

THE SNAKE AND THE ANCESTORS
CONNECTING WITH OUR STORIES OF ORIGIN

Symbols of the Ancestors abound in the stories of the Jews, or whose tribal name is Ivrim (Boundary Crossers). In the Jewish culture, for example, the culture of the Ivrim, or the Hebrews, the snake is a sacred and primordial Ancestor who plays an integral role in the story of our origins. The snake lives at the center of the cycles of time and sits at the root of our sacred tree.

“It is the snake itself, coiled in a circle, encompassing all of the winds and their attributes, connecting all of our life cycles and life changes The snake is the circle, the cycle, the stream that flows through our very being and through each of our stories as they unfold through the choices we make and the actions we take.”ⁱ (Winkler, 1999)

The snake in many cultures represents feminine energy and sexuality and since ancient times has been a symbol of life. The snake resembles three life-affirming images: the meander of the river, the roots of trees, and the umbilical cord between child and mother. In Genesis of the Old Testament, the ancestral river is not only the river that gives drink for the garden and separates into four life affirming headwaters: the Mouth of Transformation (Peeshon), Belly Flow (Geechon), Simple Unity (Cheedekel), and Multiplicity (Parass) (*Genesis 2:13*), but it is symbolic of the map that we create with the footsteps of our life and the lives of our ascendants.

The roots of ancestral trees are the roots of the sacred trees. For the Ivrim (the Hebrews), these trees are the olive, the acacia, the myrtle, the willow, the elm, the carob, the cedar, and the pomegranate. These also are the roots that lead us back to ourselves, our land, our nourishment, our people.

The umbilical cord represents the genealogy that ties us to a people, a land, and a culture, as well as that which ties us lifetime after lifetime to life herself. This is the journey of remembering our indigenous mind. Healing happens by bringing together the sacred hoop of humanity that is held in the Four Directions, the Four Rivers, the Four Winds that blow us together and create the sacred spiral that is the human experience. (*Zohar 1:130B*)

In the tradition of the Ivrim, the snake carries the medicine of knowledge. (*Book of Genesis 3:1*)ⁱⁱ Although the snake is not the carrier of knowledge itself, snake is the Spirit or Ancestor that guides and directs the feminine to the place where wisdom can be found. In the language of the Ivrim Ancestors, the word for snake, *Nachash*, is also the Ivrim word for *trickster*. The medicine of the snake, then, is to challenge our very understanding of what we think we know and comprehend. In the Biblical Creation story when Earth Being (Adam) and Fire Being (Woman) are in the Garden, the snake directs Fire Being to partake of the fruit from the tree of knowledge, leading her to the place where the wisdom of balance and extreme could be acquired.

Christian colonial thinking and reason have maintained that this was the original sin of humanity and the fault of woman. This act, the colonial mind teaches, caused the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden; and since that time man has been trying to regain entrance to that Garden through control, arrogance, intolerance, oppression, will, dominion, and power over all of Creation. This one story has been

distorted for centuries, concealing the teaching and power of snake as well as the ancestral Spirits that live within this story in the guise of the letters, words, and sounds of the traditional language. The snake, the feminine, and nature all have been demonized by a colonial interpretation of this holy text.

Without noticing, this understanding is the sense Jewish men and women have been given by the dominant society about themselves, their world, and their culture. The demonizing of the feminine has been accomplished by using the patriarchal and colonial values and practices in which we have been steeped and educated, and by which we have been seduced.

The de-valuing of the feminine is reflective of a mind-set and mode of being in which blame and scapegoating flourish; this is detrimental to achieving healing, self-realization, enlightenment, and community. As a result, the dominant culture has been able to keep wholeness and healing at bay, ensuring that its dominion is safe from the strength of a healthy, illuminated community.

