

Gaia: Then and Now Webinar - January 09, 2022  
Questions from the session and answers from Jules Cashford, presenter

nancehardinglpc

Could you speak the idea of illness as an initiation in relation to what you just said  
1:34 PM

I think the image below shows that the Greeks certainly thought of illness as an initiation – and so in that sense a part of the whole.

This stone stele comes from the Temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, where people who were sick would go to participate in the ‘Temple Sleep,’ and dream their health and wholeness into being. The goddess Mnemosune, goddess of Memory, was first ritually invoked, where she would be offered a cake by the supplicants about to enter their incubation, and the goddess would receive their last prayer so that they would remember the visions they had while sleeping.



Asclepius, god of healing, and his snake healing the dreamer. Votive stone stele. Precinct of Amphiaraos at Oropos (Attica). Early 4th century. 52 x 55 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. No. 3369.

At the back of the stele on the right, a priestess is overseeing the first stage of recuperation. A snake is shown rising from the body of the dreamer, healing the wound on his shoulder. The young man is then shown in his dream standing before the god Asklepius who is touching his shoulder in the same place, suggesting that healing arises from a union of body and soul.

Archinos, the name of the dreamer, wrote his gratitude for his cure on the rectangular plaque on the wall above him, which was ritually left empty for each person so the dream could come. Without the sickness, the man would not have encountered the god of healing, who was celebrated for healing the whole person, not just the sickness for which they came to him. So in that sense isn't it an initiation?

12:01 PM      theresaclinton

Q. What do you think is at the root of the almost world wide misogyny.? Your story shows a reverence for the feminine going back thousands of years. How do you think this was lost.? I think this loss is very closely related to the trouble our planet is in today.

Yes, I agree the loss is very closely related to the trouble of our planet today. But, the fact that there was indeed a reverence for 'the feminine' going back thousands of years – as far back as we can go – seems to me to mean that 'misogyny' is not *endemic* in our species. Especially when we can see so clearly certain times in *history* when there was a radical change from goddesses to gods, such that the gods 'killed' or 'abolished' the earlier goddesses – the difference between the Sumerians and the Babylonians, for instance, the literal interpretation of the Garden of Eden in Genesis, and the Roman interpretation of the Christian story. Significantly, perhaps, all this coincided with a withdrawal from Earth, and eventually a reallocation of value to the human mind – and, it would seem, a corresponding devaluing of our relationship with Earth, who is now teaching us we have apparently forgotten our origins. So we could optimistically look upon this last period of misogyny in our history as for the most part 'tribal,' and so eventually self-limiting. Certainly in the west, where misogyny is no longer formally sacralised in religion and law. Unfortunately, we cannot yet say the same for the destruction of our Earth.

12:05 PM      khodges

"Q. Is there a sense in which traditional images of the Greek/Roman gods and goddesses in human form draw us away from their living reality? I'm thinking of the aniconic origins of Hestia/Vesta, and how deeply moved Ovid was by coming into the presence of this sacred dynamic as simply a flame upon the altar in a temple. Before that moment, he had only encountered anthropomorphic representations of gods and goddesses, whether in visual art or in poetry, none of which had actually conveyed to him any numinous quality. He came to the temple of Vesta as a sightseer, a tourist, with an expectation of finding rich ornamentation. But, even as that expectation was profoundly disappointed, a powerful emotion welled up in him, and he wrote about it as a moment of revelation. A poet himself, he seemed to realize how art can obscure or veil sacrality."

A. Yes, I agree, there is indeed a danger, and it seems to me it is ultimately a question of how transparent the art is – can we see *through* an image of a god or goddess in human form – or any image for that matter - to the numinous beyond all embodiment? I tried to find Greek images rather than Roman ones for that very reason. As you beautifully put it 'art...can obscure or veil sacrality' (and especially pictures during a talk!). Though, I'd want to say, some artists can still beckon us, as Hermes does, and you never quite know when it will happen. So like Ovid we find ourselves beyond ourselves - in another world. In Greek art this Etruscan image of Hermes does this for me.



