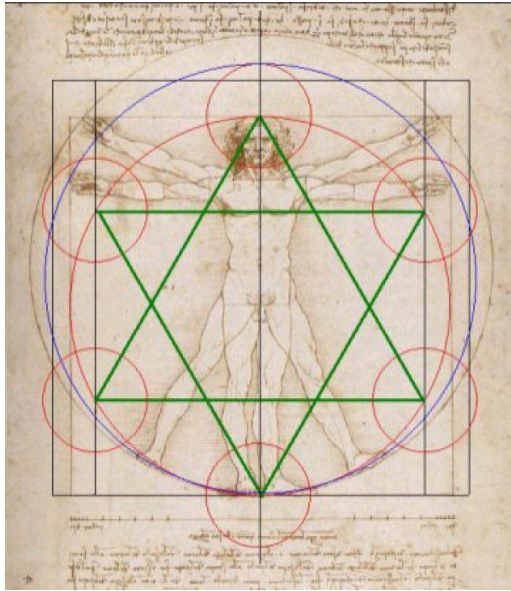


The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death – the Cross

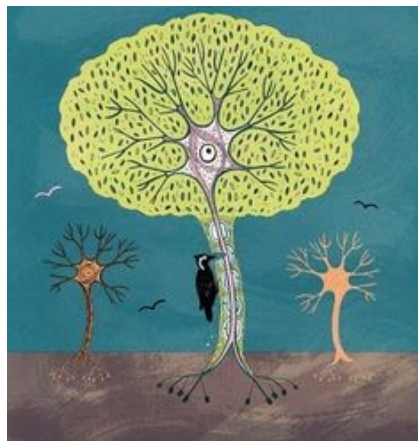
“It could be said, I think, that we all try to choose peace, but that many move further and further away from it by evasion of the struggles and necessary conflicts of the human journey. What the one on the way to hell chooses all the time is peace for himself; rejection of everybody else except his own ego... The point about peace is that the true peace does not come until one has accepted boundaries and conflict—to the bitter end. That’s what the whole Christian story is about. That’s what the cross is.” ~Helen M. Luke



If you were to ask me, “Where were you born, and where are you from?” I would say, “Johannesburg, South Africa.” And if you were to say, “I have no idea where that is,” I would take a map of the world, find the African continent, search for Johannesburg in the Southern part of the continent, and place an X on the spot of my birth. The cross would mark the spot of my incarnation into duality, into a world of immense beauty, wonder, and delight as well as suffering, heartache and pain. From the moment of my conception I am born to this reality of duality, nailed to it, so to speak. This ancient symbol is as old as the very first humans on the planet. Christians did not create the cross. The Romans didn’t invent it to torture and kill humans. The form *is* representative of the human body.

If I did not have a pencil, I might have a pin to stick into the spot, creating a two-dimensional cross, the vertical pin in the horizontal paper as you see at so many tourist destinations. All those little crosses are souls living suffering lives at every point on the planet. Every point represents a line of latitude and longitude. And every single one is right at the center of the planet and the universe. You are, quite literally the center of the universe. Try to visualize this. Try to see yourself as *not* at the center of the planet. What does it require to NOT see this?

The cross is the symbol of the tree, or the tree is a symbol of the cross - the vertical intersecting the horizontal. And the tree is the symbol of you yourself, imbued with even more life, intricacy and complexity than the tree. Every single neuron of your body is a tree of life.

