

FIRE

Every creature on the face of the planet flees fire except one-- Man. When one considers the source of ancient fire it is truly amazing that even one creature did not run. Fire either came from the sky in a blinding bolt of electrical energy or spewed forth out of the earth in violent volcanic eruption...both terrifyingly destructive forces. It is understandable why every creature flees. What remains the mystery though is why one stopped running and turned to face the flame. What spark, both literal and figurative, ignited in this primitive biped to compel him to stop, turn and approach this violent phenomenon? One may never know. But what one does indeed realize is that in the moment that hand with the opposable thumb reached down and grabbed a burning branch and held it aloft to marvel at its heat and light a new path was forged. A creation and divergence issued forth from that act that is now the basis for who we are and what we have become.

At what point did man become aware? At what juncture did the realization evolve that his control over the tangible earth and its creatures did not extend to that vast and unknown vault above? What mysteries were held in that intangible cathedral that alternately dispensed the warmth of the summer sunshine on his face and the night terror of the crashing thunderbolt? More directly, at what point did the concept of a higher, controlling Being creep into his subconscious?

We will never know for sure but what we do know is that in the Eastern cultures, Heaven is represented by Fire. Perhaps during the quiet of the night our forebears watched the ethereal flames of the campfire reach ever upward to disappear into the night sky and the seed of his spirituality was planted.

Man has a very strong evolutionary bond with water. He has an even stronger one forged by fire, a dual bond of technology and the spiritual. The technologic facet would enable man to gain ascendancy over the earth but place himself forever apart from the purity of nature. After all, before fire, man was just another predator...another cog in the vast complex machinery of Nature. He was an extremely resourceful and savage predator, but predator none the less. Before fire he was a part of the natural order, a creature **of** the earth. After 'illumination' he became a creature **on** the earth. After fire he became

less a member of the 'natural society' and more a ruler of it. After fire a separation occurred. Man diverged from Nature.

Fire also separated man from himself through the awakening of his spirituality. There was now a recognized force bigger; wiser and stronger than was Man. There was a mystical side to the new universe that contained the realm of dreams and life beyond life. When man embraced fire not only did he find himself* looking down on his known world, but also looking up to a new and **unknown** world. Fire marks this point at* which man departed from being a creature of the natural plane and became an individual force in his own* right.

The duality of fire, heat and light is mirrored by the duality of its impact on our lives. It is a mystical as well as a practical force and exerts its influence on the individual as well as the community. Since natural fire descends from the heavens or wells up from the earth how mystically auspicious the first man, dwelling between, should be the one to embrace this wonder. Indeed, it is no accident that in Japanese garden design three elements **must** always be represented...Earth, Man and Fire.

Our interaction with fire to this day remains in these two realms. The mystical is exemplified in religious ceremonies whether that be burning candles or incense or walking barefoot across a bed of hot coals. Practically, fire is the root of our technology. From hearth to forge to electricity to fusion to fission it provides the glue that holds our communities together.

The fire Garden celebrates this duality and provides sanctuary for the mystic individual as well as the communal family. Man's first step away from existing as a purely natural being occurred when he embraced the flame. Since this is the first step away from Nature it is also the last step **back** to Nature. If you would seek that shadow of your natural soul you will find it on the other side of the flame. The illumination provided by fire is a metaphor for the spirit and our sense of personal enlightenment. Sitting before the open fire is a significant step toward awareness of self. The illumination of the solitary flame brings us back to the threshold beyond which dwells the time of pure Nature...the time before fire. Although we cannot physically journey there our spirit can seek that sanctuary and find comfort there.

The warmth provided by the fire is the basis of our shared community. The first families gathered around the fire, seeking its safety, comfort and camaraderie. It is the same today, for it is this

gathering around the open fire that brings us together as family and friends.

The components of the Fire Garden are designed to accommodate this duality. Intimate enough for the individual yet spacious enough to welcome the 'tribe'. The solitaire seeking intimacy with self and soul as well as the family seeking to share this intimacy with one another utilizes it.

Correctly constructed, the Fire Garden provides a personal and family focal point of enduring value in our search for self.