

# THE SOUL OF WATER

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*The highest motive is to be like water.  
Water is essential to all living things,  
Yet, it demands no pay or recognition  
Rather it flows humbly to the lowest levels  
Nothing is weaker than water  
Yet for overcoming what is hard and strong  
Nothing surpasses it.*

- Lao Tsu

## *Waters of Life*

Thales of Miletus, the first philosopher, commented that the world is made of one element –and that element is water. Water is fundamental to life; simply, we need it to survive. In myth, water encompasses and embraces the divine, a resource that regenerates and replenishes. Yet, like all elemental powers, it is also destructive and overwhelming.

In myth, water has an abundance of symbolic meanings: fecundity, procreative powers, fertility and birth all characterize this element. Some waters had special powers that could restore virginity or youth. Upon the river Styx the Gods would take their oaths; water encompasses the mysterious and the sacred. On many levels, water is a cleansing element as it washes away impurities: it suggests physical cleanliness, emotional purging as well psychological catharsis. Mythic waters confer spiritual sanctuary, immortality, even rebirth. Water, as a spiritual blessing and protection, is embedded in the Christian ritual of baptism. The crossing of a river or body of water was associated with rites of passage, like birth, death, marriage and other life transitions. Water also symbolizes emotional wisdom, feminine knowledge, feeling and prophecy. Fluidity, formlessness, beauty, power, sustenance and even terror are all images of mythic water.

Water is also an important part of cosmogony – personified at creation's beginning by Oceanus, Pontus, the Nereids and the Oceanids, all mythic inhabitants of water's vast dominion.



*A Nereid riding a dolphin (4<sup>th</sup> C BCE red-figure plate) Nereid Thetis holding dolphins (6<sup>th</sup> C BCE kylix)*

Oceanus was imagined as the great river that encircled the world, while Pontus was envisaged as the sea itself, father to the fish and all the sea creatures. The Nereids, the fifty goddesses famous for their beauty, were daughters of Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea, who personified differing aspects of the seascape. The most celebrated Nereid was Thetis, mother of Achilles. The Oceanids, daughters of Oceanus, were the nymphs of the springs and fountains while their brothers, the Potamoi, were the river gods. Oceans, seas, lakes, rivers – all the waters were embodied by a multitude of mythic figures.

Many other gods and goddesses were associated with water. Aphrodite was born from water. She surfaced out of the sea near the island of Kythera, after the sea had been fertilized by the severed genitalia of Ouranus. While the goddess is often referenced as motherless, in a way, water was the womb through which she emerged. Even though she became an Olympian, her name is forever reminiscent of water since *aphros* means sea foam.

Amphitrite was the granddaughter of Pontus, also a Nereid who married Poseidon, the god most generally associated with the watery realms, especially the fury of water. In the Greek epic, *The Odyssey*, the stormy seas characterize Poseidon's fury at Odysseus for killing his son Polyphemus. Poseidon shares the world with his brothers Zeus and Hades, becoming the god of the sea after the three brothers divide their father's kingdom. In Roman mythology he is Neptune, a shape shifting god of water, the astrological ruler of the water sign Pisces.

There are so many stories of ancient water deities, but it is the story of Galatea which highlights the theme of beauty and the power of feelings that are ignited by unrequited love, some of love's numerous watery themes. Galatea was a Nereid. Jealous of the Nereids's renowned beauty, Queen Cassiopeia boasted that she and her daughter were even more beautiful. This infuriated Poseidon who sent a sea-monster to wreak havoc on their land. To appease the monster, the queen's daughter Andromeda was sacrificed to the monster. But this was not the first time that a Nereids' beauty ended in a destructive episode. Galatea's tragic love triangle, recounted by the Roman poet Ovid, is a story of how love can be tragically destroyed by rage and monstrous feelings.

