

# The Clarion

St. Raphael's LCC and Theosophical Society of the East Bay  
St. Patrick's Issue, March 2020,

We meet at 332 Harbour Way in Richmond, close to 880; just 4 blocks from  
Bart. Parking in back.



## A Writhing, Folksy Legend

By Odette Lardé

ST. PATRICK is the patron saint of Ireland. However, many people doubt that he ever existed, especially since he is known for having driven the snakes out of Ireland. Doubters point out that there weren't any snakes in Ireland since the ice-age had swept them into the sea, —physical ones that is. But he may very well have cleared the land of “snakes” meaning any negative energy — or pagans—impeding the Irish from being able to convert to Christianity. The celebration of St. Patrick's Day today has become a secular, folksy tradition set against a religious background with some metaphysical overtones.

Although there are debunkers and party-poopers doubting the existence of one who has inspired Ireland with the likes of the message of Christ, we still have details of his supposed life. St. Patrick is thought to have been born in either Kilpatrick, Scotland, or near Boulogne, France in around 387. He was sold into slavery to a Druid priest in Ireland, and after five years he eventually escaped and made his way home. Afterwards, Pope Celestine commissioned him to go and preach Christianity in Ireland and he eventually became a Bishop.

There are religious overtones behind the legend of St. Patrick. For one, his having driven the snakes out of Ireland is set against the story in Genesis wherein the snake tempting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is depicted as the root of all the evil and troubles in the world. There are many other similar stories and legends depicting snakes or lizards and dragons as the epitome of evil, such as the story of St. Michael slaying the dragon which is a story of good overcoming evil, the dragon being affiliated symbolically to the snake, in spite of its being more like a lizard with

feet and wings. And in near-by England we have the story of its patron saint also slaying a dragon.

But this is only half the story, for snakes have not always been seen as evil. In the Bible they are considered both good and evil and have a dual symbolism. The snake in the Garden of Eden guards the tree of knowledge of good and evil. After eating of the forbidden fruit, the veil is dropped from their eyes, and Adam and Eve realize that they are naked, are driven out of Paradise and begin their long journey accumulating knowledge and experiences in their long fall and ascent back to the Creator.

One of the most striking stories about Biblical snakes/serpents is the one whereby Jesus Himself attests that “as Moses lifted up the brass serpent in the wilderness, [to cure the Israelites of snakebites] even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.” (3:14-15) In this passage Jesus compares Himself to a snake. This insinuates that the evil of the Fall is also a good-evil, because, like the Prodigal Son, through it one accumulates the knowledge and experience to make one's way home to Source.



In driving the snakes out of Ireland, the legend of St. Patrick, rather than being literal, is a two-fold allegory. It depicts a folksy rendition illustrating the decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity. This folksy rendition is installed against a spiritual background, depicting the positioning of Good in the Emerald Isle.

It has assimilated the ideal embodied in the motto Erin go braghe, and green beer, and shows that Ireland is Christian.

# The Orphic Egg

## The Creative Realm of the Snake

Barbara Penninton



The Orphic egg in the Hermetic tradition is a synthesis of three powerful forces of creative energy: the snake representing regeneration, the egg suggesting the birth of existence, and the spiral the potential power of an upward surge of energy. The evocative symbol, rich in history, has the power

today to open the imaginative field of the higher mind and soul,

Symbols that attune with the soul have been revered throughout the ages. The symbol of the sacred snake has occurred on every continent since ancient antiquity. The birth of the cosmos has been depicted as an egg throughout history. The spiral, deeply embedded in the natural and representational world, is truly timeless.

The Orphic Egg makes no sense to the concrete mind. It does, however speak the symbolic language of the imaginal realm in the higher mind. A powerful synthetic symbol with strong primal energies like snake, egg, and spiral can confound the lower concrete mind and engage the creative mind somewhat like a visual koan.

Jean Houston suggests that symbols and myths encourage us to recognize that we are larger than our ordinary selves. At the the mythic symbolic level there are “helpers there—animals, angels, people gods and goddesses, the archetype of abundance and above all, the entelechy or higher self which provides guidance and opens pathways to the new possibilities.”

The higher mind and the soul might easily recognize the potential for birth into higher

consciousness when powerful, primal forces, sometimes called kundalini, are activated. There could be recognition that while snake has a tail remaining in the past, its head is oriented to the wondrous light of a celestial future.