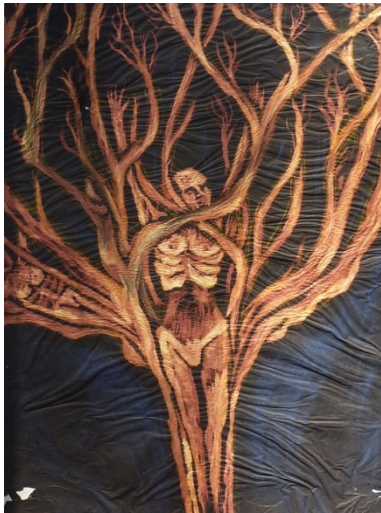




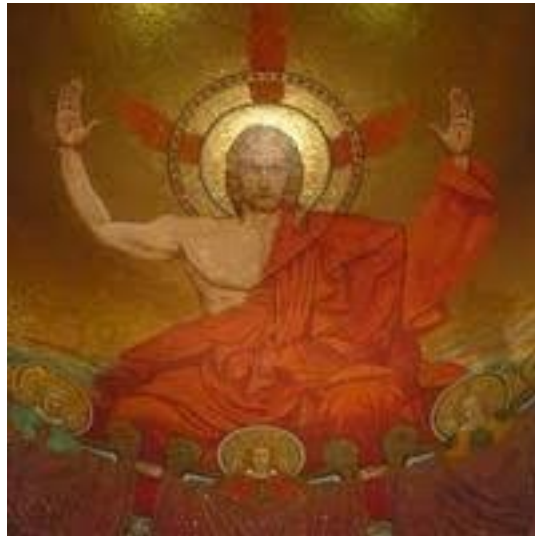
The cross is the symbol of the elemental and essential principle of life in form. You are both the tree of duality and death in the book of Genesis, and the tree of Life in the New Testament. For a large part of your life you are suffering in unawareness, stuck in the dualities of good and evil, right and wrong, up and down, time and space. By diligently and intentionally walking the long Via Dolorosa, i.e. the way of suffering, the path leads to the center of the cross, your heart. Through facing and accepting the suffering of your life, seeing deeply into the matter, you

reach the heart. To live from the heart means it had to be pierced, and cracked open, to love. The heart is at the center of the cross where the lines of duality intersect. I wonder if the centurion who thrust a lance into the heart of the Christ, is an allusion to Eros, one of the four Greek Gods of Love. It is passionate love that results in death to an old way of being and creation and integration into new life.

I love these two modern representations of the tree of Death and Life. In traditional medieval art you will often see the cross of Death being the suffering Christ nailed to an unaware life and dying to ego, or the Rosicrucian cross, representing the awake human. The rose in the West is the symbol of the anointed one, the chosen one – in other words *you* in your enlightened state. In Christianity it is the symbol of Mary and Jesus, symbols of the ascended state of consciousness.



If you have "transcended" the experience of physical life it means you are living in love, instead of the dumb, deaf, blind unawareness of the dualities to which you are nailed. This transcended state is often represented by the empty Cross, but I prefer a living cross that is growing ivy and roses or a cross of the triumphant Christ, as in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. Here the realized human, as fully human and fully divine is depicted with such strength, and power. This incredible mosaic seems to depict his ability to encompass the universe into his passionate love (red and gold). Transcendence and Resurrection are basically both referring to the same state of consciousness of living a loving life not **determined** by the unaware suffering of the egoic state of consciousness. This does not mean there is no pain – there is. You are just not determined and defined by it. You are aware of it without judgment and in relationship to the suffering of your human life with love – whether you experience has been "good," or "bad," you see into the depths of what resulted in actions with loving awareness.



By walking the Via Dolorosa and doing the inner work, you can eventually live in a resurrected and transcendent reality *while still in form*. You are still the tree, but now the living tree - The tree bearing roses, and fulfilling your destiny and your purpose in this lifetime. You have been "born again." And you are the mother and the child, together, integrated, and at-one. Being born again is not a matter of believing in someone else, quoting a scripture or doing an altar call. It is gut wrenching hard inner work.

*"The human being has to be born twice,
once from the mother,
and then out of the body and of one's own existence. This body is like an egg.
The essence of man must become in this egg a bird,
thanks to the heat of love.
And then he will escape this body into the eternal world of the soul, beyond space."
~ Rumi*

The great Greek mystic Nikos Kazantzakis is quoted in the opening of Martin Scorsese's movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ* based on his book of the same title:
"The dual substance of Christ - the yearning, so human, so superhuman, of man to attain God... has always been a deep inscrutable mystery to me. My principle anguish and source of all my

joys and sorrows from my youth onward, has been the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh... and my soul is the arena where these two armies have clashed and met."

Jesus, like each of us, had to walk this inner path of doubt and fear, shame and temptation. To do so requires an inner turning and facing all the inner experiences of suffering you have every had and seeing in what it resulted in terms of behaviors and choices. Jesus, like all of us, had to turn inward and face it, become fully aware of the experience in the human body, accept it and learn to love himself anyway – no matter how good, or bad, he was. (This is the reference to the two thieves in the myth. Good and bad rob the attention of the soul to look outwards, instead of inwards. It was the acceptance of this inner struggle, daily, that brought him to his final temptation and last duality. He doubted he was truly the child of God. Why would his “father” require such suffering, cause such suffering? Surely living a normal, “good,” life is all that is required of God. It was only when he could see that he himself created his own suffering and chose to avoid doing the work when it really got too hard, that he recognized the final truth, accepted the suffering and died to his ego fully, realizing himself as fully human and fully divine - a god in human form. The final words of the movie are “It is accomplished.”

