

YOGA TM MAGAZINE

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LOVE EVERY BREATH OF LIFE.

NIRAJ NIAK

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YOGA FOR
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POST NATAL
YOGA PRACTICAL
MASTERCLASS

*Yin/Yang
&
An Egyptian
Goddess*

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SACRED
HAND GESTURES

SAVINA ATAI

THE CREATION OF
TAO FACE YOGA

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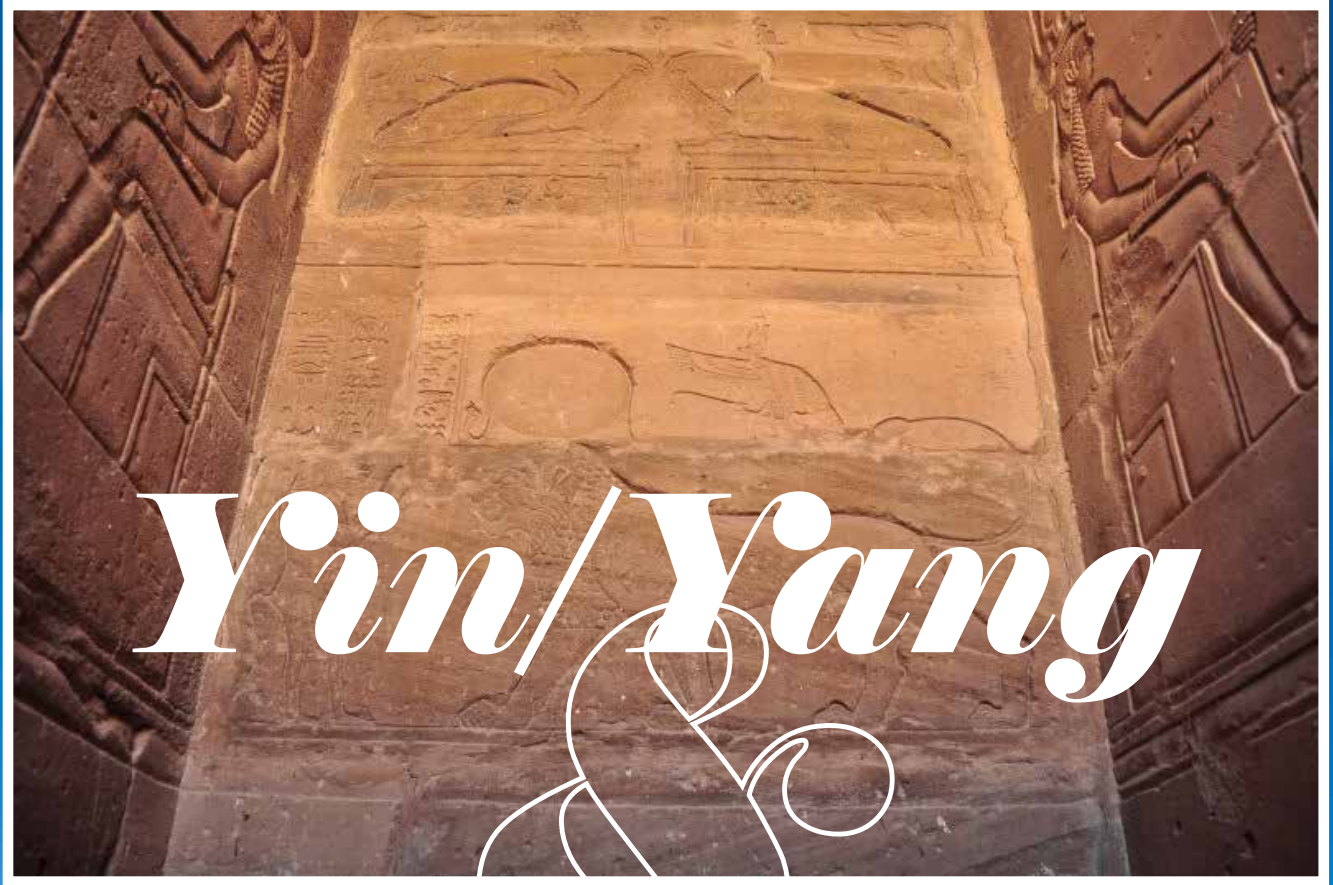
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Yin/Yang

