

The Full Moon in Aries

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We are approaching the Higher Interlude, the three-month period when abstract or divine thought impresses the Soul and is transmitted to the waiting mind. Throughout the rest of the year the mind, through concrete thought and an attempt to embody divine thought in form, impresses the brain and produces action through the medium of the physical body. The Higher Interlude begins with the vernal equinox, when the Sun moves into the sign of Aries.

The first of the three major spiritual festivals of the Higher Interlude is the Easter Festival. It is observed over a five-day period centered on the first full moon in Aries. In 2011 this occurs at 2:44 a.m., Monday April 18, universal time, or 9:45 p.m., Sunday April 17, Eastern Standard Time in North America.

The Easter Festival is a call for effective action in the world, but that action must be mediated by love. Aries transmits the energy of the First Ray of Will or Power – energy that can be constructive or destructive according to the vehicle through which it flows and according to whether it is conditioned by the Second Ray of Love-Wisdom. Alice Bailey, serving as amanuensis to the Tibetan Master, declared that the Easter Festival is conditioned by “the Love aspect of God.”¹ She also spoke in that context of the energy of *restoration* and *reconstruction*. The First Ray under such circumstances can truly be transformative.

Easter Sunday, in the Christian liturgical calendar, is the Sunday following the Aries Full Moon. In 2011 it is celebrated on April 24. Accordingly, the full moon falls within “Holy Week” when Christians commemorate Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. Holy Week overlaps the period of the Easter Festival, and important insights can be gained by considering them together. From a larger perspective, the Easter Festival recalls the totality of events associated with Christ’s incarnation in Palestine, 2,000 years ago. It also recognizes his continuing mission of implementing Hierarchical Purpose; therein a link is established with the third festival of the Higher Interlude, the “Festival of the Christ” at the full moon in Gemini.

Holy Week is the most solemn week in the Christian calendar. Maundy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper, Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion, and Easter Sunday – the most joyous day in the Christian year – commemorates the resurrection. We can examine the sequence of events as portrayed in the New Testament, Christianity’s sacred story. Or we can examine them as they play out, year after year, in the Holy Week liturgies of the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions, and to varying degrees in the liturgies of other Christian traditions. The liturgy is a complementary sacred story, played out as drama with great emotional, mental and spiritual potency. Esotericists can recognize it as a *form*, or vessel, through which higher power can flow to participants and perhaps to humanity as a whole.

On the first Maundy Thursday Christ shared the Last Supper with his disciples in the upper room – a gathering that modern scholarship has identified as a *chaburah*, or religious gathering of friends.² The disciples preparing for the gathering were told to go to Jerusalem, and “there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.”³ At the meal, Christ instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, to be an extension and continuation of his incarnation; it would become the heart of the sacramental liturgy. Alice Bailey commented that the water bearer foreshadowed the Aquarian Age and that the first communion service foretold “that great relationship which will distinguish humanity in the coming age, after the tests of the Piscean Age.” “Such a communion service,” she added, “has never yet been held, but the New Age will see it take place.”⁴

The gospels report that, after supper, Jesus went with his closest disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. In agony, he made his formal declaration of renunciation: “Father ... not my will, but thine, be done.”⁵ His arrest, trial, and conviction quickly followed, and the following day he was crucified. Jesus’ last recorded words were: “It is finished,” or, in versions closer to the Latin Vulgate, “It is consummated.”⁶

Jesus is said to have suffered on the cross from noon to 3:00 p.m., and the liturgy provides for a three-hour vigil on the afternoon of Good Friday. The service of *Tenebrae* (Latin: “darkness”), one of the most dramatic rites in the liturgical calendar, is conducted in the evening of Good Friday.⁷ While scriptural passages are recited or chanted, the lights are progressively extinguished until only a single candle remains on the altar. That candle is then hidden behind the altar, leaving the church in complete darkness. The service ends with the *strepitus*, or “great noise,” recalling the earthquake reported after Jesus’ death.

