

A Reflection on Being and Becoming in a Conscious Evolving Universe.

Anne Bliss



"Although you appear in earthy form, your essence is pure consciousness. You are the fearless guardian of Divine Light. So come, return to the root of the root of your own soul." ⁱ

Last month's beautiful reflection by Trisha Boetto invited us to enter into the wisdom of trees and to what we might learn from them during our mutual earthly inhabitation. This reflection explores the image of a tree to inquire about who we are at our deepest belonging, and who we choose to become in each conscious moment. Living on a finite planet with rapid transitions occurring on all fronts is daunting and, at the same time, a perfect opportunity to contribute to our collective consciousness in this unfolding sacred cosmos.

I have found Karl Jaspers' framework of 'Axial Consciousness'ⁱⁱⁱ to be insightful as I realise how much my understanding of God, the universe, and myself has been influenced by Western philosophical thought. Jaspers identified a major shift in the evolving of global consciousness from 'Pre-axial' to 'First Axial'. Other writersⁱⁱⁱ have extended this framework to include an emerging Second Axial Age. In this radically new shift 'new wineskins' are called for to receive the latest fermentation in consciousness.

At a glimpse, 'Pre-axial' Consciousness' is characterized by a collective sense of being and belonging to each other, to the earth and to the cosmos. However, under the influence of early Greek philosophical thought we shifted towards a more individuated and interior sense of self. In this 'First Axial' period, consciousness is perceived as being a quality that we innately possess and that takes place in our minds. Similarly, matter and spirit are seen as oppositional and hierarchical. The 'Greater Chain of Being' depicts a pyramid with God (pure spirit) at the apex, followed by angels, humans (bridging both spirit and matter) animals, plants, minerals and elements. This paradigm became further embedded during the Age of Enlightenment with philosophers such as Descartes. Within this perspective (hu)man is seen as 'the measure of all things', and the universe, created solely for our benefit.

'Second Axial Consciousness', however, entails a profound leap in perspective from 'Anthropocentric' to 'Cosmotheandric'.^{iv} In the old paradigm, science and religion were separate domains with contrasting and almost irreconcilable values. Now, cosmologists, theologians, and scientists from a range of disciplines are beginning to converge in their inquiry about the nature of consciousness and the mystery of a finely tuned universe.

ⁱ 'The Root of the Root of Your Own Soul'; Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi

ⁱⁱ 'The Axial Age; 5 Fast Facts'; www.britannica.com

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Welcome to Second Axial Consciousness'; Brian Stout (substack) December 2025

^{iv} 'The Cosmotheandric Experience: emerging religious consciousness'; <https://raimon-panikkar.org>

In the new paradigm, the cosmos, God and the human co-constitute all of existence and dwell within each other. Consciousness is understood to be a fundamental component of the universe, with all things existing in a dynamic movement towards higher consciousness and complexity. Thomas Berry^v (v) built upon the work of Teilhard de Chardin in this respect and his writings expound further on what he terms as 'The New Cosmology'.

In Cosmotheandric thought, the cosmos, God, and the human - indeed all things - exist within entangled realities, where, as Ilia Delio^{vi} (vi) puts it, we live in a field of infinite potentialities and fathomless being. At each moment we can choose our becoming. In today's world of persistent and deepening divisiveness, I sense that our greatest challenge as 'human becomings' is to move beyond the dualistic mind into oneness. It is heartening to find that many of the world's contemplative traditions share common teachings on non-duality. This is true, too, of indigenous cultures past and present.

Jesus was a master of non-dual or unitive consciousness, and many of his teachings and parables invite us to look at the lens through which we view 'reality'. For instance, the word 'repent', used by Jesus and John the Baptist, stems from the Greek word '*metanoia*' meaning 'to go beyond mind'. In her book, *The Wisdom Jesus*, Cynthia Bourgeault,^{vii} brings a contemplative lens to the teachings of Jesus as she unwraps his metaphors. The Kingdom parables do not so much represent a distant realm as they do an expanded consciousness growing within us, as leaven works in bread and a tiny mustard seed grows into a tree providing goodness for all.



The image of a tree first came to me on a retreat some years ago, when we were invited to draw or write about a symbol that represented our lives. For me, a tree emerged with a large firm taproot and a network of interconnected underground roots. A dense crown of intricate branches reaching towards the light forms the crest of the tree.

