

A Study of Naga Beings as a Global Phenomenon and their relation with Kailash/Manosarovar region

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Introduction

Serpentine creatures of all varying types are depicted in art and mythology across the world from North, Central and Southern America, to Europe, Africa and the Middle and Far East, as well as Australasia and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. It seems that throughout the centuries, humans used their coiling, sinuous and sometimes fiery representations to symbolise a greater meaning.

Known by diverse names, in China, they are referred to as 'Chi' and in Japan as 'Ki', whereas in the UK, dragon lines are known as 'ley lines' and in India, 'Naga' or 'Kundalini'. What is apparent here is that the cult of snake worship in its various forms is one of the oldest in the world.

Yet finding the historical traces of such practice is not so simple, as its roots are primordial and have often not been assimilated into mainstream religions, belonging instead to folklore and common people, rather than scholars and ecclesiastics, who tend to consider this type of worship as 'pagan' and therefore off the radar. In fact, it was the shift into monotheism that largely demonized snakes, as their association with ideas such as there being a 'Tree of Life' upon which one may acquire the knowledge of existence that is accessible to every human, did not go down well in the new religions, whose purer meanings tended to get lost in political motives and intentions to control the masses rather than to give them spiritual freedom.

Across the world, if you were to ask people on the street what the symbol of the snake or dragon means to them, some would reply that they are dangerous creatures, powerful icons representing the fall of man and the eternal fight of 'light' versus 'dark'. However, on the other side of the coin, some would mention that they are protectors, or even associate them with wisdom and healing, which is seen globally in the famous symbol of the caduceus that many apothecaries and practitioners of medicine still use today to show their craft.



Caduceus

These interpretations seem contradictory to one other, but nevertheless, the issue remains that snake-like creatures are a universal phenomena lurking in the background of our understanding, causing the question "Why?" to naturally arise.

In fact, if we just look a little deeper into the characteristics of the dragon and how it is portrayed in Western mythology, we find that Dragons are not creatures of evil and retribution, but actually symbols of the renewal of the natural world, breathing forth the breath of life. In images of St George and the Dragon where the saint pierces and supposedly kills the beast, what we are actually seeing is the drawing out of primal energy, the dragon with the spear from inside the Earth.



St George and the Dragon

Dragon lines or ley lines are pathways snaking across the landscape that have been identified in previous times by ancient man, who has carefully marked their routes with various markers, like purposefully arranged clumps of trees on the tops of hills, sacred buildings and pockets of standing stones, just one or many at various intervals that pierce into the ground to obtain access to this hugely powerful magnetic flow of Earth energy, their natural combinations of quartz crystals channeling this magnificent power out of the Earth, charging them with vital energy and imbuing these places with a reputation for healing and fertility. It is interesting to note that these lines often coincide with underground waterways.

Dragon or snake-like images are often found inside sacred places such as at the famous Rosselyn Chapel near Edinburgh in Scotland, where one can see them appearing at the base of a pillar with spiraling images of plants emerging from them and twisting up the stone column, showing that it is the energy lying in the earth that regenerates and brings life to all things, a power coming up from its interior to energise individual objects and living beings on the surface. More discreetly, these images indicate a hidden force lying within us that may empower spiritual awakening if activated.



8 Dragons at base of pillar at Rosselyn Chapel, near Edinburgh, Scotland

Spirals are one of the earliest symbols for the dragon and are of course, the basic format of our universe in operation, spiral energy being that which reflects all natural systems, from DNA within the creative heart of living cells to the growth sequence of shells and plants and the movement of the Earth, solar systems, galaxies and ultimately the universe (and perhaps even multi-verses) existing throughout space.

As a vibrant metaphor for the energetic nature of the universe, whose writhing movement in the form of a sine wave perfectly encapsulates the idea of primeval energy, that continuous movement behind all life forms, the spiraling, twisting motion of the dragon exactly parallels the way energy functions. In fact, the word 'sine' comes from 'sinuous', which is both related to the

word 'Sin', who was a Babylonian Moon God, waxing and waning to shed his skin in a serpent-like fashion, as well as a measure of earthly time.

Viennese artist – Friedensreid Hundertwasser (1928-2000) said,

“The spiral lies at that very point where inanimate matter is transformed into life... I am convinced that the act of creation took place in the form of a spiral. Our whole life proceeds in spirals. Our earth describes a spiral course... it is characteristic of a spiral that it seems to be a circle, but is not closed.”

Indeed, time itself moves in a spiral, revolving around an ever present continuum that seems to mark a past forwarding into a future, but a trick of its own sinuous shape.

The constellation of Draco (dragon) winds around the Pole Star, guardian of the cosmic order, its long body composed of lesser-magnitude stars revolving timelessly around the universal axis. Mesopotamian astronomy depicted it as much larger than how we see it now and considerably more serpentine. It also can occasionally be seen spitting fire in the form of meteor showers known as 'draconoids', creating the impression of fiery breath issuing from the starry dragon's mouth.

In this sense, St George's spear represents the Pole around which the Dragon eternally revolves. The Pole is the Tree of Life and the dragon guards it, thus determining the natural cycles of fertility, birth, death and rebirth of Nature. In Western mythology, dragons also guard hidden treasures, a trait of theirs not dissimilar to that of their eastern counterparts.

Yet, in its symbol of the earth, caves and underground chambers, the coils of these serpentine creatures appear tunnel-like, leading dimension to dimension, crossing from one state of reality to another, like the Mayan road to the Underworld. In their creation myth, the Popul Vuh, serpents and poisonous snakes were guardians of the vines and this seems to point as a direct reference to structures inside the cells of living creatures, protecting the DNA held at the heart of it, inside the nucleus of each of them.



Image of DNA

DNA is the blueprint of creation in all its multitude of forms kept in the most secret place in the heart of our cells and the hidden meaning behind this creation text points towards the process of the mixing and re-mixing of it in the so-called "correct" way in order to create more perfect beings. Throughout the ages, humans have continued this process both consciously and sub-consciously as they keep their caste and bloodlines intact. At this juncture of time with new research going on into genetics, albeit deliberately so we continue to search ways of creating perfection. This research not only involves experimenting with human genes, but continues into animal and plant life too.



Hunab Ku, Mayan depiction of 'One Being'

On the equinoxes, the two days of the year when there are equal hours of light and darkness, a shadow falls exactly on the side of the great pyramid, El Castillo at Chichen Itza in Mexico's Yucatan province, giving the impression of a full snake body sliding down the edge of the pyramid. It is said that the great feathered serpent god Kukulcan descends from the sky at this point, slithering down the enormous pyramid to energize the Earth.

In his book 'Serpent of Light', which itself is a metaphor for the Earth's dragon energy, Drunvalo Melchizedek mentions that it is reputed that after the destruction of the fabled world of Atlantis, The Nakkals - a word which sounds surprisingly like 'Nagas' and refers to an ancient priesthood of the lost continent ended up at a Great White Pyramid located in the western region of Tibet, underneath which a great white serpent was coiled. The Nakkals are thus meant to have then seeded the Tibetan race that was to subsequently maintain and preserve the inner teachings of universal knowledge in this world. Tibetans have varying theories about their origins involving divine intervention, the most common of which involves the mating of a celestial being disguised as a monkey with the demons who were occupying the earth at that time.

Snakes are deeply infused into Western esoteric traditions, the ancient Hermetic symbol of the Earth encircled by a great serpent being depicted by Ophion coiled 7 times around an egg



Ophion

and of course, Ouroboros, the serpent-dragon whose circles around to complete the circle by sticking its tail into its mouth, representing the act of Nature permanently self-fertilising itself.