The mood of deep introspection continues until the Great Vigil on Saturday evening. Scriptural passages again are recited, with the church in semi-darkness and stripped of all decoration. But at a dramatic moment in the vigil – traditionally at midnight – the celebrant proclaims that Christ is risen. Candles are lit, flowers are brought out to decorate the church, joyful hymns are sung, and a festive Eucharist is celebrated.

On the third day after the crucifixion, the first Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene, accompanied in some accounts by other women, found the empty tomb. Subsequently the risen Christ appeared to the disciples and others and then ascended into heaven. Easter Sunday and Ascension Day, observed 40 days after Easter, have their own joyous celebrations in the liturgy.

Easter represents the emergence of new life and hope after death and despair. Its joyous mood draws upon age-old spring festivals. The word “Easter” was derived from the Old English word *Ēostre*, which originally came from a Proto Indo European root *aues-*, meaning “to shine.” The month of April in Anglo-Saxon England was known as *Ēostur-monath*. Writing at the turn of the eighth century, the Venerable Bede noted that *Ēostre* was a Germanic goddess and explained that the Christian Anglo-Saxons referred to the season “by her name, calling the joys of the new rite by the time-honored name of the old observance.”⁸ *Ēostre* has parallels with the Germanic dawn goddess Hausos, the Greek Eos, and the Indian Ushas.

What purpose Christ’s incarnation served, and precisely what happened during and after the first Holy Week are debated within and among all interested constituencies. Christian interpretations of the incarnation range from a narrow view of blood sacrifice to atone for the sin of Adam to the more positive view that it expressed divine love for humanity. Eastern Orthodox theologians agree with the fourth-century CE Gregory of Nyssa that the incarnation was preordained from humanity’s creation and unlocked latent potential in human nature.⁹

Traditional Christian doctrine affirms that Jesus Christ – one “person” with both human and divine natures – died, was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. The Apostle Paul suggested that the risen Christ appeared in a *soma pneumatikon* (Greek for “spiritual body”), as distinct from a *soma psychikon* (an ordinary living body).¹⁰ Later doctrinal statements insisted that his crucified body was resuscitated, whereupon the empty tomb became crucially important evidence for faith. The church supported Paul’s declaration that the whole Christian faith rests on the fact of the resurrection.¹¹ However, many modern seekers for the historical Jesus understand the resurrection as nothing more than a metaphor or symbol.

Esoteric teachings distinguish Jesus from Christ. The latter – the Lord Maitreya, Master of Masters, and World Teacher – is said to have “overshadowed” his disciple Jesus during the three-year ministry. The Greek verb *episkiazein*, translated as “to overshadow,” appeared in the Septuagint¹² and also in New Testament accounts of the annunciation and transfiguration.¹³ The full significance of the relationship between Christ and Jesus probably lies beyond human comprehension. No doubt the relationship was intimate, supporting the Christian doctrine of hypostatic union; possibly it resembled our relationship with our Solar Angels. But the overshadowing relationship was temporary and ended at the crucifixion.

Esoteric teachings assert that Christ did not die on the cross. Nor, in Bailey's account, did he "rise out of a rocky sepulchre and reassume His discarded body."¹⁴ Instead,

Christ passed through the seventh Initiation of Resurrection and returned back to His original state of Being – to remain there throughout all the eternities. This is the true and final resurrection. The Son of God has found His way back to the Father and to His originating Source, that state of Existence to which we have given the name Shamballa.

Bailey had stated earlier that the "sixth initiation marks the point of attainment of the Christ."¹⁵

Pious attempts have been made to spare Jesus his fate. But he did die on the cross – as did thousands of others whom the Roman authorities deemed politically threatening. According to Bailey, Jesus "is known for two great sacrifices, that in which He handed over His body for the use of the Christ, and for the great renunciation which is the characteristic of the fourth initiation."¹⁶ Jesus' cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" may have been prompted by the wrenching departure of the Solar Angel, which occurs at the fourth initiation. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as the departure of the Christ. Bailey stated that Jesus subsequently attained the fifth initiation as Apollonius of Tyana.¹⁷ However, she later wrote: "[T]he Master Jesus arose out of the tomb; the chains of death could not hold Him."¹⁸ Thus confusion exists on when Jesus attained mastership, as well as on the initiatory status of the Christ.

