

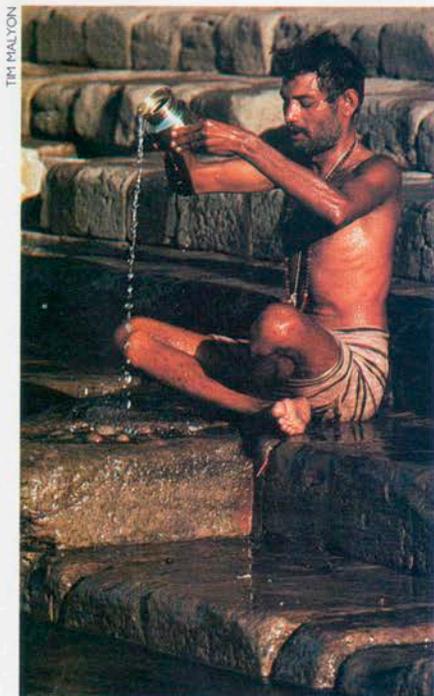
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*'The spirit of the valley never dies. It is named the Mysterious Female, and the doorway of the Mysterious Female is the base from which heaven and earth sprang. It is there within us all the while; draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry.'* (Tao Te Ching c400BC).

# Water womb of life

*The world's myths have many common themes. The most fundamental symbolizes water – the oceans – as the mother of the universe. The replacement of this feeling by belief in a male-dominated universe has had the effect of separating us from our source. The myth of the mother needs to be revived.*

WRITTEN BY TIM MALYON AND JULIA BOND



TIM MALYON

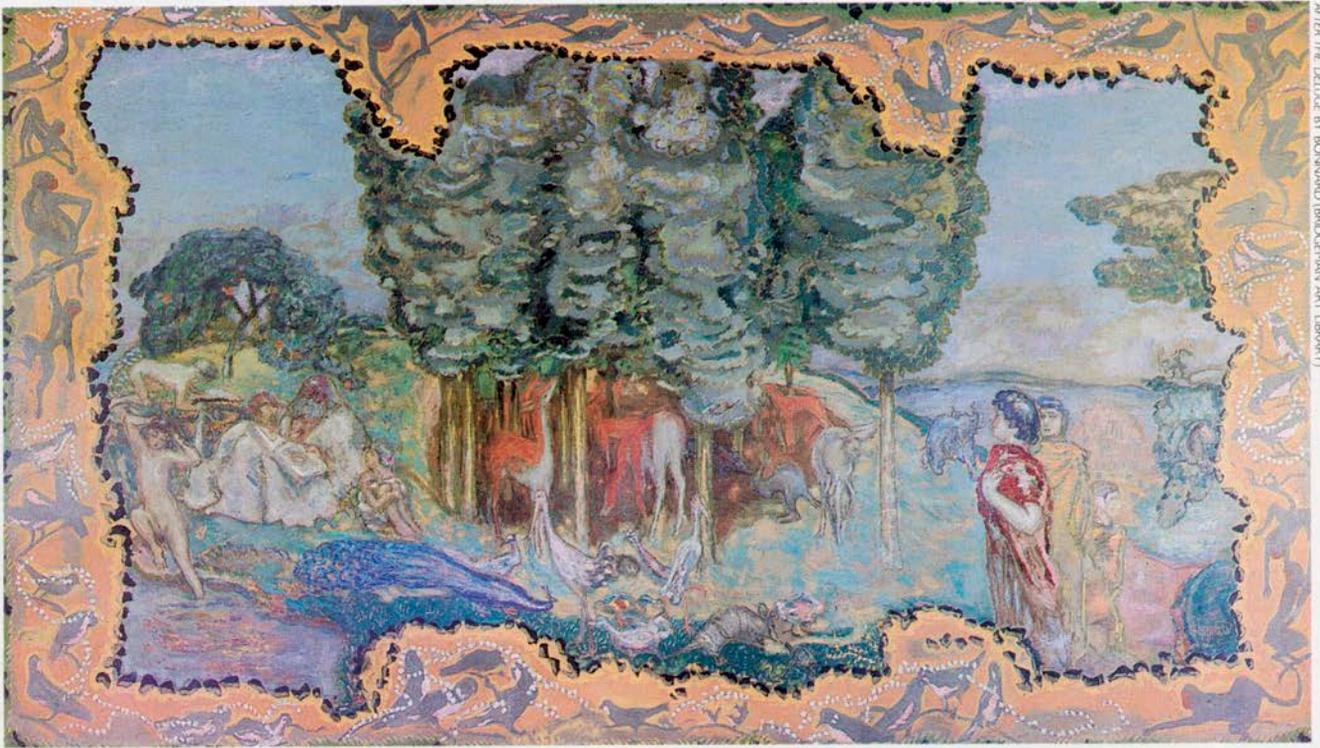
On the M6 motorway stands a service station. Outside there are hills and a lake. Parents can't keep their children away from the water. Inside through the restaurant runs a small stream, rising in a rocky waterfall built against one wall. People stop and stare. They pitch coins into the pools. Why?