The destiny that is each of our lives, given the opportunity to reveal itself, will move our lives, our loves, and our work. This movement is directed by our Ancestors, all of them. The Ancestors will stir our lives whether we ask or not. However, if one does consciously ask for ancestral assistance, the motion can be formidable. When we have asked the Ancestors to assist, when we have done the ritual activity of re-connection and reexamined who They are and what They chose during their lives, and we have done this with compassion and intention, then we have begun what is called The Ceremony of the Dead. In the Ceremony of the Dead we redeem our Ancestors and their history. We ask them and we ask ourselves: What would it have been like to have spent a day connected, whole, and in the good mind?

From an indigenous perspective, we can assume that within the practice of our spirituality and in the traditional languages of our cultures live tiny fragments of an earlier time and a different world view. For the most part we are oblivious to these pieces of this ancient and timeless puzzle. So much time and so much hardship have elapsed following the genocide and assimilation of our people into the cultures that have surrounded, or engulfed, or become us. In addition to the extensive suppression of our traditional ways, our memories have been discounted, invalidated, and nullified, so the conjuring of the cellular memory held in the body knowing of those of us who lived, who survived, and who endured, is more difficult.

Immersion into the dominant culture assists in the dulling, numbing, and deadening of our awareness of the fragments that still exist of our original ways, our original instructions, our duty to Creation. As we continue to melt into the universal cauldron that is American or European or Western, we not only lose our distinction, but we lose access to those fragments that do remain and that can guide us home to that place of being/knowing that is specific to us as a people. With this loss of memory is also the loss of hope for healing and sustainability, for not only ourselves as whole and healed people, but for each of the diverse peoples that make up the consciousness of this magnificent planet, cosmos, and universe.

Many of us now carry the ancestry of many peoples who come from vastly different traditions and customs.ⁱⁱⁱ Through the passage of time, we have begun to blend these obligations. Nonetheless, each of us carries a piece of the whole wheel. Each nation, each race, each community, each person carries the medicine needed at this time for the healing of those whose circles we share and encounter. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner reminds us of the synchronicities that occur to bring these pieces together:

“There must have been a time when you entered a room and met someone and after a while you understood that unknown to either of you there was a reason you met. You had changed the other or they had changed you. By some word or deed or just by your presence, the errand had been completed. Then perhaps you were a little bewildered or humbled and grateful. And it was over.

Each lifetime is the piece of a jigsaw puzzle. For some there are more pieces. For others the puzzle is more difficult to assemble. Some seem to be born with a nearly completed puzzle. And so it goes. Souls going this way and that trying to assemble the myriad parts.

But know this. No one has within themselves all the pieces to their puzzle. Like before the days when they used to seal jigsaw puzzles in cellophane ensuring that all the pieces were there.

Everyone carries with them at least one and probably many pieces to someone else’s puzzle. Sometimes they know it. Sometimes they don’t.

And when you present your piece which is worthless to you, to another, whether you know it or not, whether they know it or not, you are a messenger from the Most High.” (Kushner, 1977, p. 69-70)^{iv}

From the perspective of indigenous knowing/being, when we forget our place of origin, our homeland, we are cut off from our Ancestors, their wisdom base; and thus a denial of our culture of origin is inevitable. This reality not only has created a split in the psyche of the human soul and is responsible for perpetuating the violence, the rage, the despair, and the loneliness that pervades our society, but it also is responsible for the deterioration of the planet herself. The result of the disassociation from the sentient landscape is deep rage that is percolating within the souls of modern human beings. Many cultures have passed since we understood how to communicate with the Earth and knew how to be deeply informed by Her. As a result of this disconnection, our despair lives deeply buried in the subconscious and collective mind, only to percolate or explode in our days.

The wisdom and the healing for this dis-ease is in our memory of the indigenous being/knowing that participates in relationship with the Earth. This memory, this cellular memory, lives within each person and every culture, as well as within the morphic field that surrounds us. Each nation carries a vital piece for the ecological sustainability of this Earth and this universe. If we do not remember who we are, whence we come, and the instructions inherent in our traditional knowledge, and if we do not take our rightful place in the wheel of life, how can the Earth be sustained?

