

The World Tree ~ Axis Mundi

~ BY Deanna Jenné

[THIS WRITING IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK I'M CURRENTLY WRITING - IT HAS RECEIVED A FEW EDITS BUT NOT READY YET. I SHARE IT WITH YOU BECAUSE IT CAN SHED LIGHT ON HOW I THINK ABOUT AXIS MUNDI & TREE OF LIFE. ©]

Greatly revered as the Tree of Life, the Axis Mundi of the World, She resides at the center, and is protected by the snake in most traditions. The dominant culture's narrative of being cast out of the Garden of Eden reflects poorly on the serpent, who guards the Tree of Life in many cultures. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge have been used interchangeably in the story of exile from eternal life. Serpents wrapped around an axis (a variant on the Axis Mundi) are Greek symbols still used today, evolved from the age of animism when the twisting action of the serpent had to do with what ancient medicine people saw as DNA or the key of life.

The caduceus, a Greek symbol of two snakes intertwined around the axis or rod with wings, is attributed to commerce, negotiation and eloquence of speech associated with the god Hermes. We often confuse this symbol with the Rod of Asclepius, a trademark today meaning medicine and health care. But it is only a single snake on the Axis. There seems to be an almost mystic connection modern commerce and medicine makes with the Guardian of the Tree of Life, which remains a symbol in western culture. The Rod of Asclepius suggests that ancient and original instructions from nature's apothecary forms the foundation (earth) of the highly technological medical and healthcare system people have today. Perhaps these symbols carry an energetic thread of hope that a *revival* of the true nature of these symbols would bring us back to the Garden of Eden, a place where innocence and the recognition of oneness with nature prevails.

Many traditions, for example the Peruvian culture, say they were never cast from the garden and therefore remain a part of nature. They have no doubt about who their brothers and sisters in the natural world are. Adopted by western culture, the story of being cast out for thousands of years, having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has left us orphans. Rather than navigate life from our intuition and hearts, we've had to employ our minds to navigate Mother Earth, our rightful mother.

Many years ago I was a student of Alberto Villodo learning the ways of the medicine wheel. At the center lies the Tree of Life, its roots growing deep into the earth and its branches reaching into the heavens, connecting all beings to a great web of life. This tree is the center of the universe. In my Nahua tradition, the Tree of Life is called Chichihualcua, or Tree to Above. The Chichihualcua is an invisible conduit or energetic force that connects us and all of life's entire soul, the invisible and visible of our bodies, to the divine realms. The story of being cast from the Garden of Eden suggests that human beings received *will*, a loss of naivety about life being eternal. Basically, we were faced with good and evil and that life is finite.

This story of being cast out from the garden misses an important element from many of the stories from other traditions. The Wiraxika (or Huichol) tradition of Mexico, says, yes, we have a will (meaning a mind to choose). However, we were granted this mind to do one thing that animals and plants could not do: give gratitude to all of life. Not just the Wiraxika, but all extant indigenous people have elaborate ceremonies of appreciation to maintain balance, following the original instructions of reciprocity.

Those of us born into a Judeo-Christian society grew up internalizing our culture's *original story* of being cast out of paradise and separated from our divine Creator. This story tends to permeate our lives whether we are raised in a religious home or not, causing feelings of abandonment, betrayal and separation from the divine. If we wish to heal our wounds, it's crucial that we discard this myth, based on a fall from grace, and realize we have always been part of the Garden of Eden.

~ Alberto Villodo

We would have to use our mind to live, yet, all of life gives what is needed when we acknowledge and give thanks. The nature of our relationship with the plants and animals and every other being on earth — the soil, rains, clouds, everyone — allows us, and expects us, to express our words of praise. We are not separate, nor should the planet

simply get rid of humans and everything would be fine. No, we have a role and it is very important.

As you can see, this role greatly differs from having *free will* without awareness that allows us to plow the earth into dust, spray chemicals on land and plants making everyone sick, having a *belief* that all our relatives in Nature are commodities to be traded and resourced (even humans—especially children and women, and even body parts). In this realm of unconsciousness where we marginalize the World Tree, people take the Sun’s dawn and dusk for granted. Overcast or rainy days (“bad weather”) intrude on our “happiness” and we guzzle gasoline freely as if we’ve been granted an eternal supply. “Free will” without awareness has created this crisis called climate change, as we misunderstood our role as human beings in the scheme of creation. Plants teach us that life should be treasured, that life doesn’t owe us anything.