An Egyptian Goddess

Words: Mary-Louise

I am passionate about linking the world of academia, with which I am associated through friendship, with the Yoga Community, of which I am part. With regard to my friendships within the academic community, first and foremost is that with Mark Smith, Emeritus Professor of Egyptology, University of Oxford. Knowing of my interest in all things 'goddess', Mark recently introduced me to 'The Myth of the Distant Goddess'. Never expecting to discover a strong link between ancient Egyptian myth and the

philosophy of yoga, I was immediately struck by how Tefnut, the goddess in question, had some essential truths to offer and some questions to inspire.

In response to my excitement, Mark generously shared with me an article he had published about this particular myth in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 5 (Wiesbaden, 1984). The myth, preserved in a number of papyri nearly 2000 years old, describes how the goddess Tefnut travels back 'home'. Though written so long ago, the myth offers us something essential, timeless, and beautiful today, about our own personal journey and possibly even shows us a glimpse of how to move

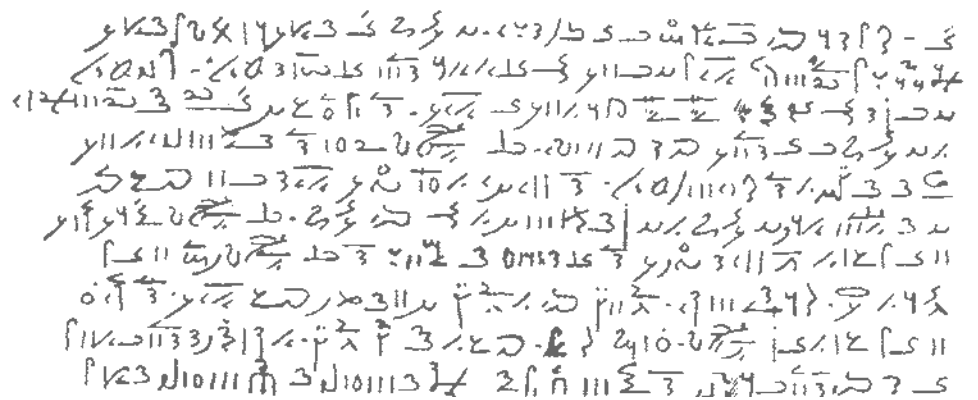
towards that sometimes seemingly elusive destination, wholeness, upon our ultimate voyage towards enlightenment.

Tefnut, the daughter of the sun god, also his 'eye', is found at the outset of the myth in the form of a cat, far from her homeland of Egypt, in a place called Kush (= modern-day Sudan) and is being called back, with urgency and longing, by the god Thoth, in the form of a baboon. Thoth says that, 'every being has a home, an appropriate place in which to dwell'. Tefnut must return but what Thoth does not yet appreciate is that she must only come back once whole, changed. Although closely associated with the sun god's creative force, Thoth is also the god of the moon.

