

The awe towards great nature

The great nature, this grand entity.

When humans first stood upon the earth as human beings, what opened before the eyes of our ancestors was the vast sky spreading high above and the expansive earth stretching to the distant horizon. In the sky, there was a shining sun, a moon illuminating the night sky, and twinkling stars. The sky would be covered with clouds carried by a gust of wind, and eventually rain would fall upon the earth accompanied by the rumble of thunder. On this earth, grasses and trees flourished, animals moved about, and most importantly, there were caves that provided shelter and protection. Moreover, towering mountains upon the earth connected far into the sky above.

The natural world that resides in the heavens and the earth possesses tremendous power. Through this great power, it bestows abundant blessings upon humanity, yet it also unleashes terrifying fury. In the face of this mighty force of nature, humans were powerless. They had no choice but to submit to the immense power of nature. Nature's power surpassed human capability; it was an incomprehensible mystery. People feared this immense power of nature and harbored an infinite sense of awe towards its force, which transcended human intellect.

The feeling of awe towards the great unknown was indeed the starting point of religion. It is not surprising that people worshiped natural phenomena imbued with great power and life force, stemming from this sense of awe. People saw divine elements within the great life force residing in everything in nature—be it the sky, the sun, the moon, stars, thunder, wind, earth, grass, trees, soil, stones, sea, mountains, caves, water, fire, and so on—and lived within that understanding.

The Heavenly and Sublime

To primitive humans, amidst their awe of the great unknown, nothing appeared more sublime than the vast expanse of sky stretching endlessly above their heads. They imagined the infinitely high as possessing a power far greater than any human could fathom. Gazing up at this "most sublime entity," primitive humans harbored a sense of awe towards a power surpassing their own. This reverence was among the most primal of religious sentiments. The sky symbolized infinitude, transcendence, supremacy, and eternity. It was within this sublime realm that humans saw divinity.

The sky also symbolized cognition. In the bright sky where the sun shines, and in the night sky where the moon and stars shine, the ancient people saw symbols of cognition and eventually saw there the supreme god who knows all. The sky god later became the ruler of the heavens, the guardian of cosmic order, and the legislator of earthly laws and covenants, precisely because the sky god symbolized cognition.

The heavenly gods cause rain to fall on the earth, nurturing plants and crops, thereby becoming both creators and progenitors. Consequently, they are often envisioned as heavenly fathers. It came to be believed that many other gods reside in the sky with this heavenly father-god,

In ancient civilizations such as Sumeria with Anu and Enlil, ancient India with Dyaus and Varuna, ancient Judea with Yahweh, ancient Greece with Uranus and Zeus, and ancient Persia with Ahura Mazda, as well as ancient Rome with Jupiter, many supreme sky gods played significant roles. They symbolized supremacy, omniscience, sovereignty, and fertility among other qualities. These attributes represented developed forms stemming from the sublime and immense power of the sky, perceived originally in primordial times.

The shining sun in the sky, for early humans, was perceived as the brightener of the world and the source of vitality that sustains all living beings. It symbolized cognition and life force. Alongside the moon, it was revered as the son of the sky god, the eye of the sky god, and a divine entity with infinite power that nurtures all earthly creatures. Eventually, this sun deity would transcend to become the supreme being of the sky, replacing the sky god. Furthermore, as human societies developed, leaders of communal societies themselves often came to be worshipped as offspring of the sun god. Various sun worship practices developed across ancient civilizations

such as in Ancient Egypt, Africa, Oceania, Japan, Ancient Mexico, and Ancient Peru, all evolving from the primordial worship of the sun.

The moon, as the eye of the sky, illuminates the night and governs it. In particular, the moon measures time and informs people, teaching the divisions of months. Furthermore, the waxing and waning of the moon symbolize death and rebirth, representing the eternity of life. Through the phases of the moon, people came to understand that death is not final but rather a new beginning of life. Faith in the moon dates back to the Aurignacian period of the Upper Paleolithic era, around 30,000 years ago, much earlier than the discovery of agriculture. Since then, people have been using the lunar cycle, carving it into bones and other materials.

Thunder, since ancient times, has been feared as the manifestation of anger or will in the sky. Yet it has also been revered as a bringer of rain, nourishing the earth, aiding the growth of grasses and trees, and thus seen as a fertility deity, capable of impregnating the earth. Similarly, storms, feared as the fury of the sky, also promised rain and ensured the reproduction of terrestrial life, leading them to be worshipped as gods of abundance. From Min of ancient Egypt, Parjanya and Indra of ancient India, Baal of ancient Palestine, Thor of ancient Germanic tribes, to Taranis of the Celts, sky gods generally embody the characteristics of thunder and storm deities.