Who – Jesus or Christ – appeared to the disciples and others after the resurrection is unclear, though the predominance of evidence, particularly the sayings attributed to him, suggests the latter. Another piece of evidence comes from scriptural reports that his body could pass through walls but had a measure of solidity.¹⁹ That body may have been a *mayavirupa*, roughly corresponding to Paul's *soma pneumatikon*. Manifestation of a *mayavirupa* is normally considered to be an ability of fifth- and higher-degree initiates. Christ, a sixth- or seventh degree initiate, certainly could have done so. Jesus would have been able to manifest a *mayavirupa* if he had attained the fifth initiation. As a fourth-degree initiate, he could have appeared in his astral body, but that would have lacked solidity.

Nobody would deny that these controversial issues are important, but our present theme is better served by focusing on the impact of Christ's incarnation. The Last Supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection were its defining events. But that triplicity was itself bracketed by the transfiguration and the ascension – producing a total of five that finds an echo in the five days of the Easter Festival. Through the incarnation higher power descended into the fabric of the planet. The earth and its lives experienced an initiation of new light – along with the granting to humanity of the ability to respond to it. Those with eyes to see perceived the light as a revelation of divine glory, providing a basis on which the Christian liturgy was built.

At Christ's transfiguration – commemorated in Eastern Orthodox Christianity with more emphasis than in the West – the veil separating the divine and human natures was drawn back. Christ's divine nature shone through him, and the disciples Peter, James and John "saw his glory."²⁰ The manifestation of glory harked back to experiences of the transcendent *Kavod* and the indwelling *Shekinah* of Judaic tradition. But it occurred in a new context – the unfolding revelation that reached its climax at the resurrection. It occurred in the context of a newly initiated humanity capable of comprehending the glory. Manifestations of the *Kavod* and *Shekinah* could, depending on circumstances, be either awesome or terrible. Michael Ramsey, who later became archbishop of Canterbury, stressed that, while the transfiguration and resurrection were obvious manifestations of divine glory, even the crucifixion should be viewed as such a manifestation.²¹

A further manifestation of glory came at the ascension. Some scriptural accounts suggest that the ascension occurred late on the first Easter Sunday; others suggested that it occurred months or even years later. In any event Christ "was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."²² Perhaps we can affirm with Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov, "the God-Man's earthly humanity follows His Ascension

to heaven, first the Most Holy Mother of God, and then the entire Church in the age to come. This is the deification of humanity.... The Father saves and deifies the world through the Son, the God-Man, and it is through the Son that He sends the Holy Spirit into the world.”²³

Esotericists understand that the power that descended into human consciousness was the Second Ray energy of Love-Wisdom. It promised major changes in the ways people behaved toward one another. Concepts like “Love your enemies,” “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful,” and “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” had few precedents.²⁴ Judaic culture was based on tribalism, with sharply different attitudes to members and nonmembers. In Greco-Roman culture, Socrates and Plato expounded ethical principles focused on self-realization and political stability.

However, changes were already on the horizon, perhaps anticipating the incarnation – and we note that Christ “has presided over the destinies of life since about 600 B.C.”²⁵ In the fifth century BCE the Buddha – “the Enlightened One,” Lord of Wisdom, and Christ’s predecessor as World Teacher – preached compassion. The fourth-century BCE Chinese philosopher Mozi taught principles of universal love. The Stoics of third century BCE Greece promoted concepts of brotherhood. Most significantly, Mahayana Buddhism shared notions of love and wisdom at almost the same time Christ did, though it had no known contact with developments in Palestine.

