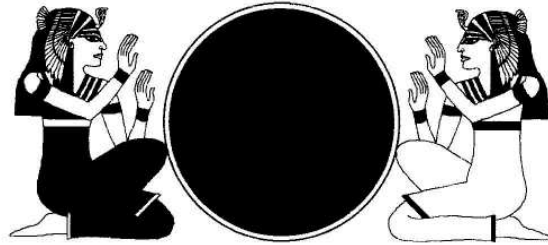


Temple of the Dark Moon



Water: The Source of Life

By Frances Billinghamurst © 2003

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From the most earliest point in man's existence on Earth, water has played a vital part - earliest settlements were often established along the banks of rivers or lake shores to ensure a ready supply of water was obtained. For without water, where would human life be. Water is the element of all people. It is our common bond as our bodies and souls all need to be nourished by water.

This connectiveness and dependence upon water is started from the uterine protective waters of the mother's womb. Indeed, it is this symbolic reference water has with life source that has spanned the ages. Oceans surround the land, the greater ocean or abyss of space, from which the rains fall, overall symbolically related and refer to the life forces in their fluid state.

Our bodies may be able to survive up to a month without food, but without water, we can only last a week. Water is needed, not only to re-hydrate ourselves, but also to keep our muscles and other parts of our bodies (ie eyes) operating properly. We all need two to three litres of water per day, and up to six litres in extreme situations. Because of this importance, we, as a race, need to look after our precious resource as not only our own lives depend on having fresh clean water, but also the lives of all other inhabitants on the planet.

In Australia, water is not one resource that we actually have plenty of - despite the illusion we have developed by simply turning on a tap and having water pour forth from it. It has only been recently that the Snowy River has been allowed to flow again, however the Murray/Darling, in particular the Murray Mouth, is in serious trouble. As I live in the driest state in the driest continent (South Australia), I am amazed, and horrified, of how disconnected we are from nature - and in particular the lack of respect we show for water. It is as if we are totally unaware of the very fact that water not only flows around us, but through us as well - as humans, water makes up for about 80% of us.

JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY

In order for us to learn to appreciate our natural resources more, in particular those of us in the West, it would be beneficial to learn from other cultures. In Japan, for example, despite the emphasis on modern technology, one ancient ritual, that of the Tea Ceremony, is still valid to modern Japanese today as it was for their ancestors. This ceremony is an ancient water ritual which encompasses the four principles essential to a state of grace - being purity, respect, tranquillity and harmony - principles that I am sure all of us could benefit from at one time or another.

- The state of "**purity**" is obtained through the washing of every bowl and utensil to be used in the ceremony. This simple act enforces to the participant that they are about to undertake something special.
- "**Respect**" binds the host and the guest together in a way of taking the tea. No matter how busy our lives may be, there is always time for tea.
- "**Tranquillity**" is the natural aesthete of water. The grace and beauty of life is observed and maintained through this aspect of water.
- "**Harmony**" allows for space between things - the tea ceremony allows mankind to be in harmony with the rhythms of nature, not moving against it.

In terms of evolution, water is near the beginning and source of life. In her book "Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets", Barbara Walker mentions water is the first of the elements and seen as the "mother of all things".

" ... Water gave birth to "spirit", a male principle; hence the idea of baptismal rebirth that Christians copied from the Pagans involved both water (feminine) and spirit (masculine). The baptismal font was described as a "womb", specifically the womb of Mary, whose name was that of all the ancient Sea Goddesses...".

In many myths around the world, water is the primary impulse of creation, the watery womb of chaos, and is representative of the Great Mother. According to the Zuni people in south-western United States, for example, the first humans emerged into this world through the waters of a spring from the Underworld. Most of us are probably aware of the story of the great flood in the Bible. However, such stories are found all through the ancient world, including on ancient Sumarian text, therefore confirming Barbara Walker's suggestion that water represents the oldest of the Divine Powers.

Water has been used in rites of passage, marking a symbolic act in initiation rites marking the beginning of adulthood. The initiation rite of the Yolngu people of northern Australia re-enacts the swallowing and regurgitation of two boys by Uurlunggur, a great serpent venerated as the source of rain.

Worshippers from ancient Greece through to Muslims of today touch themselves with water (a form of self-blessing or dedication) or wash before entering a sacred place. Ritual bathing of sacred objects is performed with similar intent. The Greeks bathed statues of their Deities every year in order to reaffirm their powers, while the king of Saudi Arabia performs an annual ritual washing of the Ka'ka stone, the sacred black rock which stands as a focal point at Meca, the holy city of the Muslims.

Water played a significant role in the ancient Akkadian story (dating back to at least the 8th century BCE) of the Goddess Ishtar's descent into the Underworld. When Ishtar, the Goddess of Love, Fertility and War, forces her way into the Underworld, she is stripped of her powers and treated as one of the dead, a situation which causes great problems back

on Earth. It is only when Namtar, the Goddess's vizier goes to the entrance of the Underworld and sprinkles Ishtar with the waters of life, that she can return.

In the West, however, we have lost our reverence for nature - we treat it merely as a commodity. Although our rituals of living and dying are interwoven with the cycles of water, we have removed ourselves so far from nature that we can no longer see this, unlike other cultures around the world. We need to be re-enchanted with water in order to value its importance again, especially with the hotter Summer months approaching.

One way to bring back this feeling is to contemplate the importance water has on us in our normal lives - something I doubt many of us have considered before, unless faced with an emergency. The next time you take a shower, brush your teeth, clean the car, wash the dishes, or even hose down the drive (this action I personally cannot bear to watch), think about the water you are using and the water you are wasting. What would you do if there was little or no water around - would you cope? There are countries in the world who live on as little as three litres of water per head per day - would you and your family be able to do this?

We need to realise that our actions, no matter how slight, do effect other people, and that we can make a difference. In making this difference, we became special individuals because we realise the importance we play in the cycle of life.

"Without water, there is no life;
so water is not an image or simile,
but a symbol of life."

About the Author:

Frances has been a student of metaphysics and the occult for most of her life, with her formal training commencing in 1993. She is trained in both ceremonial magick and Alexandrian Wicca, and has been initiated into the Alexandrian Wiccan tradition.

Frances founded the Temple of the Dark Moon in 1999 to provide accurate information on Paganism (in particular Wicca and Wytchcraft. For a period of six years from 2000 Frances was the secretary for the Pagan Alliance Inc (SA) and worked closely with both the SA Police and Attorney General with respect to changes in legislation.

In 2003 she was invited to speak at the New Zealand Pagan Fest where she also led the opening ritual with Chief Druid, Philip Carr-Gomm.

Frances regularly writes for Australia's number one spiritual lifestyle magazine "Insight" and her articles also appearing in over 10 separate publications around the world including the 2008 Llewellyn's Witch's Calendar. Frances has appeared in the "Sunday Mail", the "Messenger" and the "Melbourne Age" with respect to being a Wytch.

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