

The Feminine in the Temple

by French Grand Master Serge Toussaint

We think it important to highlight the importance of the role of the feminine, its image, and its representation expressed by those we deem qualified as initiates. In mythical, ritualistic, and symbolic efforts, a Temple comes into being. What were the motives and aspirations of the first Temple "builders?" Perhaps they were attempts to capture the unknown and gain understanding in order to "transform" the apparent chaos in the cosmos and make life more human. By providing structure to a space or a site, they worked on reference points and markers, the seeds of civilization, and the first steps of a society desiring to forge a link with the Divine.

By constructing the Temple, topographic and aerial spaces were circumscribed, symbolizing rime. By virtue of attitude, rite, and worship itself, its structure became a receptacle for the sacred. Within human experience, the sacred has a necessary value in becoming conscious of the reason and condition of being and existence. Since falling into matter, human beings have "destructured" their psyche, which is no longer connected to the soul's heart; through tests and trials, wholeness must be restored.

For this reason, women and men are searching for their divine regeneration. An unconscious memory and nostalgia of the creative source are ever present. Remember that before the Fall, Adam and Eve had the Divine Substance flowing in their veins that gave life and generated the heart of humanity. According to the Unknown Philosopher: *"Humanity was the living sign of God, God's universal figure, and we dwelled in the sanctuary."*

The quest for the sacred developed a creative outpouring with its diverse forms of expression. The abstract was made tangible, giving it universal values and making its form accessible. We can even say that it is a law within the physical order of things that everything productive draws its substance and maintains itself from the source from which it had its own existence. Each mind emanates from Thought, the creative Word, and Divine Action.



The *Venus* or *Woman of Willendorf* a 4 3/8 inch high statuette, approximately 22,000-24,000 years old, found near Willendorf, Austria in 1908.

Cave art turned out to be religious art with its paintings, engravings, and figurines of female figures (in the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods). Through observation, people became aware of "opposites": the inseparable factors of life and death. The representation of divinities, for example, showed them with a body that was supposed to contain the whole universe with its creative, yet also destructive and chthonian potentials.

The Feminine Principle in World Traditions

The feminine principle appeared throughout an ancient and universal form of worship dedicated to a mother-goddess or the universal mother as a representation of the Creator's will. The name of the divinity, along with its function and powers, was originally found in myths, rites, and religions of agrarian civilizations; these gave rise to matriarchal or gynaeocentric societies. The female body is analogous to the earth mother who is generative and nourishing, but also devouring and destructive-both a vault and a tomb.

In *Egypt*, the goddess Maat symbolized balance and social, moral, and cosmic order. The best known representatives of these agrarian divinities, goddesses of fertility, or mother goddesses, included the temple of Catal Huyuc in the south of Anatolia, (6000 BCE to 5000 BCE), the Venus of Pazurdzie in *Bulgaria*, the Venus of Willendorf in Germany in 20,000 BCE, and, from France, the Venus of Lespugue.

In the upper Paleolithic Period, in Laussel (Dordogne region), Venus carried a lunar crescent in the right hand. In their chthonian aspect and as representatives of this aspect of nature, there were Ishtar, Innana, Lilith, Sekhmet (third millennium BCE), Cybele, Hecate, Persephone, and, in India, Kali.

Temples dedicated to the worship of the serpent were also found. These include some African divinities like Mimma, worshipped among the

Touaregs in South Algeria, among the Yoruba in Benin and the Bantu in South Africa, and as the Wouivre, among the Celts.

The moon was also worshipped and said to have multiple powers in and over space as well as on earth. It had three phases of development: the crescent, the full moon, and darkness or the new moon. These cycles influence vegetation, water, the amino acids of the human organism, and the female cycle.

Even today religions that hold their festivities according to the lunar cycle demonstrate the importance of the moon's cycle. Further, consider the significance of the moon for lumberjacks, farmers, and gardeners. In the psyche, the lunar world with its dreams enables the transpersonal world to be reached: "a place where ego and linear space rime become blurred."

These figures are mentioned in many myths and legends. In E_gypt, the goddess Seshat was capable of drawing up the plans of a temple and designating where it should be located. In Greece, Phrasimede conceived of plans (she was from the family of Daedalus). In Europe, Melusine was the ultimate avatar of these master mistresses; she was responsible for the construction of abbeys, priories, and other buildings; in the Bayeux Gothie cathedra!, there is a reference to this on a tapestry titled, "A Picture of the Lodge with the Virgin."

From a philosophical point of view, goddesses symbolize that which remains open within being and the tendency to express the self. Earth faces Heaven with the possibility of becoming Light. Goddesses designate the soul in which God receives the Divine Self, for God alone "Is."

