



# *Fresh Approach to Sacrifice*

by Alys

by Alys, former Abbess Guardians of Grace & Blessing

Sacrifice is one of those words that has lost a lot of flavour over the past few centuries. We've stayed with the dark side of it, seeing it in terms of maidens stretched out as altars and mists of gloomy incense hovering round a few pretty paltry acts of misjudged trivia. Which is a shame.

I'd like to take a look at the history of the word, and to bring to our notice that sacrifice is pretty much part of the fabric of our everyday and more wholesome world.

The word itself comes from Latin (of course!) and means, at its heart, to make holy. At first that seems not to have a great deal to do with giving up, giving away, and losing the use of. But the Romans had two very useful ideas when it came to religion and spiritual things. One was sacrifice, and the other magnification. Remember the Magnificat from the new testament? "*O magnify the Lord with me.*"

Now magnification was something that happened to the God, Goddess, Spirit, or idea to whom a sacrifice was made. The sacrifice, by the way, didn't have to die. Quite often the opposite was entailed. It means that what you feed gains strength and dignity, and that feeding takes place by sacrifice or your choice, to make holy.

We have the idea in the Western World that what you give away, you lose in some respect, and yes, it is often so. If I give you my cake, I don't have cake myself, perhaps. I may, however, be magnified - by your pleasure and your praise. In this example the sacrifice comes from both directions. What interests me about this is that the more spiritual and intellectual a sacrifice is, the more of it there is to go around. The more emotional and physical it is the less there is to go around.

Even more than that, it seems to me, that if a 'sacrifice' is 'whole' - that is, spiritual intellectual, emotional physical - then so is the magnification. I'm pretty sure that this is what the first covenant of the Hebrew people means by a 'whole' sacrifice. If you find this difficult, perhaps it will help to remind you of Dion Fortune's *Demon Lover*. Here, the heroine is used as a passive channel. She becomes exhausted to the point of depletion. Later, when her mentor has died, he uses her energies,



her love, her time in order to be able to build himself a place in the world which he does not wish to leave, and all this with no consideration for her, or for her willingness or understanding. She was not 'made holy' by his actions, or even by his setting her apart for these activities. (Though, I might point out that the powers that be did those things for her, to his great eventual benefit).

Most of our ideas of sacrifice assume this kind of model. The black magician sacrifices a living chicken or whatever, so that the spirit he is after can feed off the life energies sufficiently to be magnified and to manifest according to the will of the magician. Many, perhaps even most magicians see it this way too, I'll admit, but I suspect that they are the losers thereby.

In everyday life we see that this pattern does indeed hold true. People argue as if by being right they can take away a little of the energy of those around them. Putting someone in their place is seen as putting them down. I was very interested to read a few years ago the Celestine Prophecies, which put these very principles into vivid light. Nevertheless, I hold that it is a twisting of a very important principle. The most important things that we give each other can never be taken away and neither do we lose them thereby.

If I give you a book which I have not read myself, then I must either buy it again or borrow it back to read. If I give you my ideas or my knowledge or

my love or my patience or my comfort, I am no loser, and neither, I hope are you. But we may both be energised or not, and this sometimes depends on such little things as my wishing to do something else. Then, it is a sacrifice, and depending on several factors we both either lose energy or gain it. Only if a relationship is very sick does one lose and the other gain.

There is something in the human makeup which seems to assume that only one may be 'the winner' and that all the others must be diminished. There is an assumption that attention given to one god or spirit will diminish the others. To me it seems that if the people or the gods or the ideas are such that they can be so diminished then there is something out of balance with them. So, it may be that I miss a ball game or an opera in order to be with a friend. This will diminish me, only in so far as I am not actually with the friend with my whole attention. If I spend that time instead with a grumble, or resentment, then again, we are both diminished, and the true winner is the spirit of the grumble.

If, for example, I use a qabalistic balancing rite to enhance my own 'din' energies, I do not lose the hese energies already worked into my way of life. Rather they will become more focused and enhanced. More balanced. Aphrodite is not diminished by Ares, rather the opposite, if we have our own inner attitudes right.



We all have choices every step of the day. There are many things we can't do 'as well as'. If we get up early we can't have a long and cosy lie in. In the terms of sacrifice and magnification, mental alertness and energy can't happen if I'm going to choose instead a relaxed warm think instead. Either is good and depending on other things one may well be better than another. Part of this too depends on knowing our seasons - some seasons flow better with the warm think, others with the get up and go. We don't (usually) celebrate midsummer at midnight, nor Yule in the flickering noon.



Right now, as we enter the autumnal season we have made the harvest. This is the assessing time, a time for culling the good that we have had of them. It is a time for choosing which seed to store against the spring planting, which seed to set aside for use. The time for sweeping burning, preserving and throwing out.

The sacrifice, setting aside, making holy, lies in the willing choice, whether we are laying down our lives for the cause, or simply spending our time on them (how different are those two things anyway?) We 'make holy' - make the sacrifice - by doing one thing rather than another. It does make a difference. Someone who stays up all night to watch a ball game usually gets more of a kick out of the game, and doing it with someone else is even more exciting. Even so with waiting up for a particular time in order to do a rite, or with taking particular care with one's appearance or the order of the house, before one has a visitor. If nothing else, these 'sacrifices' mark the occasion as special, and draw our minds and selves into the kind of attention in which something special may be magnified.

Whatever else, let us realise that sacrifice, where it is a conscious, deliberate, 'making sacred choice' will always magnify us all, and enhance not just our individual lives and magic, but our connectedness with the seasons and the earth herself. It is part of the spiral consciousness, part of the gift.