It's an old habit. A well at Carrawburgh in Northumberland contained coins dating from pre-Roman times, over thirteen thousand of them. There

were also shrines to a goddess figure, carved in stone. Why?

And today when our minds' eyes stray from the service station waterfall to the cascades in the hills outside, or the ocean beyond, what are we seeking? Begin at The Beginning. Once upon a time, in the womb we were conceived and floated.

'In the beginning all was water, and hovering above it was the great shaman Doh, accompanied by swans, loons and other waterfowl. Since he



ALTER THE DELUGE BY RONNARD (BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY)

could nowhere find a resting place, Doh asked the diver bird to bring up some earth from the bottom. The bird dove twice, and of the bit of mud then brought up, Doh made the earth as an island floating on the primal sea. Father sky, mother ocean, this story comes from the Ostyaks of Siberia. The next tale is similar:

'There were bubbles on the water and a little worm underneath. Then it got big and came out of the water and fed and grew arms and teeth and feet and a head and it turned into a baby.'

'Where did the bubble come from?'

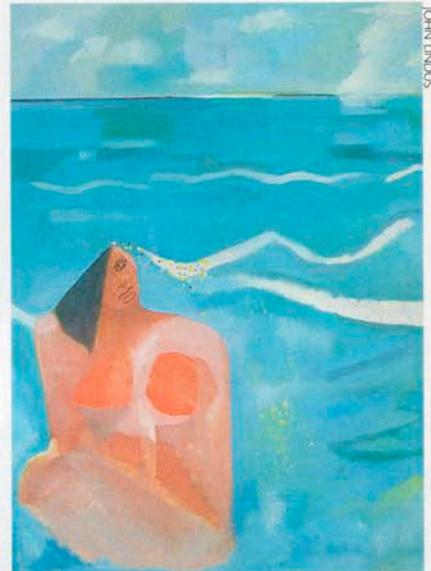
'From the water. The worm came out of the water and the bubble broke and the worm came out.'

This is the reply of a nine-year-old child when asked by psychologist Jean Piaget how landlocked Switzerland began. The Blackfoot Indians told a similar tale. Japanese mythology describes the earth floating like a fish on the primeval ocean. The Kayan people of Indonesia speak of a primeval rock being dropped in the ocean by the creator spider. In Brazil the Karaja Indians recall a mythological era when 'we still lived in water'. Human babies possess a 'dive reflex' when water touches skin, cutting their heartbeat in half, like whales and dolphins. From the womb we come, before the

*Something is stirring, a long repressed river which flows through the unconscious depths of every human being on this planet.*

waters break, this formless maternal ocean, in reality and in myth.