As Marianne Williamson in her book “Return to Love,” says,

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

At what point do you shy away from doing the inner work and take a drink, snap at someone, deny, lie, cheat and steal for the momentary cessation from facing your inner suffering with love. At what point do you give in to the temptation to say, “This is good enough.” “This is far enough.” “My life is fine as it is.” The story tells us that we must be true to self even in the face of death - most especially in the face of death – because it is coming for all of us in one way or another. Will you at the end of your life be able to say with joy and a smile, “It is accomplished?” At what point do you sacrifice your integrity (wholeness) for momentary fake peace? How do you just take opioids of some kind to dull the pain of your suffering and continue to hang on the cross of duality? When have you questioned God for causing suffering instead of accepting responsibility for it and examining it deeply? When have you been angry and defiant about your inner suffering and abandoned your own soul? For many of us the story is depicted in such a horrifyingly violent and graphic way that we have easily shied away from the deeper meaning and decided it's a good thing this man Jesus did it for us, What a wonderful way to avoid the responsibility of our own work! When have you said “no” to being loving to yourself and perpetuated the agony?

It is important to realize that many humans die in horrific and hideous suffering, under immense threat from their fellow humans. Most succumb and deny themselves. But a few can face their inner fears with love (compassion) and live out of complete integrity and love for themselves and others. Think of the recent Christ's in our own life's history. The Etty Hillesums and Anne Franks of the world. Józef and Wiktoria Ulma who together with their 7 children were murdered

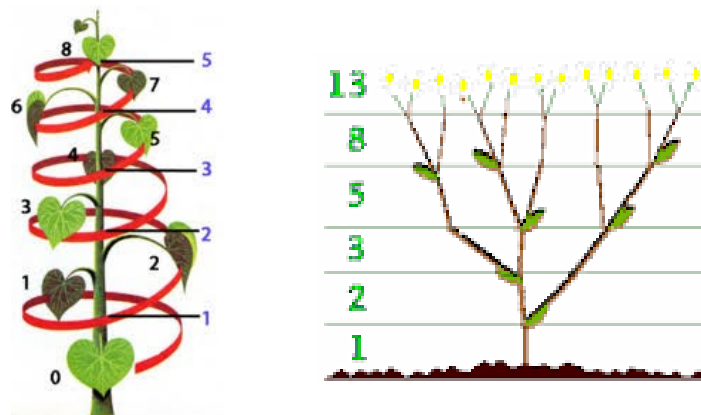
by the Nazi's for hiding Jewish children. Start looking to see if you can find examples of Christ's like this and then you will see that the Jesus story is not so unique after all. It is not that people like this do not feel anguish, fear, pain and doubt, but they do not act on it. They choose love instead of safety. For as much horror as people perpetrate on themselves and on one another, there are those whose godliness and nobility of spirit shine through enough to keep encouraging us forward in finding new thresholds of integrity.

Consider how the Via Dolorosa can also be represented by the labyrinth, the medieval gothic churches, and the representation of the Kabbalah. If you saw the labyrinth three dimensionally you would see a spiral – the spiral growth of the plant, the human, and all living things. At the very center is the “heart of the matter,” the point of transition from one state of consciousness to another, from suffering, to Life eternal. The very same symbol is the beautiful rose windows in Gothic cathedrals with the Madonna and Child at the center of the circle.

Leonardo da Vinci's image of man above is drawn to the very same exact proportions as depicted in the Fibonacci sequence of a plant, or the formula of the golden mean. The Cross and the tree is the simplest and most complex symbol of life on earth, growth, the struggle of growth until the final fruition – the moment when the plant is strong enough, well established enough, tended and loved enough to start sprouting flowers and fruit.

Spend some time studying the Fibonacci principle and the Golden Mean. Start noticing this sequence of growth everywhere on the planet including your own body/mind (which are not two, but one). Notice how even in your thoughts, you formulate a hypothesis, antithesis and synthesis. In other words, $1 + 1 = 3$. See how the trinity is inherent in all matter. Study Michael Snider's book “The Beginners Guide to the Universe,” or at least look at his website:

<http://www.constructingtheuniverse.com>



The Christian mythology is very deep, rich and complex. To really study it and mine it for its meaning is rewarding, revelatory and exciting especially when you can apply it to your own experience.



But getting back to the myth of Jesus....

Here is an ordinary, primitive tribal man walking the path of life's suffering, feeling desolate, abandoned, betrayed, depressed, anxious, miserable, angry, bitter, terrorized, avoidant, trying to get help and support along the way, finding some help along the way, working through all the archetypal energies of the gods, trying to “find himself,” and nailed to the cross of human suffering.