Indigenous is a term with vast social, ecological, and political meanings. Anyone who attempts to embody this consciousness must be willing to carry the burden of its meaning. Indigenous consciousness not only is a personal and social struggle for de-colonization, but a commitment to stand strong against the tides of genocide, racism, sexism, agism, ecocide, ethnocide, and all other forms of oppression that permeate the social strata of our modern culture.

To engage in remembering our indigenous roots carries with it the responsibility, both morally and politically, to engage in de-colonization in all its various aspects, including the awareness of the daily conscious and unconscious subjugation and annihilation of indigenous peoples and cultures still attempting to live on this planet, Gaia. With this commitment is a cost, and that cost is the deep and profound

unexpressed grief over both the overt and subtle displays of subjugation and annihilation of all people that underlie all that we feel, all that we encounter, and all that we do in the arena of action. This unexpressed grief shows itself in our lives through the individual journey we have with our own suffering and the unhealed ancestral trauma in each of our cultures of origin which is passed on generation after generation. Ancestral trauma, unless healed, carries on as an open, festering wound.

Ancestral trauma is the result of the painful past and our people's responses to that pain. Although collectively we can walk through the history of painful events, there are still silences and gaps about what happened in our stories, some which we may never know. This is particularly true for our Ancestors during the ancient of days.

Often in trauma there is no collective remembering, for communities were torn apart, separated, and scattered across the Earth. People often turned inward into the silence of their experience and their knowing. This pain, this silence, this desire to forget, passes on from generation to generation. After more than 2,500 years of oppression, we can see why assimilation is so appealing. Both healing and transformation become crucial when a community is encouraged to remember what they or their Ancestors may have decided consciously or unconsciously to forget.

As we begin to educate ourselves about the travesties done to our Ancestors and of that which we ourselves and our Ancestors have done to others, we embark on the process of forgiving. Forgiving is the entry into the healing of ourselves as world. To acknowledge the fact that we are living on someone else's land, for example, and deeply understand how that came to be, opens new avenues of respect through mutual exchange of knowledge and protocol. We must be willing to stand and take the pain of that remembering. There is no going around this pain. We must confront it, acknowledge it, and experience it. Only through the pain of our Ancestors can we make our way to the other side of healing.

HEALING OUR LIFE

We are both Spirit and body commingling with mind. The purpose and intention of the healer and of healing are to promote the harmonic resonance of these three aspects of ourselves. Our Ancestors, in all their different expressions, guide us on our journey home. What is required of each of us, in order to reach this sacred place called home, is to be aware of the self enough to recognize the directives and insights of the Ancestors; for it is they who lived so each of us could reach this moment in life. Their lives are meaningful, *because* we have reached this moment in life.

This coming home, the knowing of our indigenous nature, is the place at the core of our being called soul. Healing into this place called soul is about walking our life path as Spirit has laid it out for each of us. Healing the soul is about walking this path with integrity and wholeness and living in the Divine Order. "Heal the life and the life will heal you." (Deena Metzger, 1994)

The alliances that we are making with the Earth, the Ancestors, and the dead are to stop us in our tracks and restore our relationships to balance. Wholeness and identity are achieved through respectful attention to the web of sustaining relationships and conscious service to Spirit. All tribal cultures know and understand this. Remembering these ancient ways realigns our lives towards transformation and balance.

When we remember our own ways, call our own Ancestors' names, drum and dance the rhythms of our homelands' heartbeat, and bring these things to life, we participate in the healing and transformation of the soul. This memory, this engagement

with ancient ceremony, prayer, and ritual of our cultures of origin, ensures that our children, our grandchildren, and our grandchildren's children will not have to struggle to remember that which once was lost. Out of our remembering, they will come to know their own true nature.
