

# THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE AND HUMAN BEINGS

## YIN AND YANG AND THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

In a time long past, before Heaven and earth came to be, there was only chaos. The universe was vast, obscure, and barren. For there was only a great, gaping expanse of desolate space—without light, without form, and without life. Images alone appeared and disappeared within the mist.

Then it came to pass that chaos gave birth to two gods. They wove the fabric that became the heavens. And they molded the substance that became the earth. So great were these gods that they were beyond understanding. They could move higher into the heavens and lower into the depths than anyone could imagine. And no one knew where they took their rest.

After the two gods had fashioned Heaven and earth, it came to pass that they became separate in form and in function. They divided into Yin and Yang. And Yang gathered into himself all that was bright and light. And, like a mist, Yang drifted upward into Heaven and became one with it. And Heaven became round. Then Yin gathered into herself all that was dark and heavy. And, like a thick, plodding mass, Yin sank downward into the earth and became one with it. And earth became square.

Yang's hot breath became intense and gave birth to fire. And his fiery breath became the sun. Yin's cold breath became intense and gave birth to water. And her watery breath became the moon. Stars spun off from the sun and the moon. And, being part of Yang, the sun, the moon, and the stars all settled in the sky, while, being part of Yin, rivers and seas, rainwater, silt, and dust all settled on the surface of the earth. The complex essence of Yang and Yin became the four seasons that dwell on earth in an endless cycle. And the essence of the four seasons became the ten thousand things in nature that populate the earth. Substances became hard or soft. And a multitude of living things came into being. The vapor that was dense and cloudy took the form of insects. And the vapor that was pure took the form of human beings.

## **NU KUA, CREATOR AND PRESERVER OF HUMAN LIFE**

Nu Kua, the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess, created the first people. She herself was formed like a human being, except that instead of legs she had the tail of a dragon. Nu Kua glided over the earth. And as she traveled, she admired all of the beautiful forms that had emerged from P'an Ku's corpse. She loved the trees, the plants, and the flowers. But she was most interested in the fish and the animals. For these living creatures were more active.

Nu Kua decided that she wanted to watch the fish and the animals, and so she stopped gliding and studied them. And after studying them for a while, Nu Kua decided that creation was not yet complete, for animals and fish were not intelligent enough. She decided that she would now create creatures who would be superior to all other living things.

And so Nu Kua glided along the Yellow River, and she decided to use the yellow earth of this riverbed to form human beings. And so she sat down along the shore of the river. She then took handfuls of wet clay from the riverbed, and she formed them into little people. She made them look almost like her, but instead of dragon-tails, she gave each of them two legs to match their two arms.

As soon as her little people were prepared to walk, Nu Kua breathed life into them. Some she infused with Yang, the masculine, aggressive principle in nature. And these little people became men. Others she infused with Yin, the female, submissive principle in nature. And these little people became women.

Nu Kua worked quickly, but it was very hard work. And so, after a while, she became too tired to continue to fashion people one at a time. She decided that she would try to find a way to create her little people faster and more easily.

And so Nu Kua glided along the shore of the river. And it came to pass that she soon spied a twisted rope—the type of measure that builders would use in time to come. Nu Kua studied the rope, and she decided that it would help her make her little people faster and more easily.

And so Nu Kua picked up the twisted rope. She held onto one end, but she placed the rest of the rope on the wet day of the riverbed. Then she rolled the rope

around in the wet clay. And as she turned it, Nu Kua was delighted to see that, as she had hoped, the wet clay was sticking to it.

At last, the upper end of the rope was completely covered with wet clay. Nu Kua then lifted the rope off the riverbed, and she shook it over the shore. And Nu Kua was delighted to see that, as she had hoped, each drop of clay that fell off became a human being.

Nu Kua was pleased that she had created her little people faster and more easily. But her two methods did not create exactly the same type of human beings. The people whom Nu Kua had fashioned by hand from the rich yellow earth of the riverbed were high-born, wealthy, and intelligent. But the people who had fallen in drops from her rope were low-born, poor, common folk. Nevertheless, all of Nu Kua's children built homes and settled into villages and farms in order to provide for their daily needs.

In time it came to pass that Kung Kung, an age-old god, became so angry at another god that he attacked him. But Kung Kung did not look where he was going, and so he rammed his head into one of the mountains that supports the sky. The mountain came rumbling to the ground. And as it fell, it tore a great hole in the sky, and it caused the earth to crack open in many places.

Flames blazed forth from some of the crevasses, burning homes and crops. And these fires raged far and wide, for no one could smother them. Rivers overflowed their banks, and torrents of underground water gushed forth from other fissures. These surging waters flooded the land and created a vast sea where once there had been villages and farms, for no one could provide a drain.

Now everything was at the bottom of the sea. And the few animals and people who remained alive could find nothing to eat. And so it came to pass that starving animals became ferocious and feasted on whatever people they could find. Meanwhile, starving birds of prey swooped down from the heavens. They grabbed all who were old and weak in their talons, and then they carried them off to their nests. No one could stop them.