His people, and so he himself, is in bondage to the tyrant and oppressor. This is the same story as the Israelites being in bondage to the Pharaoh. The metaphor is that your soul is in bondage to the tyrannical ruler of the ego. This is your story and mine. Except that you have the great privilege to have been born 2000 years later when humanity is much further along in it's evolution in consciousness. **With this privilege comes even greater responsibility.**

What was required for Jesus to gain freedom, whether he actually attained it or not? The story is quite clear. You must die to your suffering. You must let it go and surrender it. **How do you do this specifically?**

Firstly, you recognize and get aware of your suffering condition, in adulthood, and see that it is recreated over and over again by you, **no one else**. You have to see the internal judgments, demands, rules, shaming, hatred, criticism, lack of mercy or insight, dualistic thinking, dumb unawareness, blindness to the truth, avoidance, deafness to the words of grace, forgiveness and love which *is* the medium within which you live and have your life. You have to see how you are at war and conflict with your own young soul.

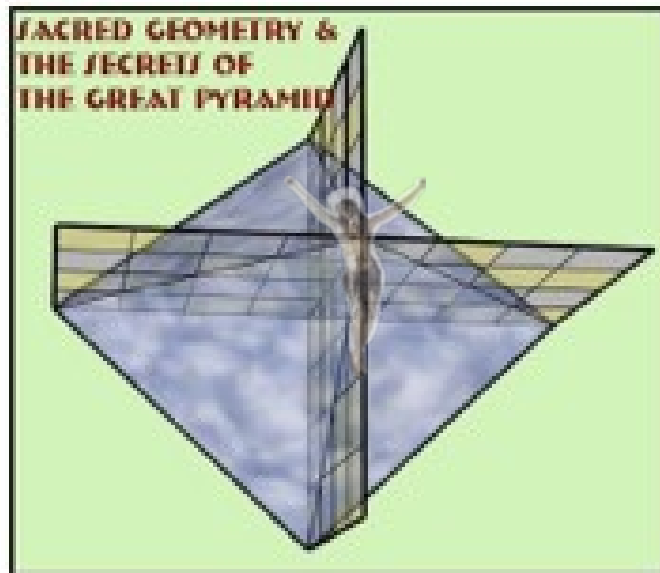
Instead of defending against this self-imposed suffering, you become aware of it, sink into it, and embrace it with the unifying and healing love of your own heart. You allow your heart to break. You learn to **suffer with** the early wounding of your soul. You embrace it with love, you open your arms wide to the suffering and accept it, understanding that it cannot kill you as it could have when you were just little. You recognize that the introjected socialization of rules, demands and expectations that were inculcated into your young soul through fear and shaming is a lesson learned. You recognize that the cruelty, disinterest, abuse and rejection of others had to do with their suffering, not your inherent "badness." Once this is seen, re-experienced and accepted in love, you will soon not act in ways that are defensive and destructive to you and others again. Once you really know what happened and relive it, you can stop rehearsing and re-perpetrating the original shaming over and over again in a mindless and hateful way. Just as once you have learned to ride a bicycle, you do not have to keep cajoling, encouraging, teaching, and criticizing yourself. You fall a few times as you practice, but finally it becomes automatic. You heal the rift between the one teaching and the one taught and you become The Teaching itself.

In learning to do all this for yourself you are then able to do this for others. You do not shy away from the suffering the world. You allow your heart to break over and over again, you take it all in with the embrace of your infinite love and bring it to yourself – every last soul. The greater your love, the greater your capacity to open your arms. You become not only your own salvation, but the savior of the world. The sweet scent of roses trails your every word, deed and thought. You have fulfilled your destiny, and your purpose, which is to love infinitely and eternally and bring all suffering into your heart so it might heal. The flowers of your life blossom and the fruits ripen. The last years of life become years of real service instead of desperate defensive attempts to lead a good life.

All you are ever required to die to, is your own suffering. But you cannot die to the suffering except through the loving embrace and acceptance of it with your own love. Do not abandon yourself as Jesus did by calling out to some external God to save him. This is up to you. You have only to open to the Universal Truth and Love of all that is, and find it within yourself. **It is imperative humans start accepting their godly responsibility to become that which they are instead of avoiding the path by having an illusionary dependence on some external savior.** Until now humans have lived and died in a primitive theology of dependency. The myth is **not** about Jesus "saving you." It is an instructive myth as to how to save your self. If your religion still frightens and shames you then you have not understood the first thing about

this epic journey of life. It is a story about LOVE – only Love. And it is your God-given responsibility to realize this within yourself.

Exercises:



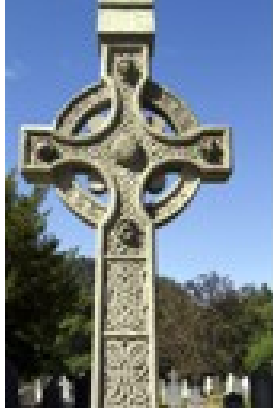
Study this picture.

