

GOSPEL OF THE  
LIVING TREE

*For  
Mystics, Lovers,  
Poets & Warriors*



RODERIC KNOWLES



Earth Cosmos Press

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“Hear the voice of the Bard!  
Who Present, Past and Future, sees;  
Whose ears have heard  
The Holy Word  
That walked among the ancient trees.”  
- William Blake.

# PRELUDES



*A Tree is not a Tree  
is not a Tree . . .*

*On Their True Identity,  
Wisdom & Sacredness*

 **THE WISDOM OF TREES** 

Way back in the twelfth century, the great Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, acknowledged by historians as the most powerful and influential figure of his age, made an interesting confession:

“What I know of the divine sciences and Holy Scripture, I learned in wood and field. I have no other masters than the Beeches and Oaks.”

He was not alone. In the same century, the mystic Bernard of Morlaix proclaimed:

“Trees will teach you more than you can learn from the mouth of a doctor of theology.”

How is this? Do trees speak?  
Is the notion so absurd?  
Or is it, rather, a profound and sadly forgotten truth?  
One can trace its origins to the Bible:

“But ask the beasts, and they will teach you ... or the plants of the earth, and they will teach you.”

So it is written in *The Book of Job* (12: 7).

We may also read in *The Bhagavad-Gita*, one of the great classics of Hindu literature:

“He who knows the tree is the knower of the Vedas” – meaning he is the knower of spiritual knowledge.

So is the wisdom of trees revered.

“The tree,” proclaimed Zarathustra, “is the Law itself.”

Truth lies behind many an apparent absurdity. “When you agree to listen to the wisdom of Socrates, it might seem at first to be nothing but absurdity,” wrote Alcibiades, for example, over two millennia ago. And Socrates, as we know, was the wisest of men. The same could be said of trees: “Really how ridiculous the thought that *they* can have anything to say to *us*!”

Poets don’t think so.  
Wordsworth wrote:

“One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.”

And Ezra Pound in the twentieth century:

“I have been a tree amid the wood  
And many a new thing understood  
That was rank folly to my head before.”

“Oh yes,” you might scoff, “but they’re merely poets, given to delusions and over-imaginings, whilst reckless in their verbiage!” Hear ye, then, Brian Swimme, a renowned physicist and mathematical cosmologist of the twenty-first century:

“You need no teacher.  
The universe is your teacher,  
The forests are your teachers.”

And every tree in them!

“Every tree speaks through Thee.  
O God! What glory in the woodland,”  
Beethoven rejoiced.

**A TREE IS NOT A TREE  
🌿 IS NOT A TREE ... 🌿**

“Surely there is something more in each of the trees, some living soul,” Walt Whitman ponders in *Leaves of Grass*.

Can this be so?

“A tree sits like an avatar, an embodiment of the immutable, far beyond the pains of man,” George Nakashima, a Japanese woodworker wrote<sup>1</sup>.

Really, can this be so?

“We think of trees,” writes Brian Swimme, “as firewood, as plywood, as unvarnished hardware floors. We have convinced ourselves that they are just inert stuff, standing there for twenty years until we get around to cutting them down. We are deluded.”<sup>2</sup>

Spiritual disconnectedness from trees was forced upon Christian culture by the Roman imperialism that commandeered its Church and thereafter formally denied Spirit in Nature; even, also, Spirit in Man.

Along with these denials in the name of Faith, we have the same in the names of Science and Reason:

In relation to trees: In the late 1800s, Baron von Liebig, showed triumphantly by scientific methods exactly what a tree is. Having reduced a living specimen to ashes, he then proceeded to analyse these. After removing its water and destroying its life force,

considering these no further, *though they are what makes a living tree*, and having separated the ashes into different chemical groups, he proudly declared that this *is* what a tree *is*: Simply matter! Dead matter!

This is science at its most ridiculous.

Yet it has managed to convince the minds of men that such a methodology is the surest, indeed the only means of arriving at truth! – the *whole* truth! – though it excludes the core and vital aspects of Life, Intelligence, Spirit, Consciousness and other immeasurables, that do not fit conveniently into its preordained parameters and/or cannot be detected by its crude instruments!

Seeing not the whole it makes a creed of its parts!