Nu Kua watched in horror as hundreds of her little people starved to death or drowned. She decided that she had to act quickly if she hoped to save any of the children she had created. And so, first, she set fire to the reeds that grew beside the

river. She then stuffed their ashes into the burning cracks in the earth to smother the raging flames. Next Nu Kua piled up more of the reed ashes to form dikes. These dams forced the swift flood-waters to seep into the earth and to flow in controlled river channels. And so it came to pass that Nu Kua's children returned to their farms and villages, for they could resume their daily occupations.

Then Nu Kua glided over to the Yellow River and chose a number of stones in five different colors. She melted them in a forge and covered the hole in the heavens with them. Next she removed the four legs from a giant tortoise and used one at each corner of the earth as an additional pillar to support the sky. In this way, Nu Kua repaired the devastation that Kung Kung had so thoughtlessly created. But she knew of no way to raise the northeast corner of the earth on which the fifth pillar had fallen. And so, from that day to this, that land is lower than the rest of China, and rivers flow eastward across that land and into the sea.

Nu Kua continues to watch over her children. Her swift, winged dragons pull her thunder-chariot through the heavens and bring forth the rains that nourish all that grows upon the earth. And so the hearts of Nu Kua's children are filled with gratitude for all that the Mother Goddess has done for them and for all that she continues to do.

## **P'AN KU, CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE**

In the beginning an egg-like that of a chicken-contained the entire universe. Within the egg was one chaotic mass. Heaven and earth were identical. And all was always dark, for neither the sun nor the moon existed. From within this dark mass, P'an Ku, the first living being, was formed.

Then, finding himself alive in darkness, encased within an egg, and surrounded by chaos, P'an Ku decided to bring order into the universe. First he broke open the world egg. Yang, the lighter part, rose and became the heavens. And Yin, the heavier part, sank and became the earth.

P' an Ku tried to stand upon the earth. But the heavens pressed heavily upon his head. He realized that no life would ever be able to exist on earth if the heavens were not high in the sky. And so he sat down and thought about how to solve this problem.

That day, P'an Ku went through nine transformations. And it came to pass that P'an Ku became more godlike than Heaven and more wise than earth. He decided that

the only way living objects and creatures would form and survive upon the earth would be if he held up the sky.

For the next eighteen thousand years, P'an Ku worked constantly to keep the heavens from crushing the surface of the earth. He ate only the mists that blew into his mouth, and he never slept. At first he could only rest on his knees with his elbows bent, And yet, summoning all of his great strength, he pushed his feet against the earth, and he pushed his hands upward against the sky. Each day he pushed the heavens ten feet higher, and he forced the earth to sink ten feet lower. And each day he became ten feet taller.

The time came when P'an Ku could rise to his feet. But his knees were still bent as he pushed his feet down against the earth, and his elbows were still bent as he pushed his hands upward against the sky. At last the time came when P'an Ku could stand at his full height. And then he pushed his feet down against the earth with straight legs, and he pushed his hands upward against the sky with his arms stretched out to their full length.

Day after day and night after night, month after month, and year after year, P'an Ku stood upright, as firm as a rock column. He never stopped pushing the earth lower with his feet, and he never stopped pushing the heavens higher with his hands. P'an Ku's pushing caused the earth and the sky to move ten feet each day. And so it came to pass that, little by little, the earth sank lower and lower beneath the sky. And it came to pass that, little by little, the sky rose higher and higher above the earth. And the lower the earth sank, and the higher the heavens rose, the taller, P'an Ku became.

At last the earth reseed far below the heavens. And the heavens rested high above the earth. And only then did P'an Ku realize that he was very, very tired. He looked up at the heavens above his hands, and then he looked far, far down to the earth beneath his feet. And P'an Ku felt certain that the distance between heaven and earth was so great that he could lie down and rest without fearing that the sky would collapse and crush the earth.

So P'an Ku lay down and fell asleep. And it came to pass that P'an Ku died in his sleep. But he had not done all that he could do, for living objects and creatures could now survive upon the earth, but as yet they had no form.

And so it came to pass that P'an Ku's corpse gave shape and substance to the universe. His head formed the mountain of the East, while his feet formed the mountain of the West. His right arm formed the mountain of the North, while his left arm formed the mountain of the South. And his torso formed the mountain of the Center. These five sacred mountains defined the four corners of the square earth and its center. Each stood firmly upon the earth like a giant stone column, and each did its part to hold up the heavens.

From the hair on P'an Ku's head, chin, and eyebrows came forth the planets and the stars. His left eye became the sun, while his right eye became the moon. His breath formed the clouds and the wind. His voice became lightning and thunder. And his perspiration and body-fluids became the rain and the dew.

P'an Ku's flesh formed the soil of the earth, while his blood and his semen became the oceans and rivers that encircle it. His veins and muscles gave shape to the earth's surface. His teeth and his bones formed rocks and minerals, while his bone marrow became jade and pearls. From the hair on his body came forth trees, plants, and flowers.

Then the wind that had come forth from P'an Ku's breath blew upon the mites that lived on his skin. And these mites became fish, animals, and the black-haired people.