The integration of opposites results in the return to the center point of either the square or the circle, which marks the spot of transcendence. It is said that when this happens, the “circle is squared” which is actually mathematically and geometrically impossible (see the image of Leonardo da Vinci at the beginning. In this drawing he is alluding to the cosmic man being able to “square the circle.” The cosmic man can be both human and divine; both in duality and creation (the square) and in an ascended state of full awareness spiritually (the circle).

In the pyramid diagram the middle point of the cross is the line that reaches to the tip of the pyramid representing the transcendence of the ego into a more expanded state of consciousness that is eternal and absolute. It is through the heart (center) that we transcend. Originally the capstones of the Pharaohs’ pyramids were covered in gold to represent the eternal life of the transcendent and eternally alive Pharaoh or Sun God. Of course, we do not quibble about the Pharaohs really being enlightened beings – that seems pretty silly to us. The Christian myth arises out of the Egyptian and Roman/Greek mythologies and so is just as rich, if not more so, but just as symbolic too.

In this image you can see that Life in form and the attention that is paid to staying alive (ego functioning) **is the foundation for the awakening in consciousness and the realization of Self as essentially spirit.** It is a common mistake to denigrate the ego. Consider how you do this and what kind of trap you are walking into. Pay close attention before this retreat and see if you can document and journal about actual examples. Remember, being in ego consciousness is the same as being nailed four square to the earth - as in the lines of longitude and latitude that represent

the markings on a spherical planet to represent place. Do not keep perpetuating this state of consciousness for yourself. See it, accept it and bring love to it.



I suggest working on a piece of art for yourself that represents the “squaring of the circle.” The Rosicrucians, and certainly in the Irish Catholic tradition, you will see roses painted at the center of the cross. Or you will see the cross with a circle. Or you will see the Irish patterns of infinity on the cross. The rose is symbolic of the enlightened Soul. Mary and Jesus are the symbols of the integration of ego and soul, masculine and feminine, soul and spirit, Personally I love the idea of a Mature Wise Soul holding and embracing the hurt child close to her heart at the center of the cross.... Play with these ideas. There is no right or wrong. You find the symbols that work for you and create your own icon.

Consider the four points of the cross representing different dualities you struggle with. The pyramid itself is a three dimensional reality. One line perhaps represents time and space, the other light and dark (all relative truths). The full integration results in transformation and transcendence into an absolute and the 4th dimension (at least).

Think of passive/aggressive, male/female, pretty/ugly, right/wrong, good/bad.... and see if you can psycho-spiritually see the process of transcendence through the sacred geometry of the pyramid and cross. A clue: what motivates/causes these opposites in duality? Can you see the emotional/intellectual function creating suffering? How is it possible to gain freedom?

Internalize this teaching so that you can teach it to someone else. This teaching has no relevance unless you start noticing these processes and dynamics within your own psyche. The story as an intellectual teaching is useless unless you start using the map to realize where you are on this via dolorosa yourself and bring your heart to your suffering.

Consider:

- Just like a tree has three main parts: a crown, a trunk, and a root system, so the nervous system has three main parts: a brain, a spinal cord, and all the nerves that go to and from your spinal cord to the rest of your body.
- Just like a tree is able to send water and nutrients from the roots to the crown and vice versa, you can send messages from your brain to the rest of your body and vice versa.
- Just like the roots of a tree begin as small individual roots spread over a wide area, your nervous system begins as individual cells called neurons that are spread all throughout your body.
- Just like the small roots of a tree join together into bigger and bigger roots as they get closer to the tree trunk, your neurons join together into bigger and bigger bundles, called nerves, as they get closer to the spinal cord.
- Just like all the roots of the tree join together to form the trunk, your nerves all join together into one big bundle called the spinal cord.

- Just like the branches of a tree split off the trunk and spread out throughout the crown, your nerves diverge again at the top end of your spinal cord and spread throughout your brain.

The Big Difference

Unlike a tree where the branches don't connect to each other, the various centers of your brain are extremely interconnected. **This allows your brain to integrate many different pieces of information.**

So let's embrace being human and start the work of integrating.

<http://flamboroughhealth.com/6-ways-that-your-nervous-system-is-like-a-tree-and-1-big-difference/>

Watch this delightful documentary and consider what you can do to support life on this planet by protecting and promoting trees. What a wonderful educational gift Judi Dench has given the world! We are never too old to make a contribution to the awakening of our planet.

[Judi Dench: My Passion for Trees BBC Documentary 2017 - YouTube](#)