

ALUNA PRESENTATION BY ALAN EREIRA:
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The word Aluna comes from language of a people called the Kogi by us, and the Kaggaba by themselves. It is the very core of their understanding of the world.

So first I need to tell you quickly about the Kogi. They inhabit a mountain massif in northern Colombia, which is where the Spanish first discovered South America. It's the highest coastal mountain in the world, rising from the Caribbean to glaciers and snow-fields peaking at over 19000 feet in just 25 miles. And that was their salvation. When the Spanish tried to take them over they simply moved into a pretty impenetrable fastness, and for the next 400 years, they managed to hold their civilisation together. And I use the word civilisation advisedly. They don't have the wheel, or writing, but they do have cities, spiritual leaders called Mamas – Enlightened Ones – and a profound and serious philosophical system. Which begins like this:

In the beginning, there was blackness.
Only the sea.
In the beginning there was no sun, no moon, no people.
In the beginning there were no animals, no plants.
Only the sea.

The sea was the Mother.
The Mother was not people, she was not anything.
Nothing at all.
She was when she was, darkly.
She was memory and potential.
She was *aluna*.

Aluna is pure thought and pure energy - the energy of life. Memory and potential, past and future. And Aluna, they say opened a space within herself, a space between past and future, which is the material world. The present. The moment. Where we have our physical being. And everything here is just a trace of thought-structures in Aluna, visible, tangible echoes of what is past and what may be to come.

So Aluna is, in a sense, the amniotic fluid in which the world was made, and one of its traces is water. Water is, as it were, the physical trace of pure spirit. When the Kogi Mamas want to know what needs to be done, they consult a bowl of water.

Of course the idea of the Primal Ocean doesn't just belong to the Kogi. The Aluna project seems to me to draw together a number of threads of thought and culture that have been quite fundamental to human society.

It is a form of timekeeping which is based on the connection between earth, moon and sea. The ways that different cultures have understood that

connection are remarkably similar, and all go to the very heart of our understanding of the cosmos.

The sea has always been understood as more than just a body of water. It is literally primal, the substance from which creation began.

The Hebrew Bible speaks of God beginning creation by dividing the waters below from the waters above. In the original Hebrew the words are Mayim (waters) and Sha-mayim (sky or heavens). These waters are the womb-waters from which life emerged, seas of spirit.

This also corresponds to making a space between the two parts of Aluna, memory and possibility, past and future. The material world is the present – and it is us, because out of the separation emerges Adamah, Hebrew for Earth, mud – female – from which is shaped Adam – the Hebrew word for Man.

That idea of an original spirit-ocean is echoed in later Christian writing. The Gospel of St. John begins “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. In the original Greek, Word is “logos”, which means spirit and reason. It is in fact a reference, in a different metaphor, to the Waters of Genesis.

And of course this is not just a Judeo-Christian idea.

Whether it is Marduk, the God of Babylon, bringing forth the world from the primeval ocean, or the Voodoo god Damballah the sky-serpent beginning creation with water, or the endless waters at the start of the Hopi creation story, almost all peoples seem to understand the cosmos as starting with an ocean which is a sea of spirit as well as of material water. It is not surprising that in the Kogi language Water and Spirit can be the same word – Aluna. This spirit-sea is a source of life, but it is also a sea of chaos, wild and disordered. That is also true in all these different religions. The Egyptian Nun was the primeval ocean of chaos from which emerged Ra and then order. It is threatening as well as beneficent. That is the significance of the very widespread stories of a great flood, which threatens to sweep away all order and restore the original chaos. All creation stories are about the process of creating order, and the tale begins with the sky. The heavenly bodies perform the first step in ordering the world, and the moon plays a central role, because the link between the moon and the sea is obvious to anyone with access to a beach. The ebb and flow of tides are the obvious evidence that the heavens and earth are linked, and that the ordering of the heavens created an order on earth.

Here is the beginning of astrology, the art of reading the sky-shaping of destiny, the belief which extended through almost every human society that **as in heaven, so on earth.**

And here too is the beginning of time-keeping and the calendar, which allow human beings to claim to have some grasp of a cosmic story which processes

through the sky and works itself out on earth. This grasp is necessary because human beings have always known that they are not quite part of the machine. They can choose their own actions, and they need to understand what is happening in heaven and on earth to make the right choices. That is where calendars began – and, eventually, clocks. The first European clocks were devised to determine hours of prayer, not hours of work.

The shift from a lunar to a solar calendar was one of the greatest changes in our civilisation, and it was a shift that was never quite completed.

It was necessary as soon as we became agricultural. The moon shapes tides, and is linked to human fertility – we still talk of the menstrual cycle, the cycle of months, and those months are the time from one new moon to the next.

But agriculture is seasonal, and seasons are timed by the orbit of the earth around the sun, not the orbit of the moon around the earth. The first solar calendar we know was the Egyptian, 6_ thousand years ago – actually it was based on observing a star, Sirius, rather than the sun, and it was linked of course to the flooding of the Nile. And the problem from then on was to bring the solar and lunar calendars together.

Tricky. The earth goes round the sun every 365 days 6 hours 9 minutes and 9 seconds. Roughly. Which is why we need leap years.

The moon goes round the earth every 27 days 7 hours 43 minutes and 11.5 seconds. Roughly. Which means that there are 13.36875 lunar months in a year. Roughly. Which is why Muslims, who use a lunar calendar, have Ramadan in a different season every year. Tricky for Easter, a seasonal Spring festival but tied to the lunar calendar.

Establishing a date for Easter that could fit in the solar calendar was a major challenge to theologians and mathematicians. Every Spring we celebrate, in one way or another, resurrection and new life according to a calendar set by the moon.

That link between sea, sky and time remained central to society, and the development of a time-keeping system that allowed men to carry time on ships made modern navigation possible. Time keeping gave us possession of the world. Today, we carry clocks wherever we go – in our computers, in our phones, in our televisions. Timekeeping is the fundamental heartbeat of our world, but we have rather forgotten what it means, and lost sight of our own roots.

The sun, the moon, the sea, the tides, the links between spirit and the material world, between creation, chaos and order – all this is contained in the idea of time, and in the word Aluna.

Last week I was with the Kogi. I saw that the glaciers and snows on the mountain have almost melted away, the waters that feed the rivers have

almost dried up, the sea at the bottom is so polluted that you can't sink in it – you float as if you were in the Dead Sea. Dead Sea. And Kogi society is now being invaded, by a combination of armed violence and commercial development hungry for resources.

Perhaps it's too late to save them, to save ourselves, to save life on earth. But if we are to stand any chance at all, we need to learn how to contemplate the transcendental cosmos of thought and energy from which we were born. We need to be aware of Aluna.

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