

## **Eve, Snake & the Awakening of Kundalini**

© Copyright Sheila Foster, 2010

Recently, over the course of a two-week period, I received a large number of emails from women in my Temple of the Sacred Feminine community stating that they had had unusual sightings, experiences, or dreams of snakes. That same week, a beautiful green snake with yellow stripes crossed my path. Over the last 30 years, since my own Kundalini awakening, I have had significant sightings and dreams of snake. I came to understand that snake is an archetypal symbol of the Great Mother Goddess, incarnate in one of her most universal forms, as well as an ancient symbol of the Kundalini Shakti, the divine energy of spiritual initiation and awakening that lives within each of us. Snake's appearance in a woman's life or dreams can be a harbinger of a threshold crossing, a portal to a new level of embodied feminine consciousness that is emerging.

In *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (1983), Barbara Walker points out that practically every culture has a snake in its mythology, and most often it is seen as a symbol of wisdom, healing, initiation, and secret knowledge, or it is associated with transformation, eternal life, death and regeneration. Because snake is an archetype, she embodies duality. People the world over have projected both bright and shadow qualities on to snake. Considered evil by some, others see her as divine. In some myths, snake is a male, and female in others. Ancient maps, most likely made by men, often depicted great serpents at the outer edges of the oceans, warning men not to dare to sail their ships beyond the known, charted world, lest they meet with certain death. Ancient women saw the snake as a symbol of the Creatrix, She who is the bringer of the seasons, the cycles of the moon, woman's body and life, including birth, menstruation, conception, pregnancy, birth, menopause, and death. She was not feared, She was honored and celebrated, part of everyday life.

Our ancestresses, the ancient Indo-European women, knew about the snake's connection to spirituality and the Great Goddess. Images of snakes and spirals abound in the archaeological discoveries of the *matristic* cultures of the paleolithic and neolithic sites in Western Europe. This has been documented by the late archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas, in *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991), and *The Language of the Goddess* (1989). Gimbutas uses the word *matristic* instead of *matriarchal* to indicate that, while these cultures were matrilineal, they were definitely not female versions of patriarchy, with women ruling over the men in a hierarchical structure. Indications are those women and men were equal in these societies, even though the primary focus of worship was the Goddess. The lives of these people, first as hunters and gatherers, and later as the women developed agriculture, were lived in close connection to the earth, and completely intertwined with the seasons and cycles of nature. The life-giving, nurturing, death-giving, and renewing aspects of nature were the basis of belief in a Divine Feminine who gave, sustained, and took life back into herself.

Our ancient ancestresses, the grandmothers of our lineages, carved snakes and spirals into pots, female icons, and painted them on the walls of caves and their temples. Among the artifacts, there are images of women holding snakes, wrapped in snakes, and with snakes for hair, as well as small icons of women with snake bodies.

Gimbutas' books are filled with numerous images of statues and icons of women where the snake or spiral is used in combination with bird's heads, symbolic of soul flight and shamanic travel into other realms of consciousness. During contemporary Sacred Feminine Initiation, when the Kundalini energy, also called Snake Power, becomes active in a woman, the veils of ordinary consciousness are lifted, and awareness of other dimensions is opened. These icons suggest that this initiatory journey of Kundalini awakening brings with it the ability to shift consciousness from one dimension to another, and to engage the energies and beings of these other realms for healing, empowerment, guidance, and information. This speaks to the shamanic aspect of snake and Sacred Feminine initiation.

Snakes in world myths are perceived either as allies or evil, depending on the culture in which they emerge. We in the west have become familiar with the snake mostly through our creation myth of Adam and Eve in Genesis, and through the myths of Greece, which we learned about in school. These are the mythologies of patriarchy that have most influenced and shaped the misogynistic attitudes and treatment of women in the west for thousands of years, and we have all have been deeply conditioned and both consciously and unconsciously affected by these attitudes and beliefs. Snake appears in Sumerian and Babylonian mythologies which contain elements akin to Genesis. In these, the serpent is often dual in its nature: good and evil, tricky and truthful, hostile and benevolent.

In one Greek myth particularly relevant to women's psychology, it is said that Apollo killed the mighty python that guarded the cave of the Oracle at Delphi. *Delphi* means "womb." Apollo killed the high priestess, Delphyne, as well. Originally, before patriarchy, the Oracle at Delphi was a holy place tended by priestesses of the Great Goddess, called pythia or pythonesses, and the wisdom of the Great Mother was given through the priestesses to seekers. Once the python was killed and the priestesses of the Mother were banished, the only priestesses allowed to sit on the oracular seat were the consorts of Apollo, those women who relinquished their deep connection to the feminine source of wisdom and spoke for the patriarchy.

