

“Trees In Our Cosmos”



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My Story With Trees

I was born a city kid – New York City to be exact. We city people walked everywhere or rode in taxis, buses and subways; that was the life. But amidst the concrete, tall buildings, and masses of people, there was “The Park”. For as long as I can remember, we always played in the park. And in the park there were trees - the big, massive, mighty oaks and maples of the East. They commanded your attention, begged for a hug and welcomed a climb or a game of hide and seek and provided a nice shady spot to sit.

Around the time I was ten my family and I moved to the “country” - a house on Long Island with one acre and a treehouse. This treehouse was to become a haven for me and my friends for many years. We went there immediately after school. It was our space to tell secrets of friendships, first kisses and loves.

I even took to sleeping in the tree house most of the summer when I was not upstate at camp. Upstate New York is mountainous, and I begged to be able to go away to camp for the summer for eight weeks. The idea of sleeping in a bunkhouse in the woods was just plain magical. I was free to enjoy the great outdoors after riding horses and doing camp activities. My friend and I would play hooky, going on grand adventures to explore all the woods around us. We would start on a path and go wherever it would take us. I never had any fear in the woods even when they were very thick, dark and shadowy; I always knew I'd find my way home. These were grand times and I would look forward to them each year by crossing out the days till camp starting in June!

In my 14th summer my family and I drove across country from New York to San Francisco. As we were driving over the Bighorn Mountains I knew I was destined to live in a vast country with tall mountains and my heart would not rest until I could call this country home. I was drawn to the beauty, rawness and, even the danger. Part of the exquisite beauty was the trees – spruce, pine, aspen – so fresh, so alive, calling to my soul.

Years went by and life took me to the West Coast, New England and for a long time the South - to the soft willows, magnolias, flowering trees of all kinds to the

swampy, mossy trees that hung in the humidity. During this time I had begun to sense that the trees had knowledge; I didn't know how or what they knew just that they did. As I began my journeys out West in earnest I spent winters skiing and summers hiking through the aspens in the mountains. Trees kept calling me.

When I was living in Tennessee I had a dream of the Beartooth Mountains. After locating them on a map, a trip was planned that summer. I explored the Beartooths on foot and on horse and for me there was no going back. The wilderness, the untouched land and forests took hold in my heart.

A year later I moved into, and still live in, a log house. The logs are massive, cut down in 1979 from the old grown trees from the Glacier Park area. The home was first set up like a European home where horses were housed on the first level. It is no coincidence I live in a "tree house."

So my adventure began anew. Thrilled to be in my mountain home, I set out to learn every inch of the forest. I have climbed up and over all the plateaus in the Beartooths, sitting with, talking to and hugging many a tree. Each summer I am drawn to the Bighorn Mountains, where I have trekked many miles for countless hours. I have visited an ancient mountaintop where a Medicine Wheel sits at 10,000 feet. This sacred place has windblown trees that serve as ceremonial sites where I have sat in communion with the trees.

I walk daily among the trees on my property; the spruce, the pines, the aspens and ones I have named the "Hackles," because of their thorns. In speaking to the Hackles one tree revealed his name as Many Winters. As I sat with this tree I received much wisdom.

History and Function

Trees are outrageously generous. Trees act as our planet's lungs; they inhale carbon dioxide, exhale oxygen, release water into the air and are responsible for rain. They store carbon in their tissues, create habitats and biodiversity, and provide shade, shelter, fuel, heat and housing. In a broad sense a tree is any plant with a single woody stem or trunk. Trees can survive in the most extreme conditions. Trees first appeared 390 million years ago. The ginkgo tree is an ancient survivor; we can trace its origins

back 180 million years, long before human beings arrived. Trees hold much wisdom and have witnessed the rise of civilization.

Tree Symbolism

In myths and legends around the world trees symbolically appear as ladders between worlds, as sources of life and wisdom and as physical forms of supernatural beings.

One can easily see how the tree serves as a symbolic living link between this world and those of the supernatural; its roots are buried in the earth (the lower world), its trunk in the middle world and its branches reaching toward the upper world.

