

Note :The Dream Song

The Dream Song: Draumkvaedet, see collection *Norske Folkeviser*, edited by Thorwald Lammers, Kristiania 1910, by Aschehoug & Co.

Rudolf Steiner spoke about the Norwegian Dream Song of Olaf Asteson on 1st January 1912, 7th January 1913 and 31st December 1914, and his talks were always accompanied by Marie Steiner-von Sivers reciting the Dream Song. These three lectures or addresses were put together as a volume and published in 1958 as an enlarged new edition of the lecture 'Cosmic New Year'. Ingeborg Möller-Lindholm, the Norwegian poetess (1878–1964), drew Rudolf Steiner's attention to the old legend, and it is largely due to her initiative that this extraordinary folk epic has acquired such an important place in the anthroposophical movement. Through her help we are in a position to include in this edition the notes she made of her conversation with Rudolf Steiner. We have also included in the references, several points from a lecture Ingeborg Möller-Lindholm gave on the Dream Song of Olaf Asteson, which she kindly put at our disposal in translation, and which we have attributed accordingly.

Notes on the Dream Song by Ingeborg Möller-Lindholm of Lillehammer

In June 1910 Dr Steiner held a cycle of lectures in Oslo entitled [*The Mission of the Individual Folk Souls in Relation to Teutonic Mythology*](#). As I lived in Oslo and had a large room at my disposal, I invited to tea about forty anthroposophical friends who had come to Oslo for this occasion. Dr Steiner and Frau Marie Steiner had also agreed to come. I asked Dr Steiner the previous day whether he could tell us something about the unusual Norwegian folk epic, 'The Dream Song of Olaf Åsteson'. Rudolf Steiner smiled amiably and said he would first have to have read or heard it. I saw the point of this. Then he himself made the suggestion that he should arrive the next day an hour before the other guests, so that I could read the song to him and make a rough translation. And that is what happened.

While I read it to him, Dr Steiner sat with his eyes closed and listened intently. He was obviously deeply affected by the unusual content of the song. After tea the Dream Song was read out in Norwegian by a member of the Society, whereupon Dr Steiner gave a short but moving lecture on the song. In particular he dwelt on the fact that these events took place during the time of the twelve holy nights when extraterrestrial influences are at their strongest. He also gave special mention to the name of Olaf Asteson. Olaf or Olcifr means the 'one left behind' after his predecessors have gone. He is the one who passes on the blood of the father of the generations. Ast means love; so he is 'the Son of Love'.

Dr Steiner asked me to translate the song into German. He himself did not know Norwegian, let alone the old dialect in which the Dream Song had been written down, and which was difficult even for modern Norwegians. To begin with I made the excuse that I did not have a sufficient command of the German language to convey the wonderful musical rhythm. Dr Steiner said that did not matter, I should just translate the song literally word for word, so that he could get an exact picture of the content. I did this in the course of the autumn and sent him the translation, which was

very prosaic and in many respects extremely inadequate. Later on Rudolf Steiner put the song into its own characteristic rhythms and gave several lectures on it. It was also used for eurythmic presentation, especially at Christmas time.

Dr Steiner told me in 1913 that I should not think that Olaf the Saint was the *original* Olaf Åsteson. (St. Olaf, a Norwegian king, died in 1035 at the battle of Stiklestad, championing the cause of Christendom.) There had been several people with the name of 'Olaf Åsteson', said Dr Steiner. It was a kind of mystery title.

Dr Steiner was in Norway again after the First World War, in 1921 and 1923. On these occasions he stayed with engineer Ingero. Mrs Ragnhild Ingero, who died a few years ago, told me that Dr Steiner had talked to her about the Dream Song. He had meanwhile gone into it further and discovered new things. One of these was that the song was much older than people believed. It originated about 400 AD. At that time there was a great Christian initiate in this country. He founded a mystery school in Southern Norway; the place was not mentioned. His mystery name was Olaf Asteson, and the song describes his initiation. Originally, so Dr Steiner says, the song was much longer and had twelve sections, one for each sign of the zodiac. The song describes Olaf Asteson's journey through the whole zodiac and what he saw and experienced there. Today we only have fragments of the original song. The aforesaid mystery school continued into the early Middle Ages. The leader was always called Olaf Åsteson

Dr Steiner said that in course of time he would publish these facts and other important things connected with the song. However he did not want to do this until he had found certain external proofs of his findings. He thought he would be able to find these. But the burning of the Goetheanum, excessive work and finally illness and death prevented this intention being realised. Now these indications are all we have.