Marion Zimmer Bradley wrote an interesting novel called *The Firebrand*. It is about Cassandra, the oracular priestess of the Mother who refused to submit to Apollo's demand that she be his consort and speak the patriarchal party line. To punish her, Apollo gave her the gift of prophecy and along with it, the curse that no one would believe her. Cassandra was the priestess who kept warning that the Greeks were coming, and no one listened to her. Thus the Trojans were vanquished by the Greeks. Many of us carry the ancestral curse of Apollo in that we have intuitive knowingness but we don't trust it for one reason or another. Aligning with feminine

wisdom can change this. Bradley's book also contains some interesting information about the relationship between the oracular priestesses and snakes.

Snakes were kept in the Greek healing temples of Aesklepius, the god of medicine. When people came to the temple for a healing, they were invited to ask for a healing dream. If they were lucky, they would dream of a snake, which they believed to be Aesklepius himself offering a healing. The caduceus, two snakes intertwined, is the symbol of the medical profession today. It was the symbol of Aesklepius, and according to Barbara Walker in *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (1988), the symbol goes back to 2000 BC Mesopotamia, where the "intertwined snakes represented the healing god Ningishzida, one of the lovers of the Goddess Ishtar." The Greek god Hermes, messenger of the gods, had a magic staff entwined with snakes and surmounted by wings, which was said to be so powerful that it could raise the dead from Hades. Hermes' job was to conduct the souls of the dead to the underworld and he was believed to possess magical powers over sleep and dreams.

### **Snake and the Awakening of Consciousness**

Erich Neumann, in *The Great Mother* (1963) writes that "...the uroboros, the circular snake biting its tail, is the symbol of the psychic state of the beginning, of the original situation, in which man's consciousness and ego were still small and undeveloped. As a symbol of the cosmic source and of the opposites contained in it, the uroboros is the 'Great Round,' in which positive and negative, male and female, elements of consciousness, elements hostile to consciousness, and unconscious elements are intermingled." Neumann is speaking about the human condition of living in a dualistic world with eons of ancestral conditioning by thinking that parses things into me/you, right/wrong, good/evil, war/peace, friend/foe, male/female, and every other polarity possible in human experience.

We are now so fortunate, so graced, to be living in a time when so many can wake up from the trance of duality and see so clearly its often horrible manifestations and consequences for all beings on the planet, human and otherwise, as well as for the planet herself. We are experiencing an unprecedented awakening of our consciousness to the ultimate Reality beyond separation, beyond duality. As dark and insidious as conditions appear to be on the planet right now, this awakening of consciousness is much bigger and more powerful than the darkest darkness. Never has there been such a mass explosion of consciousness on the planet or so many people coming awake to the unitive field and the reality that nothing and no one is separate. Even physics and other sciences are discovering this. There truly is a huge shift happening and we are called to participate and do our part in it.

In India, where spiritual awakening, enlightenment, has been commonplace for thousands of years, the snake is the primary symbol of the Kundalini Shakti energy, the cosmic force that ignites and fuels our spiritual awakening process. Kundalini is a Sanskrit word meaning "coiled

up," according to Ajit Mookerjee in *Kundalini, The Arousal of the Inner Energy* (1982). This coiled snake energy rests at the base of the spine until it is time for her to awaken and rise up through the spine to the crown chakra. Kundalini is also known as Shakti, the feminine energy of manifestation that rises, like a snake uncoiling, up through the spine and body to meet her beloved, Shiva, the masculine name for the formless, at the crown chakra. This divine union of Shakti and Shiva, form and formlessness, opens our awareness beyond duality to ultimate reality and brings the awareness of embodied divinity in us.

Kundalini Shakti awakening is radical, revolutionary, and Eve-olutionary in its life-changing effects on our consciousness and the way we live our lives. This Shakti is the energy of the Divine Feminine, and SHE calls forth the embodiment of divine energy in us, in human women and men. When this occurred for me 30 years ago, I did not know what it was, I was terribly frightened by the many phenomena, and when I understood what was happening my response was, "Who? Me? Me??? Why me?" This energy is quickening in so many now, seekers and non-seekers alike, and there is a lot of information and numerous guides through the territory, now. I have written in detail about my own Kundalini Shakti awakening in my e-book, *Sacred Feminine Initiation: An Archetypal Journey*, available at [www.templeofthesacredfeminine.com](http://www.templeofthesacredfeminine.com) .

