

Reading the White Eagle Teaching (1)

This is intended as a three-article series that I hope will provide some help in understanding the teaching we share, not so much by its content but by focusing on how we read it and what were White Eagle and the Brotherhood's intentions in giving the teaching. Much of this first article will be about how we actually *do* 'read White Eagle'. The second article will explore some of the contradictions in the White Eagle teaching, not in order to reconcile them but to explain why it is important they are there, and the third will consider whether part of the work that White Eagle has come to us to achieve is about changing the way in which we think.

For the benefit of posterity, I will begin with a few words about my own experience. I began to hear White Eagle regularly, live, as attendance at Children's Services developed into attendance at the adult services in New Lands Chapel and – just on special occasions – London. This childhood sense of a 'treat' associated with London may be what has kept my focus so unflinchingly on the city. But in both places, I remember how Minesta would rise to allow the trance address that came through her, and how she – or rather White Eagle – would close it. Of that more anon.

Those days of first hearing White Eagle were, I suppose, the early 1960s, and I thus had a decade and a half of listening to White Eagle 'live' (his final talk was given in 1976). That's only a fraction of the involvement I have had with White Eagle's community as a whole, from whom I have heard a number of striking comments repeated, frequently. The first, from those who attended as well as from those who have heard White Eagle talks read out, is that when those present discuss them after, one individual seems to have heard a quite different talk from the next person. Further, people reread and even read again the teaching and say that quite different points came to them each time. Again, more or less, they have heard a different talk. I have done this myself and of course part of it is subjective: we hear what we needed to hear on each occasion.

I think, though, it is more than just subjective response. People sometimes talk about the 'white line effect'. That is, what White Eagle *really* said seems to have existed not in the lines of type but in the gaps between the lines. The comment could become a cliché, but the experience is so widespread I think it demands explanation.

Much as we like to talk about 'white lines', to talk of a written teaching is quite inaccurate. White Eagle *gave talks*: he never, in any shape or form, wrote a book or an article, although he must have overshadowed Minesta many, many times in her correspondence and in her own creative writing. Every book we have produced, from *Illumination* in 1937 to *Group Consciousness* in 2016, is a compilation from transcripts of talks – the three main groups being Sunday addresses, talks to committed students ('Inner Teachings') and talks to the Inner Brotherhood. There are of course other, smaller, sets of talks.

Somehow the sense of ‘the truth is in the white lines’ seems to have been carried through from the delivered talk to the printed transcript (originally, maybe, in the magazines *Angelus* (1936-50) and *Stella Polaris* (from 1951) – and right through, we trust, to the presentation of the teachings on searchable database, which is ongoing as I write). I suggest two explanations, neither of which is exclusive. The first is that the atmosphere of the talk somehow continues into the printed transcript – even though the punctuation is arbitrary, errors in shorthand may have crept into the text, local emphasis may be lost, and so on. I hope this is true, because White Eagle’s stenographers and copy editors have always held that hope. We sense the love with which White Eagle considered his listeners. We sense the peace that had unfolded within the room. We sense the expectation of the listeners.

The other, though, is that there may be something about the very construction of White Eagle’s habit of speech that subtly implies rather more than words convey. To quote White Eagle himself, ‘There is always something beyond all earthly things, something elusive which cannot be caught, trapped and harnessed by the human mind. It is so free, so subtle that it can only be realised in your own heart.’ *White Eagle on Festivals and Celebrations (originally The Way of the Sun) page 98.*

And this is very similar to Chandogya Upanishad ‘There is a light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the light that shines in your heart.’

Many, many times, White Eagle has spoken of the difficulty of putting what he would call spiritual truths into a language the human intellect understands. But he does not fail in this; what I think he does is so express himself that the imagination has to be called in as well. Or, to put it more forthrightly, there is a demand on us that we listen with our hearts not our heads. Only to listen with our minds will leave us disappointed and even confused (see my second article). Of course, the moment we do this we pick up nuances and intuitions that extend out beyond the printed page. If we are reading great literature we do this with our imagination, but when we read White Eagle the human sympathies, and our voluntary aspiration, are opened up as well – partly by conscious decision, and partly because the very words demand it.