Poets have been more intelligent:

“The particles of which a tree is made do not explain the tree,” wrote aviator-poet Antoine de Saint-Exupéry of *Little Prince* fame, countering the crass materialism of his day.

What is obvious to a poet isn’t always so for a scientist, it seems.

A tree is not a tree is not a tree  
 is not a tree ...  
 not as we see it,  
 nor as we’ve defined it.  
 It is far, far more.  
 It isn’t anything we know,  
 though we have named it, categorized it,  
 dissected and analysed it, *ad finitum*.  
 What it is escapes us, remaining a mystery.  
 Yet we say we know what a tree is!

To know what a tree is, we must first come to clarity about what it is not. The renowned metaphysician, doctor and quantum-

philosopher, Deepak Chopra<sup>3</sup>, endeavours to enlighten us on the subject:

“If I look outside my window I can see an old gnarled oak standing between myself and the ocean. Is that tree simply there, a given object in the landscape? Not at all. To a neutrino, which can pass through the entire earth in a few millionths of a second, solid objects are as vaporous as fog.” Therefore: “My nervous system must create an oak tree from the fog of quantum data ... Everything about that tree is malleable: To a proton, which takes billions of years to be born and then decay, the life of an old oak is less than a split second. To a mayfly, with its life span of one day, the oak tree is literally eternal ... Take any quality the tree might have and it changes according to the perceiver ... I will just emphasize the most important point: *There is no tree “out there”.*”

Is this to say there is no tree? Of course there's a tree, but it is not the solid, material object it appears to be visually. Like us humans, its true identity is beyond all appearances.

My first experience of ‘the tree beyond the tree’, of the *real* tree beyond the *apparent* tree, came to me one day, wholly unexpectedly, as I entered a wood on the west coast of Ireland.

Driving through the mountainous lake district of Killarney, I decided to stop on reaching an extensive area of woodland and take a stroll through it, along a path which would eventually lead to a lake. The very moment I stepped into this wood I found myself, to my utter astonishment, in a world of other dimensions. It was as if a veil had lifted. The trees which surrounded me, all oaks, were no longer simply trunks, branches, twigs and leaves: They had become shimmering flames of liquid translucent energy. While ever rooted in the earth, the fluid energy of their beingness leapt and danced skyward. All around me was one luminous sea of energy, with the energy-being of every individualised element,

tree or otherwise, interpenetrating; yet without any diminution of physicality. All was simultaneously both ethereal *and* physical. So, while I was experiencing the otherworldliness of the trees and the entire woodland area through which I walked, including shrubs, plants, rocks, and the mossy ground itself, I never lost the sense of their material concreteness.

But the ethereal aspect was even more real.

And as it became more real, the material realm became relatively denser, to such an extent that even the air became a struggle to walk through, making my movements unusually slow. Slowly, slowly, one foot moved forward; while slowly, slowly, the other followed. Thus I proceeded, dazzled by the radiant splendour of the world which had unexpectedly revealed itself to me.

But this was merely phase one of my experience, a vivid learning, eye-opening experience.

Suddenly, two miles further along the path, I returned to my everyday state of awareness - which, compared to what I had just experienced, seemed one of limitation and relative sleep.

Much to my surprise, I found myself walking at an incredible speed, my eyes focused on the ground immediately in front of me, almost at my feet, aware of nothing externally, only of my thoughts.

Since I had begun my walk in such a wide-eyed mode, with my awareness sensitized and extended to include what was clearly beyond everyday appearances, and I had been struggling to advance through 'dense' air, how could I have become so closed down, moving so speedily?

Shocked, I realised that I could not remember a single tree, rock, or inch of the path over the last two miles that I had travelled, as if my consciousness had been withdrawn wholly during that time. What had happened?

I had become lost in thought, I realized.

In that same instant, I remembered the words of Krishnamurti, "Life begins when thinking ceases."

So, this is what had happened. On entering the wood, I had

been without thought, in an experiential mode of *pure awareness*. It was while in this mode that I had been able to perceive a level of reality beyond appearances. An unimagined faculty of perception had opened up, rendering my visionary experience quite natural. But after some time, a thought had crept in; which had led to another; then another and another; and so on. Soon I had become so locked in thinking processes that all awareness of life around me had vanished. Literally, not metaphorically, “I” had become “lost” thought.