Myths read like dreams. The psychologist C.G. Jung spent a lifetime studying dreams and myths. He became aware of a family of world dreams – myths, rich in cultural diversity and structurally the same. To explain this common core he proposed the idea of the 'collective unconscious', the mind's deep structure whose symbolic language is shared by all humanity, a universal language of the spirit. 'The great problems of life', he wrote, 'are always related to the primordial images of the collective unconscious. This is no matter for astonishment since these images are the deposits of thousands of years of experience of the struggle for existence and adaptation. Every great experience in life, every profound conflict, evokes the accumulated treasure of these images'. These 'primordial



JOHN LINNOS

images' Jung called 'archetypes'. They speak through mythical characters, amongst whom the Great Mother with her associated symbol, water, is paramount. The unconscious influence, individually and collectively, of these images is colossal. 'Our personal psychology is just a ripple on the ocean of collective psychology', warned Jung. 'The archetypal images decide the fate of man.'

'From space the planet is blue', begins Heathcote Williams' *Whale*



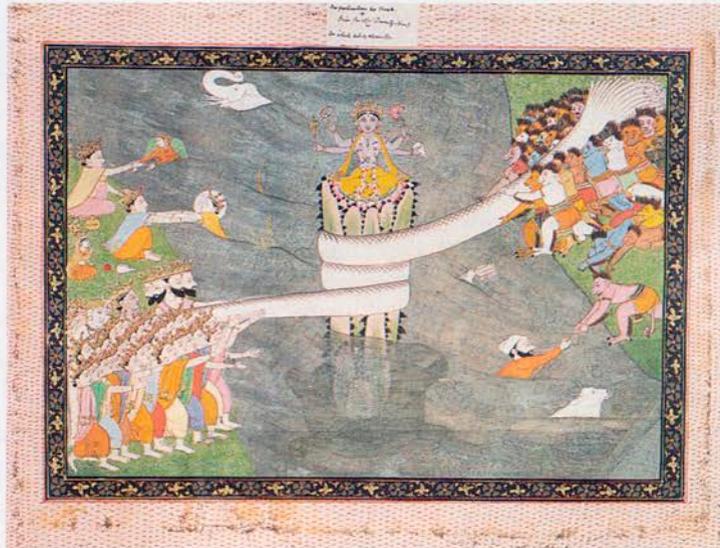
Left: the sacred Narmada River in India, is a goddess like many other rivers. Just to gaze on her waters is said to cleanse the sins of seven lifetimes. According to an Indian sage, 'Mother Narmada makes us egoless'. She is soon to be dammed. Below: gods and demons churn the oceans, whence, according to Hindu myth, all emerged in the beginning, including the 'amrit', or nectar of mortality.

*'Neither Non-Being nor Being existed then, neither air nor the firmament above. What was moving? Was it the deep and fathomless water?'*

old mother-goddess mythologies was herself already the universe, so the great creative deed of Marduk was a supererogatory act. There was no need for him to cut her up and make the universe out of her, because she was already the universe. But the male-orientated myth takes over, and he becomes apparently the creator.'

By the time of the Genesis creation stories a thousand years later, Tiamat is reduced to an inanimate 'tehom', Hebrew for 'the deep': 'And the darkness was upon the deep.' Amongst religions, Christianity has not been alone in repressing the mother goddess.

The matricidal battle (Marduk was Tiamat's great grandson) was a battle between the two sides of the human psyche: Feeling, moon-centred female versus mind-as-intellect, sun-centred male. We all, men and women, carry both within us. The outcome of the battle which left a besieged tyrant on the throne of creation had an incalculable influence. Marduk is a 'hero archetype', another universal image in the mythological pantheon. For the



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next two-and-a-half millenia the dream hero would be a nationalist egotist, St George who killed that nasty dragon – a celestial Rambo.

See the contrasts: in the Tibetan mind, springs and wells remain the domain of the female spirit. So she is tended, respected, worshipped – not defiled. In Britain she is privatized and polluted. The American Indians were dismayed at the white man's destructive attitude to mother nature – his insistence on ownership. 'Every part of this earth is sacred to my people,' Chief Seattle wrote to the US president. 'The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. This we know:

the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it.'