For this reason, continuous reading of a White Eagle talk, or book chapter, is always better than looking up references. As we read on, the imaginative opening that goes on internally extends, and we unfold. In many ways, as I shall explore in the third article, I think that part of the desire of the brethren in spirit who gave White Eagle the task of messenger was to put something before us that more or less forced us into this opening of consciousness, but by its very beauty assisted this with an invitation to raised awareness. To listen to a White Eagle talk – most particularly, to listen when White Eagle was speaking, but even today with someone else reading it – is like a meditation. You may not even take in the words with your mind, yet an awareness grows in you.

I remember some advice that Minesta gave my mother, Ylana, before she gave her first address to a Sunday congregation. ‘All you really have to do’, she said, ‘is to

stand up there on the platform and love them'. That really is true today, when talks are given, and it most certainly describes what we all felt when White Eagle was talking. In an unemotional way, he loved us. Listening to White Eagle as a child, adolescent, and even young man my attention wandered – lots – but I never came out of a service or other meeting without the feeling of having been noticed and loved. I never dreamt, of course, what a precious memory those services would become.

I'll give White Eagle the last word in the first article, hoping that what he says will explain what I believe was his endeavour, even though he seems more to be talking about meditation in the passage. 'In the profound silence of the soul, all thoughts of the earth are stilled, the turbulent emotions subdued, and the mind set on thoughts of the heaven world. Then the divinity in the soul and the inner light of the Christ Spirit begins to stir ... it is an inner feeling deep within ourselves which brings us closer to God. This feeling lies beneath all thought. It is an awareness of an enfolding love, a strengthening and an upholding power deep within our own being, and aligns our spirit with the cosmic life. We cannot think our way to this centre of truth. We can only feel it or realize it. In the profound silence, it is then that we reach the centre of truth and find God.

Reading the White Eagle Teaching (2)

How we read White Eagle's teaching will depend partly on our own unfoldment – as well as factors like how we feel at the time. In this it is unlike factual statement, with a single meaning (or even multiple, but definable, meanings). As we discovered in my first article, our receptivity changes with each new experience – hopefully unfolding each time although, just as in life, there will be times when something seems newly incomprehensible, even when it was clear before. Even the recognition of that is a pointer to our growth, however.

One of the areas where we are most likely to respond with puzzlement and incomprehension is that of reincarnation. Many of us make the assumption, quite unquestioningly, that this is something White Eagle teaches. It's reasonable to assume so. What, then, of this statement? 'Reincarnation, as usually understood, is an illusion'? I've put in some commas to emphasize 'as usually understood' because White Eagle certainly *doesn't* say that there is no reincarnation – simply that there is something in it that we don't understand. Elsewhere he puzzlingly tells us that reincarnation both is and is not true, and in yet another place, that the normal 'idea of rebirth is a very crude and inadequate description of what really takes place' (Inner Teaching no. 6).

I dealt with this enigma in my 1997 book, *Eyes of the Spirit* (pp 123-6), and I won't go over the whole argument here. The first thing that may be worth saying, though, is that one of the reasons the concept of reincarnation is unsatisfactory to White Eagle – and may even seem contradictory to White Eagle himself – is that we see it from a purely linear, physical-world, perspective, and he sees it from a higher world. 'I lived many years ago as an American Indian, is the sort of thing we might want to say;

‘and next life I should love to be a successful composer’. That’s what I mean by a material-world perspective: without imagination, we find ourselves presupposing that our incarnations are in a straight sequence and ask such reasonable, this-world, questions as ‘Could they overlap?’. From spirit, I’d like to suggest that question simply cannot be asked. There is no time in spirit – we accept that from White Eagle – so why should there be any sense of sequence at all?

So while incarnation clearly enough brings us in through the door of birth into the physical world, and sees us leaving through the great portals of light, to get anywhere near understanding reincarnation requires a different viewpoint, one unattached to earth. I won’t presume to answer the question within this article, but will rather comment on the implication: *to understand White Eagle you have to be prepared to see things from the perspective of spirit*, and that will most certainly mean not reading it in a conventional way but in a prepared state. No wonder White Eagle talks almost always began at least with a prayer or invocation – or in the case of a Sunday address, with most of the service already having happened. We generally assume that that gave Minesta time to go ‘under control’, but I think it was just as much to ensure that we, the listeners, were raised and ready. How many times does White Eagle talk – and pray – about ‘going into the upper room’ in order to hear teaching? Here is something he says right back in 1936, in the fourth Inner Teaching he ever gave: ‘It is not only in the words spoken, but in the power which is concentrated around us at these groups that you may learn. Your teachers are here, giving greater things to you than White Eagle’s words can bring.’

