

Daily Meditation 07-15-24

What About Resurrection and Reincarnation?

Good morning.

We are meditating on themes of death and resurrection, and reincarnation and regeneration. And I'd like to begin here with some thoughts on regeneration. It is a more ancient way of naming rebirth, what comes after this life.

So Marija Gimbutas, who was a well known feminist archeologist, writes about what she found in her studies of pre-patriarchal times. She writes,

Throughout prehistory, images of death do not overshadow those of life. They are combined, the symbols of regeneration. The death messenger and the death wielder are also concerned with regeneration. There are many symbols of regeneration that were created during the Neolithic period. Graves and temples assume the shape of the egg, the vagina, and uterus of The Goddess, or of her complete body. The megalithic passage graves of Western Europe quite probably symbolized the vagina, the passage, and the pregnant belly, the round chamber of the Goddess. So The Goddess played an important role in the passage from life to death. The Life- and Birth-giver can turn into a frightening image of Death, she says.

The Goddess as a bird of prey or a poisonous snake. In mid-fifth century BC, masks of the Goddess of Death were very frightening, fearsome even. But above all, life, birth, death, regeneration, presented in terms of the cosmic spiral, the cycles of nature. For example, the most dramatic is a change from one lifeform into countless others, from bucranium to bees, butterflies, plants. Epiphanies of the Goddess of Regeneration.

And there were some places of human sacrifices in sacred caves. They were part of the regeneration mysteries. She says,

The cycle of regeneration is mirrored in the cave's uterine shape, the life water below, and the stalagmites in a constant process of formation. The double axe symbolized regeneration for the culture in Knossos and Crete — which it was my privilege to visit at one time -- Very likely ceremonies took place where people would go through passages in life that included death and regeneration or resurrection. Participants returned to the womb, and that says they died and then through ceremonies, they were reborn again.

Of course, I find this very, very similar to the sweat lodge of the indigenous people, certainly in our land. But in fact, we know sweat lodges were practiced not only in Scandinavia, but in China, and in Ireland, and so forth.

So this practice of putting people through experiences of life, and what seems like death, a kind of dying, and then being reborn in the process -- these were very important ceremonies and rituals, to prepare people for the full experience of living, and the full experience of leaving this life.

Among the Hopi people, there were ceremonies that followed the seasons very carefully. The Hopis buried their dead in a seated position facing east, the direction of sunrise, so the spirit may rise easily, begin its journey into the Spirit World.

Of course the latter plays an important role in the Kiva: getting in and out of, climbing up and down, and getting in and out of the sacred ceremonial place. And it's a symbol, too, of entering Mother Earth and leaving her. So one Hopi elder says,

Hopi life must follow a path which coincides with the cycle of the natural world, a cycle of fertilization, birth, youth, maturity, death and rebirth. On Earth, the Hopis must follow a divinely ordered path of life. At death, they must follow the Sacred Path to the Spirit World, for the protection and sustenance of the Hopi people on Earth is their principal responsibility.

So this connection, what Christians might call the communion of saints, the connection with the ancestors becomes very strong, between those who have gone before us and those who are here on Earth. Chief Seattle, in one of his famous talks, talks about how he is mourning the depletion of the Earth and its resources. And he says this:

"A white man will never be alone. Let him be just, and deal kindly with my people. The dead are not powerless." He's just talked about how many of his people are dying, and have died under the work of the white people. "Dead, did I say? There is no death: only a change of worlds."

So these are a few examples of regeneration from the indigenous peoples, from the ancient peoples, from the goddess peoples. It's just one more evidence that humans are always asking this question: "Is this all there is? Is there another mode of Being after we die, a place of Being?" And so we come up with language like resurrection, or reincarnation, or regeneration. And we come up with ceremonies, with rituals, whereby we can practice, if you will, our habits, the habits we build of living, dying, and being reborn.

So we'll be sharing some of these various traditions from various cultures and religions in some upcoming daily meditations. Meanwhile, I think it's appropriate that we do meditate on these

matters, because all of us face the reality of death, not just our own, but those of our loved ones, and of course, those who've gone before us, our ancestors. And there's so many lessons to learn about how to live fully, and how to undergo death before we die. And the mystics talk eloquently and frequently about that very real experience.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.