Ouroborus

Wadjet, the ancient Egyptian wisdom deity who was the protector of pharaohs, is depicted as a snake with wings that may be the iconographic forerunner of the dragon, linking sky, earth and water.

As the offspring of Sky and Earth, Echidna, a she-viper of Greek mythology, who lived alone in a cave is often depicted as half-woman and half-snake. She was the mate of the fearsome monster Typhon. In 'Theogony' that describes the origins and genealogies of the Greek Gods, Hesiod calls her the "Mother of All Monsters." And another Naga-like figure in Greek mythology is the Delphic Oracle, a priestess who was called, 'pythoness' as she relied on a serpent intermediary for her oracular art.

There are also legends about snake beings among the aboriginal tribes of Australia, who worship the White Serpent Spirit, Black Serpent Spirit and Rainbow Serpent in their dreamtime mythology. In these legends, the Nagas inhabited a big continent that existed somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. It sank and the remnants of it formed the Indonesian archipelago and Australia. This reflects the Cambodian legend that speaks of the Nagas as a reptilian race of beings possessing a large empire in the Pacific Ocean region. These Nagas are thought to have superhuman powers and to have developed a subterranean civilization, technologically much more advanced than ours.

Many examples of Buddha's association with Nagas appear in Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka and along an avenue leading to the temple of Ankor Wat in Cambodia, seven-headed Naga serpent statues may be seen.

The Creator-goddess of ancient China, Nu Kua is usually described as having the upper body of a woman that melts into her serpent lower-half. After creation, during which she made humans, she put down a rebellion against the heavenly order. Queen of all snakes, she combines and embodies creativity, cosmic order, water, earth and sky. And in Japan, 'white snake' spirits, who are messengers of love and fortune live in lakes, and in Korea, there are guardian serpent spirits and so it goes on, culture by culture throughout the world.

Snakes slither into other aspects of history too in that Thoth, the Egyptian God of writing, wisdom, magic and the moon was also the inventor of the Phoenician written characters and is credited to have taught man, 'Snake Science'. The oldest Phoenician character, 'Theth' is the sacred number 9, having the form of a snake curling itself up.

Philo says that "The letters of the Phoenician alphabet are those formed by means of serpents... the supreme gods, the rulers of the universe". In this case, letters represent the gods. A recent analysis by Judith Mann and Nenad Djurdjevic of symbolical writings incorporated into different bronzes from Nigerian art revealed that the earliest form of writing was code made to express neither letters nor words in gross, but things or notions specifically related to the human biological system and our DNA. An examination of the Proto-Sinaitic script from which ancient alphabets such as Phoenician, Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Etruscan derived, has shown that eighty percent of known signs strikingly resemble the shape of various chromosome formations.



Images of cellular structures, like snakes

The myths of so called primitive peoples and molecular biology are staggering; Jacob's ladder, snakes in water, twins going through a tunnel to search for their dead father (representing their ancestral line) deep underground and the list continues... The people we call Shamans, those of many different traditions around the world communicate with their DNA through ritual techniques and imbibing various plant medicines that cause hallucination of snake-like forms that 'speak' to them, often giving wise advice or imparting knowledge to them.

As we can see from the above descriptions, which barely scratch the surface of the universal theme of serpentine creatures, it is a much too large a subject for one session and in this paper, I am going to focus in on "Nagas" in the context of Asia and in particular that of the Indian sub-continent and its neighbouring Tibetan region.

Who and what are Nagas?

Naga is the Sanskrit word for 'cobra', and in most of the languages of India '**nag**' means '**snake**', but especially the cobra, even though some translate it as a 'being with no arms and legs'. A female Naga is a 'Nagini'. However surprisingly so, the word sometimes refers to an elephant both due to its snake-like trunk and association with the forest-dwelling peoples of north-eastern India also called Nagas. The Hindu elephant god, Ganesh is often shown wearing a Naga as a belt and many times appears under shrine trees outside of rural Indian villages.

However, it is largely agreed that the strong serpent cult legacy that still appears in both Hindu and Buddhist practices originates from the early Indus valley civilization, around 2500 BC where tribes called 'Naga' existed. There are also Naga Hindu and Tantric sects, which took up the serpent cult as a way of being, but they are not necessarily fixed to any particular location. It is thought that the serpent legacy was absorbed into Buddhism at an early date, whereby they inherited much of their ancient Indian symbolism.

In Indian mythology, Nagas are almost always associated with Lord Shiva and therefore most of their images are found inside temples dedicated to him. Shiva is always found with a Nagaraja (Naga king) around his neck and is often shown with snakes all over his body. However, snake worship known as 'ophiolatry' is an ancient tradition that has been practiced all over the world and not only by Indians as we have seen in the many world mythologies associated with snake symbolism.

Traditionally speaking, Nagas are a class of long-lived, serpent-like, semi-divine awakened spiritual beings, described in Hinduism and Buddhism as masters of wisdom. Well respected for their prodigious powers, beauty, skill, and great courage, but sometimes feared for their violence and quick tempers - just like humans and other beings, they have their own type of perception and vary in their level of enlightenment. The venom of a Naga or Nagini, albeit deadly, also carries the elixir of immortality, so like many of us they are a double edged sword. Living extremely long lives for millennia, they are neither considered mortal nor immortal and can eventually die.

Also able to change into human form at will, most Nagas, however appear as snake-like creatures typically depicted in classic iconography as attractive, richly adorned, bejewelled, awe-inspiring men and women with a human upper body and serpentine tail below their waists. They are however, always recognisable by the glowing gem on the top of their head or forehead, which can grant wishes and manifest their powers. To top all of this off, three, five, seven, or ten (or more) expanded cobra hoods are situated like a crest above their heads, like a kingly crown.

Often considered as symbolic for the various layers of the human psyche, this condition of part animal, part human, part god refers to consciousness in a state of awakening awareness, whereby part of it exists in a base or ordinary state of lower, animal-like instinctual qualities, another part

of it in a state of awakening knowledge, like a human being and another in a higher, enlightened state that may be achieved through conscious effort.



Naga being

Indeed, in Tibetan Buddhism, Nagas are called 'Lu' and occupy one of the three worlds described by the great Indian Saint, Padmasambhava, who presents us with a neat self-expression of the psyche. Lu Yul, 'the Naga world', refers to the realm below, Me Yul, 'the human world', is situated in the middle and Lha Yul, 'god or celestial world', above that. This kind of theriomorphic form can also be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization of ancient India where on a surface level, the number of hoods they display may have originated from the number of estuaries of the ancient Indus River.

In this tripartite layering of the cosmos, the Naga realm is depicted as beneath that of the human and also represents the darkness or unknown of our subconscious. However, Nagas are also supposed to be very wise and eager to teach and to also be the guardians of texts containing information about the enlightenment process. This is synonymous with our own reptilian brain that is said to hold the key to this process, but must be unlocked in order to gain access to the knowledge stored within it.

In standard iconography, Nagas are commonly white in colour, but are also individually coloured to correspond to their five castes of society, or to the eight great Naga kings. They can be large or small, can change size and mostly appear with one face, two hands, often with their palms folded in appreciation, or offering jewels.

A Naga may offer you a jewel, as a condensation of a potential wisdom experience. The jewel, perhaps a lapis lazuli the size of your fist, acts as a portal for you to enter a dimension or experiential place where a revelation awaits.

Nagas can breed with humans and this divine-human marriage is recounted repeatedly in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, as well as in royal histories throughout Asia in particular, their snake ancestry often confirming their legitimacy as royalty!