But instead of loving the mother, god-fearing nations defiled and polluted her, abetted by their religions which commanded them to 'subdue the earth and have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon it'. Now Marduk's rule much of our planet, and every hour a thousand children die of waterborne diarrhoea. As the Zen philosopher Dr D.T. Suzuki once commented: 'God against man. Man against God. Man against nature. Nature against man. Nature against God. God against nature – very funny religion.'

'He always thought of the sea as la mar, which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Some of the younger fishermen spoke of her as el mar which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours.' (from *The Old Man and The Sea* by Ernest Hemingway). Right: *Deluge II* by Kandinsky; below: Aztec water goddess with serpent mask around her eyes.



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Nation. Human beings are nine-tenths water. A world without water is a wasteland. We baptize babies in water. The sound of water soothes. It would be extraordinary if our creation myths did not reflect water as the mass from which all emerged, if water were not identified with the 'fons et origo', – goddess of creation. Yet, for the last two millenia most civilizations have believed and behaved as though the one true god were a man.

The Sumerian-Babylonian myths of creation from the second millennium BC illustrate the process. These myths were vital sources for the later Genesis myths. The Sumerians inhabited the Tigris-Euphrates delta of Mesopotamia, or modern Islamic Iraq. For them the sound 'a' meant both 'water' and 'conception/sperm.' But slowly their collectively ruled water/goddess civilization was taken over by war-like herders, ruled by kings.

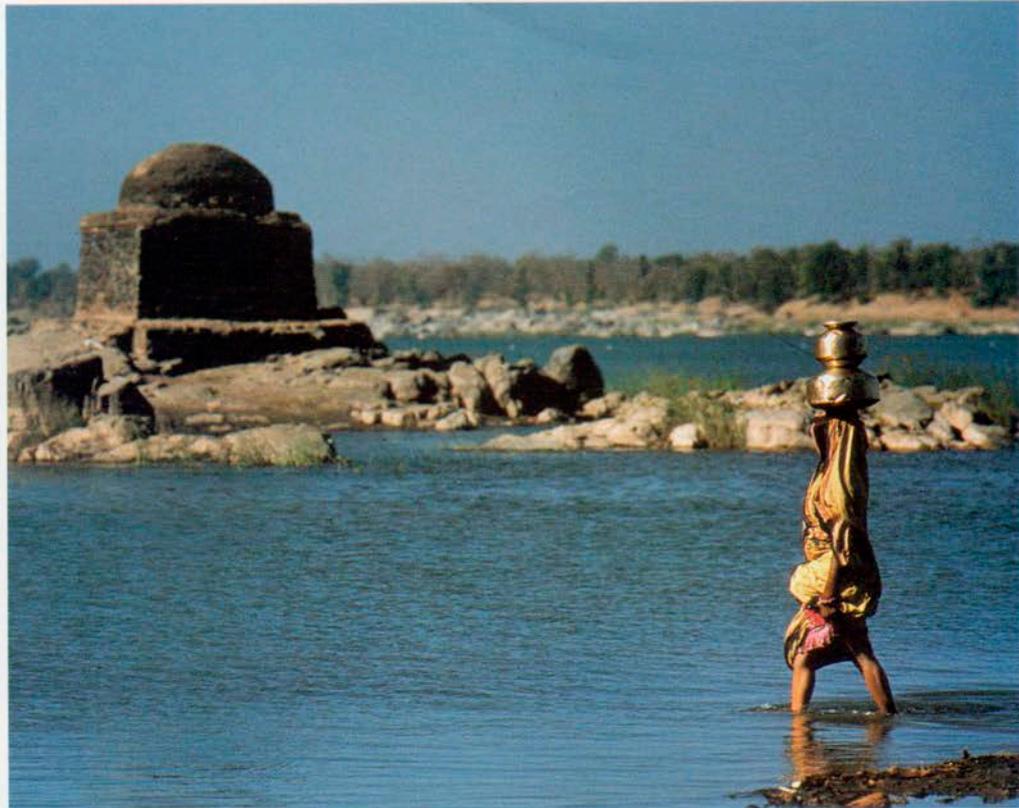
The great visionary authority on world mythology, Joseph Campbell takes up the story at this point:

