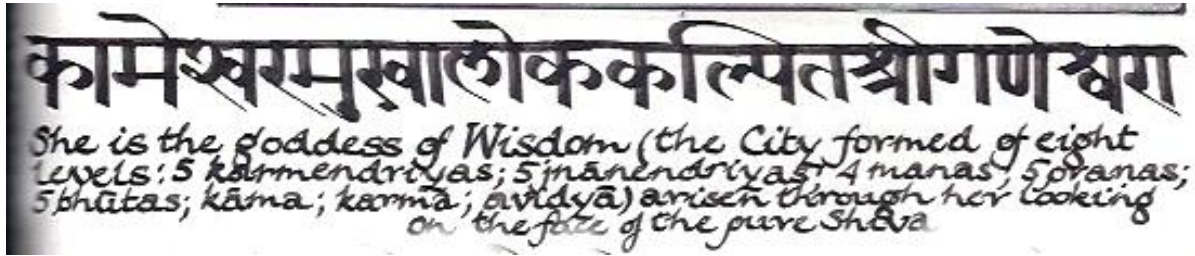


## THE REAL CHRISTMAS TREE

Many books and papers have been written by academics about the Tree of Life as represented in Ancient Near Eastern art. The forms it has taken, from Assyrian palace reliefs to the Jewish *menorah* vary hugely, providing an icon of the Universe according to different systems of thought. I aim to keep this little demonstration extremely simple - simple enough for you to choose out of only three approaches which one you will let your mind dwell upon in the three months following the Winter Solstice of 21 December.

### THE THOUSAND NAMES OF THE GREAT GODDESS

Just yesterday I was trying to get my head round the 77<sup>th</sup> Name of the Thousand Names of the Great Goddess<sup>1</sup> in Sanskr̥t, written out below, with translation and transliteration given underneath:



### Kāmeshwara-Mukhāloka-Kalpitashrī-Gaṇeshwarā

I had been stuck this whole year with the full meaning of this name to really sink in: it describes the Goddess as *Goddess of the City of Wisdom, created through her contemplation of the Lord of Love (Shiva)*. In other words, through cosmic combinations of Love and Desire the Goddess becomes the Universe - the City of Wisdom: what is that City? Anyone studying Vedānta will recognise its 8 levels, which are:

- Love/enthusiasm/life;
- The 5 elements of Aether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth;
- The 5 forms of Action/movement;
- The 5 modes of Knowledge;
- The 4 levels of Mind;
- The 5 directions of Breath/Wind;
- Action and its consequences;
- Detachment beyond knowledge/Non-knowing = WISDOM - her Crown

Since I have limited space I must leave you to pursue the detail of the different modes of Action, Knowledge and Mind: what is essential to understand is that the name conjures up an image of levels of body, mind and heart as they negotiate the Five Winds/Directions and the Five Elements (Aether is Consciousness). How often do we consciously connect to our position in this City of Wisdom and move our attention to this massive Octave of Existence? The saying goes that a fish swimming in water does not

<sup>1</sup> I wrote a small contribution about the first 83 Names of the Thousand Names of the Great Goddess (*Lalitasahasranānam*) in a small book edited by Joseph Campbell and Charles Musès entitled *In All Her Names* Harper Collins San Francisco 1991

realise it is in water! We live our lives worrying about earning our living, getting enough sleep, having happy partnerships with other human beings - but as human fish for our very sanity we need the deeper links and must connect to the entire City we are bound into - and made of.

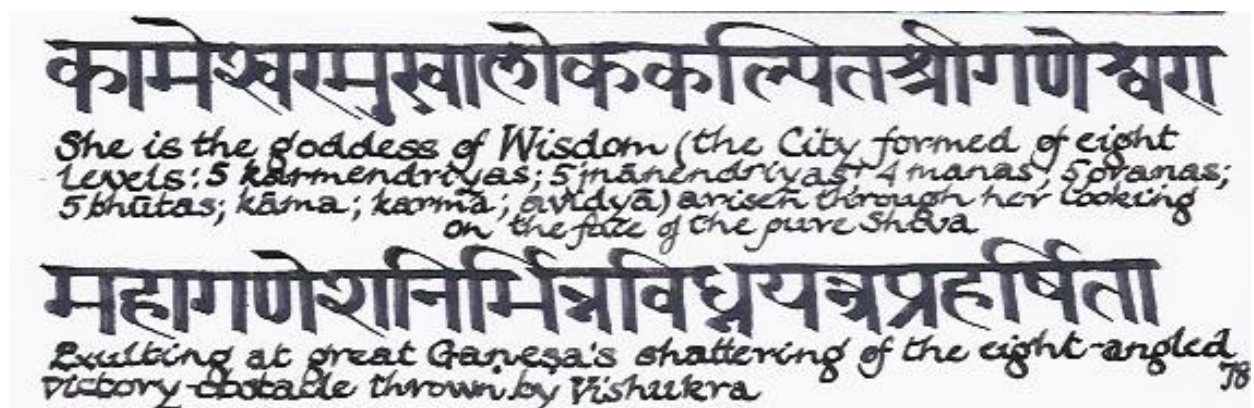
***THE CULT STATUE OF ARTEMIS AT EPHESUS AS THE CITY OF WISDOM***



What happened yesterday was that I suddenly made the connection between this name, which I was trying to learn by heart but kept on forgetting, and this statue. Having read it over and recited it yet again, I walked into my living room where there is a large picture (above) over the fireplace of one of the two Roman copies of the statue of the Goddess Diana/Artemis of Ephesus that used to be the cult statue placed inside one of the Seven Wonders of the World - the Great Temple of Diana at Ephesus. (Ephesus happens also to be the place The Virgin Mary ended her days after the death of Christ.)