Galatea would often sit on a favourite rock off the island of Sicily, surrounded by her much-loved sea urchins and eels. Her gaze would be fixed on the faraway horizon to see if she could glimpse her handsome lover Acis returning to her. But always, lurking in the background was Polyphemus, the Cyclops, hopelessly in love with Galatea, who spied on her with his one eye. Galatea was repelled by his presence. Consequently, the huge monster began to change his appearance in order to become attractive and learnt to sing and play the panpipes to court her. He promised her wealth, glory and all the resourcefulness that nature provides. But Galatea was not interested as she was deeply in love with Acis. Like his father Poseidon, Polyphemus was full of rage. When Polyphemus found Galatea lying naked in the arms of her lover, he became enraged and hurled a chunk of the mountainous rock at Acis, who was crushed to death by its weight. Mourning, Galatea returned to the sea, having lost the love of her life.

The myth reminds us of the devastating aftermath of feeling excluded in a triangle and the wisdom of the old folk saying that 'three's a crowd'. Triads bring powerful feelings to the surface when one of the three feels excluded or rejected. Three-way conflicts occur from our earliest family arrangements with siblings, then with friends and colleagues, but when they involve sexual and emotional liaisons, feelings of exclusion and rage become intensified. On a psychological level Galatea personifies the caution needed when the intensity of human emotion excludes or rejects others close by. On an inner level the myth also reveals the pattern of rejecting unattractive parts of our self while falling in love. Water reminds us of the powerful feelings which flow beneath the surface of all attachments and relationships.

### ***Astrological Water***

The water element contains the signs Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces, bringing depth of feeling and emotion to the symbol. Akin to the element in nature, Water meanders and changes course, ebbs and flows beneath the visible surface. Water flows towards the mysterious and mystical side of life, towards what is unknown, invisible and hidden. The myths underpinning these signs describe the full spectrum of feelings aroused through ancestral and familial attachments and the bonds of love and hate experienced in our close relationships. The astrological trinity of the water signs symbolize the journey of life, beginning in the oceanic waves of the womb (Pisces), the breaking of the waters at birth (Cancer) and crossing the river at death (Scorpio). Each sign is concerned with a specific form of attachment – Cancer represents the unconditional love of the personal mother; Scorpio is concerned with an equal and committed attachment to the Beloved, while

Pisces embraces universal love and compassion through the Great Mother. We could compare each of the signs to one of nature's waterways:

- ♋ **CANCER** is the gentle and flowing waters of the world's rivers, the babbling brook, the flowing stream, a child's tears, the feelings that flow through the family of origin and ancestry such as mother-love, the family atmosphere, baby-love, childhood mementos, a secure base.
- ♏ **SCORPIO** is the clear pond or the stagnant pool, the still billabong or the frozen lake, the feeling of intense love, the power of love, yet also the love of power, Eros and the potent feelings that flow beneath the visible surface with imagery of the Beloved, shared intimacy, trust, and union.
- ♓ **PISCES** is the wide sea, the tides of the ocean, selflessness, the Great Mother, the collective layers of the unconscious, oneness, merging, surrendering, the feeling for all of humanity, universal love and chaos, the spiritual and magical realms, including sacrifice, divine-love and idealized love.

The zodiacal emblems of the water signs are all cold-blooded encrustations: crabs, scorpions, fish, the children of Pontus. Water represents the most primal layer of the human psyche; therefore, these signs depict deeper archaic motifs. When Cups, illustrative of water, appear in a spread, the feeling life seeks acknowledgement, either in our own self, or through relationship with individuals of this temperament, that is water signs or feeling types.

Temperamentally watery individuals are attracted and repelled by feelings and vibrations, unable to articulate the invisible thread that pulls them towards another or the impulse that drives them away. They idealize the sphere of relationships, which renders them emotionally vulnerable and creates unrealistic expectations of both themselves and others. Led by their feelings, aroused by empathy and compassion for another, water individuals seek a soulful connection to nurture and fulfil this longing. Being receptive, empathetic, compassionate and feeling-sensitive water individuals are instinctively able to sense another's feeling life, their pain and their despair. Astute at sensing what others need the watery type habitually serves others in an unspoken way. Without invitation from the other, the watery type tries to soothe the pain, attend the discomfort and nurture the broken heart. Often these feelings are not reciprocated leaving the individual adrift emotionally.