Tibetan lamas and Chinese Buddhists have assimilated dragons with the Nagas of Indian mythology. These primeval flying saurians of geologic times, now known only through the sporadic fossilised remains that have been found around the world, are considered as the crashing of thunder in the sky caused by them awakening and rising out of their sea beds, disturbing the elements to fly across the sky as a flash of lightning. In a more mystical sense the lamas, like the Chinese, believe their appearance to symbolise the entire world; its head is the heavens, its eyes, the sun, its back, the crescent moon, its wings the wind, its feet the earth and its tail the trees and plants.

In the Buddhist sense, Nagas are the underworld guardians of the treasures of the Earth (minerals, gemstones, and other riches), but are especially credited with safeguarding key spiritual texts and concealed teachings. Having been a Naga in a previous birth, Gautama Buddha

had an extremely good relationship with them and had asked them to keep the Prajnaparamita Sutra text safe until humanity was ready to receive it. It was the great second century Indian Buddhist master and philosopher, Nagarjuna, whose name itself means, 'the great Naga,' who eventually received this 'hidden treasure text' known as a 'terma' from them during a special visit he made to the Naga realm.

Nagarjuna also received his illuminating insights and tantric empowerment with the help of the Nagas living in the lake beside which he meditated. Called the "Second Buddha", partly in tribute to his having established the Madhyamika –that offers a philosophy of 'Middle Way' thinking, he is traditionally portrayed with a sunshade or halo formed by a multi-headed serpent and in thangkas is always shown seated upon a throne of serpents.

Nagas are said to have raised their hoods to protect the Buddha and other spiritual victors like the Jain saint, Parshva. They are also said to have washed Gautama at his birth, protected him during his life, and guarded his bodily relics after his death. However, at least 1500 years before Buddha Shakyamuni's enlightenment when Muchilinda with his many heads, sheltered him, the mythic image of Nagas doing homage to great yogis was already well-known.

Somewhat confusingly, Nagas are sometimes called elephants, possibly through association with their long trunk and are also said to be the progeny of Airavata, a primordial elephant god that emerged from the ocean of milk in the Hindu legends. It says in the Mahabharata, "Airavata is the Naga lord, the King of Snakes", and adds that "the Nagas number in the tens of millions".

The tradition of Sera Monastery holds that when Sakya Yeshe was on his way back from visiting China, it so happened that the set of Tangyur (Buddhist scriptures) donated by the emperor fell into the water while the party was fording a river. The travellers could see that the texts were hopelessly lost and so, distraught, they continued on their way back to Sera. When the caravan finally got back, the monks told them that just before their return, an old man with attendants had visited the monastery and was delivering a set of scriptures for Sakya Yeshe. It was believed that the old man was really a Naga king, for when the texts were examined, it was found that they were still a bit damp.

Where do the Nagas come from and where do they live?

Generally Nagas are considered to be powerful, magical serpent beings dwelling in a variety of locations ranging from the underworlds below land and sea, aquatic realms of rivers, lakes, wells and oceans, as well as inaccessible mountain caves and subterranean caverns often located where there are geothermal vents and hot water springs providing pockets of warmth to protect them from harsh weather conditions. The entrances to such places are said to be marked by ant hills on the surface of the Earth. Further to this, they are also considered as unseen beings associated with water and fluid energy.

The land of the Nagas, called the 'Saparanya' is considered totally forbidden for outsiders. The Agni Purana says, "Under the earth is the underworld. This too, consists of seven regions."

In the Hindu Puranic legends, all Nagas are considered to be the offspring of the Rishi sage, Kashyapa, who is said to have produced diverse progeny by his twelve wives, including reptiles, birds, and all sorts of living beings.

Garuda is a large legendary humanoid bird that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology, whose father was also Kashyapa. Kashyapa had two wives who were sisters, the Nagas being the offspring of one of them, Kadru, and Garuda being the child of Vinata, the other. Due to an act of treachery by Kadru, the Nagas are said to have become the mortal enemies of Garuda, who is also known as 'Destroyer of Serpents'.

Kadru gave birth to a thousand serpents, each with many heads, who populated this immense region of the Underworld many miles deep inside the earth in an opulent Celestial City on nine-levels called Patala or Nagaloka, 'the realm of the Nagas'. This subterranean realm is rich in treasures with beautiful palaces surrounded by jewel-encrusted forts, whose interior exceeds 8000 square miles and whose outer doors are 40 miles high and steps at its entrance, decorated with gems and gold.

Its capital, Bhogavati is filled with numerous palaces, houses, towers, and pleasure gardens where they live luxuriously in sensual delight. Legend says that if one drinks from a pond in Nagaloka, the water will give you the strength of a thousand elephants.



Mandala of Naga Universe according to 'Kriya Yoga' Tantra

The archetypal image of Shiva and Shakti (or Bodhisattva and Yogini in the Buddhist tantric sense) is two mating serpents interwoven as a caduceus, an image found in Tantric art and on many different Naga Stele. In complete union as The Great Naga, 'Kundalini', they are the centre of the Naga universe. Arrayed about them are the eight Naga Kings shown at the centre and the four Naga Dikpala guardians guarding the four quarters.

Nagas are divided into a fivefold system based upon the Hindu caste system or social order. In the east are the white kshatriya or warrior caste; in the south, the yellow vaishya or merchant class; in the west, the red Brahmin or priestly caste; in the north, the green shudra or labourer caste and at the centre, the black chandali outcastes, or untouchables.



Wrathful Buddhist tantric deity

While the Hindu Puranas describe these eight great snakes as 'Ashtanagas', eight great Naga kings are commonly listed in the Buddhist tradition, and in Buddhist Tantric art and ritual,

wrathful deities commonly wear Nagas as one of the eight great attires of the charnel ground, known as the 'revolting snake ornaments'. These consist of pairs or clusters of ferociously writhing, coiling and hissing poisonous serpents, worn as body ornaments by these wrathful deities or as being crushed underfoot.

The coiling white serpents of the warrior caste are wreathed around the half-vajra on a wrathful deity's crown. Clusters of yellow serpents of the merchant caste hang on a coil as the deity's earrings. The deity's necklace or sacred thread is formed from a wreath of red serpents of the Brahmin caste. As a sash or chest garland the deity wears an entwining bunch of long green serpents of the labourer caste. As bracelets, armllets and anklets, the deity wears encircling wreaths of small black snakes, which represent the outcaste or un-touchable caste.

The colour spread bears resemblance to the five Dhyani Buddhas that are associated with Highest Tantric Yoga of Tibetan Buddhism, their five colour placement corresponding with the traditional directions of the Five Buddha Mandala, with blue-black Akshobya at the centre, white Vairochana in the east, yellow Ratnasambhava in the south, red Amitabha in the west and green Amogasiddhi in the north. Each one embodies one of the five wisdoms, antidotes to the five deadly poisons that keep man tied to worldly existence.

The 3 most important Naga kings are named Shesha, Vasuki and Takshaka.

Shesha, also known as Ananta is the eldest and supreme of them all, the absolute King of all Nagas, an Avatar of enlightened consciousness. As the couch on which Lord Vishnu lies, he represents the concept of eternity and is said to support the entire weight of the earth. Vasuki is the ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and has the gem, Nagamani, a universal panacea and bestower of fortune, on or rather, in his head, whereas Takshaka is mentioned in Book 1 of the ancient Indian text of the Mahabharata when it is said, "Uttanka replied, 'Sir, Takshaka, the Naga king, disturbed my work, and I had to go to the land of the Nagas.'

Further to these three, Karkotaka has immense magical powers and Pingala is related to a mythological story of 'Four Great Treasures' and then there are Padma, Mahapadma, and Kulika making up eight Naga kings in total.

Their chief is Varuna, a Vedic god, who is not a serpent and not always necessarily solely associated with matters of only Naga interest.