The Shakti awakens us to the fact that we are that which we have been seeking. We gain access to higher dimensions of consciousness, fuller embodiment, deeper loving and living, boundless compassion, and sets us on the path of our life's purpose on the planet. There is nothing to figure out as we learn to surrender to what is as it is. Shakti shakes up everything we thought we knew, de-constructs all of our ideas about everything, including ourselves, our relationships, other people, and 'how it is.' Kundalini removes the veils so that we can see beyond appearances and deepen in our surrender to direct experience of what is as it is. She relieves us of the burden of believing our thoughts, and makes it so clear through our own direct experience that we are one with everything, light and dark. There really is no separation. *Kundalini Shakti initiation does not give us anything or add to what we are. It takes away what we are not.*

### **Our Creation Myth and Eve-olution of Consciousness**

Eve's encounter with Snake is the central event in our own western creation myth. In Genesis 3:30 it says, "The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living." The etymology and meaning of Eve, Hawwah has puzzled scholars because it is similar to the Hebrew root word *hayah*, "to live", and also to the Aramaic word *hiwya*, which means "serpent." At the time Genesis was written, there were many ancient goddesses of the Middle East that were called serpent goddesses. The snake/serpent archetype was very much in the collective consciousness then, and it is no wonder that our creation myth turned out as it did since it emerged from patriarchal consciousness. However, the myth as it stands is perfect, and

our understanding of its meaning, its interpretation today, can be totally different, informed by the feminine.

I recall Jean Houston saying that myths are stories that never happened but are always true—at least in terms of the behavior and psychology of human beings. Mythology points to the dance of archetypes, the universal patterns of experience, that inform and manifest as human behavior. A creation myth rises out of the consciousness of a culture and, in turn, that culture rises out of and is shaped by its creation myth, as are the people in that culture. It is the chicken and the egg. The myth is woven into our DNA, our cells, and it informs the entire consciousness of the culture and those living in it.

Our creation myth emerged from and was eventually written at a time when patriarchal consciousness, which was highly misogynous, was on the rise in the western world. The snake was one of the most widely used symbols associated with the Goddess in many cultures of the Near East where the Eve mythology had its roots, as well as in the Far East. Yet the interpretations of our creation myth that we have been given for thousands of years deny Eve her goddess status and goes further to shame and denigrate her, make her evil.

I see that we are on the cusp of a new understanding and unfoldment of the myth of Eve and Snake. I capitalize Snake here because I have come to understand that Eve, our unacknowledged Great Mother Goddess, was meeting the Divine Mother incarnate, the Kundalini Shakti, when she met Snake in the garden. Imagine how your life, the life of all women with this mythology, would have been different if this were the story we had been told? If we had had a sense of our own Mother Goddess, a Sacred Feminine divinity watching over us, of the goodness and beauty of being female, instead of an all male cast of characters with one bad, trouble-making, disobedient woman responsible for ‘the fall of man.’

Eve and Snake have been denigrated and demonized due to the patriarchy and patriarchal religions that have perpetuated a great deal of fear and hate-filled projections about woman, snake, the feminine, the natural world, the unknown, and that which lies beyond the comprehension of the rational, egoic, mind.

About ten years ago, when I was in the process of co-creating a film called *Eve's Fire*, an evocumentary about women's spiritual initiation and kundalini awakening, it became so clear that the patriarchal interpretation of Eve and Snake is a trance imposed on all of us in the western world. It was/is a very limited and skewed point of view that originated to give or justify to men total power over women, as well as the right to disempower women. It did not honor the feminine, prevented our culture from having a feminine image of divinity, and completely maligned and judged Eve's independent thinking and her own honoring of her longing for knowledge, wisdom, and nourishment—or to ‘be like god’.

Our creation myth has not only been instilled in our culture and our minds, it is woven into our genetic memory, our cells, and self-image as woman. These insidious attitudes of Eve as

shameful, guilty, and to blame for 'the fall of man', and the snake identified with Satan, have been harmful to our ancestral lineages and to us. The karma, the suffering, the injustices that have occurred for thousands of years resulting from this absurd, misogynist interpretation of Eve's disobedience can end here, with us, when we see it with new eyes from a feminine, spiritual point of view. Consider Eve as a woman who felt and trusted her longing for nourishment, wisdom and knowledge. She did what she was called to do, she listened to and trusted her own inner spiritual authority rather than the external father god, and she ate of the forbidden fruit. Why did he not want her to eat that fruit? What did this father god fear? Eve felt kinship with the snake, perhaps recognized the snake as the Mother Goddess, and trusted Her wisdom, felt truth in the snake's words to her. Here is the passage from Genesis 3, where Eve encounters the snake:

*"Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

I consider Eve's meeting with snake as an encounter with the Goddess, with the Kundalini Shakti, the great feminine fire of spiritual awakening and consciousness. It seems to me that this myth is really a harbinger of what is happening to so many women and men now. This creation story is only a chapter in our Eve-olution, and now the next chapter is unfolding. This chapter is being written now, as we enter each present moment, awake to what is here. It is taking us beyond duality, beyond the knowledge of good and evil, into a life we cannot imagine. In my experience of the spiritual awakening process, we become acutely aware of duality and all of the suffering that it engenders, and we learn to embrace it in order to go beyond it, to the realization that we are not separate from anyone or anything. Not even from 'god'. We are the divinity incarnate, as women and as men.