The watery type enters all relationships with a sense of deep connection, moved by the need to nurture, fuse or merge with the other. This fate could manifest as becoming a caretaker or nurturer to others. Water is attracted by sensitivity and creativity in others, drawn to compassionate and caring qualities. Emotional manipulation, chaos, secrecy and moodiness are the shadows that might lurk underneath the calm waters. But when water becomes conscious of its projections, attempting to maintain boundaries, then warmth, emotional generosity and support are returned. When a predominance of Cups appear this alerts us to the probability that this type of individual is pivotal to the situation being revealed.

Water is the psychic element that merges with its environment. Psychic individuals often absorb water, which is carried as body weight. Water is the element that lifts the veil separating the visible world from the invisible one. It has a natural affinity for symbols and signs and is inclined to see the source of the illness, not the symptom; water types are able to read what is below the surface of the situation. In this way they are natural counsellors, helpers and healers yet always need to be conscious of their propensity to become enmeshed in an entangled web with those they try to help. Water in essence has no form and needs to be contained. Without containment its potentiality to invade or erode is relentless. By nature it is an element that assimilates what is in the environment. Psychologically it is difficult for water to let go of the affect of feelings, collecting reminders, memories and mementos of their life. Since water locates itself in the past, there is an element of nostalgia and sentimentality. However when engaged it has the great potentiality for depth of

intimacy and union. As the ‘Old Master’ Lao Tsu points out in the opening quote, water is both weak and indelibly strong.

The water element embraces the feeling life, not just in itself, but also in others that it has shared a bond with. Generally there is a strong need for harmony in relationships and the feeling type tends to be agreeable, even compliant, in order to accomplish this. Feeling is subjective and draws its attitude from its personal experiences and responses. “Still waters run deep” is a common expression that aptly describes the introverted feeling type. Extraverted feeling displays their feelings, or as the expression suggests “wears their heart on their sleeve”.

Familial and ancestral patterns are carried by the element of water. It is the element whose roots reach deep into the collective; hence watery energy is charged with familial, ancestral, social and collective patterns. The element of water may be easily possessed or entranced or longs for escape. Water often desires release from the mundane world and if so, its choice could range from drugs to the religious quest through to an addiction to helping, or continuous serving and surrendering of self. Water seeks containment and balance with the other elements.

### ***An Imbalance of Water***

Too little water may suggest a difficulty in empathizing with others or listening to another’s feelings. This could be felt by others as a lack of sensitivity or experienced as coldness or aloofness. A lack of water may instinctually rationalize or promote strategies to ‘overcome’ feelings, as there may be an innate distrust of not only the feelings, but also psychic and intuitive ways of knowing. Without an adequate water supply toxins may accumulate both physically and emotionally. We are alerted to this temperament when there are very few Cups in the spread.

An overabundance of water may leave the individual waterlogged and overrun with feelings. They may experience an inability to reason, as emotions may be overwhelming. With too much water there may be a tendency to ‘hold water’ or put on weight, a result of enmeshment with others, being the carrier of their feelings. Too vulnerable and sensitive to others they may not be aware how to erect appropriate boundaries between themselves and others. An over-emphasis of water suggests the individual may instinctually sacrifice themselves for others, prone to being a scapegoat, or unable to say no to unrealistic demands. When there are proportionately more Cups in the spread we need to be aware of these possibilities.

### ***Tarot Water***

Watercolours paint the Cups with a depth and intensity of emotional experience contributing to the maturing of the feeling life and the development of the soul. They are chalices filled with holy waters. With Cups we plunge into the sphere of water and meet the mysterious life-giving *daimons* that inhabit this territory. Underlying Cups flow potent rivers of feeling and emotion. When Cups appear we are alerted to a full spectrum of emotions ranging from the brightest to the darkest. They can reflect the feelings we express, or ones we project onto others. Cups may describe a person with the water temperament or a watery individual who constellates strong reactions in our life. Heroines, healers, shamans, magicians and instinctual animals, which represent the mystery and complexity of feeling, are encountered as Cups reveal themselves. Important transitions and passages in the life cycle are also revealed when the Cups appear in a spread. With Cups we journey into the soulful regions of the human psyche and confront its deeper mysteries and cycles.