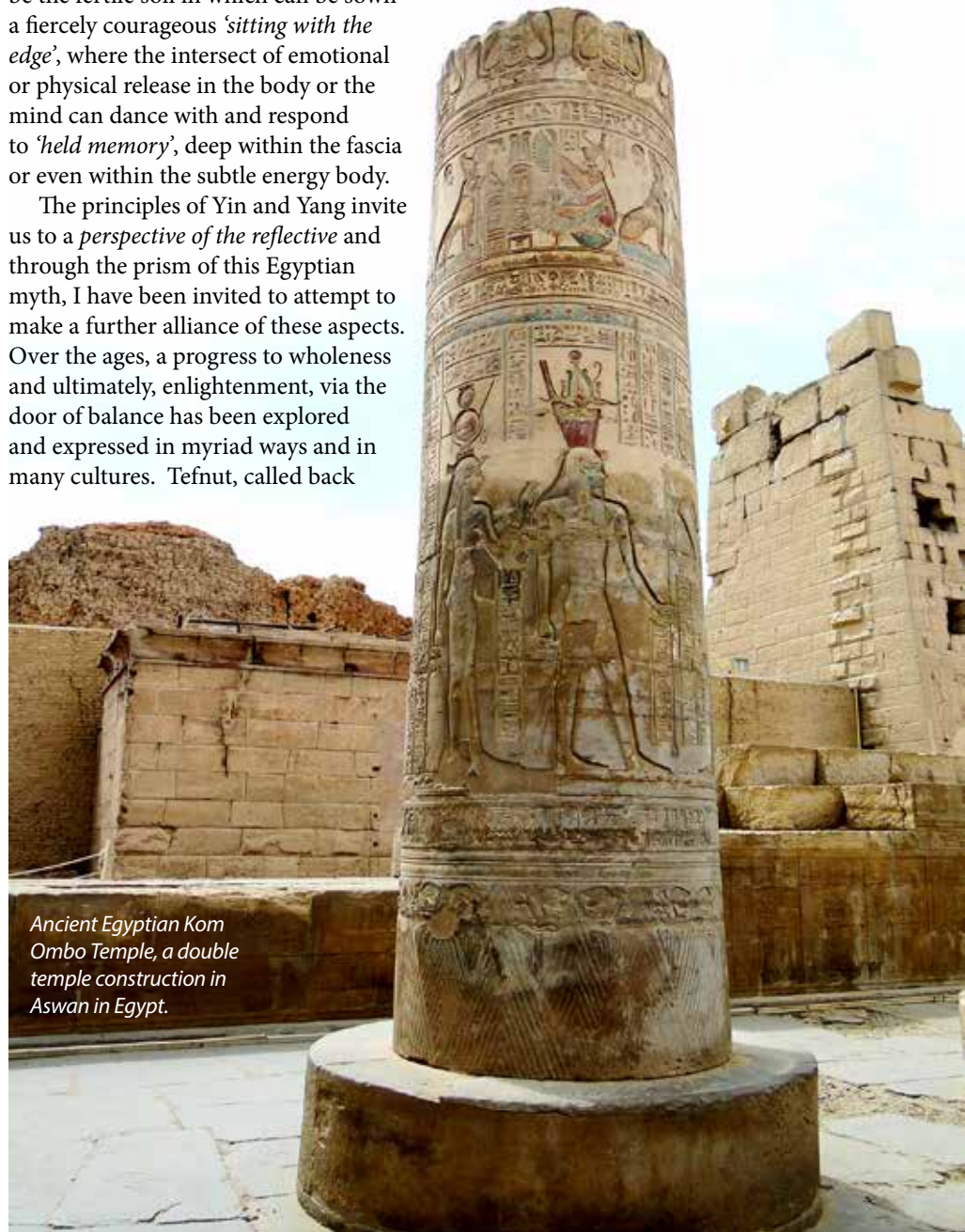
Dakka Temple, Gateway

Likewise, although Tefnut is the eye of the sun, she has lunar associations as well. It would seem that each incorporates a part of the other's nature, and here, we find Thoth crying out to the lost part of his own being, integral to lasting fulfilment, order, cohesion (within Egypt itself), or perhaps to a sense of personal wholeness and enlightenment. He longs for 'the feminine': Tefnut.