The Etruscan Hermes. Terracotta head with traces of paint from the Minerva temple of Portonaccio, Veii. Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome. Inv. no: 40772. 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC.

12:57 PM nader\_khaghani

""God save us from singleness in vision, "" Does it move contrary to mind and Gaia as one."

Blake's thistle, who embodied his own 'double vision,' 'saves' him from 'single vision' – which, like Isaac Newton in his painting, opposes mind and Nature (Gaia), believing that 'mind' – the human mind - is superior to Gaia. This is what Blake means by 'Single Vision and Newton's Sleep' – a way of thinking which would certainly move contrary to mind and Gaia as one – as you say. If Newton found himself by mistake in Blake's later poem, he would only see the thistle, not the 'old man grey' – he would analyse from outside and there would be no relationship with the thistle. Blake looks at life with his inner and his outer eye together, so he feels into Gaia with his mind, and puts his inner eye first in his poem.

'with my inner eye 'tis an old man grey,

with my outer a thistle across my way.'

12:59 PM nader\_khaghani

"Maybe the alchemist statement one is two , two is one, answers some of our confusion. I appreciate your thoughts. Thanks much for an eye opening film. Grateful to you and your wisdom. Nader"

1:03 PM nader\_khaghani

"Dualism yes, but duality of zorasterian was also Jungian form of forces in tension. Would that form better serve us. It was the ancient thought of love and strife."

I think they all work in their own way. Like the ancient symbol of the Caduceus – a male and female snake both entwined around a central pole – the symbol of Hermes among others. Or thesis, antithesis and reconciliation of opposites.

They all at least avoid the danger of having just one and that one having to be 'right.'

1:23 PM scotthyder08

"I very much appreciate the linkage of the great and small in that the 'virus' is a mirror of our own predations across the planet, unleashed by our actions and now preying upon us in kind."

Thanks Scott. We can't make the links enough probably.

1:23 PM imageneen

These films are gorgeous and rich with ideas. I am hopeful there is a transcript — will one be available?

Yes, if you go to the ARAS website you can find the transcript with the text, images, and references altogether.

1:23 PM nader\_khaghani

"your statement, Gaia calls, can we hear, listen. Put me in tears. thanks."

Thank you very much for sharing that with us, Nader.

1:27 PM amironnberg

please state ur thoughts on we r guests here of the animal planet need to respect this in order to reinstae the land..

Yes, We are all guests of Gaia, aren't we? Though sometimes we act as though we have forgotten that Gaia gave us the invitation, not the other way round. Perhaps we are becoming the guests who have also lost respect for the other guests, let alone the host who invited us -

so used to putting ourselves first that She might ask us to leave before we had intended - just to give the other guests peace.

1:27 PM ronaldaschenk

"May we not consider phenomena such as climate change, environmental pollution, technology, Trump/Johnson as ""intelligences,"" that is part of the world soul, ie as part of a unified vision, rather than thinking of these phenomena as ""other"" to self/Gaia?"

Yes, indeed. We are all part of the world soul. Ultimately, as you say, nothing is 'not Gaia,' so it is we who have continually to work towards a unified vision that reminds us of this.

1:29 PM theresaclinton

All things on this earth are as valuable and deserving of love and respect as I am.

1:29 PM scotthyder08

"The prescription: Have respect! (?) Mutual respect, wholistic respect, self and other, inner and outer, as one."

I respectfully agree wholeheartedly - with both of you – Theresa and Scott.

1:34 PM roby.esp92

"Thank you so much for your research, it was illuminating. I wonder how can we actively heal this perceptive fracture we are living in? What are the most effective way to spread this way of thinking in order to have a significant change in our society (and hopefully a political change that would care more for earth rights)?"