When writing the Celestial Tarot<sup>1</sup>, the suit of Cups corresponded to the water element. The first nine cards represented the nine decans (10 degree markers) or divisions of the three water signs. Each one is represented by a major constellation, as follows:

<b>Minor Arcana</b>	<b>Astrological Harmonic</b>	<b>Constellation</b>	<b>Decanate</b>	<b>Decan Ruler</b>
ACE	Conjunction	Ursa Minor	1 <sup>st</sup> Cancer	Moon
2	Opposition	Ursa Major	2 <sup>nd</sup> Cancer	Pluto
3	Trine	Argo	3 <sup>rd</sup> Cancer	Neptune

4	Square	Serpens	1 <sup>st</sup> Scorpio	Pluto
5	Quintile	Asclepius (Ophiuchus)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Scorpio	Neptune
6	Sextile	Hercules	3 <sup>rd</sup> Scorpio	Moon
7	Septile	<i>Al Risha</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> Pisces	Neptune
8	Semi-Square	Cepheus	2 <sup>nd</sup> Pisces	Moon
9	Novile	Andromeda	3 <sup>rd</sup> Pisces	Pluto
10	Element	Water		

Starting with the Ace of Cups the instinct to nurture, to protect and care is encountered in the Great She-Bear, an archaic image that symbolizes mothering instincts. This is Cancer's domain and as we journey through the first three Cups we engage its needs to nurture, attach and respect the bonds of family. With the Four of Cups we meet Serpens the healing snake that introduces us to Scorpio's domain of mystery, healing, power and love. Scorpio initiates us into the depth of our unconscious and confronts us with honesty and integrity. With the Seven of Cups we encounter a nodal point in the journey: the knot tying the ribbon of stars that link the two fish of Pisces together. This heralds the experience of Pisces and the journey into the imagination that engages the Divine. As we reach the Ten of Cups we experience the fullness of Water where the three layers of feeling merge.

When engaging with the Celestial Tarot Cups, we encounter the fullness of the feminine and feeling through images that are representative of the *anima* and its life sustaining imagery of nurturing, healing and loving. Let's take a sea journey through the ten Cups, as they appear in the Celestial Tarot.

#### **THE ACE OF CUPS: *Ursa Minor***

The journey of Cups begins with the powerful image of the bear, the most ancient of sacred animals, whose mothering instincts became a timeless motif for the human need for safety, nurturing and protection. The card depicts Ursa Minor, the 'lesser bear' the constellation closest to the sacred cosmic point, the North Pole. When the Ace of Cups appears our instincts remind us to be receptive to the waters of the heart, alert to nurture what is being created through a new relationship, a new life stage or even a new idea.

#### **THE TWO OF CUPS: *Ursa Major***

The seven stars forming the tail and lower back of the great She-Bear in the constellation of Ursa Major are commonly known as the Big Dipper. Ursa Major is a northern polar constellation representing the Two of Cups. The nadir of feeling has been plumbed and emotions are about to be transformed. The Great She-Bear, the goddess' surrogate mother, protects the new phase of relating. On an oracular level this card suggests an important relationship will be transformed through the revelation of deeper feelings, honesty and integrity.

#### **THE THREE OF CUPS: *The Argo***

To the ancients the constellation Argo Navis was the great ship that carried the Argonauts on their search for the Golden Fleece. The Argo is the vessel that symbolizes leaving familial ground and encountering life outside our safety zone. But it also reminds us that when we relate to others outside the familial circle, we unwittingly replay family patterns. The Three of Cups marks the maturing and acceptance of feelings that are necessary for a successful relationship. When the Three of Cups appears in a spread the unconscious is alerting us to the complex of feelings which love ignites.

