

NATURE SPIRITS: SELECTED LECTURES BY RUDOLF STEINER



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About the Author

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was born in the small village of Kraljevec, Austro-Hungarian Empire (now in Croatia), where he grew up. As a young man, he lived in Weimar and Berlin, where he became a well-published scientific, literary, and philosophical scholar, known especially for his work with Goethe's scientific writings. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he began to develop his early philosophical principles into an approach to systematic research into psychological and spiritual phenomena. Formally beginning his spiritual teaching career under the auspices of the Theosophical Society, Steiner came to use the term Anthroposophy (and spiritual science) for his philosophy, spiritual research, and findings. The influence of Steiner's multifaceted genius has led to innovative and holistic approaches in medicine, various therapies, philosophy, religious renewal, Waldorf education, education for special needs, threefold economics, biodynamic agriculture, Goethean science, architecture, and the arts of drama, speech, and eurythmy. In 1924, Rudolf Steiner founded the General Anthroposophical Society, which today has branches throughout the world. He died in Dornach, Switzerland.

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Based on knowledge attained through his highly-trained clairvoyance, Rudolf Steiner contends that folk traditions regarding nature spirits are based on spiritual reality. He describes how people possessed a natural spiritual vision in ancient times, enabling them to commune with nature spirits. These entities - which are also referred to as elemental beings - became immortalised as fairies and gnomes in myth, legend and children's stories. Today, says Steiner, the instinctive understanding that humanity once had for these elemental beings should be transformed into clear scientific knowledge. He even asserts that humanity will not be able to reconnect with the spiritual world if it cannot develop a new relationship to the elementals. The nature spirits themselves want to be of great assistance to us, acting as 'emissaries of higher divine spiritual beings'.

- Sales Rank: #924141 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-04-23
- Released on: 2013-04-23
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Filled by the spirits

By Ashtar Command

"Nature Spirits" is a book containing selected lectures by Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy. As

usual, I don't know what to think - was the man quite mad, or was he on to something huge? Or did he just misinterpret everything he saw through his clairvoyant "sixth sense"?

Steiner believes that humans are literally surrounded by many different spirit-beings. This is hardly surprising, since Steiner seems to be a rather consistent animist. There doesn't seem to be any truly material causality in his view of the cosmos. Instead, everything that happens is the result of the activity of literal, personalized spirits. Steiner's ideas are extremely complex and somewhat convoluted, and hence difficult to follow. Yet, the lectures in "Nature Spirits" are relatively well-written compared to many other Steiner texts I attempted to devour.

Steiner claims that "the gods" control the material universe by sending elemental spirits into matter. The elementals are effectively bewitched as they descend into our level of reality. However, humans can redeem the elementals. Apparently, each time we observe a material object, elementals from that particular object enters into our consciousness. If we are lazy and unspiritual, the elemental remains inside of us and follows us to the next incarnation. However, if we grasp the spiritual nature of the object, the elemental is released and redeemed. We can also redeem elementals by having a cheerful disposition and positive attitude to life, which is said to liberate spirits "chained by the waning moon". Likewise, "winter spirits" must be transformed into "summer spirits" through a devotional attitude towards the Christmas and Easter festivals, otherwise they are forced to reincarnate together with us.

I'm not sure about the practical consequences of all this, however. Is karma a patchwork of elemental spirits?

In another lecture, Steiner deals with demons and similar entities, claiming that they are in effect caused by man. Every lie or other negative act creates a distortion in the astral body, causing certain spirits from the higher world to be "detached" and trapped inside the negativity. If they are released from the human body, they become phantoms, spectres or demons.

Even spirits that could be considered evil or malevolent can play a positive role in the bigger scheme of things. The "spirits of birth and death" are actually hostile to humanity and the physical world, and want to wreak destruction on us. However, the gods use these spirits to make humans mortal and create obstacles in our path, all in the service of evolution. These malevolent spirits inspired Western humanity to create modern, technological civilization. Today, they serve technology, industry and commerce (which Steiner regarded as something bad). Steiner even implies that "the spirits of birth and death" might no longer be subordinated to the gods. Somehow, they are striking out on their own. In the end, our entire civilization might collapse because of it.

Another class of negative spirits make us appreciate truth, beauty and goodness. The lecturer claims that clever people are constantly surrounded by foolish spirits, that great artists are penetrated by the spirits of ugliness, etc. The ugly spirits are (it seems) black, spider-like and can be seen crawling in and out of people's ears at art exhibitions! There is also a demon with a kangaroo-like body and enormous webbed feet like a duck, which is associated with the plant known as the autumn crocus. I didn't understand its function...

It's precisely these kinds of somewhat absurd statements, that sometimes make the reader wonder whether Steiner was barking mad, or is simply pulling our leg. But sure, I admit I never meditated in a field of autumn crocuses, so perhaps I should keep my peace?

The above was just a sneak peak at the material. There's even more! Ever wondered where salamanders came from...?

I'm not sure how to rate "Nature Spirits", or if anyone outside the narrow confines of Anthroposophy has managed to replicate Rudolf Steiner's findings, but since I feel very spirit-filled this afternoon, I'm actually going to give this somewhat peculiar tome four stars. :-0

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

nature spirits

By Amazon Customer

For someone who is starting out to see the supersensible, will find this book to be very helpful and revealing. It's good to get the heads up in how to navigate through this realm.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Another great Steiner read

By Sarah Vander Meulen

Great compilation of lectures on the the super sensible spirits of nature and the cosmos. I would not recommend this book for those who are not familiar with anthroposophy.

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