The tree of life is a recurring symbol in the artwork of ancient cultures. In Judaism the meaning of the Tree of Life is very powerful and it is often seen as the key to consciousness. The Tree of Life is truly a symbol of the Creator. The Tree of Life is portrayed in various religions across the globe from the Mayan, Sumerians and Assyrians to ancient Egyptians. As the Hebrew religion has the Kabbalah "Tree of Life" symbol, the Buddhists have the Bodhi tree (a ficus) that Buddha sat under when he became enlightened. In the Nordic cultures we find the Tree of Life called the Yggdrasil, a massive holy ash tree. In China the peach tree is thought to be magical, as one who eats the fruit becomes immortal. Celtic tradition revered the ash, calling it the "World Tree," a mythic tree at the center of the world. The Celtic peoples also worshipped groves of trees, believing them to be embodied deities. The Tree of Life teaches us we are deeply rooted, many branched and have the same innate desire to reach for the light.



Myths Associated with Trees

In many myths great powers are associated with trees:

- The ancient yew is said to have sprung from the staff of St. Martin. This particular tree is still living in Brittany; Robin Hood of Sherwood used the yew as his bow and married Maid Marion under a yew tree.
- The oak is one of the three sacred faerie trees and major cultures throughout Europe have held oak in mighty esteem. To the Celts the oak was a tree associated with the connection to the high king and prosperity.
- The apple tree has close links with the Shaman, the wise woman and the magician. It is used for other world journeys. The Celtic myth names one of these other worlds "Avalon." Avalon, it was believed, was a physical manifestation of an other world paradise.
- The weeping willow myths generally concentrate on its drooping, visually sad appearance. In Japanese folklore, when a warrior reaches for his love he finds instead his arms full of the wispy leaves of the willow tree. When he dies, from his remains spring a willow tree that entwines with his love; beneath the earth their roots embrace.
- Spruce trees, symbolic of the sky and directional north, are sacred to the Hopi Indians. According to Hopi myth, the spruce tree was once a medicine man who transformed himself into a tree.

- Aspen leaves appear to tremble in the wind, thus the Celts said the tree was communicating between this world and the next. The Celts also chose the lightweight wood of the aspen tree to make their shields, which were thought to protect them from spiritual harm more than physical harm.

-Ash was one of the magical trees of Ireland. St. Patrick allegedly banished the snakes from Ireland with an Ash stick. Ash was the preferred wood for magic wands.

Greek mythology has many stories of nymphs (goddesses of nature) who turned into trees. The nymph Daphne turned herself into a laurel tree when trying to flee Apollo. Apollo then adopted the Laurel as his sacred plant. Other mythic transformations also symbolize love. Upon the death of the married couple Baucus and Philemon, the Greek gods changed them into Oak and Linden trees that then grew to become an intertwining pair of trees.

Modern Myths

The fighting trees depicted in “The Wizard of Oz” are ancient beings thousands of years old, and their job is to keep intruders out of The Enchanted Forest, which they guard and protect. When Dorothy and her companions try to enter the forest, the trees picked Scarecrow up and threw him back. They also disliked people who eat their apples, and resorted to throwing apples at Dorothy to keep her out of forest.

In “The Lord of the Rings” trees come alive in the last march of the Ents. Treebeard, the oldest of the Ents, leads 50 others to the walls of Isengard, where the power of their voices cause great destruction.

The Tree of Souls in the film “Avatar” is a point of extreme spiritual significance to the Na'vi people. The tree has the capacity to connect directly to the human nervous system. The roots of the Hometree are capable of initiating a neural link with the Na'vi and allow all Na'vi to unite as one.

A willow known as the Whomping Willow in the Harry Potter books will attack anyone or anything that comes within range of its branches. Its job is protection of a given location. Throughout literature and film, trees are still lively in our imaginations as powerful beings.

