

Section 2 – Moving Inland

Seasonal Cycles

For tropical beachcombers, the seasons were of little importance.

The temperature of the sea remains more-or-less the same all year round, and the flora and fauna are just as abundant at all times. But life in a temperate zone is based on an annual, not a monthly cycle, and the further away from the tropics the more marked this becomes. The cyclical pattern of life, which had been associated with the waxing and waning of the moon, the ebb and flow of the tides and the cycles of menstruation, began to be adapted to an annual cycle measured by the seasonal changes.

After crossing the Red Sea at the Gates of Grief, our wandering ancestors at first followed the shore of what is now called the Gulf of Aden. They began to move inland, where new landscapes brought new experiences and new phenomena to explain. As the people moved further away from the sea, many would live all their lives without ever seeing it. They still had their primary reverence for the Mother, the bringer-forth of life, but they needed another manifestation of the eternal life-giving force that had brought them into being and protected them.

From the Goddess being an unlimited, eternal Sea, to becoming an unlimited, eternal Earth, was an easy step. Here, away from the sea, life sprang forth from the Earth, from the land, from the ground. Therefore, the Mother must be within the ground: she was the Earth. Rivers, themselves bearers of life, rose from springs that came out of Mother Earth, so they were sacred too.

The seasons of the Earth came to be associated with the Ages of the Goddess, as the phases of the moon had been. Spring became the Maid, the youthful goddess, summer the Mother, her maturity, autumn the Crone, and her passage into old age and winter, death. The seasons became metaphors for birth, life and death, but also a cycle of life, death and rebirth.

Triplism refers to the recurrent symbolism of the number three, and we shall encounter this frequently. It manifests in many ways, from triple deities to three-day solstices and many other cultural motifs, especially the three-day interval between the death of a deity and her resurrection.¹

¹ Although in later versions those who reappear after three days became male, e.g., Jesus from the tomb and Zarathustra from the river, in the beginning, the deity who died and resurrected herself was the Goddess.

The three aspects of a triple-goddess, the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone, are at once the whole Goddess and part of her. Even if they happen to be manifesting individually, they can never be separated; they remain one entity. Deities, after all, are not governed by natural rules.

Triple deities do not always conform exactly to this model, as in the pre-Islamic Arab triple-goddess al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat. Not all three representations need be visibly present. In the Christian triple-deity expressed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the last is completely incomprehensible in terms of human morphology but is perhaps best explained as equivalent to the Judaic shekinah or divine breath.² Nevertheless, they are three and one at the same time.

An awareness of the annual seasonal cycle soon became essential to hunter-gatherers living outside the tropics. They closely observed when and where game animals or food plants were available, allowing them to predict the availability of supplies. With the advantage of big, thinking brains and highly developed, articulate speech, they assimilated this knowledge into stories and passed it from one generation to the next. People living in the temperate zones became avid observers of the sun, the planets and the stars because of the clues they could give that might help in the search for food and shelter, and these celestial objects were included in the stories.

For hunters, winter can be good. There is far less cover to conceal game, and herbivorous animals may be weaker due to hunger, and easier to chase and kill. On the other hand, for the home group of women and children, winter is challenging. There are few plants to gather and the imperative to keep warm and sheltered is even more compelling. In summer and autumn the group of women could, as they always had, easily provide for the whole tribe. In winter and spring, they may have been far more reliant on the hunting men to supply food and the animal skins they used to keep warm.

² The word 'shekinah' is feminine grammatically but this has been extended to mean 'the feminine creative power of God', especially by the Kabbalists.