarchy.”¹⁶ Yet greater awareness of the Planetary Hierarchy, and of the Christ’s central role in it, is urgently needed if a broad-based expansion of human consciousness is to take place. Belief in the Communion of Saints can provide a starting point for introducing traditional Christians to the concept of the Hierarchy of Masters.

The Master Djwhal Khul prophesied that the Festival of Easter will become one of three major festivals to be celebrated worldwide in the liturgy of a New World Religion. The others are the Buddhist Festival of Wesak, at the Full Moon in Taurus, and a new festival, World Goodwill Day, or Festival of the Christ, at the Full Moon in Gemini.

The Tibetan explained that the establishment of “certain major festivals in relation to the moon, and in a lesser degree to the zodiac, will bring a strengthening of the spirit of invocation and the resultant inflow of responsive influences.” Incorporating the historically separate observances of Easter and the Wesak Festival into a common framework will establish “a certain uniformity in the world religious rituals [which] will aid men everywhere to strengthen each other's work and enhance powerfully the thought currents directed to the

waiting Spiritual Lives.”¹⁷ In the New World Religion, the Tibetan continued, “all men of spiritual inclination and intention everywhere will keep the same holy days. This will bring about a pooling of spiritual resources and a united spiritual effort, plus a simultaneous spiritual invocation. The potency of this will be apparent.”¹⁸

The three festivals extend over the three-month liturgical season we call the Higher Interlude, a time of special opportunity for spiritual growth and service. It is a time when “abstract or divine thought impresses the Soul and is transmitted to the waiting mind.”¹⁹ Esoteric students have been observing the season for sixty years, and participation increases year by year. During the rest of the year, with its lesser Full Moon festivals, we assimilate what has been received. At each full moon the Hierarchy reaches out to humanity in a distinctive way.

Full implementation of the New World Religion will require active intervention by senior members of the Hierarchy and still lies in the future. Yet early signs of its development are already becoming apparent,²⁰ and there is much we can and should do in the months ahead to facilitate it.

Our immediate focus is on the Full Moon in Aries, which ushers in the Higher Interlude. To this end it will be helpful to examine the astrological significance of the sign. The esoteric ruler of Aries is Mercury, which “leads into the mysteries,”²¹ while Uranus, its hierarchical ruler, “is peculiarly active at this time and brings in the energy of the seventh ray” of ceremony.²² The ceremonial rituals of Easter, the most impressive in the Christian liturgical calendar, may well be absorbed into the restored mysteries. Mars, however, is the exoteric ruler of Aries. Mars is a planet of action, with idealistic Sixth Ray associations, reminding us of the festival’s practical implications. Finally, we should not forget that the Sun, with its Second Ray quality, is exalted in Aries. This combination of influences offers something of the potency to which the Tibetan referred.

We can observe the Easter Festival by joining with disciples throughout the world in invoking energies of the First and Second Rays and putting them to work. Second Ray energy flows through the Solar Logos – and we note that this is the second solar system – and through the Christ. First Ray energy, the energy of Aries, flows through Shamballa. Will or Power, mediated by Love-Wisdom, provides a firm basis for effective action. The world’s many problems require vigorous action to strengthen the growing powers of Light and to lay to rest the declining – but still all-too-apparent – forces of darkness. The New World Religion, the Externalization of the Hierarchy, the Reappearance of the Christ, and Restoration of the Mysteries cannot occur until significant progress is made toward the establishment of right human relations. It is our responsibility to make that happen.

While we should not miss the opportunity to participate in the worldwide invocation, we can also join with Christians in the traditional celebration of Easter. While western Christianity has tended to view Christ’s incarnation in terms of atonement, Eastern Orthodox theologians insist that he came to unlock our latent potential to become divine beings. That doctrine of *theosis*, or “deification,” comes tantalizingly close to esoteric teachings on our divine destiny.²³ We would add that, in addition to his own initiation, the Christ brought about a major initiation for humanity and the planet.

The Christian Easter is not just a commemorative festival, however. It is also an ongoing celebration of new Light, new Life, and new Love. In the words of an Easter prayer:

Christ, you are risen with the sun; you are light in our darkness, warmth in our cold. You are peace and hope and joy... You live eternally, and with you live the millions, living and dead, who trust you.²⁴

The Easter Festival is a living, vibrant occasion when people of goodwill everywhere can join with the Planetary Hierarchy, whom we trust, in collective resolve to put into practice what the Christ initiated 2,000 years ago. The Tibetan declared: “On this day the Spiritual Hierarchy, which [the Christ] guides and directs,

will be recognized, and the nature of God's love will be emphasized."²⁵ In joy and expectation, let us seize the opportunity to proclaim the risen Christ, the reality of the Hierarchy, and the eternal love of God.

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- ¹ The gospels disagree on which day Jesus was crucified. The synoptic gospels state that the Last Supper was a paschal meal, and that he died the following afternoon. *John* suggests that the Last Supper was held the evening before the beginning of Passover.
- ² *Mark* 15:33.
- ³ *I Corinthians* 15:6.
- ⁴ *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (trans: R. A. Bullard and J. A. Gibbons), Nag Hammadi Library. Online: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/2seth.html>. (Accessed Jan. 25, 2013).
- ⁵ *Gospel of Peter* 34-41 (trans.: M. R. James), *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924. Online: <http://www.gnosis.org/library/gospete.htm>. (Accessed Oct. 23, 2012).
- ⁶ *I Corinthians* 15:14.
- ⁷ John F. Nash, "Christology: Toward a Synthesis of Christian Doctrine and Esoteric Teachings," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Winter 2012), 37-61.
- ⁸ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1960, 355.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 730. Despite the apparent clarity of this statement, the Tibetan's teachings leave some uncertainty regarding the initiatory level the Christ attained. See *The Rays and the Initiations*, 83, 730; also *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 17.
- ¹⁰ Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation: Human and Solar*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1922, 56-57.
- ¹¹ Judith von Halle, *And If He Has Not Been Raised*, Forest Row, UK: Temple Lodge 2007, 134. Emphasis and parenthetical clause in original.
- ¹² Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 355.
- ¹³ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, Lucis Publishing Co., 1957, 697. See also *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 772. *John* 20:20-29 records that the risen Christ could pass through walls.
- ¹⁴ *I Corinthians* 15:44.
- ¹⁵ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1957, 420.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1957, 419-420.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 420.
- ¹⁹ Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1934, 517.
- ²⁰ John F. Nash, "The New World Religion: Opportunities and Challenges," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Summer 2012), 17-38.
- ²¹ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1951, 549.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 548.
- ²³ John F. Nash, "Theosis: A Christian Perspective on Human Destiny," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 15-33.
- ²⁴ *Book of Common Prayer*, Hastings, NZ: Anglican Church of New Zealand, 1989, 555.
- ²⁵ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, 420.