Healing Qualities of Trees

1. Holly - A sacred tree to ancient Celts. It is written that the powdered leaves were brewed into tea for measles, the ashes from burning leaves were used for whooping cough and hot compresses made from leaves and bark helped ease broken bones and dislocations. Holly carries the meaning of protection from unwanted energies. Holly is a true friend that looks out for your health and welfare.
2. Heather – A symbol of passionate love, sacrifice, immortality and rite of passage. Its healing qualities include toning and soothing muscles and rheumatic pain, while also possessing antiseptic and diuretic qualities. The flower essence promotes generosity of spirit and awareness of others' needs.
3. Eucalyptus - A symbol of wealth and abundance. A fairy tree that makes anything possible, its oils are used for respiratory, viral, asthma, fever and speedy healing of fractures.
4. White Willow – Symbolizes feminine energy, brings healing visions and dreams and fulfills the wishes of the heart. She also reduces pain, inflammation, fevers, headaches and is good with eye problems.
5. Maple – It is the wood of longevity. It holds the wisdom of balance, promise and has very positive energy. In a recent scientific study dated 2011, researchers found 54 new compounds in maple syrup, several possessing antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer benefits.
6. Spruce – Is an excellent grounding tree, holding and storing large amounts of energy. A tea using young shoots promotes perspiration therefore reducing fevers. It is good for cleansing the system from bladder infections and scurvy; externally it is good for wounds, ulcers and sores. The pitch makes turpentine with powerful healing properties. The gum is used in incense, perfume, salves and adhesives.
7. Aspen – It is associated with the element of air, seen in action when the wind blows and the aspen leaves dance. Aspens symbolize protection and overcoming one's fear, while containing analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. Tea made from the leaves of aspen alleviates diarrhea and urinary disorders. A poultice can be made for cuts and bruises.

8. Pine – It reaches for the stars and eternal life. Pine attracts prosperity; it purifies and helps one to stay the course during difficult times. It has antiseptic, expectorant and tonic qualities. Pine needle tea can aid with bladder, urinary tract and kidney problems. The needles and shoots are rich in Vitamins A and C. The cones and needles are good for skin complaints and pneumatic pain. The essential oil is antiviral and antibacterial. Sitting under a Pine tree renews one's energy.
9. Elm - Signifies inner strength and the realm of intuition. Many Native American tribes have traditionally used the inner bark for colds and severe coughs. The inner bark is known as slippery elm and it is soothing and protective for muscle tissue. It is also an emollient, nutrient, astringent, anti-inflammatory and diuretic.
10. Hazel – Represents hidden wisdom. Wands made of this wood symbolize white magic. The nuts of this tree are filled with protein, Vitamin E, calcium, magnesium and potassium. The leaves can be used as teas in such ailments as varicose veins, circulatory problems, fevers and diarrhea.

Trees in the Shamanic Universe

Shamans in the Amazon are called Paleros (tree specialists). As part of the shaman's training, they undergo periods of time in the jungle where they must ingest infusions made from the barks of trees, be on a strict diet, and not be touched by anyone. During this time, a relationship between the Shaman and the tree spirits becomes established. The Shamans can then call on the tree spirits for energetic healing (medicinal or protective). Shamans believe that the tree spirits have a far greater mastery of the underworld, thus making them powerful allies in journeying. The tree spirit helps to guide the Shaman and each tree has a particular specialty in the kind of healing that it gives.

The tree becomes a gateway between worlds; therefore, Shamans liken the cosmos to a living tree - an evolving organism with intelligence and an awareness of its own being. Gaining the cooperation of nature spirits has always been an important Shamanic art. The Shamans knew that the tree spirits were loosely connected to their physical bodies, the actual physical tree. Trees enjoy great freedom on the astral plane and in other realms. Shamans use the trees to journey to the underworld via the roots,

the middle world is accessed by the trunk, and the upper world through the branches to the heavens.

In the Native American tradition, a cottonwood tree is located by the medicine person and brought back to the Sundance site where it is understood that that particular tree has chosen to be the center of the ceremony. The Nepalese Shamans use song and drumming to visualize a pine tree in the forest. Members of the village then go in search of the tree that was visualized. They proceed to cut down the tree, which becomes the focus in ritual and initiation.

The tree is the universal bridge that connects and allows the spirit to pass from one world to another.



Famous Ancient Trees Still Among Us

1. Old Tjikko – A Norway spruce in Sweden that is 9,550 years old.
2. Ballyconnell Yew – An ancient tree in Ireland that is well over 2000 years old.
3. Major Oak – This is the most famous and visited tree in Great Britain. It lives in Sherwood Forest and is about 800 years old.
4. Chandelier Tree – A vast redwood in Northern California; a passage for cars was cut through it's base. Is estimated to be 2,000 years old.
5. General Sherman Tree – A giant sequoia in California that is estimated to be 2,300-2,700 years old.

