

# Patterns of Creation

## Logos and the Tree of Life in the Gospel of John

Stephen Pope BD MA

Axis Mundi Books 2012

### Introduction

*In the beginning was the Logos:* the essence and unity of Life. I have written this book because these opening words to the Gospel of John have always spoken to me of the deep connection of all life, the patterns of creation. They always seemed to point to something beyond me, to a greater sense of life and the unity of all things. Only as that sense of *something* and *me* began to diminish did I begin to feel the reality of greater awareness that continually flows into all things, where there is no fear, need, or separation. This book, like the Gospel itself, is about that revelation, which is bound to occur within every awakening human being, because spiritual consciousness is the essence of who we really are.

Although this book presents a new look at the mystical teachings found in the Gospel of John, it is not a commentary; its primary purpose is the same as that of the Gospel itself: to help you awaken to the greater consciousness that exists as the core of your Being, and to begin to live from your spiritual heart or center, which connects you with the entire circle of life. This realization requires that we strip away centuries of dogmas and doctrines, and all the mind-made images of God that obscure the essence of its teachings.

There are many names and words used to describe the unseen unity of life we call God. This is beyond anything that your mind can conceive of as anything, yet exists as your Essence deep within you. This is what the concept of Logos reveals to us - the simple and intimate Essence of life. It is the mind, with all its distractions, that brings the illusion that your spiritual Being, your connection with God, is far from you, hidden in some deep mystery that can only be realized in some future time.

The secret of the Gospel is that everything it describes exists within you *now*. And it is you and no one else who will bring it to life. Everything in life, everything you see and touch, and everyone you meet, reflects that inner reality. It is your perception of that reflection of life that changes as you awaken spiritually. This is equally true of reading spiritual writing such as John's Gospel.

One of our problems in the modern world is that we have become conditioned by the Western concept of thinking, intellect and mind, which influences our understanding of words, reading and writing. This makes it difficult for us to experience the reading of sacred texts as meditation or contemplation, in which the observing consciousness meets with the reality behind the symbols contained in the writings. Instead, these symbols have

been turned into mental concepts, which means that we no longer allow them to open out, so that what they represent can be felt as living reality within.

Before reading any sacred text, it is important to begin by being as present as you can; to still and silence the mind, since the text can only mirror back your own level of awareness.

For this reason, Chapters Two to Thirteen of this book contain exercises to help you raise awareness before you begin to meditate on the symbolism in the text. The book also contains visual meditations, or inner journeys, that can be used to help you deepen your awareness of the teachings in the Gospel of John. It is only as we learn to suspend, and go beyond, the thinking mind that our awareness deepens, and the reality of the teachings begins to take effect in us.

The teachings of the Gospel are not something to be believed or disbelieved — they can only be *known*. To begin to understand this, first learn *To Be*, and so allow all things, all creatures, and all people, *To Be*. To be present as fully as possible wherever, and in whatever situation you may find yourself is the essence and simplicity of the mystical teachings found in John's Gospel.

## Chapter One

### In the Beginning

The opening lines of the Gospel of John are one of the world's great spiritual poems. These few short lines weave together the most profound teachings on the relationship between God, existence, creation and humanity. The words, like those of all true sacred writing, are uttered on the edge of silence: they are the last words that can be spoken before language itself is no longer of use.

The opening words "In the beginning" refer us back to the opening line of the creation story contained in the Book of Genesis. But for the Jewish mystics the creation — *Bereshith (In Hebrew)* — was not a story to be read and believed in, or a series of events that had taken place in the remote past. Creation is the continual outpouring of life *in the ever present now*, understood through direct experience as continually unfolding out of this eternal present moment, within all forms of life.

This knowledge and understanding came through the practice of Merkabah, a word that means "Chariot" and its practitioners were referred to as the "Riders in the Chariot." The chariot is a symbol for the Soul, the vehicle in which we journey through life, and which takes us in what the chariot riders called the mystical ascent or descent: the inner journey of awakening consciousness from the depths of physical matter, through the lower halls of psychological form, to the upper halls of creative pattern, into union with our Divine source: I Am — *Being*. In the language of John's Gospel, this is to experience Logos, the

Greek concept normally translated as Word, which in fact is untranslatable. We will explore the deeper meanings of Logos throughout this book.