The College of Vestals

The Vestals were guardians of the sacred fire in the temple, a fire that was never extinguished. In Greece, the goddess of the



The Goddess Ishtar.
Glazed Parthian coffin
fragment (ca. 247 BCE
- 228 CE), from the
Rosicrucian Egyptian
Museum collection.

hearth was Hestia-Vesta, an ancient goddess of Rome; in India, it was Agni.

The Vestals of the Roman Forum numbered ten. Sworn to Vesta, they were chosen by the only masculine element, a priest. They made a vow of chastity and served from five to thirty years. On the first of March, the festival of Vestalia took place, the relighting of the sacred fire. The cleaning of the temple took place on the fifteenth of June.

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In 534 BCE Tarquin the Proud (Lucius Tarquinius Superbus) promulgated an edict regarding the virginity of the vestals: they were to be severely punished if they broke their oath. The Vestals or Colombes, in their virginal state, meant and symbolized purity of the non-manifest, the non-revealed, and the conscience. We stress the existence of these "colleges of vestal priestesses"

who guarded the eternal flame, and their stories that told of the goddess Sessia, a protective divinity of seeds, wheat, and associated rites.

Women Initiates and Goddesses

Women initiates, having made the vow of chastity, lived on the Isle of Sein off the coast of Brittany. In Ireland, too, ancient divinities existed: "feminine trinities" such as Fodla, Banba, and Ériu, as well as Druidesses guarding the hearth and the flame. The Celts worshipped Danu or Dana (Dôn for the Gauls). The goddess Epona was represented by the mare Rhiannon (sixth century); legends speak of Rhiannon as the "great Irish queen," "The Green One," and "Reigning Feminine Spirit" considered to be a mother goddess. Under a triple aspect in Greece, Hera was venerated as child, spouse, and widow.

The Yoruba in Nigeria and Benin worshipped an aquatic divinity called Oba Oshun Oya, the spouse of the god of thunder. This goddess had the capacity to metamorphose herself. (Note that in Europe, Melusine and Morgana were the equivalents of Oya, a buffalo, which transformed herself into a woman.) Melusine transformed herself into a mermaid or snake.

We know that even today there are rites dedicated to this "trinity" in Africa and Brazil (Macumba, with her priestesses called mambos of the *terreiro* or temple). To return to Ireland, in the sixth century, the Druids ruled; however, their religion seems to have disappeared by the sixteenth century. In a document preserved to our day, the archbishop of Dublin made a "charter" prohibiting this religion and its rituals.

Shekinah and her Presence in the Temple: Wisdom throughout Sacred Writings

In Judaism, the personification of the feminine principle survived in the form of Chokmah or Sophia. In the *Book of Proverbs*, Sophia speaks of the world's creation and the links that unite it with its Creator. She resided in the Temple of Jerusalem and personified Israel.

In the *Song of Songs*, a collection of poems, King Solomon says of his beloved (1:15): "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful, your eyes are like doves, your lips a scarlet thread." Actually, he is referring to his encounter with the soul imprisoned in matter. These words remind us, too, of mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross.

In the *Gospel of St. John* (3:21), the text says: "He that has the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy is therefore fulfilled." In the Gospels we find the rich and contrasting image of Sophia as a "repentant sinner." She is still considered by Gnostics to be the Initiate's model.

In an Egyptian text from the third century titled *Pistis Sophia* (Faith and Wisdom), Jesus states: "Mary of Magdala and John should be placed above all my disciples and all those who will be initiated into the Mysteries of the Ineffable."

Mary Magdalene is considered to be the mother, sister, and companion of the incarnated Logos. She is the first one to have "seen" and heard the risen Christ. She took him for the *Rabbouni* (gardener). Actually, she had essentially "seized" the conducting link of the One who works in our secret gardens.

For Meister Eckhart, the virgin soul becomes the spouse in so far as it is the influx of illumination. As it develops fully in humanity, it will elevate the soul to its highest degree, which is "the state of the Mother of God."

He writes:

"If we always remained virgin, no fruit would come from us. To become fertile, we must be woman... it is the noblest word that can be given to the soul, and is far nobler than virgin. That we receive God into ourselves is good, and in this receptivity, we are virgin. But that God becomes fertile in us is better, because to become fertile through the gift received is to be grateful for this gift."

In Islam, reference is made to the nuptials of the Sophia, of the soul. In the Qur'an of Iranian Islam, it states: "The virgin of light reveals to the elected one the spiritual form that is within us, the new man or woman, in becoming our new guide and leading us upwards."