6. Methuselah – A bristlecone pine in California. At 4,700 years it is a candidate for the oldest known living organism.
7. Arbol de Tule – So large it was thought to be multiple trees; this tree in Mexico is between 1,200 and 3,000 years old.
8. Tree of Life – A mesquite tree in the middle of the desert in Bahrain. It is said to be 400 – 500 years old. The local inhabitants believe that this was the actual location of the Garden of Eden.
9. The Senator - The Senator is found in Big Tree Park, Longwood, Florida. It is the largest and oldest bald Cypress tree estimated to be 3,400-3,500 years old.
10. Old Hara – A Redwood located in the White Mountains of California that is the oldest known living tree. Its age is 5,065 years.

A clonal colony is a group of genetically identical individuals that can survive much longer than an individual tree. An example of this is a colony of 47,000 quaking aspens in Utah that is estimated to be 80,000 years old. This colony is found today in the Fishlake National Forest.

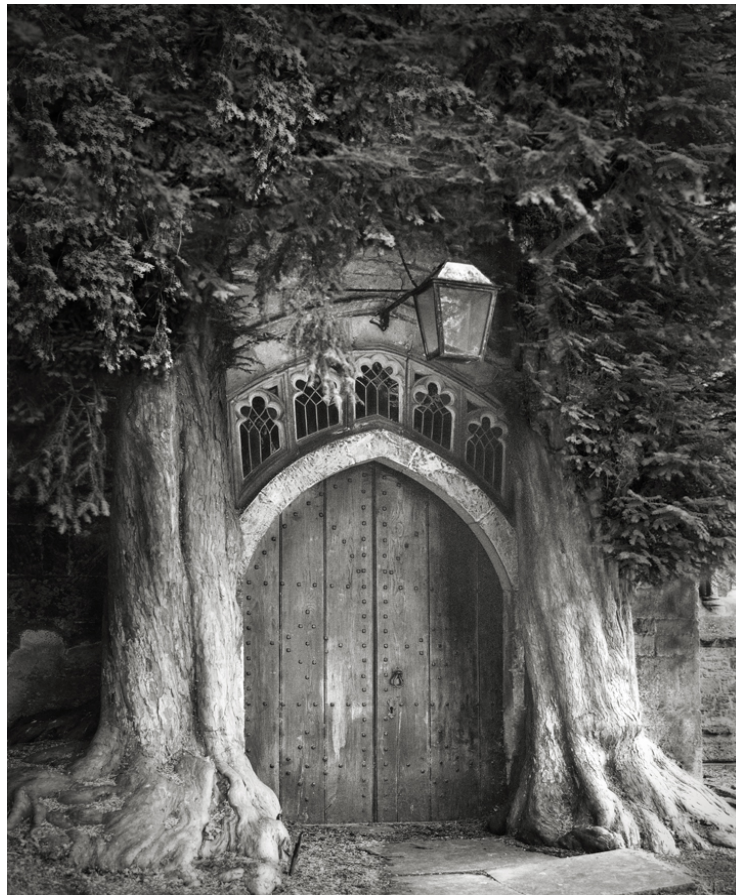
Diane Robbins, author of Tree Talk, believes that “trees are living libraries” we can tap into for knowledge and wisdom. You can call on trees and ask for information on many subjects. Trees are record keepers, guardians and guides.

Sharon Hidalgo, author of The Healing Power Of Trees, shares these words from the trees: “We are healers. You are healers. All life is sacred, as is our connection to you and you to us. Wake up and take your rightful place and heritage in the holy scheme of nature. We are not separate and never have been so paradise exists right here and now. Paradise is this planet in its beauty and perfection. We invite you to become one with us and recognize the perfection that you are and that we are. Remember, in protecting the tree people you are protecting your own species and all of life. This is what you are to do. This is your stewardship.”

Tree Meditation

The following are techniques I use when meditating with a tree. I praise and thank the tree for its beauty, gifts and willingness to share its knowledge as I slowly approach. I notice the sunlight, raindrops, snowfall and how the tree responds to the wind, whether a gentle breeze or a gust. I acknowledge the presence of all creatures, including the tree fairies. I will then circle the tree and find a spot to sit or stand, sometimes by holding a branch for guidance. While sitting I place my back against the tree, ground myself and sense in!

Sometimes a word or a vision appears; other times I ask for the tree to download information so that I may access it when the time comes. Some trees that I am in frequent conversation with have told me their names. The trees have become my loving guides and I can call on their presence wherever I may be. I am grateful for the loving support and generous friendship the trees have offered me. They truly enrich my life.



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