By the first century of the Common Era, Jewish mystical teachers had begun to refer to the passing of this knowledge from one generation to the next by the Hebrew word Kabbal, which means, “to receive.” It is from this Hebrew word that the term Kabbalah has come. In order to receive we have to create an inner space of silence and stillness; go beyond the constraints of the thinking, analytical, time bound mind, and leave behind the distractions that block our connection with our true self and the abundance of life we call God. Learning to find our still center and inner silence is the primary purpose of Kabbalah, and of all mystical teachings.

### **The Tree of Life: Symbol of Living Torah**

The word Torah is normally associated with the first five books of the Old Testament. However, Torah means *teachings on the laws of life* and these cannot be contained by the written word. Every living creature, every human being, is a manifestation of the laws of life. They are in our breath and blood, in the great web of life from the smallest subatomic particles to the great galaxies of the Cosmos. We ourselves become *the teaching* when we realize our spiritual center, our own *Being*; when we hear, see, and feel its creative patterns come alive in ourselves, and in all our fellow creatures in the world around us.

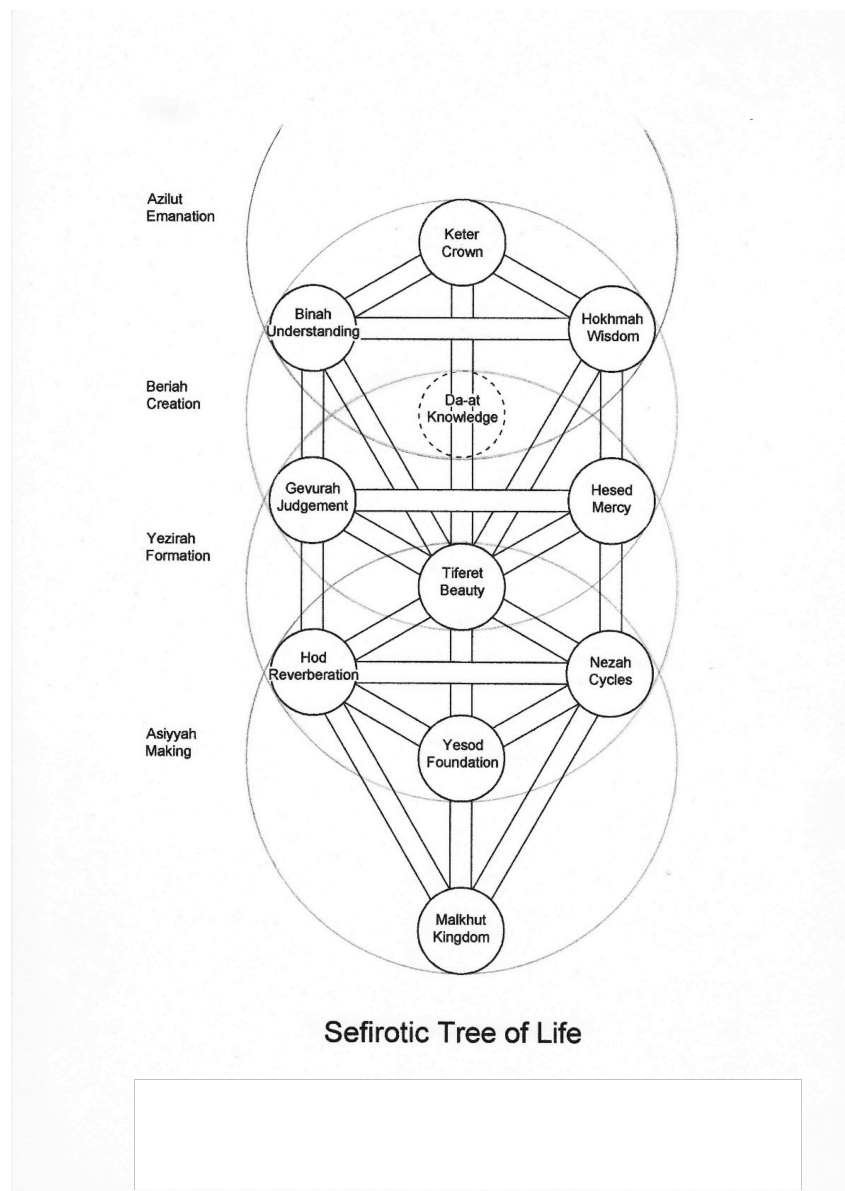
This is depicted in the symbol of the great Tree of Life: the single source of created existence, from which consciousness expresses and realizes itself through bearing the fruit of all life forms, holding them in their interconnected patterns. For this reason, it was said by the Jewish mystics that the Torah given to Moses on the mythical Mount Sinai was, and remains, oral. It was to be written down only in order that it might not be forgotten. It is the oral tradition, consciously carried on the breath that connects, that brings any teaching and the seeds it contains to life, because it is the living creative source of life that the written Torah can only point towards.