I'm often asked whether my interest in goddesses revolves around wanting to see women as 'ruling the roost' or even whether I see a woman's potential as being stronger than that of a man. I am keen to emphasise that the myths associated with goddesses can offer an invitation for each of us to consider the union and balance of our own male and female energies. Goddesses are often seen as consorts, trusted associates, advocates, sisters, mothers, daughters, each playing either a supporting or a starring role, and equally well. In this myth, I see Thoth as searching for a reunion with Tefnut, representing an archetypal yearning for balance, while the 'mirror-image' is longed for by the goddess herself. We each hold a unique and ever-changing interplay of male and female energies within us; this is one of the reasons why I love teaching Yin yoga as well as a fiery, Vinyasa Flow. The 'Yang' style of yoga links movement to the breath in a particular way, builds heat and muscular strength, promoting flexibility and balance, as well as harnessing the solar, active, action-focused aspects of life. Yin yoga, on the other hand, is a quiet, mindful practice of floor-based poses which are held to stretch and cool the body, to bring the focus back inside, allowing us to target our connective tissues (fascia and ligaments). I love to build classes which promote balance through this Yin / Yang combination. However, a more experienced yogi will start to notice that a Yang practice can be an act of 'mindfulness in motion' or the perfect arena within which the most gorgeously powerful quietude imaginable can be forged



(imagine a warrior standing on a hill-top, surrounded by chaos yet finding stillness). Equally, a Yin practice can be the fertile soil in which can be sown a fiercely courageous 'sitting with the edge', where the intersect of emotional or physical release in the body or the mind can dance with and respond to 'held memory', deep within the fascia or even within the subtle energy body. The principles of Yin and Yang invite us to a perspective of the reflective and through the prism of this Egyptian myth, I have been invited to attempt to make a further alliance of these aspects. Over the ages, a progress to wholeness and ultimately, enlightenment, via the door of balance has been explored and expressed in myriad ways and in many cultures. Tefnut, called back



Ancient Egyptian Kom Ombo Temple, a double temple construction in Aswan in Egypt.



home from a foreign land (or a state of separateness), passes through a variety of animal and bird forms on her journey towards self-wholeness. She leaves her cat form temporarily to become a lioness, before transforming herself into a cat again. These two animals represent the two different sides of the goddess's nature, one gentle and calm (qualities we can associate with Yin), the other more Yang-like: wild and unrestrained. However, both sides are essential parts of her being and each balances the other.

Following her transmutation from cat to lioness and back again, Tefnut becomes a Vulture, associated with nurturing and other maternal qualities as well as self-reliance or wholeness. This in turn is followed by her metamorphosis into a Gazelle, an animal linked to desert mountains, often viewed in Egyptian culture as the setting for death and rebirth. The gazelle can also be associated with swiftness and gentleness and so we may infer that an enlightened state is congruent with these qualities.

Having attained a fully-realised goddess-state, are we to understand that Tefnut's enlightenment

is imminent (or even complete) and documented as a returning 'home' after the death of the old self? Tefnut's return 'home', a place where the power, influence, stability, and harmony are once more established, impacting the whole country and causing its inhabitants to rejoice once again, tells us that the journey is where the magic resides, or perhaps where it begins. Can we understand then that we offer so much more to our communities, and within our relationships, once we have grown to truly 'become' ourselves? Is this new-found 'order' the place from which true union, full health, one's ultimate and true state can be achieved? Is it possible that an exploration of Yin and Yang energies, however we may choose to explore them, are vehicles by which we might move beyond ourselves, embracing all aspects of our Nature? Please know that my passion is to ask, to play, and to invite others to do so rather than to give an answer which might work for some and not for others; I look to share ideas along my own journey and encourage everyone to travel well. One question I found myself asking and which I would like to share in response to the myth of the sun's eye, is this: *'Do we yearn for the 'eye of the sun' or does the 'eye of the sun' yearn for us?'*

Until next time, travel well | Namaste

MARY-LOUISE is a Yoga Alliance accredited, fully insured yoga teacher (Hatha, Vinyasa Flow, and Yin), living in Hove and currently offering classes via Zoom - booking through her website marylouiseyoga.com. As an ex-operatic soloist, Mary-Louise knows how to intricately weave the melody of her voice to ease her students towards an experience of authentic interiority, providing insights to inspire, techniques to investigate, and guidance in tuning to the messages in the body - an approach which she believes supports wellness and connectedness.

www.marylouiseyoga.com
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