I would think the best way to spread a new way of thinking is just by living it as well as we can – implicitly offering an example - while perhaps also looking for the places where the old way of thinking has begun to doubt itself, and might be more open to changing its mind and caring for all life. I saw Thomas Berry do that: he only had to laugh, and people just wanted to be like him and do it too, as it obviously gave him such joy to love all creation.

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### Discussion From Day I: January 8

sutibola

Can you talk more about the tribe that came from India and brought Gaia and the Gayatri mantra please?

1:29 PM

Jan 9

12:00 PM evejax

Would it be possible for Jules to say a little more about the intriguing connection between Gayatri and Gaia?

Yes, it's rather complicated, so I've put it here at the end – from a booklet I wrote on Gaia for The Gaia Foundation, London.

The origin of the tribes have been largely tracked by the languages they brought with them - eg. the Proto-Indo-Iranians, from which the Indo-Aryans came (though still being debated by Nilsson and others!). Over the millennia the tribes are thought to have travelled (whatever they were called) half way across the planet, from India, to Iran, making their way eventually to the northern shores of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, and then coming into Europe, arriving in Crete and later in Greece.

But they brought with them the name of *Gaya*, who belongs to the essence of early Indian thought, where she was called *Gayatri* – (first among their many other goddesses of the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC).

#### GAIA IN ANCIENT INDIA

Gaia does not belong solely to the classical western tradition, which in any case is suffused with the language and thought of the earlier Indo-European cultures. The actual name 'Gaia' comes from India at least one or two thousand years before - *Gaya* in Sanskrit. It appears in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* in the form of the *Gayatri Mantra* (where *mantra* is the most sacred sound embodied in and dedicated to the Goddess *Gayatri*, also called the *Mother of the Vedas*). Its meaning also expands infinitely to include Earth, humanity and all other beings. It is also a Story of Origin which relates humanity to Earth as the Image or Song of the whole. Just the act of chanting the *Gayatri Mantra* brought happiness and stability, blessings to the mind.

According to Satish Kumar, who was a Jain monk for nine years in India, and later founded the Schumacher College in Devon: 'If there were one phrase to capture the meaning of *Gaya* it would be 'Moving Song.'" I am very grateful for his teaching on this:

The seed word for all Indian thought is the sound *Om*. Out of this comes the *Gayatri Mantra*, the most important mantra of all, a hymn sung in a metre with 24 syllables arranged as a triplet of 8 syllables each. Out of this in turn come the *Vedas*, which are hymns that celebrate and incarnate the 'Natural Elements,' and out of this come the *Upanishads*, which humanize and interiorize the earlier thought. In the *Rig Veda*, the most sacred occurrence of the *Gayatri Mantra* was a prayer addressed to the Sun: 'We meditate on that excellent light of the divine Sun; may he illuminate our minds.' The recitation of this hymn was believed to grant a second birth: freedom from sin, old age and death. When the *Gayatri Mantra* is given narrative form as the Goddess *Gayatri*, she is the wife of *Brahma* (the Creator in late

Vedic thought) and Mother of the four *Vedas*. In southern India she was attached to *Siva*, god of generation, destruction and regeneration which is eternal life in time.

In the *Khandogya Upanishad*, *Gayatri* discloses itself / herself as Earth:

‘The *Gayatri* (verse) is everything whatsoever here exists. *Gayatri* indeed is speech, for speech sings forth (*gaya-ti*) and protects (*traya-te*) everything that here exists.

That *Gayatri* is also the Earth, for everything that here exists rests on the Earth, and does not go beyond.

That Earth again is the body in man, for in it the vital airs (*pranas*, which are everything), rest, and do not go beyond.

That body again in man is the heart within man, for in it the *pranas* (which are everything) rest, and do not go beyond.’ (17)

As *Gayatri* is the Earth, and the Earth is the human body, and the body is the heart, so *Gayatri* is Earth and the human heart together as one. *Brahman* is ‘under the disguise of’ or ‘described as’ *Gayatri*, both ‘the same as’ the ‘ether which is around us and within us as the ether within the heart.’