We often talk about the group for whom White Eagle humbly claims only to be a ‘spokesman’ – how often do we remember that the intention behind his teaching is to lift us to the level at which that spirit brotherhood are present in our understanding and consciousness? Two sessions before the teaching just quoted, he had reminded us: ‘Only those who enter the Silence reach indeed to truth’. In the ideal relationship, ‘Pupil and Master are so attuned that no word is necessary’. Attunement to the teacher is something to emulate, in short. In Inner Teaching no. 193 he asks: ‘Will you try to attune yourselves to the power of the spirit and not remain on the earthly mental plane?’.

I am inclined to think that the contradictions in White Eagle’s teaching – and there are quite a few – are all of them deliberate. They dislodge us from dependency on the teacher and remind us how essential it is that we do the work that is required of us truly to understand. In just this vein he once asked, ‘Remember that old White Eagle is not an oracle; we are all children, learning’ (Inner Teaching no. 7). He also spoke of the subtlety of the contact he made through Minesta’s ‘base of brain’ chakra: ‘We would explain to you all that we do not work on the purely mental or mind plane when we come, but on the intuitional or Buddhistic plane of consciousness, and the vibration is most delicate to sustain’.

Let’s allow White Eagle himself to sum up this part of what we are trying to say: ‘When you want to docket everything and tie truth up in neat little parcels, you will stumble.... You will all find that as you proceed along the path of spiritual

unfoldment you will change. In all probability in twelve months from now you will see things quite differently from how you see them tonight. That is how unfoldment takes place. It is not that what is true today will not be true tomorrow, but a question of expansion, greater comprehension of spiritual principles.’ That’s from a late Inner Teaching (no. 286). If I now quote an earlier comment, ‘It is not enough that you accept this truth with your mind. You must accept and believe with your whole being’ (no. 198) it may sound as though I am simply repeating the argument. However, there is something new in this statement: ‘believe it with your whole being’. I know that in my own experience there are things in the teaching to which I simply paid an easy acknowledgment – or an intellectual one – up to a few years ago, even the reincarnation contradictions. What has changed for me is that I now find myself considerably more able to really *feel* when White Eagle is talking (I include the printed page) – and in feeling, discover how utterly radical White Eagle sometimes is. I think White Eagle really wants us to forget conventional understanding, to ignore the literal as unhelpful, and to absolutely give ourselves in imaginative understanding to how immense, how wonderful and how real the spirit world is.

Here’s an example: a phrase White Eagle sometimes uses is ‘the spiritual Sun’, or, more mystically ‘the Christ Star Circle’. I heard those concepts intellectually, once, now the first brings into my consciousness an almost incomprehensible blaze of light that leaves me reeling with its power; the second takes me into a world behind the Sun where that brilliance still reigns, but some individualization of the illumined beings still exists. Every one of them blazes like the sun. Every time my human consciousness feels far too small to grasp the full reality, yet is just large enough to know that the reality is there.

When White Eagle seems to contradict himself, is it going too far to say that he wants to trick our minds out of their normal functions and demand that we engage different faculties, like many meditation group leaders may do? In my next article I want to talk about ways in which White Eagle actually seeks to train our minds, and whatever lies beyond mere mind.

Reading the White Eagle Teaching (3)

MAYBE MY article in December will have given the impression that the only way to derive the best from White Eagle’s teaching is with a serene expression, cross-legged in front of a candle! No, I didn’t quite mean that – I have had too many experiences of sudden flashes of insight from White Eagle’s teaching at the most unexpected moment, or from something read quite unexpectedly or in passing, to believe that. But what I think links the two types of experiences is the absence of intrusive mind, and it is mind that I want to talk about in this third article.

‘The absence of intrusive mind’ – I wonder myself what that means! Well, some of the negatives around ‘mind’ are so obvious as to be truisms. The mind seeks to analyze, it is critical, and it has an extraordinary capacity for believing that it is right (sometimes against all reason!). But I think the phrase means a little more than that,

even, and the key word is 'intrusive'. When we function from a place of serenity and the mind is quiet, all sorts of further imaginative enquiry is possible, but then the busy mind charges in, saying 'It is like this' and even 'It is not like that'. People who felt they agreed become divided; personal belief is shaken.