#### **THE FOUR OF CUPS: *Serpens***

The Four of Cups is represented by the constellation Serpens, the heavenly serpent, which embodies the profound mysteries of healing and oracular wisdom. The Four of Cups suggests there are feelings needing to be confronted. Unattended feelings from the past feed suspicion and insecurity and without facing them they fester and become toxic. The Four of Cups is the snake, the soul's surrogate offering us the homoeopathic remedy: to heal the wound we must acknowledge it, then enter into it and embrace it.

### **THE FIVE OF CUPS: Ophiuchus, the serpent bearer**

Ophiuchus, constellation of the serpent bearer, was known to the ancient Greeks as the healing god Asclepius, the patron of the Five of Cups. Asclepius healed the sick by creating a therapeutic space where the power of dream images could soothe the soul. Asclepius calls us to the inner sanctuary because the split between soul and body has widened and the imbalance may ignite a healing crisis. The Five of Cups draws us into the liminal space between the wounding and the healing where we can restore our sense of self through interaction with the gods of the imagination.

### **THE SIX OF CUPS: *Hercules***

The Six of Cups introduces us to Heracles who is surrounded by the artifacts of his heroic persona. Yet this card illustrates another aspect of the hero; his knees are bent and his head is bowed in reverence to the mysteries of divination and healing that enabled his heroism. Underpinning this card is a feminine integrity, not forged from worldly conquests, but from an ability to engage mystery and the wisdom of the anima. When this card is drawn it reveals the individual is facing a heroic labour, yet what will nurture and provide strength will be an intimate relationship with the feeling life.

### **THE SEVEN OF CUPS: *Al Risha, the knot of Pisces***

For the first and only time, a fixed star, Al Risha, represents a card. This star is the knot in the cord that ties the tails of the Piscean fish together. The knot symbolizes bonds of love that have become so entangled they need to be cut, or alternately reflect the heavenly knot which binds loved ones together. The card also denotes a nodal time, in either a relationship or life stage, where it is important to be bonded but not bound, clarifying the necessity to cut through emotional ties that are chaotic and entangled and choking the life force.

### **THE EIGHT OF CUPS: *Cepheus***

Throughout antiquity, kings represented this constellation. Cepheus, father of Andromeda, was instructed to sacrifice his daughter; therefore, this card asks, 'what needs to be sacrificed to restore a harmonious relationship with the gods?' The Eight of Cups signals periods of withdrawal while these feelings are being worked through. Often the central trigger for this self-examination is a close attachment and/or relationship. On an oracular level the card suggests a journey of the heart which may also materialize as a physical journey. Whatever way this unfolds, the individual is transformed through sacrificing their defensiveness and fear.

### **THE NINE OF CUPS: *Andromeda***

The image of the Chained Woman has been consistently projected onto the constellation of Andromeda. Her name 'ruler of men' reveals the ancient tradition of the Queen, as the surrogate of the goddess. In the Nine of Cups, the heroine Andromeda is free of the chains that have held her hostage. In a mood of reverie she raises her arms in a gesture of liberation. Naked, innocent, no longer sacrificing feelings for the father, she is ready to give herself freely. The Nine of Cups augurs a period of emotional fulfillment and satisfaction as the weight of the past has emotionally lifted.

### **THE TEN OF CUPS: *The Water Trinity***

The Ten of Cups depicts Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces merging together to create a potent life-affirming fountain of feeling, an omen that a celebration is imminent. Water signs signify emotional attachments and bonds of love. When the card is drawn it is time to reflect on the depth of connection with those you love and to express this feeling of closeness. The Ten of Cups symbolizes a culmination of the process of feeling and the need to both honour and be honest with that development.

The journey through the Cups baptizes us in the waters of life though the revelations of our genuine feelings and care for those we love.

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<sup>1</sup> The Celestial Tarot Book is now available in kindle at: <https://www.amazon.com/Celestial-Tarot-Book-Brian-Clark-ebook/dp/B07MVS88SR>