

# The Sacred Bear—Body, Energy & Spirit

By Miguel F. Sarria, 1996

身氣神

There was the memory of a flute as they added wood to the fire. It had been a clean crisp day of work. The night was clear, the stars decorated the sky and the gentle dance of the flames brought their awareness back to the moment.

Father and son were sitting by the fire in the campground of Apple Valley. As they watched the flames, the night silence was interrupted by a voice.

"I worked on the animal-forms today, and I wondered why the Bear is the last animal of the form," commented the son. The father looked at the North Star, remembering some of the experiences lived, silence and memory engaged. Finally the silence was broken, and he commented.

The bear encompasses all things and the Void. The Void is the element of the bear. The Void is neutral, without desire. The bear is not only complex, but ambiguous and contradictory. Yin and Yang. From the union of Yin and Yang, all things derive.



The bear needs abundant space and solitude, and as an omnivore, he requires a diversity of food. From time older than human memory, the bear has been considered a special being, human-like, yet a wild animal. Like us, the bear stands upright on the soles of his feet, his eyes nearly in a frontal plane. The bear moves his forelimbs freely in their shoulder sockets; sits on his tail end with one leg folded like an adolescent; worries with moans and sighs; courts with demonstrable affection; produces excrement similar to man's; snores in his sleep; spans his children; is avid about sweets; and has a moody, gruff, and morose side. Yet the bear is a creature in his own right, needing no justification or compliance with human purpose.

The bear strikes a chord in us of fear and caution, curiosity and fascination. He is many things to men: the comforting stuffed toy of childhood, the shambling clown in the circus, the caricature of cartoons, the terrifying monster of the mountains and the Arctic ice, the prince of game animals, the grandmother in mythic tales, a constellation marking the passage of the night, a symbol of Church, and a powerful spirit who mediates between man and forest god.

The bear has been an ancient sacred presence since the beginning of human culture. Through folk customs and archaic rites far older than the records of state and empire, European and Mediterranean peoples were linked to traditions of Scandinavia, Russia, the Far East, and North America. Central and South American peoples venerated and perhaps even celebrated the bear in performances similar to those of northern peoples around the world. The mill of time has scattered the records of those ceremonies, but indirect evidence for the bear's role in the birth of human consciousness is found in archaeological relics, in the residue of belief today in tribal cultures, and in the structure of the language we use.

The bear moves across the terrain like no other animal—a purposeful and methodical transit keyed to the plants and game of the seasons. The bear knows all sources of food and all den sites. He moves through space tuned to the needs and possibilities of the seasons, as deliberate as the celestial rhythms.

Across the northern sky Ursa Major, "the great bear", rises according to the season and makes its impeccable circuit of the North Star each night. It guides men on earth to their similar physical needs. The whole vault of the heavens seems to revolve in time with the energy of the bear's chase, providing the momentum for the passage not only of the night but of the coming of the sun and, as the days pass, the season of the year.



For centuries men of the northern world have known that the hunt was a holy activity. The body of the slain bear was accepted by them not only as a sumptuous container of meat, fat, healing substances, and fur, but as a communication. To the American and Eurasian tribal peoples the bear brought a message of good ecology and good relations between them and the sacred powers that govern the world. When the bear delivers himself by allowing his location to be known, and the ceremonies and songs of his presence are celebrated, the bear, being addressed as a guest at his own feast, is sent off with the joyful reverence of his hosts still ringing in his ears. Then his spirit returns to his mountain home and the domain of the ruling divinities of the forest. He himself has become the message. He is an emissary in both directions, reporting man's respect and goodwill toward the forest, mountain and animal gods as well as the continued favor and generosity of the world in providing for men

To traditional peoples the she-bear seems to know about death and how to survive it, both in her self-healing abilities and in the "almost death" of her hibernation. Yet, since the she-bear comes forth from the earth with babies born deep in the dead of winter, she is also a preeminent giver of life. Nurturing the cubs with loving care, guarding and educating them, she transforms them into wholeness. When they are old enough, she deliberately and firmly sets them on their own, as though formally initiating them into their independence.

So the bear as mother, constellation, and messenger not only brings new bears into the world, she guides the years ripening, tests man's gratitude, marks the seasons, and acts as mentor in birthing and dying in the endless cycle of becoming.

Silence came back upon them. As a soft breeze blew through the campfire and the flames rose in a burst of power, the spirit-presence of the Bear was felt.

After a long period of silence, the son said, "I see what you mean by the Bear encompassing all things and the Void. The teachings of the Bear and of Kojosho Qigong never end. We are always learning, day after day; an ongoing path through life—the circle of life itself".