*Gaya* was also the name of the sacred place where the Buddha attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi Tree, the Tree of Life, and a temple and village grew up around this place called *Bodh Gaya*. The evocative coincidence of *Gaya* for the place of Buddha’s transformation (in a culture so attuned to sound) may perhaps point to the right relationship between Earth and human consciousness being suggested as the supreme human achievement. The Buddha is frequently drawn seated, with his right hand touching Earth, for it was to Earth that he appealed to bear witness to his own integrity and to the truth of his teaching.

There are also other goddesses and words for Earth in Hindu thought: *Bhuma*, *Aditis* (the ‘Unlimited,’ also goddess of Space), *Mahi*, *Ksama*, *Ira*, *Prthivi*, ‘the Broad One,’ and, in the hearts of the people, *Shri-Lakshmi*, the goddess with the lotus in her hair, who arose from the Ocean of Milk when it was churned into time at the beginning of things. Many of these goddesses are embodied in the Sacred Cow, who is also called *Gaya*, and whose curved horns traced the shape of the Crescent Moon, giving forth the Moon’s eternal *Soma*-milk as food and rain, which circulated continually throughout the universe - through the rivers, the animals and birds who drank from them, entering the semen of men and the wombs of women, the souls returning to the Moon for rebirth. Similar images are found in many other cultures: the Sumerian *Ki-Ninhursag*, and the Egyptian goddesses *Hathor* and *Nut*, Great Cows with starry bodies whose legs formed the four cardinal points of the universe, mapping the space between Heaven and Earth in which the world could dwell.

This is the Goddess of a Thousand Names, of whom Apuleius speaks in the first century

AD, (18) found all over the world in Bronze Age, Neolithic and even Paleolithic times, persisting in the west to the Romans and beyond, and in the east and south never completely dying out - the image which expresses the feeling of early people that Earth is the Universal Mother, such that the human story and the universe story are one and the same.

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Great conversation you are all having now, so you might like to take it from now on?!

Thanks so much for being here. Jules

1:36 PM      scotthyder08

"I SOOO agree: teaching in nature. A PRACTICE of mutual relationship. We have to unlearn to re-learn. Yes, a work against our own nature having been perverted by our thinking-ratiocentric orientation, our collective narcissism, speciocentric approach. We must learn anew!"

1:40 PM      Mary.valiakas

In a course on the anthropology of consciousness I learned that the snake was associated with women because of the menstrual blood dripping down the woman's leg in a snaking pattern (in addition to the imagery of rebirth)

1:40 PM      clairelcostello

"Perhaps it has something to do with learning again to listen to our forest or field. Reawakening the capacity to take in what is coming to us from Gaia vs thinking of "talking to Her" but resonating communicating w her, more listening?"

1:47 PM      scotthyder08

"Mercurius was the god who represented the Spirit of Nature... We can practice imagining, humbling ourselves to receive, not just do, but learning to be..., no?"

1:47 PM      scotthyder08

"Spirit of Matter, I mean..."

1:58 PM      jen

Not indigestible as is! :) We just need different versions for different audiences. :)

1:59 PM anushmirbegian

BUT Truly!! She is amazing and I could listen for hours! To you both! Thank you!

2:00 PM theresaclinton

"Thank you so much. That explanation was right on. This has a beautiful harmony. You could not have split this up, it is a real tapestry. All interwoven."

2:01 PM steveclark147

"are you aware of Stephen Fry's work on Mythos, Heroes and Troy? for me having listened to these books on audible makes the presentation more digestible!"

2:01 PM jeanetaylor25

Not indigestible. Many entry points that allow for entry. Requires a listening from deeper self.

2:01 PM nader\_khaghani

The whole must remain whole

2:02 PM nader\_khaghani

We take in based on our temperment and knoweldge from the whole.

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