Theotokos: Bearer of the Divine

In ancient cults we found the Earth Goddess oriented towards Heaven. Fertile, she becomes a transfigured Earth, an Earth of "Light." The Greek term *Theotokos* ("bearer of God") signifies the alter ego of Sophia. The Virgin M_{ary}, for example, is the symbol of the capacity of the soul to become a receptacle of the Divine Fruit. The fact that God receives the Divine Self by emanating God's Self-for God alone is-is proof of the divine incarnation. According to Jean-Yves Leloup, "All souls are feminine in the eyes of God. Because what makes us God, is the Goddess; what makes us Human, is Wisdom."

After the involution of being, the Shekinah was exiled into matter. "The feminine element of God," the Superior Shekinah, became illumined by the Divine Light that caresses the earth. On this philosophical and wisdom-loving earth, of which we are an image (Adama), Initiates and Men and Women of Desire seek to travel the ascending path towards the "heart of life," the life of the spirit, the essence of life, and the way leading to universal unity.

Divine Alchemy: The Reunion of all that is Scattered

In the reconstruction of the Temple, the Martinist initiate must reunite all things that are scattered. The initiate must leave behind the fascination of matter and its appearances: the "emptiness filled with too much." In this way he or she can become his or her "own monarch." In *Ecclesiasticus (The Wisdom of Sirach)* (33:15), we read: "Look upon all the works of El, everything is in pairs, the one opposite the other."

A merciless combat ensues between the archangel and the dragon in order to gain access to the place within the soul where matter and spirit are potentially united. This place has to become "the heart of the soul." The birth of the new woman or man takes place within the Self; the heart becomes conscious; and the power is given to perceive the transcendent and become the eyes of the soul - the virgin mother who gives birth to ideas. *Ecclesiasticus* again states (33:5): "The cowardly heart is like the wheel of a chariot, its thoughts are an axle that turns on itself."

As far as the physical heart is concerned, it has a dual action of contraction and expansion, pushing the blood from the top of the head right down to the toes. It extends outwards and returns towards the center. The heart for the initiate becomes a symbol of the womb, the foundation, and the rhythm.

Divine alchemy takes place within this receptacle. The four elements are no longer part of the material attributes and become transmuted into a subtle energy. Salt, sulphur, and mercury - the vectors of spiritual energies - "react" within the purified thought and a dismembered ego. The transmutation of vices into virtues begins. Consequently, the reconstruction of the Temple (and of one's self), begun from a degree of unconsciousness, ignorance, and bias, will be consummated in a discovery of the Presence, Essence, and Substance that the Creator places within our hearts.

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In the "Temple of Harmony," or the new person, the soul will sing the praises of the divine nuptials: "I have seen the two worlds united into one: the first, the last; that without and that within; simple as the breath of one who breathes." (Rûrrû - *Mathnawi*, Book 111).

The Role of Woman: the Female Initiate in our Lodges and Heptads

In this context, the female initiate, considered as desiring truth, love, and unity, and consciously exercising her authority, teaches her brother to look into himself and come to know the fundamental

femininity of his being, the complimentary image of his soul. This is valid, too, in mundane life.

The initiate, whether man or woman, knows that in this world of duality, we exist in different forms and appearances; and that in the absolute there is neither the feminine nor the masculine, but only being whose divine descent drives the person to Reintegration. Woman's authority is considered to be one of her principal qualities, along with her intelligence, intuition, and knowledge. She balances and complements power, a masculine quality.

The initiates in our Lodges and Heptads, knowing that Isha is the heart of humanity and that Aisha is the conscience or free will of Adam, are aware that the Shekinah can transmit its secret and its energy into being. In the work of Reintegration, Isha must, with Aleph Shin He, rejoin Ish and his Aleph Yod Shin. Together, they will create a being of light, a new person. The Savior of the initiates, the Repairer, acts within this mystery.

The goal of initiates is to evolve with humanity, and the feminine and the masculine are necessary and transitory manifestations to reach the unique and One God. In the home or in the professional world, initiates have the duty and responsibility to do whatever is required so that "the attitude towards a woman" and the "feminine" evolves beyond seduction, submission, or aggression. *As Rûnû again said, and we conclude with this: "Woman is a ray from God, she is in the desire of God, in the fundamental femininity of being."*

There are for us three desirab[e thin3s:

-- "Never to forset that there is o.ndher *lisht* thon the JerrR-nto.ry of *which* this is but the vetf o.nJ. the mask.

-- To realiz.e tho.t nothin3 either co.n or shou[d prevent us from o.ccomplishin3 our work.

-- To learn tho.t who.t we know best is tho.t we know nothin3.

-AJapteJ hom the prayers of--Eouis-Cfaude Je Jainto(l/artin