While the Orphic Egg has a symbolic immediacy, it has, as well, a history of wonderful myths and stories. The Orphic Egg is a compelling symbol of cosmic creation associated with the poet/musician Orpheus who may have lived in Greece around sixth century BCE. In this version, out of a silver egg emerges Phanes, a god/goddess entwined by a snake.

### ORPHEUS' ODE TO PHANES:

You scattered the dark mist that lay before your eyes, and flapping your wings, you whirled about all throughout this world. You brought pure light. For this I call you Phanes,

The Orphic Egg continues its journey in the Hermetic tradition as the world soul. The snake with the force of sacred mysteries renews the world soul endlessly on its upward evolutionary journey to source.



# The Nagas in Buddhist Cosmology

*By Richard Wolf*

In the Buddhist cosmology the Nagas are powerful and magical shape-shifting serpents. They are quick to anger and are loyal allies but they can also be dangerous enemies. Like Dragons, they are often found guarding treasure-hoards and their chief weapon is a fiery or poisonous breath. Their natural appearance is of a large hooded serpent resembling a giant cobra but they can also assume a human-like appearance at will and they are considered to be masters of shape-shifting.

There are many stories of Nagas in the Buddhist scriptures but probably the most famous is the story of the great cobra-like Naga named Mucalinda. Just after the Buddha's enlightenment, as he sat in a state of meditative bliss, a great rain storm arose and Mucalinda protected the meditating Buddha by wrapping his coils around him and sheltering him with his out-spread hood. This scene became a popular motif in Buddhist art and statues of Mucalinda sheltering the Buddha are quite popular.

Nagas are also considered to be a type of animal and cannot become Buddhist monks. There is another story from the time of the Buddha of a Naga who wanted to obtain a human birth in his next incarnation so he ordained as a Buddhist monk.

One night while he was sharing a hut with another monk he fell into a very deep sleep and reverted to his snake-like form. When the monks informed the Buddha he told them that a Naga will usually revert to his natural form when sleeping or having sexual relations. He also declared that Nagas were not able to attain the same spiritual discipline as a human and that no Naga or other animal should ever again be ordained as a monk. As a result, to this day, as a part of the Buddhist ordination ceremony, every candidate is asked whether they are human or not before they can receive ordination.

A recurring motif in the stories of the Nagas deals with sensuality and renunciation as do many stories from ancient times that involve serpents and dragons. The Naga realm in Buddhist literature is always portrayed in extravagant language as being a sensual paradise

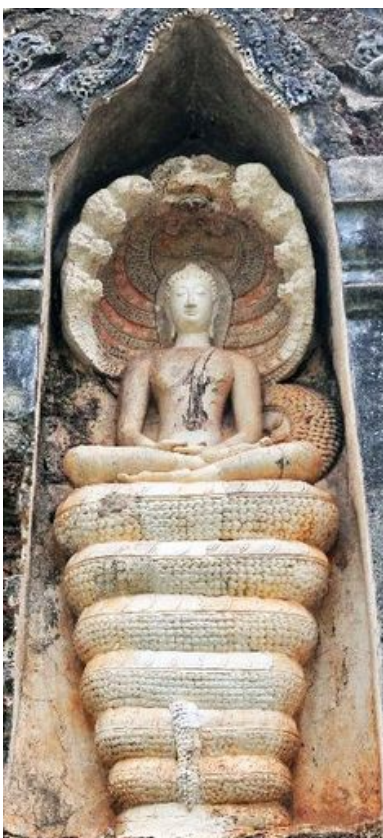
with lush vegetation, the fragrance of lotus flowers, the cries of swans and song birds and mango groves that are always in blossom and loaded with the sweetest fruit. The description of the palaces of the Naga kings are equally fantastic and are described as having a thousand pillars and built of lapis-lazuli with gold and silver decoration. The palaces of the Naga lords were also said to be full of young maidens with a magically seductive quality who were described as slim-waisted and lovelier than lotus blossoms and who would serve the King and his guests with delicious food and entice them by playing beautiful music.

Another magical aspect of the Nagas are the location of their dwelling places which are usually said to be under water in lakes, ponds, rivers or the ocean, although the water seems to serve more as a gateway to the Naga realm than as an actual abode.

In our day they would probably be described as inter-dimensional beings. There are similar stories of shape shifting serpents in many of the cultures of ancient times from around the world and some of the stories and legends bear a striking similarity to those in Buddhist literature.

In recent years there have been tales floating about the internet of people who claim to have encountered beings who could change their shape from human to a reptile-like form and back again. These are considered to be only wild tales told by delusional people but there does seem to be some basis for these stories if the tales told in ancient times are taken into account.

