

Cover Illustration: The Bee and the Hive

By Nigel Jackson



And your Lord inspired the bee, saying:

“Take you habitations in the mountains and in the trees and in what they erect.
Then, eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy (for you).”

There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colour wherein is
healing for men.

Verily, in this is indeed a sign for people who think’

The Holy Koran, Surah 16 Al-Nabl ‘The Bees’ (16:68-69)

The symbolism of the honey-bee is of very archaic provenance, including the royal bee of ancient Egyptian tradition, emblem of pharaonic theocracy. Ancient petroglyphs from the Neolithic era depict honey-gatherers scaling cliff-sides to gather the precious honeycomb, prized for its sweetening, preservative and medicinal virtues throughout the ages.

The mead (*madb*) brewed from honey along with sacred drinks such as hydromel are symbols of the archetypal ‘draught of immortality,’ *amrita* or *ambrosia*.

Of the bees emerging from the hive after a period of confinement. Louis Charbonneau Lassay says that in rural France, even up to the 19th century, the 3 winter months during which the bees had ‘died’ (being in a state of dormancy in the hive) were identified with the 3 days in

which Christ was hidden in the tomb, rising thereafter from the darkness of death in spiritual resurrection.

The rose-trees whose nectar the bees feed upon recall Robert Fludd's dictum: 'The Rose gives the Bees Honey,' an allusion to divine graces and the interior alchemy of the Spirit - the gradual distilling of the precious essences of wisdom within the heart.

The Koranic surah of the Bees and certain strands of Shia and Ismaili lore regarding the bee express the symbolic meanings of the innate God-given wisdom of the bee who builds its house of honey.

The profound symbiosis in which the honey-bee participates as pollinator of flowers embodies the delicate interconnections of natural order which sustain the well-being and fecundity of Nature.