

Being Human and the Life Cycle of the Plant

by Tom Altgelt

There are numerous ways to approach the mysteries of life and of who and what we are as human beings. Out of my work with Rudolf Steiner's remarkable plethora of practical indications and spiritual teachings, I have evolved a useful analogy that offers a lucid map to effectively aid us on our quest for inner development. It utilizes the age-old universal symbol of the *lemniscate* to illustrate the close relationship between the stages of the life cycle of a plant and our own spiritual growth.

My opening into ever deepening clarity began when I came in contact with Steiner's foundational book, *How to Know Higher Worlds*. Steiner's teachings regarding the



nature of the human being, the nature of the world, and the nature of the higher worlds, offers a way to lift the veils of obscurity to set us on a path of direct knowing. The first chapter of *Higher Worlds* outlines a safe journey for our own spiritual growth, which is astonishingly congruent with the developmental stages of a plant from seed to seed.

If we understand ourselves to be a microcosm of the whole, it makes sense to see our human spiritual development in terms of this metaphor. Already in the 18th century, one of Germany's most renowned playwrights and ardent advocates of freedom, Frederick Schiller, had spoken of our innately human capacity to do consciously that which the plant does naturally.

To see how this works, we can visualize the process through the lemniscate, the primordial symbol for eternal flow. All life cycles appear to follow this archetypal movement pattern. In a continuous fluid whole, the lemniscate reveals the entire sequence of outer metamorphic processes and our inner transformations.

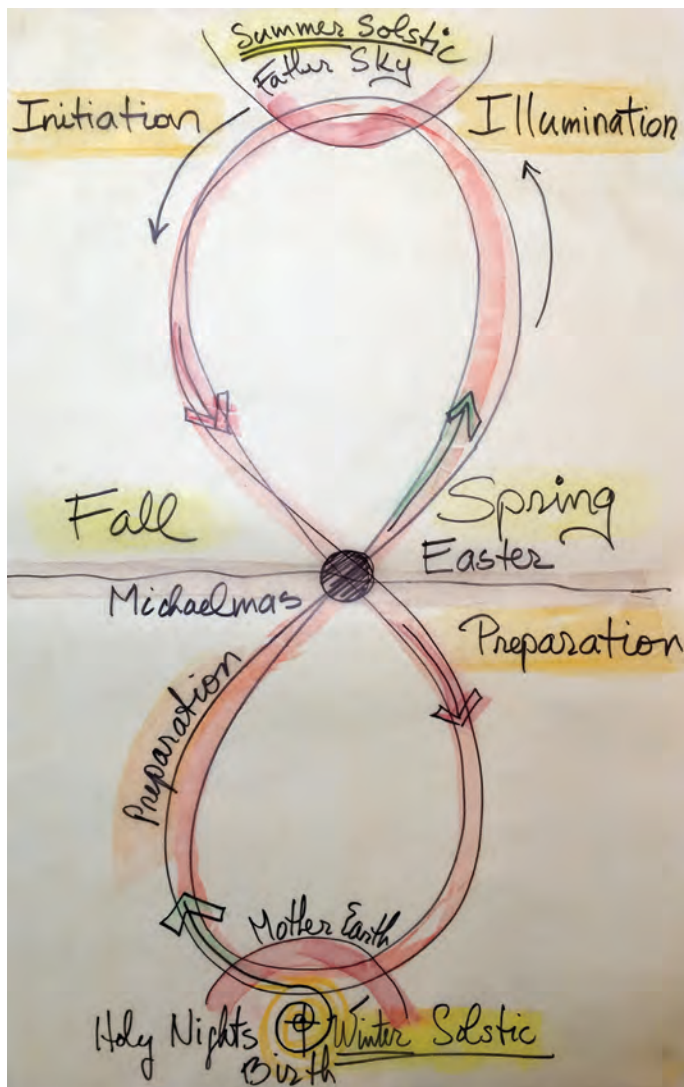
As can be seen in our diagram, the seed and the human heart are central to this correlation. They are poised at the transition or crossing over point of the lemniscate, between initiation into our deepest spiritual work and the natural evolution of our consciousness into outer fruition. The continual fluid movement of the lemniscate holds together the polarities of life and death, light and dark, beginnings and endings, weaving the resolutions of these polarities into our fruitful realizations. The seed, located in the heart of the lemniscate, encapsulates the whole of the earth's impulses of inhalation and exhalation, night and day, expansion and contraction, and past and future.

Furthermore, the life-empowering, serpentine movement of the lemniscate also counters stagnation. When we are stuck, the health of our life and soul weakens, causing us to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again. By following the lemniscate we can move out of our mistakes and move towards natural regeneration and fluidity. By selflessly letting ourselves be worked on by this powerful current, we allow our innate gifts to grow. We are empowered to more readily let go of the past and to perceive our way forward into greater equanimity, compassion, and selfless service.

Most important, the lemniscate is an exceptional vehicle providing a living imagination to steer us clearly along our path of spiritual development as Steiner described.

In *How to Know Higher Worlds*, Steiner sets forth three principal phases of our spiritual awakening—Preparation, Illumination and Initiation—each of which can be said to be comprised of seven stages. For the plant, the first phase of *Preparation* is related to the seed falling into the soil and sending its root into the earth. This stabilizes and allows the growing plant to raise itself up in the next phase into the light of the sun, or, in our case, into the inner light of the higher self, the I AM, or Christ in our humanity.