My eyes opened to the wisdom of The Tree of Life when, as an anthropology student, I visited the tomb of Tutankhamen in Seattle, as part of its 70’s world tour. Among the artifacts on display was the symbol of the ouroboros, the snake devouring its own tail. This motif represents the cycle of life, infinity and renewal. The Egyptian king’s world was surrounded with this kind of symbolism of life and death. After my Catholic upbringing, which made Christ the symbol of life, death and resurrection, I wanted to know more.

One of the earliest known inscriptions of the ouroboros motif was on the cover of the 14th century BCE Enigmatic Book of the Netherworld, an Egyptian funerary text also in the tomb of King Tut. All early traditions revered life’s cyclical nature of the universe: creation out of destruction, life out of death. The snake eating its own tail to sustain life in an eternal cycle of renewal perfectly represents how we feed life from death. The Tree of Life displays the same process, feeding on the life of soil, and creating more life. I came to realize the ouroboros held the same message my little brother conveyed in the forest that day when he saw a baby tree sprouting out of the log, “there is life after death.”

Many of the goddess archetypes of old hold a serpent in their hands as they carry the medicine of the snake. This medicine holds the womb of the feminine, we bleed and release that which dies for life to be regenerated, to either be impregnated to bring forth life or die again. At this fine, deeply personal level for a woman, life goes on in a cycle from birth to death. The snake eating its tail represents the feminine. This Tree of Life and the Guardian (the ouroboros, a foundational principal of animism, shamanism and indigenous ceremonies world wide) live in every being.

The plant world presents this cycle from life to death and back in such a demonstrative and beautiful way, throughout the year from spring through winter and back again. Many traditions' feminine deities, such as Tukutsi Nakawe of the Wiraxika tradition, hold this energy of cycles. Tukutse Nakawe is revered as the goddess of growth and germination, often depicted as a spider, where she carries the life force energy for all living beings in a ball of silk on her back. When a Wixarika woman weaves, she creates the world all over again, with kupuri (life force energy). It is our responsibility to care for life; Humans are Responsible to Life. The Tree of Life and each goddess of creation reminds us of our role within this great scheme of the universe.

The ancient story of living in the garden also lives deeply in our bones. This is simply a process or *matter* (Latin for mother) of remembering. My mother's fear of starving as a child because of the poor health of the *soil* (the matter), the elemental forces of Earth's response to blow away the soil, was a matter of unintended consequences provoked by the actions of the early settlers, my great grandparents among them. Fear lived so deep in my mother's bones that in the end, she actually died from starvation. She had Alzheimers for eighteen years, which shut down the neuron-mechanism that would tell her that she was hungry. She had lost her memory to eat.

From my perspective though, my mother's inherited *belief* in Manifest Destiny ultimately caused her to lose her deep feminine connection to the Tree of Life. She lost the *mother* of herself; her connection to Earth

and all that mattered. The disease of losing one's memory is soul loss. Modernity has led humans to ultimately forget their true purpose of giving gratitude for life, to love all our relations. My mother's sisters have also suffered from Alzheimers: they've forgotten, too, who they *really* are and where they *belong* in the world. The matter of not feeling like one belongs, this orphan mentality directly relates to memory loss. The disease of memory loss is the sixth leading cause of death in the world, according to a 2024 report from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) of people over 65. This fact alone says that we have forgotten our way. We have forgotten our relationship to the Tree of Life.

The extermination of the serpent by St. Patrick of Ireland, a celebration that takes place every year around the world on March 17th, tells the tale of forgetfulness. Whether this tale, hailing from the 6th century A.D., is true or not, doesn't really matter. The fact that we continue to celebrate this *holy day* symbolizes the eradication of paganism (in my case, animism) and the triumph of Christianity. Vanquishing the Guardian of the Tree of Life puts the cyclical nature and our care of nature in jeopardy. This is a world wide pandemic of memory loss; we've forgotten how to live in balance with the original instructions from the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life is telling me, however, that there is a way out of this mess we've gotten ourselves into. I hear the words, "Do not be afraid." In the coming paragraphs and chapters I will tell you many stories of redemption, of ways to come back into relationship with nature. Plants have been given the role of being medicine for whatever ails and whomever is ailing. They come to the rescue at roadside scars, deadened soil, as poultices for wounds, they warm us in the cold, they give us shelter, food and flavoring, beauty for our eyes to feast on, clothing, gasoline and oil, and medicine. Many forms of medicine. We are plants. Everything on earth is made from plants, including this petroleum we burn. Nothing is lost, just simply transformed.