The following poem 'Sister Tree' evolved from the image and speaks of life's imperative to bring forth life, through our relationships with the earth and with each other. Indeed, it is by noticing the Divine in all things that we help to birth life to its fullness. We share the body of this earth that nourishes us, the Spirit that moves freely as it wills, breathing Life into all, and the Light of this world that cannot be vanquished.

SISTER TREE

Our roots lie darkly within the womb
of a 14.8 million years old
spun-dust mother earth
silently spiralling depthless space.

Shoots draw down into the wildness of things,
through loam, clay, silty soils,
in desert grasslands, mountain crags
and dense tropical ranges,
probing, seeking anchorage
for their crown above.

^v Berry, Thomas (2009) '*The Sacred Universe*'; Columbia University Press

^{vi} 'Second Axial Consciousness: Building the Altar on the Open Ground'; www.TheFutureofReligion.com

^{vii} Bourgeault, Cynthia, (2008) '*The Wisdom Jesus*'; Shambhala Publications

Such are the places where the child plays,
 explores and marvels at Mystery.
 She knows she is home.
 Taproot grows fat to last the hidden depth,
 gift of Life in all things.

 Laterals, adventitious and fibrous roots find footings
 that the tree knows are good.
 Thus, the earnest life surges far beneath the heaving world.

 Once, long ago, life above danced freely,
 like wind-blown petals in spring,
 sang softly as silver dolphins diving, smiling.
 Echoes of delight rang out to the furthest realms.
 Now, this song, strangely sombre,
 murmurs mournfully... foreboding tunes.

 Tap root pushes deeper.
 In the dark depths of its belonging,
 life pulses strong, surfacing through veins, buds, unfurling leaves,
 shimmering.

 Thus the tree is seen.
 Majestic host for feathered and furry things,
 for crawly, creeping humble beings,
 and weary two-legged ones.
 Nectar, nuts, berries and leaves,
 this gracious Lady so generously bequeaths.

 Listen. Come. Taste, touch and smell.
 Take her in.
 Attend, as if every breath counted on it.
 She, infinitesimal singularity,
 just as you, just as me.

(Anne Bliss 2021)

The roots that have sustaining and continuing to sustain my tree of life represent a web of familial and spiritual ancestry as well as a diversity of living wisdom teachings from many traditions. The taproot, the very substance of the tree, is my deep belonging to and in the Eternal Word of Christ. He is 'the root of the root of my soul'.

My spiritual journey has taken me from a belief in a distant God to one that is mysteriously present in all of life and at the same time, beyond all. The fundamental nature of God is love, a live relational energy drawing all of creation towards ultimate union. This is the Omega Point of which Teilhard speaks. Through engagement with the Contemplative Evolution Network and with a growing number of global interfaith/inter-spiritual communities, I am becoming increasingly aware that we are all expressions of this divine essence. A diversity of views and language does not divide but rather enhances the awesome reality of this fundamental truth.

I sense that God enjoys us sharing the vastness of Divine Being. A beautiful Sufi phrase encapsulates this sentiment: *"I was a hidden treasure and longed to be made known."*^{viii} (viii). We are called to listen to and open to the sacred in each. When we open and receive the essential presence of another, no matter how different to ourselves, we become enlarged, compassionate, respectful, and somehow blessed beyond measure.



We all need each other in this endeavour. The African word *'Ubuntu'* which translates as *'I am because we are'*, expresses a mutuality of belonging to a greater whole in which each supports the collective well-being, without which we would not thrive. In the same way, trees reveal an amazing intelligence of how they communicate and support each other to thrive.

In *'The Hidden Life of Trees'*^{ix}(ix), the author describes how the roots of trees emit electro-chemical signals that convey to surrounding trees when there are stressors in the environment. When one tree is cut down, the nearby trees pump sugar into the stump to keep the tree alive. When we are under stress, our neurochemistry sends signals which can alter how we perceive 'reality', and this impacts our relationship with everything. Our thoughts and emotions can colour our perceptual lens and affect who we, in turn, become. Both science and contemplative wisdom traditions coalesce in this understanding.

As we enter the Season of Creation this month, may we open and receive the gift of Life within each other, may we sow seeds that lead to the full flowering of creation, and may we tend the tiny portion of consciousness that is ours to offer in this magnificent cosmic unfolding. Finally, may the blessings flowing from this endeavour bring healing to all in need and to the earth we share.

(Isaiah 55:10- 12) "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty but accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

^{viii} *'The Hidden Treasure'*; www.islamicity.org

^{ix} Wohlleben, Peter (2016) *'The Hidden Life of Trees'*; Black Inc.