'It was in the time of the rise of the city of Babylon. The characteristic of an imperialistic people is to try to have its own local god dubbed 'big boy' of the whole universe. No other divinity counts. And the way to bring this about is by annihilating the god or goddess who was there before. Well, the goddess that was here before the Babylonian god Marduk was the All Mother goddess, Tiamat. So the story begins with a great council of the male gods up in the sky, each god a star, and they have heard that the grandma is coming, old Tiamat, the abyss, the inexhaustible source. She arrives in the form of a great fish or dragon – and what god will have the courage to go against Grandma and do her in? And the one who has the courage is, of course, Marduk, the god of our present great city, Babylon. He's the big one.

'So when Tiamat opens her mouth, the young god Marduk of Babylon sends winds into her throat and belly that blow her to pieces, he then dismembers her and fashions the earth and heavens out of parts of her body.

'Now the old mother goddess in the

'We must feel our floating on the whole world river, all people breathing the same thin skin of air, all people growing our food in the same worn dirt, all drinking water from the same vast cup of clay. We must be healed at last, to our soft bodies and our hard planet to make fruitful conscious history in common.' Marge Piercy. Below: Watersnakes by the aboriginal artist, Jimmy Pike.



TIM PAUL YON

In 1979 Professor James Lovelock published *Gaia – A New Look At Life On Earth*. Described by *New Scientist* as a genius, Lovelock cooperated with NASA on their space programme. He proposed the theory that 'the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment', somewhat like the human body; a complex of individual organisms functioning as one. This 'self-organizing, self-regulating system' he called *Gaia*: 'What better name for a living planet than *Gaia*, the

name the Greeks used for the Earth Goddess?', he says.

'The myth of the great Mother is part of most early religions,' Lovelock continues, 'spring of all life; and unforgiving bringer of death.' Most civilizations have dreamed a flood myth, and many predict the great flood to come. The greenhouse effect threatens global flooding.

Lovelock warns that 'the concept of a remote master god' has finally led us

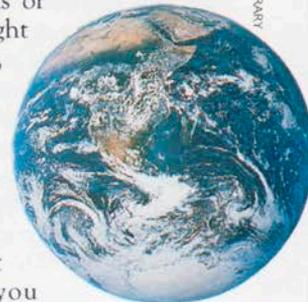
must face the past to have a future.

The tide is turning. The sun god's threat to blow us up has receded. There's a feeling abroad of the world's peoples discovering their common heritage and birthright, politically, environmentally, personally. New 'hero' archetypes are emerging to replace the old conquistador Marduks. The ecology movement, Mikhail Gorbachev's planetary policies, Bob Geldof's Live Aid – something is stirring, something long repressed flowing through the unconscious depths of every human being on this planet. As Jung said: 'The archetypal images decide the fate of man.'

Before he died Joseph Campbell foresaw a new myth and a new symbol. 'When you see the earth from the moon, you don't see any divisions there of nations or states. This might be the symbol, really, for the new mythology to come.'

'From space the earth is blue.' Remember that when next you throw a coin in the water, make love, stare at the ocean, long to see a whale. Feel her flow, respect her, join her.

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*The concept of a remote master god has finally led us to threaten the life of the Mother, Gaia, the planet.*

to threaten the life of the Mother, Gaia, the planet. 'Gaia's unconscious goal is a planet fit for life,' he asserts. 'The present frenzy of agriculture and forestry is a global ecocide as foolish as it would be to act on the notion that our brains are supreme and the cells of other organs expendable. Would we drill wells through our skins to take the blood for its nutrients?' As Chief Seattle said: 'All things are connected like the blood that unites us all.' We have come a full circle. Two and a half millenia after Marduk slew Tiamat we



DESERT DESIGNS