Vasuki's sister, Manasa Devi, the serpent goddess is mostly identified with both the cobra and Kundalini and is said to be able to cure any snakebite, indeed, any adversity. Some stories say that she was the daughter of Lord Shiva himself, who always wears cobras as decoration around his neck. Although it is not clear whether the Rig Veda speaks directly of Manasa when it mentions 'Serpent Queen', metaphorically speaking, 'Serpent Queen' may refer to the Earth herself.

How Nagas interact with humans

Nagas can have a beneficial, neutral or hostile influence on human beings and are susceptible to suffering created by mankind's carelessness and basic ignorance of proper conduct in nature and disrespectful actions in relation to our environment. Therefore Nagas often retaliate towards humans when they behave in such ignorant manners whereby pollution of their environment, or disrespectful acts – such as urinating, or washing soiled clothes in a Naga inhabited stream can result in expressions of their discontent as skin diseases, various natural calamities and so forth.

Yet, Nagas are also heavily associated with water, living in sub-aquatic abodes, serving as protectors or guardian spirits of rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and seas, and controlling rainfall and fertility. In this capacity, they are often referred to as Nagarajas, or Dragon kings. Like their

Chinese dragon counterparts, Nagas are responsible for controlling weather, often causing droughts by withholding rain and when they are propitiated, can reverse the effects causing beneficial results.

Additionally, Nagas can bestow various types of wealth, assure fertility of crops and a balanced environment as well as deny these blessings. For this reason the practice of 'Lu Sang' in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition has been developed as a natural method to increase prosperity and assist the Nagas by preserving the positive qualities of their natural environment.

Nagas in the context of Kailash / Lake Manasarovar region

Some historians say that the region of Kashmir that is situated in the Northernmost part of India, was the original place of the Naga cult long before Hinduism became a recognised religion as such, as many of the earliest Naga related artefacts have been found there.

This area of land was once in fact a huge lake of about 16,000 square miles and about 2000 feet deep, surrounded on all sides by mountains, with Tibet to the North, Mount Kailash to the east and the land of Sapta Sindhu, meaning '7 rivers', to the south and south-west. Kashmir was formerly known as Sati-Sar, or the lake of Sati, who is the wife of Shiva, who in turn dwelt nearby on Mount Kailash.

Shiva patronised the Nagas, who stayed in this area of earthly Nagaloka, which simply speaking denotes the upper catchment area of the River Sutlej, covering the Himalayan territory as far west as Kashmir, Singkiyang, Laddakh, the Hindu Kush and Turkistan, its centre being Mount Kailash and Manasarovar protected by Lord Shiva.

In global terms, the primary Naga realm is also said to be defined by a whole serpent wrapped entirely around the earth, called the Midgard Serpent in Norse mythology, whose head is in the South Pacific. The others, which are like micro images of this original one, are located elsewhere, for example, at Croagh Patrick in Ireland, Lake Tahoe in California and Lake Manasarovar near Mount Kailash in Tibet.

Mount Kailash

Mount Kailash stands in the Gangdise mountains that form part of the Trans-Himalaya in Western Tibet and is located near the sources of four major Asian rivers, including the Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra and Karnali, which is a tributary of the River Ganga, It is believed that when the earth was still Pangaea before the continents separated, these four rivers flowed out all over the world.

As it is so difficult to reach, Mount Kailash has the unique distinction of being one of the world's most sacred yet least visited places. Considered as a supremely holy place by four religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Bön faith, it is venerated by billions of people.

'Gang Rinpoche' meaning 'Precious Snow Mountain' is one of several Tibetan names for the mountain. Many Sutra books say that sacred Mount Kailash lies behind nine black mountains from Bodhgaya, the place in India where the historical Buddha Shakyamuni attained the state of Enlightenment.

It is believed that Buddha Shakyamuni and five hundred Arhats flew from Bodhgaya to Mount Kailash, landing on a rock on the western face of Mount Kailash. In order to nail it down so as to prevent a cannibal demon from carrying it off to the realm of the Nagas, Buddha is said to have stood at its four corners. Today, one can still see four footprints there, one on each side of

Kailash, whereas the surrounding mountains are known as the residences of the five hundred Arhats. Behind Kailash, the mark of a rope believed to have been left by the demon, can clearly be seen.

Whereas according to Vedic Hindu texts, Shiva, the god of destruction and regeneration resides at the summit of Mount Kailash that is regarded in many sects of Hinduism as the ultimate destination of souls and the spiritual center of the world, in terms of Tibetan Buddhism, Mount Kailash is the residence of the most wrathful deity Chakrasamvara.

The tantric tradition of Buddhism describes three principle embodiments of an enlightened being, known as Kayas in Sanskrit and Ku in Tibetan. A Buddha or an enlightened being can have all three embodiments: Dharmakaya as the body of reality, or spiritual existence; Sambhogakaya as the Complete Enjoyment Body, or celestial existence; and Nirmanakaya as the Emanation Body, or bodily existence.

Chakrasamvara is believed to be the celestial emanation or 'Sambhogakaya' form of Buddha Shakyamuni and the story goes like this. Once upon a time, there were eight space-goers - four deities and four smell-eaters; eight ground-walkers including four malevolent harmers and four cannibal demons; as well as eight underground dwellers including four Nagas and four demi-gods. All together, twenty-four of them came to earth and occupied twenty-four different territories. Their evil presence caused great suffering to all the inhabitants of the earth.

Therefore from the state of the Dharmakaya, Buddha Shakyamuni manifested in Sambhogakaya form as the most wrathful Chakrasamvara with one face and twelve hands, and in this way subdued all the invaders with his underlying great compassion, converting those twenty-four sites into the residences of Chakrasamvara and his consort Vajrayogini. In the context of the region around Kailash, both Mount Kailash and Trita Puri are two of these twenty-four territories.

The image of this tantric wrathful deity is usually depicted as locked in union with his consort, Vajrayogini, symbolizing the ultimate union of wisdom and compassion with the aim of achieving the state of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. By practicing the tantric meditation ritual of Chakrasamvara, Buddhists try to gain a profound realization of the emptiness of all phenomena and being, described as the supreme bliss of mind.

Trita Puri

Trita Puri, located a day's journey south of Mount Kailash is principally a Buddhist site paying homage to Vajrayogini, the divine consort of Chakrasamvara, where its white and red hot springs are considered as the centre of this sacred land. Buddhists claim that Trita Puri is the origin of the Tantric tradition of Tibetan Buddhism because it is believed to be where the most furious devil Mata Ruta was vanquished and that without visiting Trita Puri, no merit can even be earned in pilgrimage to Mount Kailash.

According to the theory of the twenty four sacred palaces of Chakrasamvara, Trita Puri was also one of the eight lands occupied by the Nagas. The great Indian master Padmasambhava said, "This is the land, which is consecrated by Vajrayogini, where all goddesses gather. This is where echoes the sacredness of tantric sound. Pilgrims visiting this land are able to achieve liberation in a life-time".

There are three main retreat caves there, one above another. The bottom one is the cave of Vajrayogini, whereas the middle one belonged to Gyalwa Godtsang pa, who established the circumambulation path around Mt Kailash and the top one, situated inside the Trita Puri Monastery was used by the great Indian master Guru Rinpoche.

Naturally arising images of the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche may be seen in that cave, that also has a hole in one of its side. At the time of Guru Rinpoche, there was a female demon who claimed ownership of Trita Puri. Guru Rinpoche vanquished her, transmitting her to the land of Amitabha. Through that process, this hole was made, bringing air from the Naga world to the earth.

Manosarovar and Rakshastal lakes

To the south side of Mount Kailash lie two freshwater lakes, Lake Manosarovar and Lake Rakshastal.