### **Snake and Mother Mary**

In the world of art, there are many statues and paintings of the Blessed Mother Mary shown with one foot upon the head of a snake, supposedly the same snake that Eve encountered. As a child in Catholic school, I was told that Mary was crushing the head of the snake with her foot, that she was a symbol of the feminine crushing evil in the world. If you look closely at some of those statues and paintings, nothing so violent is going on. Snake seems friendly, sometimes affectionately wrapped around Mary's ankle. I know of a forty-year old statue of Mary with a snake at her feet, and the snake has an apple in its mouth. Mary's foot is gently

placed upon the snake, her face is beatifically peaceful, and her hands are open, extended downward, as she includes the snake in her gaze.

We used this statue in our film, *Eve's Fire*, because we saw it as Mary's loving connection to Eve and snake, i.e., the Kundalini energy. The Catholic Church actually has referred to Mother Mary as the 'second Eve' meaning that she was the *redemption* of Eve. I love this statue as it shows Mary's connection to the ancient Eve and our Mother Goddess in the form of snake, as well as her embrace of the earth, embodiment, ancient wisdom, and the awakening Kundalini Shakti.

There is only one Great Mother Goddess and she wears many faces, forms, and disguises throughout countless traditions in the world, including Snake. She is a universal experience, accessible to all of us, appearing in all mythic traditions. She continues to make Her presence known to us in numerous forms: goddesses and hags, human women and snakes, and trees, birds, rivers, stones, dolphins, cats, mountains, rivers, and the earth herself. There is nothing that She is not, including YOU! She is here, now. If we feel a longing to directly experience Her, to open to Her presence, we can call to Her, ask to see Her face, hear Her voice. You can know Her directly through your own experience—and see what happens.

**Personal rituals** Take a walk in the woods, go into your garden or down the street, walk on a beach, go in the grocery store, and look for snakes, spirals, and snakey shapes. Gather some objects with spirals on them, or use clay or paint to create snakes and spirals.

Drop into a meditative place, imagine yourself in a beautiful garden, and call forth Snake... have a conversation with her. Invite her to be your ally. Ask her for her wisdom, guidance. You could also imagine meeting Eve, your most ancient grandmother, and see what conversation arises with her.

In another meditation, imagine a spiral in your heart center. Allow yourself to open to its energy, feel it in your body. Feel what it feels like to move your body, your spine, like a snake, spiraling slowly with awareness. Begin at your feet and slowly, sensuously spiral upward, then downward. Find the spirals of movement in your hips, belly, breasts, head, arms, and hands.



Sheila Foster, M.A.

Sheila has been devoted to the Divine Feminine since she was a little girl and founded the Blessed Virgin Mary Club when she was eight years old. For the last 30 years, she has had a deep engagement with the Feminine via the study and

teaching of Jungian psychology, with a particular focus on the feminine archetypes. She has also had a private practice that includes phone sessions, specializing in healing and awakening through the heart with a practice called Heart Samyama. In 1983, Sheila founded, and continues to steward, the Temenos Center for Healing and a contemporary women's mystery school called the Temple of the Sacred Feminine. She has taught numerous workshops and trainings for women, professional helpers, and artists. She has created and presented performance pieces, given workshops at conferences, and continues to offer retreats for women. She is the co-creatrix of Dangerous Old Women Studios, a women's film company, and collaborated to produce and edit an *evocumentary* film called *Eve's Fire*, about women's spiritual initiation via the archetypes of the feminine, Kundalini awakening, Eve, and Snake. She has two meditation cd's called *Meditations from a Women's Mystery School*. Volume I is the *Invocation of the Sacred Feminine Archetypes* and Volume II is the *Invocation of the Sacred Masculine in Women*. These are available at [www.dangerousoldwomen.com](http://www.dangerousoldwomen.com) and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Sheila authored *Sacred Feminine Initiation: An Archetypal Journey*, an e-book available at [www.templeofthesacredfeminine.com](http://www.templeofthesacredfeminine.com). Also available in the temple store are a variety of mp3 meditation downloads.

The mother of two amazing grown children, (her greatest spiritual teachers), Sheila resides in Boulder, Colorado, where she makes multi-media art, writes, and continues with her work and devotion to the Sacred Feminine.

Email: [temenosctr@aol.com](mailto:temenosctr@aol.com)