The teachings in the Gospel of John that we have inherited today are part of this living tradition. First taught by word of mouth, some of its teachings were eventually written down a century or more later. What is essential is to realize *now* that the Gospel story is speaking of your own individual relationship to life and to God — whatever that means to you. The teachings and your own unique understanding of them come to life as you awaken spiritually to the great circle of life.

Throughout the book, you will find geometric diagrams that are synonymous with Kabbalah. The ratio and patterns in these mandalas are contained within the teaching stories of the Gospel. You can use them as the basis for your own meditation and contemplation, and they will help to clarify the different levels of conscious awareness that are woven into the text of the Gospel. The individuals that we meet in this story, the landscape through which they move and the way in which they meet, converse, and relate to one another personify the archetypal Divine, spiritual, and psycho-somatic patterns that exist within you, and which are depicted on the Tree of Life diagram you see.

*Everything presented in the Gospel stories points to your own inner awakening: realizing your own consciousness. This awakening is represented here in the geometric form of the Tree of Life.*

*The classical depiction of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life with English translations of the four worlds, ten Sephirot and 22 interconnecting paths. The names of the four worlds and the Sephirot come from Old Testament texts, and the 22 paths represent the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.*



The Gospel story maps out your inner spiritual journey and each of the characters you meet represent your own inner levels of awareness: states of unconsciousness and consciousness that you must first recognize, then integrate and transform on your journey through life. This is not portrayed as a purely transcendent journey: it shows that you also need to have your feet firmly planted in the Earth, and live consciously in your physical body.

In the Gospel, the figure of Jesus becomes the personification of the Logos, the good shepherd, and the redeeming Sun God. The symbolism is not concerned with the historical Jesus but with the perennial archetypes that the symbolic name Joshua–Jesus and Christos–Messiah represent.

In the translation of the Gospel I have prepared for this book, Jesus tells his disciples “walk with me, step by step.” This is because *Logos* is your eternal *Being* on your journey through life. It is not separate from who you really are, and when you consciously realize *Being*, you become at-one with the whole of life.

The Gospels use the ancient symbol of a point within a circle to represent unity and wholeness, the One, *Being*, source of all life. This circle is subdivided into four, and then twelve equal divisions, to symbolize the multiplicity and diversity of life, which come from the One source. In the Old Testament first Moses, then the Anointed Joshua son of Nun take up the central point around which the twelve tribes of Israel revolve.

Exactly the same motif is used in the New Testament.

The term Anointed means the Messiah, and the Anointed — or Christ Jesus in Greek — stands at the center, with the twelve disciples revolving around this central stillness. As in the Old Testament, these twelve divisions — also known through the Zodiac — represent twelve aspects of Cosmic life through which humanity passes: all humanity, both male and female, and all the races and creeds we might identify with, reflecting the One Divine source at the center of all life.

This center exists within you, here and now, and only the illusions that exist within the mind keep you separate from it.

Because male names are attributed to all of these aspects, and to the figure at the central core, this spiritual motif, taken literally, has given the false impression that the whole scheme of spiritual enlightenment is exclusively masculine, and that the Gospel teachings were spread, without exception, by men. So many of us assume this to be true when reading Bible stories, because it has been deeply woven into the fabric of our religious and social culture for thousands of years.