Satellite view of Lakes Manosarovar and Rakshastal

In terms of sacred value, the most important of these two is the eastern one, 'Manosarovar' or 'Manasa', meaning 'Lake of the Mind'. Having a circumference of 86 km, it reaches 90 meters deep and has a surface area of about 320 square kilometres. Lying at an altitude of roughly 4500m above sea level, it is the highest body of fresh water in the world.

Albeit extremely cold, most pilgrims will bathe in the waters of 'Tso Mapham', which is one of the Tibetan names for Manasarovar, meaning "the undefeated turquoise lake", long considered as exceptionally pure and to have curative properties, and 'undefeated' because the water possesses eight qualities that no other water can compete with.

- 1/It is clean, does not smell or contain any toxic substances
- 2/ it is clear without mud nor dirt
- 3/ it is cool and free from heat
- 4/ It is smooth and has no flavour of aching and uneasiness
- 5/ It is secure and has protective powers to secure health
- 6/ It tastes delicious and is not salty or bitter
- 7/ It fully satisfies thirst
- 8/ It does not cause any sickness or disease.

Along with the many myths and religious stories it is associated with, it is also one of the most reputedly important locations for Nagas in this world.

In former times, eight Buddhist gompas, Trugo, Gotsuk (Gossul), Chiu, Cherkip, Langpona, Bonri, Seralung and Yerngo surrounded the margins of this holy lake. To Buddhists, Lake Manosarovar represents the Wheel of Life, a complex picture representing the Buddhist view of the universe,

the hub being at the center and the eight gompas surrounding that, denoting the places where the spokes of the wheel connect with the rim. Thus one full kora of pilgrimage around the lake signifies a single turning of the wheel, with all the benefits that apply.

There are a number of other stories about the preciousness of the lake. According to legend, after Buddha Shakyamuni had nailed down Kailash, he then sat on a rock in front of Mount Kailash and gave teachings to the Nagas residing in Lake Manasarovar and Lake Rakshastal, thus consecrating them. Today, Buddhist pilgrims call this rock the 'Throne of the Buddha'.

The Book of Superiors' Speeches also mentions, "If the Naga King is not in Manasarovar, how do rivers flow in this world? If there are no rivers, there would be no vegetation". It is however, said that the Nagas occupying the lake mostly leave travellers passing through this trail during the pilgrimage season alone, unless they veer off into surrounding areas where they should not trespass.

Some Buddhists believed that the lake was identical to the legendary Anotatta Lake, where the Buddha's mother dreamt she had bathed and seen a vision of the Buddha appearing from the direction of Kailash on a white elephant before he was born.

In the biography of the legendary King Norsang, Manasarovar Lake is called the Lotus Lake of Naga, so-called because its shape is similar to a lotus flower, which has a hundred petals. From each petal flows a river and at the source of each river is a Naga residence. The King of the Nagas was known as Kyi Wa Natsog and ruled over several Naga states. Every month King Norsang's subjects burned incense and made Torma offerings at the river sources, burying a vase of Torma offering every year. The prosperity and happiness of the northern King, Norsang, and his subjects depended on the lake and the Naga King.

Manasarovar is also worshipped by Hindus, who believe that it was created by the Creator god, Brahma. According to the Hindu belief, Brahma's seven sons went to Mount Kailash to visit and pay homage to Shiva and Parvati. Because they lacked a convenient source to perform ablutions, they asked their father if he could help them. So Brahma obliged, and created the lake with his mind. While Brahma's sons rejoiced at the creation, they saw a huge lingam arise from the lake and subsequently worshipped it. The lake is also seen by Hindus to be the home of the serpent Naga King and his subjects, who live in the lake and feed off the fruit of a giant Jambu tree that is said to grow in the middle of it, but is only visible to those with clairvoyant capability.

The great Buddhist masters, including Guru Rinpoche and those who have gained higher stages of spiritual realization, are known to have said that they could see a live tree growing in this universe, whose root is in the Naga world, the branches in the human world and the world of gods or celestial beings at the top of it.

Once upon a time, a seed of the Jambu Krita fell in Lake Manasarovar where it created a sound, "Zam" and this is why this world is known as Zam Bu Ling in ancient scriptures. In the 12th century, a Buddhist practitioner, Drikung Cha Nga Ling pa, went to wash himself in Manasarovar at which time he hung his robe up on the tree. Since his followers were unable to see the tree, it appeared as if his robe was hanging in the air.

On another occasion, Cha Nga Ling Pa received an invitation from the Naga king, who was asking for his teachings. He sat in a lotus position on the water at the lake's shore and was taken to the centre of the lake as if he was still on the same spot. Then he was offered an image of Buddha Shakyamuni, known as Thupa Chu Nyir Ma. The size of the image is twelve-fingers broad and it is believed to have been blessed by Buddha Shakyamuni himself. Currently, the image is kept in Ayang monastery in Southern India.

Finally, the fourth Panchen Lama, Losang Choekyi Gyal Tsen, offered a ceremonial white scarf known as a Katak to Manasarovar with his prayers and admiration that hung on the Jambu Krita

tree for a week, but since no ordinary person could see the tree, everyone thought the scarf was hanging in the air.

Sometimes the tree drops its fruits and they fall to the bottom of the lake and are said to turn into gold. In fact, gold has been found in the north-west corner of the lake near Chiu gomba, where it was mined for a while, but this action was eventually stopped due to an outbreak of smallpox, which was considered by some to be the wrath of the Nagas at this undertaking.

Legend says that rubies, crystal, topaz, coral, and other precious and semi-precious stones are to be found on its shore. The Abhidharmakosha says, "Its edges are lined with jewelled slabs" and it's true that if the pilgrim searches along the shore, he or she will immediately notice numerous polished pebbles of different shapes and colours, some of them very beautiful, perhaps the origin of this legend.

Another story abounds... There was once an evil Naga living in a corner of Lake Manasarovar. He was a shape shifter and taking the form of a red ox he came before the king and begged for protection. His legs were torn and pierced by nails, and his skull was split apart so that the blood and brains were seeping through. His tongue was lolling out, and his eyes were emerging from their sockets so that it seemed as if they would fall from his head. "What has befallen you?" asked the king. "Padmasambhava," came the reply, "that son of heathen savages is bringing us to ruin, the gods and humans of Tibet ! It is thus that he torments the Tibetan gods and spirits, innocent though we be ! I have come, Great King, to seek your protection."

The pious king was stirred to deep compassion, but no sooner had he uttered the words, "You may stay", then the ox vanished. "What might this be?" the king wondered, and then the guru told him: O Great King, your pity was misplaced ! Now throughout the garland of your future lives there will be many difficulties and then this red demonic ox will come again – as king ! The present king thus prayed that he would at least have the power to overwhelm this ox and the Guru prophesied that he would indeed subdue him. The story continues with a lot of details about empowerments, the attainment of immortality through his practise with the dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, hidden treasures, the revealing of texts, predictions etc...

A modern day Indian saint, Sadguru says there's a lot of activity in the lake between 2.50am and 3.45am. He questions why one particular spot on the planet has been used by 'life' that doesn't belong here and tells us that "Nagas are simply not the same as humans, but a life force from somewhere else that has chosen this as an airport, something like that!" He goes on to mention that there are absolutely tons of them here and even asks if Shiva was perhaps one of them, who maybe even left with them! He continues by saying that somehow humanity is unwilling to acknowledge them for whatever reason, yet they are influencing us in so many different fundamental ways.

In one session, they do an experiment whereby pilgrims lie down next to the lake and allow Nagas to enter their bodies, which creates an enormous amount of heat. Reports are that it feels like something is placed on the head to the point of discomfort and then something rushes through the system. The pilgrim should not be restrained otherwise it could damage their physical body. When ice-cold water was placed next to the hand of one of the pilgrims, water came to boiling point.