I have given much thought to these findings of Dr Steiner's and have come to the conclusion that this mystery school was possibly in Skiringssal. This place is or rather was in Vestfold, a region in south-western Norway. In old legends it has always been described as a holy place. Vikings who died on foreign soil wished to be buried in Skiringssal. There was also a *kaupang* there (market). Archaeologists are excavating things at present which they assume to be remains of this market. Up to now, though, nobody has been able to prove conclusively where Skiringssal is. At the time of the mystery school it lay on the coast; however loam deposits have now 'pushed' the place further inland. Skiringssal means 'The Hall of Purification'. Skim means baptism or purification (old Norwegian)

Where did the first Olaf Asteson come from? It has been historically proved that Irish-Scottish monks were in this country long before Christianity was officially introduced. According to legend, Joseph of Arimathea came to the British Isles as early as the first century AD, and began his missionary work there. There have been mystery centres in Ireland since very early times. The tribes on the neighbouring islands were heathen. The Irish-Scottish Church, also called the Culdee Church, arose as a result of the confluence of the work of the Christian missionaries and ancient Druid wisdom. It flourished in many places as early as 300 to 400 AD. There were churches, schools and monasteries, despite the fact that these were always under attack from powerful heathen tribes of the neighbourhood. Many priests and monks

died a martyr's death. This Culdee Church was based in particular on the Gospel of St. John and the preaching of the apostle John. It was like the first communities of Christians and contrasted strongly with the Petrine or Roman Catholic Church. But the latter was victorious. The Culdee Church was destroyed and dissolved in the year 664 AD. It sent a lot of missionaries to various European countries both before and after being externally destroyed. This Church was definitely of an *esoteric* nature. Many things suggest that the first Olaf Asteson was a representative of this spiritual stream.

‘Among these Norwegian people, who still possess many things in their *popular tongue* that approach very closely the threshold of occult secrets, possibilities existed for souls to remain connected longer with everything living and working behind outer material phenomena,’ said Rudolf Steiner in his lecture on Olaf Asteson in Berlin on 7th January 1913, in *Der Zusammenhang des Menschen mit der elementarischen Welt* (Man's Connection with the Elemental World), GA 158, 1970.

Gjallar Bridge: This bridge spans the mystical River Gjöll, which separates the realms of the spiritual world. (I.M.)

The spirit snake he struck at me: Olaf goes on to tell of his journey over the zodiac . It is particularly obvious here that a large part of the song is missing, as Landstad also says in his commentaries. The only constellation that is mentioned is the Dog (*Canis major*), although this constellation is outside the zodiac and the Snake (*Serpens*) also. But the Bull (*Taurus*) is a sign of the zodiac that has significance for him. After he has journeyed through the zodiac Olaf is prompted to take a different path and goes along the Milky Way (*Vintergaten*). There is an old belief that the Milky Way leads to Paradise, the realm of the blessed. (I M.)

Brooksvalin: ‘Brooksvalin’ is a strange old word that Landstrad translates as ‘the forecourt of oppression’. It follows from the song that Olaf now returns to the zodiac and goes into the sign of the Scales. (I M.)

Led by the Prince of Hell: Grutte Graubart-Ahriman. (IM.)

And weighed the souls of men: Everywhere where Christianity had spread there were pictures of Michael holding a scales in one hand. In the other he often had a lance or a sword with which he is piercing the dragon. He is presented like this in innumerable church paintings and sculptures, as also on the north portal of the Cathedral Church in Drontheim. At this point the epic part of the song is virtually over, though a few verses follow in which Olaf preaches to his fellow men in the manner of the Holy Scriptures: ‘They shall rest from their labours, yet their deeds will follow them.’ M.B. Landstad, a well-known Norwegian psalm writer, was told that the song had been used for the death watch in the past. The song was to help the soul at the start of its journey in the other world. (I.M.)

Concerning this lecture of 1st January 1915: Lecture notes were available for this publication which were not known of previously. Therefore there has been some alterations compared with the first edition of 1935.

first Mystery Play: [The Portal of Initiation, scene VIII](#). In Four Mystery Plays, Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1983.

[The Soul's Awakening](#): Fourth Mystery Play.

already in print: [The Mission of the Individual Folk Souls in Relation to Teutonic Mythology](#), Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1970.

Goethe himself relates: in the annals of 1790 and in the essay Bedeutendes Fördernis durch ein einziges gestreiches Wort (Significant Help by Means of One Clever Word). (1822)

from cycle to cycle: 'Cycles' being the terminology for series of lectures for members of the Anthroposophical Society, and published in their native German in the Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe.