## **Reawakening to the Feminine**

The marginalization of Women and the Divine Feminine in religion and society is part of our increasingly destructive behavior towards the natural world and each other. The figure of Mary, one of the few feminine figures to make it into the Gospel stories, has been so reduced that she is only a shadow of the great Triple Goddess, the feminine face of the One, Isis-Sophia, which she truly represents.

In the New Testament, she plays minor supporting roles to the central male figure — the masculine face of the One. But this has done nothing to stop millions of women and men from being drawn to her sacred sites, caves, wells, and springs, or consciously connecting with the beauty of the natural world and the fellow creatures we share life with. This

natural upwelling of the energy of the Divine feminine still pours through us because it courses through the life we see and experience within and about us, and it naturally increases as we awaken spiritually. Without it, we remain fragmented and divided — devoid of our potential to realize Logos, and reflect the circle of life. This suppression and disempowerment of the feminine needs to be urgently, and consciously redressed, if we are to truly realize our place within the circle of life, and end our destructive behavior towards it.

Spiritual awakening involves realizing equal balance between the feminine and masculine within the circle of life. The names given to the authors of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, depict the four types of humanity, both women and men: in the classical world, that of action, thinking, feeling and intuition.

Many other Gospels were also written: one was the Gospel according to Mary (Magdalene), fragments of which were found in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts and also some later texts, circa fifth century, belonging to the Coptic Church. Her teachings focus on the dissolution of thought forms in which we are entrapped, the end of the illusions of separation from the One and the Good. The Magdalene is key to the deeper understanding of the Gospel teachings on re-unification; we look at her role in greater depth in Chapter Twelve and explore the figure of Mary as Great Mother in Chapter Ten on the marriage at Cana. (The symbolism of the Divine Feminine can be understood more fully by reading Chapter Fourteen on the history of symbols and ideas.)

## **Text and Translation**

This book concentrates on the ideas and symbols at the beginning and end of the Gospel. I look in depth at the first two chapters and at the symbolism of the crucifixion, death and resurrection at the end. Beginning and end act as a framework that take you into the deeper layers contained within the Gospel and within your Self. This helps to give a deeper understanding of the parables and teaching stories, which are framed by beginning and end.

It is important to note that there is no single original copy of the Gospel, and that there are many minor variations in the surviving texts. The stories in the Gospel were first transmitted by word of mouth in the language of Aramaic. This was a form of Hebrew, which was the spoken language of the Middle Eastern world in which the drama is set, and was the primary medium of the teachings. There are Aramaic manuscripts of the Gospel, which I have cross-referenced whilst preparing the translation. Arguments as to whether the original text of the Gospel was in Greek or Aramaic do not concern the teachings presented in this book, as there are no great differences in the Aramaic and Greek versions of the text covered in the book.

The mystical teachers of ancient Palestine were steeped in the esoteric and philosophical concepts of what was to become the Hebrew Bible, whilst those of the Jewish Diaspora were deeply rooted in the Hellenistic cultures and were instrumental in bringing the two traditions together. Biblical Greek and Hebrew words are containers for spiritual ideas — the texts lose much of their depth when translated, particularly when they are trans- lated

without awareness of the different levels of consciousness they represent. Many of the Greek and Hebrew words can be compared to icons: they contain images that, in meditation and contemplation, open out like the corolla of a flower to reveal an inner world, the core of which lies within each of us.

In addition, the Old Testament quotations in the text of the Gospel are cross-referenced with their Hebrew sources. Some simple explanations of the Jewish and Semitic language roots relevant to the Gospel are also given in the book. Indeed, since the Greek text is the work of a Jewish mystical school, it cannot be properly understood without the Jewish mystical framework in which it is set.

It is not necessary to have any knowledge of Kabbalah to read this book. However, if you are unfamiliar with its teachings and terminology, and would like to explore them further, you will find a section that will help orientate you in its symbolic language in Chapter Fifteen.

For those of you who would like to explore the historical development of the ideas and images discussed here, in more detail, you can turn to the separate history section, which you will find in Chapter Fourteen.

© 2012 Stephen Pope / Axis Mundi Books

<https://patternsofcreation.com>