Rakshastal

Adjacent to Manasarovar is Lake Rakshastal, which is known as the 'Lake of Demons' and even standing on its shore, one gets a slightly eerie feeling. Rakshastal has two islands in it, whereas Manasarovar has none. With a circumference of about 123 km and a surface area of about 362 sq km, it lies at a slightly lower elevation than its neighbour.

During the turning of the Three Wheels of the Dharma, Buddha Shakyamuni extensively explained the merits of building images. So the King of the Gods, Indra offered precious articles of the Gods, the King of Nagas, Ananta offered precious articles of the Nagas and the King of Magadh, Bimbisara offered gold and silver, etc... to the Buddha and requested him to have three images of the Buddha made, as a means of gathering merit for sentient beings in the future.

From these items and on the instructions of the Buddha, the master craftsman Viswakarma made three images of Lord Buddha that were blessed by the Shakyamuni himself. One of these images that was kept at Magadh for devotees to make offerings and pay homage to, was one day miraculously taken by a demon to his palace at Lake Rakshastal. Then he devised that a special place was needed to keep such a sacred statue and attempted to carry Mount Kailash on his back to a realm of the Nagas in Lake Rakshastal. Following this is the story of the Buddha flying with the 500 Arhats to Mount Kailash to prevent him from taking the mountain, by nailing it down with his footprints.

In sacred Indian geography, Manasarovar and Rakshastal are seen as a pair, each representing the opposites of good and evil, light and darkness. And indeed the two lakes do have very different characteristics, the water in the second lacking the sweetness of that in the first. Manasarovar is roughly round representing the light of the sun, while Rakshastal is irregular, elongated and concave on its eastern shore so that it is described as crescent shaped and represents the reflected light of the moon.

Mount Meru



Images of Mt Meru

Said to rise 84,000 leagues high with a snow capped pyramidal shaped peak whose four faces are made of crystal, ruby, gold, and lapis lazuli and located at the heart of six mountain ranges symbolizing a lotus, Mount Meru is reputedly the pillar of the world, the central column of the proverbial Tree of Life' that so many religions and esoteric wisdom paths have mentioned in their traditions.

There are many references to Tibet's Mount Kailash as being the physical counterpart of the legendary Mount Meru, the premier mountain standing at the centre of the world mandala, the earth's navel and reputedly from which all other peaks around the globe were seeded. The Hindu Puranas maintain that Meru-Kailash once marked the middle of Jambu Dvipa, which is both a name for a legendary continent at the World's Centre and for the Earth in its entirety. Just as they do at Mount Kailash, according to a description in the Puranas, four rivers flow from it, which stretch to the four quarters of the world and divide the world into four regions.

In Tibetan, Mount Meru is known as 'Re-Gyal', which means 'King of Mountains'. Living beings are described as coming into existence through the interaction of the five elements and common Karmas. Karma is a Buddhist term that is defined as the sum of somebody's good and bad past

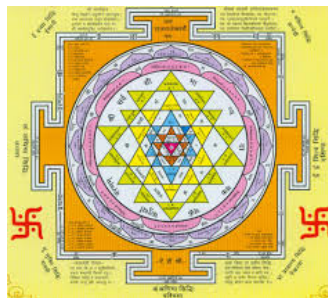
actions, which is believed to decide their fate in the future. Among living beings, there are those who have physical bodies and those who don't and live in this universe at a wide range of levels upon Mount Meru. Nagas are assigned to the lowest tier, with their Garuda enemies placed on that above.

Many of the people of Asia first appeared in the Garden of Eden that surrounds and includes Mount Kailash, including the Persians, Scythians, and the earliest Tibetans. The Bon Shamans of Tibet claim that the region was the site of their ancient Garden of Eden known as Omlongring, while some of the Tibetan Buddhists identify the area as Shambhala, the location of the imperial city and throne of the King of the World. Similarly, the Persian history contained within the Avesta refer to Meru-Kailash as Hara Benzati, the Emerald Mountain at the Center of the Earth that once united Heaven and Earth and that which is home to the Persians' ancient King of the World, Mithra.

As described in Hindu lore, the Naga realm is one of eight Celestial Cities arrayed about the cosmic peak Mount Meru, the central pillar of which is synonymous with the central column of energy located roughly in the same place as our human nervous system that spans the spine of our torso from its base up to the crown of our heads.

However, this variously described Naga realm, Patala, Bhogavati or Nagaloka is also an archetype of the root chakra of this human energy system and the Nagas are living expressions of this awakened energy, commonly known as 'Kundalini', and considered by Hindu tantrikas to be the 'Ultimate Naga'. Generally like a sentient caduceus the serpentine torsos of Nagas represent activated, interweaving energy circuits and their illumined, radiant golden heads, with the earrings, jewellery, crown, the brilliant "fruit" of that total awakening.

From the standpoint of Creation, the root chakra is found in the groin region, but in the sense of the cosmos, it is the first created centre and foundation for the entire cosmic earth. 'Earth' in this sense means all space created to hold matter and that starts with the root and here we can correlate the pillar of energy within the human form with the spine of Mount Meru. It is also crucial to appreciate that the cosmic dragon and its location of Nagaloka pertain to the archetype of the root chakra, which means 'Root support'.



Shri Yantra

The whole universe is pictured as a 2 or 3-dimensional image of Mount Meru in a diagram called, Shri Yantra. The Supreme Naga, 'Kundalini' can be seen as the pervasive power rising from a bindu at its centerpoint, which is where Shiva and Shakti reside in union, Mount Kailash in terms of physical location on this earth. This is the power that pervades and fills the universe, the energy of all things.

The Shri Yantra has 9 levels, representing the 9 levels of the body, or levels of Mount Meru, like 8 Nagarajas winding themselves around the Tree of Life, the ninth, representing Great Naga, or Kundalini. Interestingly, almost every Naga shrine centres around a tree. Images of Nagas often adorn houses and temples, as the serpent is associated with the phallic symbol, hence the Lingam shape commonly found at places of Shiva interest. This powerful emblem of fertility is thought to bring plentiful harvests and many children.



View of Kailash shaped as lingam seated inside yoni

Mount Kailash's status as being at the creative Centre of the World and home to Sanat Kumara, the divine Son of Shiva and Shakti, is indicated by its own cylindrical geometrical shape, a Lingam with a hemispherical top surrounded by an oval structure. This gigantic Shiva Lingam standing erect within the yoni of his consort is a sacred shape holding a lot of strong and special energies and in most of the temples of Lord Shiva, he is worshipped in the form of a Lingam rather than as a personality.

Nagas as metaphor

To really understand the true meaning of Nagas, it is vital not to take their physical descriptions too literally as they are NOT actual snakes or serpents. Their spiritual form is serpentine and snakelike, but only as a metaphor for their true nature. Naga worship based on veneration of actual snakes is thus misplaced and at this point, we have to leave our literal understanding behind. It's true to say that in the mythic cosmos, all things are flexible and in fact, we really need to consider Nagas as interconnected archetypal characters running through global prehistoric beliefs.

Although Hindu lore says that Nagas are the enemies of their cousins, the Garuda, they are not really so in terms of deeper meaning. The analogy is that Garuda 'eats snakes', but this actually means 'swallowing awareness', whereby Garuda represents the act of swallowing and the snake, awareness when humans are in the process of awakening their Kundalini energy. As celestial 'cousins', Garuda and Nagas thus co-participate in the same grand task.

Nagas are also the form of our ancestors as DNA/RNA that is carried within the nucleus of each cell of the physical body, thus they can both give access to the genetic code, and help one mutate it. They are also the form of electromagnetic energies of the central nervous system, and of the bloodstream. In airy form as Dragons, they are the vital pranas flowing within the body. Nagas or Dragons are also the spiral forms of the weather patterns of the atmosphere, and of the gaseous clouds of the stars in space.