Second Ray energy continues to descend on earth. Through Christ, to quote Bailey, “flows the energy of the second aspect, reaching Him direct from the heart centre of the Planetary Logos via the heart of Sanat Kumara.”²⁶ Each year, during the Easter Festival, the flow of Love-Wisdom can be experienced with special potency. Bailey commented that

the Festival of Easter ... is the festival of the risen, living Christ, the Teacher of all men and the Head of the Spiritual Hierarchy. He is the Expression of the Love of God. On this day the Spiritual Hierarchy which He guides and directs will be recognized, and the nature of God’s love will be emphasized.²⁷

In a related passage Bailey added:

On this day [the day of the Aries full moon], the spiritual Hierarchy which He guides and directs will be universally recognized, man’s relation to it emphasized and the nature of God’s love registered. Men everywhere will invoke that love, with its power to produce resurrection and spiritual livingness.... Easter will be the great Western festival.²⁸

As we progress into the Aquarian Age a “liturgy” for the observance and celebration of the Easter Festival will develop out of the Christian liturgies that have graced the Piscean Age. It will provide new forms through which the power of the Christ and the Hierarchy can flow. The five days of the Festival will not necessarily all be joyous; the inflow of energy may well evoke an emotional rollercoaster, as Holy Week does. But the Festival will end on a spiritual upbeat, setting the tone of the Higher Interlude.

Christ’s expression of love for humankind, which began two millennia ago and continues today, provides the clearest example of the conditioning of First Ray energy by Second Ray Love-Wisdom. The flow of Love-Wisdom urges us toward attitudes of acceptance, sharing, and group consciousness. The First Ray, by contrast, motivates decisive action – the readiness and courage to take a stand on issues that threaten the wellbeing of humanity, the lives with which we share our earthly home, and the planet itself.

As we observe the Easter Festival in 2011, may we, individually and collectively, open ourselves anew to love and wisdom and commit ourselves to addressing the pressing issues of our time. May we affirm peace, justice and dignity for all people. May we work to alleviate systemic hunger and sickness, degradation, tyranny, repression, inequity and waste. May we work to establish just peace, dismantle structures of injustice, and promote responsible husbandry of shared resources – including the natural

resources of the planet. May we strive to bridge the gaps among religions, ideologies, political parties, socio-economic classes, and ethnic groups and bring all into mutual harmony. May the power and glory of the resurrection overshadow all that we are and everything we do.

¹ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, New York: Lucis, 1957, p. 422

² Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, New York: Seabury, 1945/1982, pp. 50ff.

³ *Luke* 22:10

⁴ Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, New York: Lucis, 1949, p. 152

⁵ *Luke* 22:42

⁶ *John* 19:30

⁷ The Roman Catholic liturgy, on which the Anglican and Lutheran rites were based, now calls for “Tenebrae” to be observed on Saturday morning. The change may honor ancient precedents, but the symbolism of darkness is lost.

⁸ Venerable Bede, *On the Reckoning of Time*, reprint Liverpool Univ. Press, 1999, p. 54. The “old observance” was a reference to pre-Christian customs.

⁹ John F. Nash, “Theosis: a Christian Perspective on Human Destiny,” *Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2011, pp. 15-33.

¹⁰ *1 Corinthians*, 15:44

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15:14

¹² The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, prepared, according to tradition, by 70 scholars between the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E. It includes some additional books that were never declared canonical by Jewish authorities.

¹³ *Luke* 1:35; *Matthew* 17:5

¹⁴ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, New York: Lucis, 1960, p. 730

¹⁵ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, New York: Lucis, 1922, p. 17

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57

¹⁸ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 730

¹⁹ *John* 20:20-29

²⁰ *Mark* 9:1-13; *Luke* 9:32

²¹ A. Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, 1949, reprint, Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009

²² *Mark* 16:19

²³ Sergei N. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 1933, translation, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2008, p. 405

²⁴ *Matthew* 5:44; *Luke* 6:36; *John* 15:13

²⁵ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 43

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44

²⁷ Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 420

²⁸ Bailey, *Problems of Humanity*, New York: Lucis, 1964, p. 163