

Dancing Your Tree, Living As a Forest, Healing For Our Times

by Nada Anna Khodlova

The most prominent and affecting being of the forest is the tree. The reverence and adoration of trees has a strong psychological and social foundation in most all human cultures. Trees have been and remain, universal symbols, totems, and icons. Trees are one of the oldest life forms on our planet, according to myths they are the first living form that sprang out of the waters of chaos. From this, order and life ensued. Trees were believed to be all-knowing, all-powerful, all wise, ageless, and eternal. Trees have been the focus of peoples' admiration, reverence, fear, romance, mysticism, and worship through the ages. The collected history of many peoples consistently show a connection between their own creation and trees. Creation stories are filled with trees and forests and people.

"Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life."-Herman Hesse

Tree of Life

The veneration of the tree has been at the very center of ancient human's system of beliefs throughout time. It was considered to be the structural model of the universe. The tree was seen as the pillar, uniting the 3 parts of the universe. The roots representing the underworld; the crown stretching and reaching upward into space, representing the heavens; and the trunk, bridging both and representing the earth and all of life itself.

"Cosmos was imagined in the form of a gigantic tree, the mode of being of the cosmos and the first of all its capacity for endless regeneration."-Mircea Eliade

Since Neolithic times the tree of life has been identified as a symbol of the Great Mother Goddess. The veneration of the tree of life and coincidingly, the great mother goddess, has descended underground going from more overt practice and rituals in sacred groves to its more symbolic representation in folk arts such as textiles, bread making, and dance. Laura Shannon, a dance/movement therapist and ritual dance facilitator, has been researching and teaching the 3 measure folk dances of the Central and Eastern European region since the 1990's clearly affirming the connection of the dances as being an encoded representation of the tree of life. The tree of life dances represent growth, rest, and renewal as well as tapping into the divine energy of earth, sky, fertility, and the cosmic forces of life. They are a dance mantra of the Goddess, Shannon states (2010):

I see the three measure dances as a hidden mantra of the Goddess, secretly spoken in the soft touch of our feet on the ground, following footsteps laid down for us by women of long ago. When I dance Tree of life dances with my groups, I feel that we, too, are repeating this mantra, consciously affirming the timeless message of the Goddess: life in

rhythm, life in balance, we remember; life with joy, life with connection, we remember. As we dance, we know ourselves to be daughters of the Goddess, silently “writing” her name in the dance steps, which vanish without a trace after the circle disperses, leaving no outward sign. (p. 152)



(Gold Seal Ring from Isopata tomb near Knossos, Crete, ca. 1500 BCE, showing dancing priestesses with upraised arms, descending Goddess and Tree of Life)

The Forest

By embodying and dancing our trees we can tap into our roots of unconscious underground wisdom, and reach and travel up into the skies, the heavens, and to new heights. What travels between earth and sky is the body, the trunk that holds, connects, bridges past and future all through our core, our center. Our branches, always connected to the source, extend out from our heart center reaching in many directions just as our minds, visions, and all of our paths and travels in life. If we embody our tree, we too can aspire to the solid steadfastness of the tree, the ability to dig deep into the dark unknown and be grounded in reality while constantly growing, living, resting, and dying as we reach to new heights. Our leaves, fruits and nuts provide sustenance, medicine, and beauty and as a display of how we live our lives, in balance, in harmony, in joy as we dance with the winds of change and ride out the storms of our lives and our times. A constant living system of exchange. This tree of our life we fully embody does not

exist alone...it inter depends on all that exists around it-the forest...a fully exchanging cyclical system.



Photo by Tresnja Khodlova

The forest is filled with a vast integral system of living and dying beings, all working together with one another. What effects one effects the whole of the system. This living breathing dancing ecosystem is a reminder, a calling for what ails and is missing in our current world. We are all connected, we are all strands of the web and most if not all the suffering in our world is due to this alienation, dissociation, split. To heal this alienation, this separation, scattering, fragmentation we not only need to fully embody our tree selves but we need to live as a forest, interwoven, interconnected, interdependent living, breathing, dying, dancing together as one unified web being.

Healing For our times

Ecopsychologists have been heralding since the 1990's that personal sanity and planetary health are inextricably related and mutually influential. Human suffering is intertwined with the suffering of the larger Earth community, which they call 'dissociative alienation' (Metzner, 1995, p. 64) from the more than human world, and they believe that through cultivating awareness of interdependence and of our 'ecological selves' (Naess, 1995, p. 226) we can begin to heal ourselves, our relationship with the earth and heal the earth itself.

Eco philosopher David Abram (2010) sensuously describes this as 'participatory consciousness'

sentience is not an attribute of a body in isolation; it emerges from the ongoing encounter between our flesh and the forest of rhythms in which it finds itself, born of the interplay and tension between the world's wild hunger and our own.....Human awareness could not exist without a human body, true, but it could no more exist in the absence of ground, leaf, and flowing water. Mind arises and dwells between the body and the Earth, and hence is as much an attribute of this leafing world as of our own immodest species. (p.110)

To assist in the adventure of unearthing and re-inhabiting what is inherently ours-our whole body/mind/spirit selves-to embody and dance our trees, to live as a forest tribe where dance is like breath and water, is one of my greatest purposes. As one pays attention and gives attention, the layers of self are unearthed. In this process one also reweaves back into the fabric of life where self/other/earth/universe are one. The deeper one goes in, the deeper it is felt throughout. All of our ancestors knew this and danced and moved as a natural ebb and flow within their daily lives. I believe in order to bring healing and sanctity to our modern world we as a people need to weave these ancient ways back into our way of life. I believe mother earth needs these dances too. I believe the more we dance on her sacred ground the more we become attuned to her rhythms, needs, and the more we become like her because after all we are her children. Through deeper connection with the body, the human body, one can also discover greater connection to the earth body. As we tune into her we can be healer and be healed in unison. As we awaken, delve, and relive into the body and the earth body, the more we find true home.

So lets join hands, dance our tree selves, and weave ourselves back into the web, where we live as a forest with the forests, and heal our world.

Please join Nada at the Sacred Earth Festival at Bowdoin Park on September 22 where she will be facilitating an Autumn Equinox Sacred Circle Dance.

For further explorations into dancing the tree of life and living as a forest please contact Nada at nadakhodlova@gmail.com and visit me at www.nadakhodlova.com



Image by Dancing Tree Mama <http://www.zibbet.com/DancingTreeMama>

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