If you can pierce through the outer layers of reality and unclothe all living beings of their physical forms and see them purely as structures of DNA, then they would all look like curled up snakes absolutely filling up the space, especially in places of unspoilt nature. These enormously long twirling, coiling strands of DNA are the codes and blueprints for every type of physical form, appearing at another dimensional level, living within another reality from that which appears on the surface. Made up purely of 4 letters in numerous different combinations of sequences, all manner of creatures are created from this serpentine shaped being of DNA.

All the cells in the world contain DNA, be they animal, vegetal or bacterial and they are all filled with salt water, in which the concentration of salt is similar to that of oceans. In this way, DNA goes together with water, just like mythical serpents do.

However, Nagas are not water spirits although they are definitely associated with water, which also symbolizes primordial Wisdom. In psychoanalysis, water is associated with being the storehouse of the subconscious part of mind, so we could say that Nagas occupy or indeed are vast lakes of awareness.

However, Nagas are not only associated with water, but also with dwelling deep beneath the Earth, which is a symbol of the vast storehouse of energy coiled up like a snake at the base of our human torso in what is known as the Muladhara chakra, the first on the pillar of the Kundalini energy system. Here, 'Naga' is a symbol of the Kundalini power, cosmic energy coiled and slumbering within man.

The gateway to this underworld land of Bhogavati where the Nagas reside in a land of sensory pleasure is this root chakra and the word itself, 'Bhogavati' means, 'she who gives pleasure and wealth'. Indeed, the tantric priestesses or 'shaktis' were both erotic priestesses as well as Nagini who helped teach the tantric practitioner how to actively raise the snake-like Kundalini energy up the energy column of the Tree of Life.

The Puranas of ancient times say that at the end of the great age, the Mahayuga that lasts 4,320,000 human years, the universe and all beings in it will be dissolved in a great cataclysm of fire and flood. Shiva, in his destruction, incinerates the entire material universe, but eternally preserves the subtle energy states of liberated beings in its highest realms, dimensional levels that cannot be tainted by the element of fire, while all other beings, who do not raise themselves out of the realm of form, also the subtle sense of form, are annihilated in the great flood of fire at the end of the kalpa.

After this apocalypse, Vishnu rests in a state of total yogic absorption, called 'Samadhi' for a night of Brahma, an entire kalpa of 4.32 billion years, also known as 'Pralaya'. Here Vishnu's sleep is the divine model for the Samadhi of the human yogin who has withdrawn all breath, seed and consciousness, to concentrate these into a single point of pure being-consciousness-bliss (sat-chit-ananda).

But what happens to the external universe? The ashes from the burnt cosmos sink to the bottom of a milky sea and stay within the coiled body of Shesha-Ananta, meaning 'that which remains'. This primordial cosmic serpent was one of the very first creatures manifested by Brahma at the start of creation, who also serves as Vishnu's bed during Pralaya. When Vishnu eventually awakens from his blissful slumber, Shesha renews himself using the primal essence of the previous creation, the residue of which is an endless source of raw material, to regenerate new universes. For this reason, Shesha is also called Ananta, 'Endless' or 'Infinite'.



Serpent Shesha as bed of Lord Vishnu

So how does one overcome this gross elemental level? In terms of Kundalini yoga, Hindu yogis describe a serpent coiled three and a half times around the base of the Shiva Lingam, another name for the sushumna, a central energy conduit that passes through the seven chakras from groin to brow. Liberation is accomplished by lifting the serpent power stored at the base of the spine, up it, through the 'higher' dimensional levels of energetic resonance and into Enlightened

Realization at the crown of the head, completely inspiring seekers to overcome misdeeds and suffering.

Interestingly, Hindu iconography for the root chakra depicts the elephant Airavata amidst the four broad petals or vibratory fields associated with this energy-consciousness centre.

Thus, in Hindu cosmology a macro and microcosmic serpent serves as a conduit, a bridge between existence and non-existence and is the basis of yogic systems, here, the macro being the coiled serpent Shesha that not only contains the entire universe, but he who also serves as the couch of the sleeping god, Vishnu at times when the universe is nonexistent, and the micro being a serpent-like coil of energy situated at the base of the subtle body within human beings, called 'Kundalini' containing the primal essence of the universe.

Bhuridatta Jataka tells the story of a Naga king, Bhuridatta. On a few occasions Nagas do invite righteous humans to visit them and enjoy all the 'five strands of sense pleasure' there. In this particular story, there is a thieving rascal who manages to fool the Naga king into thinking him a saintly person. He goes to the Naga world and is installed in a palace, but after a year is unable to enjoy it. As a result of the 'poverty of his merit', his perception changes and he now perceives the Naga maidens as fearsome ogres and the crystal palace as a dreaded prison. Thus the Naga realm also represents perception of consciousness perceiving reality according to one's merit, spiraling around to come back to the same point, but in a variety of dimensions, grosser or more refined depending on its energetic quality of being.

Indeed, 'dragon lines', or ley lines, are symbolic for the consciousness of the planetary being, Earth, her invisible neural pathways carrying her 'thinking', her perception, and her power. In order to 'connect' with this huge being existing at a different level of consciousness to us humans, who incorporates masses of organic creatures and strata of inanimate rock and metals to make up her whole, we must first tap into her force that forms a web across the earth in numerous pathways, decoded for us by our ancestors by markers on the ground.

Just as described in the Mayan legend of the road to Xibalba, by passing through the mouth of a huge snake into its tunnel-like coils, we can connect dimension to dimension through the act of refining consciousness, eventually merging step-by-step with 'superior' layers of consciousness that are greater than our own and beyond that to our sense of being a universal or galactic consciousness that can perceive the realm of existence in its greater sense.

To achieve greater levels of consciousness within, we tap into diverse realms 'without', which are only mirrored forms of our own structure of consciousness. As we refine consciousness, so are we able to perceive more refined levels of appearance i.e. it actually manifests within the space around our physical body, making it possible to be able to tap into.

What is really happening here, however, is that we are tapping into the greatest resource of consciousness within, the hidden treasure of our energy system, more and more refined and beautiful upon each next coiling layer of the dragon's spiral that eventually leads to the most refined level of consciousness of all, supreme enlightenment and knowledge, an all-pervasive view of existence that can perceive everything, everywhere, simultaneously.

Purpose of studying Nagas and a Naga ritual

Approaching a Naga with an open heart, clear understanding and lack of greed or desire should bring positive results. Nagas want respectful human contact and appropriate offering and a correct way of requesting their intervention should be followed at all times. The last thing one wants is retribution from a Naga, who could inflict illness or trouble upon someone with a wrong intention.

Questions that arise in the light of these aspects are how can we actually call them to our aid to assist us in matters of health and wealth and pacify them when they are wreaking havoc on us as far as illness and poverty are concerned, what needs to be understood about these creatures so that we may respect the landscape they protect in a harmonious way and how should spiritual practitioners interact with them?

You are going to hear a special Naga ritual being chanted by my husband, Jamyang, the purpose of which is to purify sickness and harm that may have already been inflicted by Nagas, as well as prevent them. I am now going to describe in brief, the step-by-step process of the ritual that should also answer the questions that I just raised above.

First of all, there are some preparations that need to take place before the ritual is actually performed. Firstly one should make a torma, which is like a ritual cake designed in a certain way, like a Lingam shape. If it is not possible to make such a torma, then one should use a biscuit without egg for the same purpose.

Then the 7 offering bowls that are ordinarily placed on one's shrine should be prepared, these include water for drinking, water for washing, flowers, incense, light, water tinged with saffron and some food in the form of a tiny piece of torma or biscuit. This is a standard practise in preparation for virtually any ritual.