As a famous writer once wrote "There are more things in heaven and Earth Horatio than are dreamt of in your philosophy" and HPB also wrote about serpent men and Nagas in the Secret Doctrine. If the ancient stories turn out to have any truth in them we may have need of a modern day St. Patrick.





# THINKING ABOUT: Snakes and Serpents—Is there a difference?

AN HOMAGE TO EACH

by Peggy Heubel

This month we celebrate St. Patrick's Day on the 17th. In this, the material world, a snake is a snake no matter how one categorizes them—any definition will do—we all recognize a snake when we see one. This month, however, especially highlights the role snakes are said to have played in providing a great excuse to celebrate anything Irish; a global celebration of Irish culture in countries with people of Irish descent AND with those who consider themselves Irish-by-association and admiration. How are snakes involved? What role did snakes play that led us to this day...if any?

In the 5th century, Father Patricius (later to become bishop) began to convert the Irish to Christianity through Roman Catholicism. By the time of his death on March 17, 461, he had established monasteries, churches, and schools. As a result, Bishop Patrick was made the Patron Saint of Ireland. The absence of snakes in Ireland gave rise to the legend that they had all been banished by St. Patrick driving them into the sea after they attacked him during a 40-day fast he was undertaking on top of a hill. However, all evidence suggests that post-glacial Ireland never had snakes. Water has surrounded Ireland from the end of the last glacial period, preventing snakes from slithering over from the rest of the British Isles;

before that, it was blanketed in ice and too chilly for the cold-blooded creatures. Scholars believe the snake story is an allegory for St Patrick's eradication of pagan ideology.

The snake was the symbol of the Celts and their spiritual elite, the Druids - who inhabited the island of Ireland long before the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century. When Patrick arrived, the only "pesky and dangerous creatures" that St Patrick wished to convert or cast away were the native Celts.

Since snakes often represent evil in literature, "when Patrick drives the snakes out of Ireland, it is symbolically saying he drove the old, evil, pagan ways out of Ireland [and] brought in a new age," said Classics professor, Philip Freeman, of Luther College in Iowa; thus adding to the slander and libel of the reputation of good snakes everywhere.

In today's world, calling someone a snake represents an overt insult and, even though one very rarely hears of anyone being called a serpent, the insinuation is that the person is the devil-incarnate; thoroughly evil. Perhaps in this respect it is better to consider the middle ground: we all know somebody who is a double- talker, gossipy and a generally untrustworthy person. They are cruel to their enemies and even meaner to their friends—with the friends, however, the mean streak only comes out when their backs are turned. This type of friend is all sweetness and sugar to people's faces but acts ugly and spiteful

behind their backs. We all have a little snake in us, don't we? If we are selfish, we do. Let us be kind and generous to Nature's snakes even to venomous ones. There is an old fable: "A kind and generous old man was walking one cold winter morning and came upon a snake, stiff and almost frozen. He took it home, warmed it on his hearth, and let it lap some milk to strengthen it. He spoke often and kindly to the snake as he tended to its health, his words a reflection of his sympathetic and gentle regard. Finally, it was clear that it had recovered and the man decided it was time to release the snake. As he bent to pick it up, the snake sank its venomous fangs deep into the old man's arm. 'Why hast thou killed me?' he

cried. 'Hast thou no gratitude?' As he lay dying, he heard the snake hiss in reply: 'Thou knew'st my nature; thou knew'st I wast a snake.' Moral: the greatest kindness is no excuse for lack of discrimination. Nature will take its course.

SERPENTS—in an effort to share homage between them, we must disentangle serpents from the general, negative, and worldly definitions given to snakes which, unfortunately, does not differentiate one from the other...yet, the difference is vast. In consideration of the above, let us consider the serpent.

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Serpents have fallen into the mists of myth and legend but still occupy a significant portion of our collective unconscious. From remotest antiquity, the serpent was held by every people in the greatest veneration, as the embodiment of Divine Wisdom and the symbol of spirit. Serpents have fascinated us for millennia, and have helped us to connect with worlds beyond imagination, and even to imagine the world before Creation itself. Centuries before the Common Era (BCE), humans recognized the power of serpents and honored them as wisdom-keepers—teachers of visionary awareness, oracles of transformation, guardians of abundance & fertility, and masters of the cycles of nature that surround and enfold us.

