

SERPENTS IN THE SPRING

BY ZEHARA NACHASH

Zehara Nachash, whose name means “bright serpent,” has been working with snakes for more than 17 years. Before moving to Tucson, Arizona, she was known as “Boston’s Resident Snake Charmer” after 10 years of performing with her pythons and boas. She and her snakes have been featured in magazine exposés, music videos, and online campaign ads. She has taught several workshops on serpentine mythology and magic, as well as provided exposure therapy to those who wished to get over their fear of snakes.

Spring—the time of tulips, eggs, bunnies, and little chicks . . . and snakes!

Ok, I get it. When you think of spring, snakes are not the first image to come to mind! For many people, the word snake sends them into a squeamish fit. However, snakes represent spring in so many ways, and knowing how to work with them will allow you to create some serpentine springtime magic!

Before I get to the magic, let’s get to what those slithering beings embody.

SNAKES, REBIRTH, & CREATION: Thousands of years before Christianity, snakes were worshipped and revered. Seen as an aspect of the Great Mother, snakes represented the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth. An ouroboros, the symbol of a snake eating its own tail, can be seen as representation of the Wheel of the Year; the snake sheds its skin throughout the year as it moves into a new cycle. Symbolically, snakes sloughing off their skin signifies rebirth of creativity and ideas.

The Dahomey in Africa see the goddess Mami Wata as a symbol of renewal. She is part-human, part-snake and lives in the depths of the ocean where offerings are made to her frequently for renewal. In Australia, the Rainbow Serpent is believed to have created the oceans and the seas by slithering through the earth. There are literally hundreds of ancient mythologies that discuss the snake as a symbol of creation and renewal that I could go on forever!

SNAKES & FERTILITY: In many cultures, including Abrahamic religions, snakes were seen as symbols of sexuality and libido. The snake’s imagery as a representation of sexuality and fertility can be associated with a multitude of deities, including Lilith, Cernunnos, Kokopelli, Dionysus, and Wollunqua. In Arizona, toward the end of August, the Hopi Native Americans perform a fertility ritual in which they capture live snakes and dance with them in their mouths. At the end of the dance, the snakes are released into the fields, with them the prayers for a year of strong crops. In Crete, the ancient Minoan priestesses would perform with snakes as a means of honoring the “mysteries.” Additionally, in Hinduism, the Kundalini energy located at the base of the spine is seen as a coiled serpent who, once awakened, can invoke both passion and enlightenment.

ST. PATRICK & THE SNAKES: St. Patrick? Well, you can’t talk about spring without St. Patrick! When I was growing up, I lived in a very Irish Catholic neighborhood, and I viewed St. Patrick as that guy who chased the Pagans out of Ireland. It wasn’t until I was much older and 20 years into my studies of the occult and magic that I finally started to love St. Patrick, not as a Catholic saint, but as an African deity.

During slavery, Africans had to create a way in which they could practice the religion from their homeland without being caught (or worse) by their slave owners. The slaves came up with an incredibly ingenious idea—they took the imagery of the Christian saints and the imagery of their own gods and merged the two. Now the slaves could worship their deities, and no one would ever know the difference! St. Patrick became Papa Damballah, one the most important Lwa (spirits) in Vodoo. Papa Damballah is seen as a great white serpent who, with his great coils, created the stars and cosmos. With his shed skin, Papa Damballah created the world. To see St. Patrick now, the old man with the white beard robed in green with snakes at his feet, is to see an ancient deity that has been worshiped for thousands of years.

SNAKE SPELL

The purpose of this spell is to create a gris-gris bag to help you shed your own skin. You will need some shed snakeskin. Snake shed can be found easily by walking in the woods (keep an eye out around logs and rocks—snakes use these to assist in the shedding process) or by checking your local metaphysical shop or botanica. In addition to the snakeskin, you will need a small white cloth bag, a small quartz crystal, and herbs for renewal, such as catnip, lavender, saffron, or marjoram. On the spring equinox, fill your white bag with all the items listed and tie a knot in three times while saying:

"Serpents of spring, hear my prayer, assist me in shedding my old skin. Prepare me for the new journey as I enter this season of renewal and growth."

After you are done, you can either leave the bag on your altar or carry it with you. Whenever you are feeling stuck or unable to move forward in a situation during the year, repeat the words above. Next spring, you can take the bag and empty its contents (remove the quartz) onto a fire or on charcoal in a fire-safe dish. Thank the Serpent Spirit for assisting you and then create a new bag.

Working with snakes and snake energy is a wonderful and rewarding experience. There are so many meanings behind snake symbology, and rebirth and fertility are just the beginning. Next time you see a slithering friend in the woods, say hello and thank them . . . you never know what magic they might have in store for you!