Our inner work during this phase is initially outwardly invisible, and our gesture is earthward and establishes our groundedness. This is directly related to Steiner's admonition that "humility is the gateway to all higher knowledge." A deepening into the inner mysteries is related to Sophia's imminent wisdom, embodied in matter as the living heart of Mother Earth. Here, when our inner seeds of sincere seeking fall onto the fertile soil of our heartfelt reverence and devotion, they bear forth rich fruit.



The second phase of *Illumination* with its seven stages is marked by the earth's seasonal cycles of spring and summer. Here the plant sends up its sprout toward the sun, where in its light and warmth, it begins to grow leaves, followed by blossoms, which eventually bear fruit. This is a rich metaphor for the Illumination that occurs within us when we can speak of only being able to truly know that which we love.

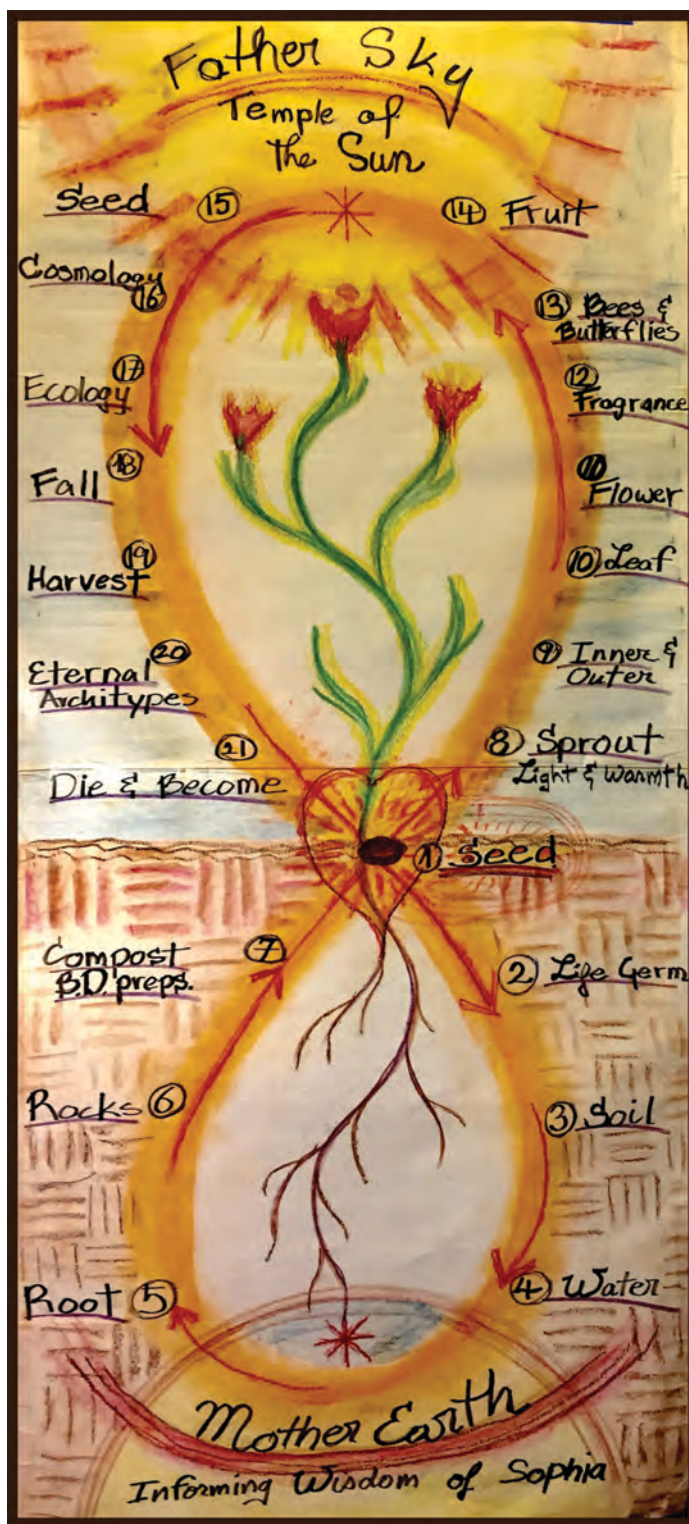
The final phase of yet another seven stages, the phase of *Initiation*, begins with the formation of the seed within the fruit, which must eventually fall and die into the earth to begin a new life cycle. What an amazingly apt analogy this is for our own initiation. In this final phase, we clearly begin to recognize the cosmological origins of each species' outer forms and growth patterns, as well as the radical metamorphosis they undergo in the fall, transcending life and death. It is in this Initiation stage that we die to the passing cycle, and where we consciously connect with higher divine spirits who facilitate our coming into a new level of being.

By contemplating the journey of the seed, we are better able to humbly understand with clarity the natural progression of our spiritual unfolding. And by using the lemniscate we utilize a visible practical means from which to realize that our being human is meant to bring the higher purpose in our heart up into

the light of day while becoming a bridge to manifest spirit down, through our heart, into matter.

Perhaps on this journey of recognition, of rethinking who we are and what the plant is, we can develop a feeling sense of what Goethe meant when he spoke of "die and become." It was Saint Francis, a man who was deeply connected with both the natural and the spiritual worlds, who said that it is in dying that we are born into eternal life. And it was Rudolf Steiner who suggested that we can look into the world to know ourselves and that we must look into ourselves to understand the world. Perhaps our own individual explorations of this analogy, between the life cycle of a plant and our uniquely human journey of inner development, can shed for each of us some further light on these thoughts and thereby allow us to ask better and better questions from the heart of who we are, as human beings co-creatively experiencing the world's and our own evolution.

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