The mind is truly important, but maybe less so when we are reading or listening to White Eagle, although I will nuance that statement shortly. He himself has said (PRAYER, MINDFULNESS AND INNER CHANGE p. 22): 'Remember, do not try to fit spiritual truths into earthly interpretations until you see the way quite clearly. Leave them as treasures, jewels, awaiting the time for their setting in the right way and the right place.' That's rather a nice image – jewels waiting to be cut.

Ever since ancient times, it has been a truism that the ideal human being is healthy in both body and mind: *mens sana in corpore sano* – a healthy mind in a healthy body. People today put huge effort into keeping their bodies fit and trim, but do they think of what keeps the mind healthy? I am not so sure. By contrast, and actually very subtly, White Eagle is constantly looking to the good functioning of our minds. He certainly doesn't say that we should really be sitting on a wonderful cushion all the time. For instance, our minds need to be trim enough to keep focus. We need to listen – and listen subtly. When we don't allow the subtle nuances he wishes to convey, when we interpret rigidly, it actually disturbs him. He once said to an audience of people he knew well: 'We are sometimes aghast at the interpretation which is put upon our words even by your good selves' (Inner Teaching, henceforth IT, no. 217).

We also need to be able to move from our mind to our heart – or, if you prefer, engage the 'heart mind'. That's something that does exist, scientifically – there are indeed cognitive cells in the heart. But what White Eagle means is a mind that fully allows the imagination and the sympathetic emotions. He once said, 'The message of the spirit is not usually understood by the intellect alone, which does not always comprehend the language that is spoken. Love understands it always. The love in your heart will always understand the language of the spirit, for this appeals to the mind in your heart..' (IT 218)

I was lucky at university to work with a mentor for whom the defining mind was not the be-all-and-end-all it might have been for some of his colleagues. We used to smile when he used his catchphrase, 'Let us float the notion that....', but floating the notion is exactly what, I suspect, White Eagle wants to do with us as he speaks. 'Let's float the notion of reincarnation', he might almost have said – or just as easily, 'Let's float the notion that reincarnation is not a useful idea' (see my last article). The mind then does not fix itself on whether the statement is correct or incorrect (after which there can be no discussion) but stays in the creative area with the idea. 'If reincarnation takes place, but is not an adequate concept for what really is happening....' (which attitude, I believe, is behind what White Eagle says) is a beginning that opens our imagination. As I said in my second article, we can't help but try and see the whole idea from a spiritual perspective.

In this way, I think, a focus on White Eagle's teaching really trains the mind – it trains it in the direction of fluidity, openness to alternatives, and breadth. 'There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea', begins a hymn that I have always liked. May there always be wideness in our reading of White Eagle's teaching. But there is a second characteristic of White Eagle's mind training, and that is discrimination. Earlier I said I would modulate my apparent rejection of the critical mind, and now is the moment. A well-trained mind is quick to spot where it is being led in the wrong direction. Yet a classic tool in this is not the analytical mind but actually the heart. If something does not feel to be true, if kindness is missing, if respect for others is not there, if spiritual principles seem to be being flouted, White Eagle says, then be really careful with the statement you are hearing.

I think I'd like to add something that has more to do with mental training than something White Eagle specifically tells us. Given the huge amount of statements about spiritual things that the new century offers us – from 'Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene' to all sorts of ideas about cosmology and messages from other planets (all of which may be perfectly true, but are hard to verify) – I think it really behoves us as pioneer light workers not to say 'this is right and that is wrong' but simply to recognize what is an objective statement ('today is Thursday') and what kind of statement is a subjective one (the sort that should really begin, 'My own belief is that...'). Many errors are made by confusing the two, and I would love to feel that in the Lodge we were able both to show flexibility and the power to discriminate between belief and shared and agreed 'fact'.

Lastly, I think that White Eagle does not just open our eyes to a spiritual viewpoint, but rather indicates that as time goes by we will start to recognize that thoughts belong on different planes. His comments on 'spiritual science' in the address that begins this issue are interesting. As we progress, we shall be able to say much more clearly than we can today what thought really comes from a wordless plane – but still know in our hearts what truth it contains. Then the whole thing will become simpler. We will know what level of emotion enables the thought to be real, and how much imagination is involved. The simple objective statements that we use and hear all the time are obviously physical plane statements, and no less useful while this is where we live. But we are already starting to recognize the etheric level and explore what yoga calls the breath body. All the planes will start to become real to us – but a really healthy mind, trained according to White Eagle's teaching, will help!

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