Rain accompanied by thunder and storms brought abundant water, nourishing human life and nurturing flora and fauna with its great power. Therefore, it was revered as possessing divine power. When storms blew and thunder roared, rain fell, saturating the earth with rich water, fostering life. The water brought by rain holds the power to sprout life, becoming a symbol of eternal life. Furthermore, it symbolizes the source of all things and even represents the chaos before the creation of heaven and earth.

land and productivity”

The vast expanse of land that early humans beheld before them would have been perceived, above all, as possessing an inexhaustible productivity that nurtured plants and animals. It was this boundless productivity that led to the reverence of the

earth. The earth was revered for its limitless power to generate plants, animals, and humans alike. Under the earth's domain, plants, animals, and humans were connected by a single thread of life.

It is believed that the concept of the Mother Earth dates not so far back in history. However, tracing the origins, it seems that the connection between the fertility of the Earth and female fertility, imagining the Earth as a mother, can be traced back at least to the early Upper Paleolithic period. Small female figurines carved from stone, bone, or ivory, abundantly found in the layers of the late Upper Paleolithic, likely express a belief in fertility. These figurines often emphasize breasts, abdomen, buttocks, and sexual parts, often in a pregnant form, suggesting an association with the fertility of the Earth.

The excavation of female figurines would increase more and more as we enter the Neolithic Age. These figurines from that era depict various forms: some wearing skirts, some adorned with veils, some with exposed breasts, others holding their breasts, some with raised arms in a gesture of worship, some squatting, and so on. These likely represent expressions of various religious rituals. Moreover, they are considered to symbolize the significance of women's roles and their superiority during this period. Since agriculture had already begun in various places during this era, the Earth Mother goddess gradually transformed into a deity promising the fertility of cultivated plants. The concept of the Mother Earth likely took root and was established around this time. Female figurines unearthed from this period's layers are believed to be connected in some form to this belief in the Mother Earth.

Faith in the mother earth deepened during the Bronze Age as the earth was regarded as the womb producing minerals. Metal ores were seen as fetuses growing within the maternal womb of the earth. With the advent of iron production and the expansion of agriculture, reverence for the earth goddess grew even stronger. Dependence on the earth's productivity was paramount to obtaining harvests through agriculture. During this era, the great productivity of the earth and the reproductive power of women were closely intertwined, leading to high esteem for women's roles. It was during this time that earth goddesses began to assume characteristics akin to grain mothers. Deities like Inanna of Sumer, Ishtar of ancient Babylon, Isis of ancient Egypt, Demeter and Persephone of ancient Greece, and Prithvi of ancient India were widely revered as earth goddesses during this agricultural era.

The faith in the Earth Goddess did not suddenly emerge with the advent of large-scale agriculture; rather, it gradually developed from the earlier Neolithic period and even back into the Paleolithic era. Primarily, it stemmed from a sense of reverence for the earth during the hunting and gathering age.

The primal people of ancient times revered the eternal life, and they saw it in the grasses and trees that grew from the earth. Plants emerged from the earth, grew, withered, yet sprouted new shoots for the next generation, anchoring themselves in the earth to sustain their long lives. Though born from the earth, they returned to it, only to emerge once more. Through plants, people learned that death is not final but a new beginning of life. Moreover, symbolically understanding the continuous cycle of death and rebirth through the vitality of plants, they recognized the universe itself as a colossal organism of death and renewal.

The ancient people felt a mysterious spiritual power in animals that crawled on the earth, made their homes on the earth, and raised their young there, and they revered this power. They believed that animals were endowed with mystical powers from nature. Furthermore, they believed that the souls of animals and humans could interchange, and that there was a profound solidarity of life between animals and humans. Especially since the Paleolithic era, humans who sustained their lives through hunting held deep reverence for the earth that supported the reproduction of animals.

Animal sacrifices and rituals for the preservation of their skulls were expressions of reverence and awe. Indeed, the discovery of animal bone fragments in many caves dating back to the Mousterian period (70,000 to 3,500 years ago), a phase within the Middle Paleolithic era, suggests the existence of some form of animal sacrifice or burial customs involving animal bones during this time. It is certain that during this era, people held a certain respect for wild beasts. For hunter-gatherers, animals were considered divine. This reverence continued even after humans began domesticating animals, evolving from the ancient fear and awe of animal spirits and the great powers of nature, which had persisted since the Paleolithic era and developed into many rituals of animal worship and sacrifice from the Neolithic to the Agricultural and Pastoral Ages.