In addition to these, one thing that is particular to this ritual is that one should find a large pot made of mud, bronze, silver or gold, but specifically not made out of metals or iron. This is then filled with clear and clean water. Actually, you are going to imagine that this is a kind of pond and therefore like in nature, you should place flowers and leaves in it too. There are special types of flowers that are used for this ritual, but these days they are difficult to get hold of, so you can use any flora which is pleasant and nice for the senses to perceive.

After preparing these things, one performs the blessing of the 7 outer offerings that have been prepared on your shrine, which includes the water for drinking, water for washing, flowers, incense, light, water tinged with saffron and some food in the form of a tiny piece of torma or biscuit. If it has not been possible to actually physically prepare these offerings, then just visualising them with positive intention at this point, is sufficient.

Then one sincerely takes refuge in one's Teacher, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and promises to attempt to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then we generate equanimity, love, compassion and joy towards an immeasurable number of sentient beings, thus opening our heart towards ourselves and others.

Then one recites a mantra that when translated means, 'The nature of all phenomena is pure – maintain that nature'. This is the law of the universe and we have to practise it in order to realise it. Through this practise of generating this wisdom in the mind, it becomes a form of gaining merit.

Within this state of emptiness, you have essentially dissolved your present solid form along with the entire universe and you are now going to create yourself as the supreme deity of compassion, Avalokiteshvara, who has one white face, 2 hands, the right one of which is in the 'giving mudra' on the knee, and the left one holding a lotus stalk at his heart centre. He is sitting in a half posture, which means one leg is slightly outstretched and upon a lotus and moon disk. He is wearing clothes and has various ornaments adorning his body and behind him is a moon disk surrounding his body like a halo.



Deity Avalokiteshvara

Inside his heart is the syllable 'HRIH' surrounded in a circle by his personal mantra of 'OM MANI PADME HUM', the supreme mantra of compassion.

Then one should recite the mantra of 'OM MANI PADME HUM' and at the same time visualise white light rays emerging from the syllables and touching all the Buddhas (enlightened beings) and Bodhisattvas (supremely compassionate beings) in the universe. The rays are reflected back and in turn purify all sentient beings, especially the earth dwellers and Naga beings etc... and imagine that all their bad things are completely purified by these rays of light. Then invite all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into the mantra located at your heart centre, with you in the form of Avalokiteshvara.

Recite the mantra as much as you can.

This is followed by an offering by all these sentient beings of the 7 substances that you had offered at the beginning of this ritual - water for drinking, water for washing, flowers, incense, light, water tinged with saffron and some food in the form of a tiny piece of torma, to Avalokiteshvara in gratitude.

There is then a little praise that is recited to Avalokiteshvara after that.

Then one makes wishes that all the negative and harmful aspects and sickness of sentient beings, earth dwellers and Naga beings are purified into the pure state of Avalokiteshvara.

Up to here, this has been a stage-by-stage process of self-creation, which is a bit like setting up the stage for the actual ritual which is going to take place as the main part of it. In all the following visualisations, you yourself remain in the form of Avalokiteshvara.

One should then bless the torma and then purify and bless the large pot filled with water and flowers, to become like an ocean of wisdom nectar. At the same time, you should visualise a very nice place, with attributes like diamond rocks, an ocean, ponds, a nice green spring and palaces and parks, as well as visualise the water in the pot as a nectar for purifying Naga sickness.

Now you should visualise the Nagas above the torma, in 9 positions, including one at the centre of a lotus with 8 petals around him, each sits on a moon disk upon the petal.

There are 10 Nagas of varying colours, including white, red, black, yellow and green. The 9 sitting on the lotus petals (as described above) and 1 in front.

These 10 Nagas are all similar in features having 1 face, 2 hands held together in a 'Namaste' posture, the half upper part of their body is godlike and transparent and very clear and clean, see through like glass. They wear ornaments, jewels, earrings, rings, necklaces etc..., and a wish fulfilling crown on the top of their heads and above that each one of them has a crest of 7 snake heads. Their lower body is that of a snake.

On the left side of each Naga, and with the same demeanour as themselves are 10 Naginis; same features, colours, ornaments etc...

After creating this visualisation, one should send out many rays of light and then invite all the actual Nagas in this world, especially those who are sick or damaged, blind and with disabilities and dissolve them into your creation. Now you should visualise all these Nagas in this created vision surrounded by fence of the rays. The reason for this is to keep them contained so that they can't leave before the offering of the torma (ritual cake) to them, because this is what will entice them not to harm us in the future.

Then visualise offering a lotus petal to each of the Nagas there and recite the outer offering prayer, in which once again you make offerings of water for drinking, water for washing, flowers, incense, light, water tinged with saffron and some food in the form of a tiny piece of torma or biscuit.

Then recite the Naga recitation mantra, along with the following visualisation. From the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG in your heart, rays go out and at the same time, a lot of milk water comes out of the palm and all the fingers that are pointing upwards, of your whole hand. This wisdom nectar enters the water in the large pot where you put the flowers and leaves at the beginning of the ritual and merges with that water. Then all the Earth Dwellers and wrathful Nagas etc... climb into that pond. They drink and wash in the water, which purifies all their sicknesses, whereby the disabled ones get better, the blind can now see, ones who had previously missed some limbs are now whole again and whatever they need they will get and whatever they wish is instantly granted.

This is the most important part of the ritual, because it is through the negative actions of humans on the Earth that causes Nagas and Earth dwellers etc... to get sick, when we damage the environment in so many ways, like digging out metals, polluting water, throwing rubbish here and there, destroying forests, building cities etc... There is no way that they can be cured from these sicknesses, unless we make these special offerings to them, so this makes them happy and fulfilled. Further to this, once the Nagas have purified their troubles, then human beings who have troubles due to their negative actions towards the environment automatically get better too.

Then offer the ritual cake, the torma to all the various Nagas, saying their names and offering them health and whatever they wish to be fulfilled. At the same time you're requesting them to remove their poison from everyone who has already got any Naga sickness affliction and also not to harm anyone in the future and instead grant them whatever they need.

All those Nagas are very happy and fulfilled, and hold their hands together in the Namaste posture, after which they promise to listen to whatever we say.

Then Avalokiteshvara gives dharma teachings to them, after which time there's a kind of dedication prayer.

Because of this process, the Naga kings and all different types of Nagas' bodies become whole again and free of sickness, their status of wealth is repaired and all things that had been damaged get better, their celestial enemy Garuda will not harm them, hot sand will not burn them etc..., all Earth Dwellers and harmful Nagas promise never harm this world, rain will come on time, the sickness of human beings and animals will be purified and they give everyone whatever they need.

Then recite the long mantra of Avalokiteshvara and at the same time visualise white rays going out from your heart to so many Nagas, so that all their sins and negative things are purified by the rays touching them.

Then another dedication prayer follows, wishing all different types of Nagas to have clear minds. It mentions that Avalokiteshvara has given so many things to the Nagas so now they must remember all those things and promise to keep practise and keep in mind the teachings, and let their anger become peaceful.

At the conclusion, one recites the Vajrasattva 100 syllable mantra, for purification of any wrong things or mistakes that have been made throughout the ritual, expressing sorrow for that and anything that may have been omitted.

Now remove the boundary of rays around the Nagas held in the visualisation and send them away. Because of the blessings of milky-white medicine and mantras, all sickness and harm is purified and everyone goes off to their places, remembering what they have promised.

After the ritual is complete, all the tormas and water must be throw in a very clean place at which time, one will continue to make dedication prayers, wishing that all beings may attain the state of enlightenment through these virtuous deeds that have just been performed, thus exponentially increasing the merit of the recitation of this action of undertaking this ritual.