I had glimpsed and then lost sight of reality – the true nature of which, in its wholeness, *is* beyond appearances.

The reality is that a tree, like other living things, is indivisibly both energy and matter. In truth, it is first and foremost a *field of energy*, its visible material aspect being but an outer denser expression of this. It is “ether with its vibrations, on the one hand, and the earth with its inorganic compounds on the other,” as the poet, John Burroughs, so aptly puts it. The outer form of a tree is but the abode of the living, sensitive, self-aware and intelligent energy which is its Spirit.

Like humankind, it is both spirit and matter.

In truth, “A tree is a being that is more spiritual than material,” the renowned Bulgarian wisdom-teacher, Omraam Mikael Aivanhov, tells us.

As a spiritual being it is endowed with consciousness.

“Tree consciousness is a very definite thing,” writes Corinee Heline in *The Mystery of the Christos*<sup>4</sup>, “and its varying moods may be easily sensed by the mystic.”

Trees, like humans, feel both joy and sadness. “Sometimes a tree’s great trunk will shiver, its drooping leaves quiver, and it appears

to evidence almost a glint of tears. Its heart-rending cries may even be heard on the eve of its destruction ... Again, an entire tree structure may become luminous with ecstasy." While the mystic knows this, so too the enlightened poet, so too the enlightened scientist: *A tree is a self*.

"A tree is a self," writes Brian Swimme: "It is unseen shaping more than it is leaves or bark, roots or cellulose or fruit ..."

"The tree, as a self, organises all these millions of operations so that it can enter into relationships with air, rainfall, and sunlight. What organises all these materials? Is it something we can see? Something we can grab onto? No. The same with humans ... We cannot point to anything and say, "*There is the self*" ... We are in the presence of numinous mystery."<sup>2</sup>

This numinous mystery belongs to an order of reality which quantum physicist, David Bohm, famously termed the *implicate order*, out of which the visible form – that is, the explicate order – unfolds. He used the tree as an example to illustrate his point: "What I am suggesting," he stated<sup>5</sup>, "is that in the macroscopic world, such a thing as a tree is built out of the implicate order, which makes possible its living qualities. If we perceive the tree in this way, rather than as a bunch of dead particles into which the property of life has somehow infused when the seed is planted, then its aliveness ceases to be such a mystery."

It remains a mystery nonetheless.

## THE SACREDNESS OF TREES 🌿 & HUMAN SURVIVAL 🌿

In 1990, two hundred and seventy scientific leaders from eighty-three nations signed a petition declaring:

“We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred.”

It is my profound wish that *Gospel of The Living Tree* contributes to our understanding of the value and sacredness of trees, enriching our appreciation of the greatness of their contributions to human well-being, consciousness and culture.

“We would be wise,” Jacqueline Paterson writes in an issue of *Caduceus*, “to understand trees for what they really are – sentient beings which have helped mankind since its very birth, providing breathable air, clean water, timber, fuel, medicine, magic, mystery and beauty – for on every level it can be said that without trees we could not live.”

But they serve more than humankind: They are guardians of the planet and serve indispensably all life upon it.

To appreciate their sacredness we need more than understanding: We need to extend and deepen our experience of them; as visionaries who see or sense what is beyond appearances; as mystics do; as poets; as all humans who have the same innate capacities; as we did in our childhood, perhaps.

The great Carl Gustav Jung described in his memoirs<sup>6</sup> how he experienced trees as a schoolboy:

“Trees in particular were mysterious and seemed to me direct embodiments of the incomprehensible meaning of

life. For that reason the woods were the place where I felt closest to its deepest meaning and to its awe-inspiring workings.”

“The relationship TREE-MAN must become religious,” the Austrian artist Hundertwasser proclaims prophetically. “Only when you will love the TREE like yourself, will you survive.”

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Born 1905.

<sup>2</sup> From *The Universe is a Green Dragon*, published by Bear & Co Inc., USA.

<sup>3</sup> *How To Know God*, page 119.

<sup>4</sup> Published by New Age Press.

<sup>5</sup> David Bohm, quantum physicist, in conversation with Renée Weber, from *The Physicist and the Mystic – Is a Dialogue Between them Possible?*, an article in *Revision Journal*, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> From C.G. Jung’s *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, published by Collins & Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1963, page 75.