The serpent's shedding of its skin teaches us the power of life, death, and rebirth, and the ancients believed that serpents were immortal, capable of infinitely rebirthing themselves in new forms by shedding their old ways. It is perhaps for this reason that the Serpent was chosen to represent infinite power of Nature itself. The Seal of the Theosophical Society exhibits one of the oldest symbols of the cycles of the Universe and of nature known to human history—the uroboros (or ouroboros)—the serpent who swallows its tail. And since ancient Egypt—more than 15,000 years ago—speaks to us of wholeness and the infinite cycle of endless creation! It was adopted by Greek magicians and entered the alchemical work of European Gnostic and Hermetic teachings, becoming a symbol for introspection and the eternal cycles of life recreating itself and the infinite unity of all things.

This serpent symbol alone transcends European history having arisen simultaneously between cultures around the world with similar meanings, and with no known history of contact. For example, among indigenous people of the tropical lowlands of South America is the common belief that waters at the edge of the world-disc are encircled by a snake, often an anaconda, biting its own tail. In Nordic cultures, Jörmungandr, (the World Serpent) encircles the world, and when it releases its tail apocalypse will follow. It is said of the uroboros in the early alchemical writings (circa 400 BCE) that it represents “the all is One.” In this sense, all other meanings of this symbol are contained—the balance of masculine and feminine energy, the liberation of unity, and the boundary between the world as we know it and what lies beyond. The Infinite Serpent, guardian of the cosmic order of all things, continues to inspire us and connect us to the wisdom of the Serpents,

and to remind us of the sacred cycle of creation, destruction, and rebirth.

We have inherited serpent DNA; we will become as they for daily we grow in serpent wisdom under the guidance of the Egyptian goddesses, Isis and Seshat, of the Greek Metis and Athena, of the Norse goddesses, Frigg, Sága, and Vör, of the Roman goddess, Minerva, of the ancient Persian goddesses Anahita and Chista, of Benzaiten (Japan), of the great Chinese goddess, Kwan-Yin, who holds in her right hand the lotus scepter containing the nectar of wisdom. All (too numerous to mention here) are representatives of Sophia.

Who is Sophia? She is not a goddess: she is Wisdom Itself. More than that, Sophia is the Wisdom of Deity in all its myriad expressions, male as well as female, throughout all ages and throughout all civilizations great and small—all gods and goddesses who, through the worship of their adherents; those who attempt, too, to dispel the darkness of ignorance and selfishness in the human heart and mind through its sages, saints, adepts, initiates, Buddhas and Christs.

Do we still need the Serpents of Wisdom? We do, desperately. The darkness increases once again as the Kali Yuga progresses; darkness is its chief hallmark...spiritual darkness. What good is material advancement? It is “not of the quality of Light, and he (the adept) finds no proof of progress in

merely mechanical contrivances that give comfort to a few of the human family while the many are in misery.” Civility and respect for one and other's differences are obviously on the wane. Right here right now, there is as much grinding poverty as anywhere in the world...and as large a criminal class if not worse as statistics suggest. Let us not point to Europe, to Asia, to Africa, or to anyone but ourselves. We have nothing to brag about for it is rightly said, “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

Are we left crying the darkness—darkness created by our own proclivities and device? NO! Do not search the world; do not rely on ancient texts and explanations said to be the foundation of the wisdom. The wisdom of ancient days is not for us—it has taken new forms. It resides within each one of us and is of our own TRUTH. The ancient serpents are there awaiting us. Let us knock for admittance. Let us open our hearts and minds to them—they know us intimately from ages long past...as we do them. [END]

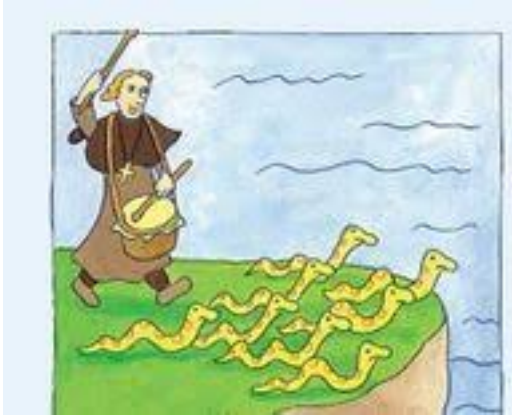






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The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



Bud found it challenging to tolerate all the Packer green in the fall, but then St. Paddy's Day comes and.. here we go again.

**Study Groups**  
 First Sunday  
**The Secret Doctrine Dialogues**  
 Second Sunday  
**Fundamental Theosophy**  
 Third Sunday  
**Science of Sacraments**  
 Fourth Sunday  
**Hermetics; Evolution of Higher Consciousness**  
 Fifth Sunday  
**TBA**