In the depths of the earth's rocky shelters, caves were, above all else, homes of protection for early humans. These caves were like the womb of the earth, where

people lived as children of the earth, sheltered and nurtured. Particularly deep within these caves lay sacred spaces, symbols of eternal life.

The numerous colored and engraved paintings, as well as sculptures found in cave ruins from the later stages of the Stone Age, depict scenes of animals and hunting. These artworks do not necessarily correspond solely to specific circumstances; they vary widely, from depictions made for amusement or some form of recording, to those imbued with deep religious significance. Among the subjects depicted are bison, wild boar, horses, deer, bears, and humans wearing animal masks. However, considering that these artworks are often found deep within narrow cave walls, it is undeniable that they held some religious significance. If the caves themselves symbolized the womb of the earth, then the depicted animals were likely created for fertility rituals. People probably prayed to the great power of the earth for abundant prey and the prolific birth of animals.

The cave was also used for burying the dead, because the cave was a symbol of eternal life. The deceased would pass through the cave's opening, travel along its passage into the womb of Mother Earth, find peace as ancestral spirits, and enter eternal slumber. However, the cave was simultaneously a passage from which the spiritual power of Mother Earth gushed forth. Therefore, the cave was seen as both an exit for the deceased to regenerate and as a spring of life force. In the cave, life and death were considered as one.

The famous labyrinth of Knossos on the island of Crete was also an imitation of caves since the Paleolithic era. Entering the maze meant descending into the underworld and symbolized death and rebirth. Legends from around the world persist about children being born from caves, reflecting the belief that caves were the wombs of earth mother goddesses with boundless fertility. Caves where women could conceive by approaching them, or where childless women could make wishes for fertility, remain sacred sites worldwide. These traditions also echo distant memories dating back to the Paleolithic era.

The original people revered stones as embodiments of great life force, particularly venerating megaliths as symbols of the Earth goddess and eternal life. The megalithic cultures that persisted in Neolithic Europe similarly rooted their respect for stones in reverence for the Earth. Dolmens, many of which remain, were originally tombs where burial rites were performed, housing generations of the same

clan. The human figures often depicted inside dolmens and found in excavations likely symbolized ancestral spirits. Menhirs, representing ancestral bodies, were believed to hold the eternal life of these spirits. Stones thus symbolized immortality and eternity. Myths of humans emerging from stones and beliefs in stones promising safe childbirth also stem from ancient memories of the productive power of Mother Earth concentrated in stones.

Generally, the concept seen by the original peoples regarding the earth, its creations, and what exists upon it was one of eternal life, regeneration, and abundance. Plants and animals that sprout from the earth, caves and megaliths existing on the earth—all symbolized eternal regeneration and eternal life. Moreover, the earth itself, which produces these, was identified with femininity and motherhood, symbolizing eternal life and fertility. This idea persisted through rituals honoring the dead and celebrating fertility, from the Paleolithic era through the Neolithic and the ages of agriculture and animal husbandry. The earth was revered as the place where the dead returned and regenerated, as the source of life from which plants and animals were endlessly brought forth.

Heaven and Land

However, for the earth to manifest its abundant vitality, there was a need for something to draw it out. It was thought that Heaven would fulfill this role. Rainfall descending from Heaven nourishes the earth, believed to stimulate its reproductive functions. The concept of the marriage between Heaven—Father and Earth—Mother arose from such thoughts.

The concept of the sacred marriage between Heaven—father and Earth—mother emerged at a time that is uncertain. While this notion became particularly prominent with the advent of agriculture, its origins appear to date even further back. In the primal beliefs of humanity, there was a concept that before the division of Heaven and Earth, a great cosmic life force was necessary for all things to come into existence. Primitive humans sought this state of undivided Heaven and Earth through the concept of the sacred marriage of Heaven and Earth. The sacred

marriage of Heaven and Earth signifies participating in the primordial life force of the undivided cosmos and represents a return to the origin of the universe. This unity with the primal life essence, this cosmic sentiment, has been cherished by humanity since its inception, evolving from religious sentiments rooted in awe towards the great unknown. All religions trace their origins to this awe and the emotional yearning for unity with the great unknown.

Since humans first stood upon the earth as humans, they have sensed the sublime and the sacred in what is in heaven, and what is bestowed from heaven. They have also felt the eternal life and fertility in what comes from the earth and exists upon it. Humans have revered these things. The primal humans who stood between heaven and earth, witnessing the great power and life in all natural phenomena born of heaven and earth, were able to exist as humans in awe and reverence toward these great things.