I bought this huge reproduction of Artemis when I visited Ephesus - and found it so compelling that it has been over my fireplace for thirty years. As I walked into the room, as it stared back at me I suddenly saw it as if for the first time. What struck me was the different bands she is divided into as the Body of the Universe (the other statue of her specifically has the Zodiac as her necklace - that is how vast She is). I realised that although the statue uses the human figure as an analogy, it does not attempt to show the legs realistically - rather, the entire statue is divided into 12 levels, 6 up the length of the legs, the bands of fruits/breasts, the necklaces and face, and then three further citadels as her Crown - the latter three most obviously asking us to see them as the highest levels of Spirit, beyond Mind. That is why the Universe expressed as a mighty Goddess becomes Mother, because we are in Her and part of Her - and inevitably looked after by Her. This is the universal meaning of all those Madonna and Child icons: you are the child on Her lap.

What happened as I walked into the room and looked at her statue was that I married the 77<sup>th</sup> Name to the statue, and saw that She is a concrete version of the City of Wisdom, even if the categories and divisions may be divided up or described in alternative ways. I was lifted out of my smallness for the rest of the day, awakening again to these invisible realms that are present behind the scenes all the time - making me realise, among many other things, that it is worth spending time in spiritual practices and hanging icons on the wall for the eventual awakening they can provide *years* later.



But there is one more thing to say - as we know, living in this World is far from perfect - the Forces of Undoing strive continually to break it down again. This is why the 78<sup>th</sup> Name of the Goddess:

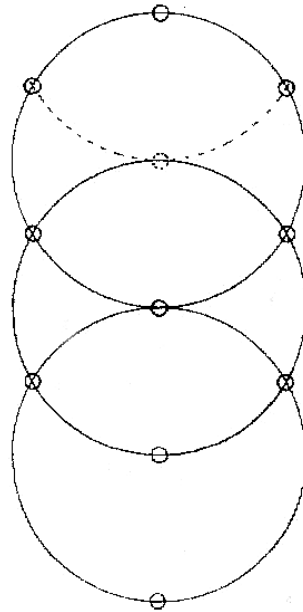
### ***Mahā-Ganeshā-Nirbhinnā-Wighnā-Yantra-Parharshitā***

also needs to be recited with no. 77. The translation is given underneath and means that any destructive weapons thrown at the Universe by demons like Vishukra will in the end be broken up themselves -which pleases her greatly. So the 77<sup>th</sup> Name is to be recited in her Praise, whilst the 78<sup>th</sup> is said for Protection.

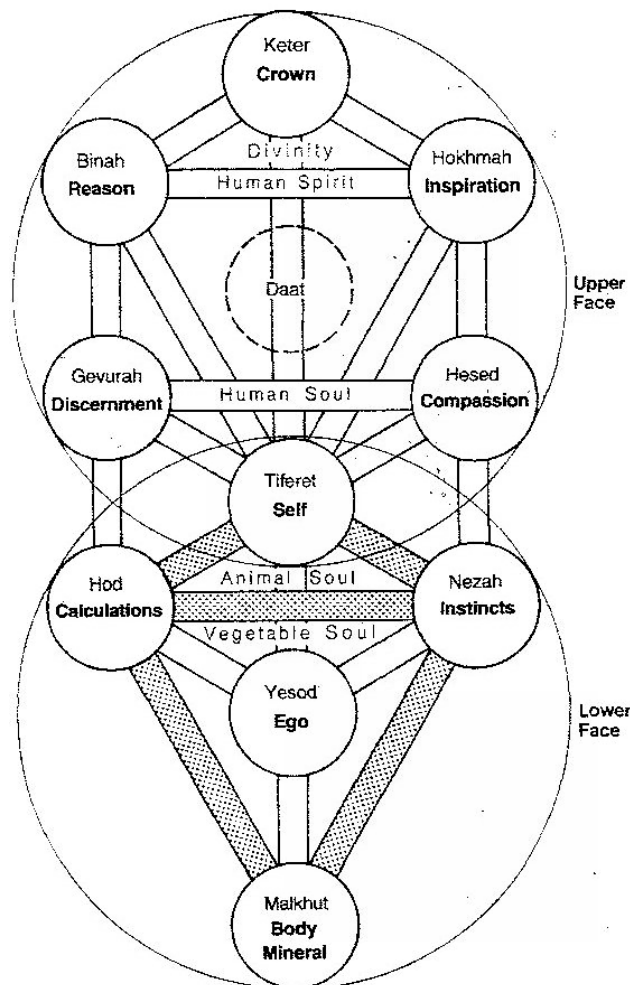
### ***THE SEPHIROTH AS THE GREAT MOTHER***

But she is not really a Christmas Tree, even if the Christmas Tree can consciously represent the hierarchy of the Universe. A more abstract support for meditation on The Mother could be preferable, embodying much the same hierarchies of the Universe as the 77<sup>th</sup> Name and the statue. The *Sephiroth*, handed down from the Ancient Near East through the Abrahamic Line and refined in the fires of passing civilisations - from Sumer to Assyria to Babylon - is ideal. Instead of decorating a live tree, one can substitute this icon as a 3D model, or draw it out using intersecting circles as the initial infrastructure (see next diagram). The almond-shaped spaces that emerge when two circles cross each other's centres like this are called *vesicae piscis*,

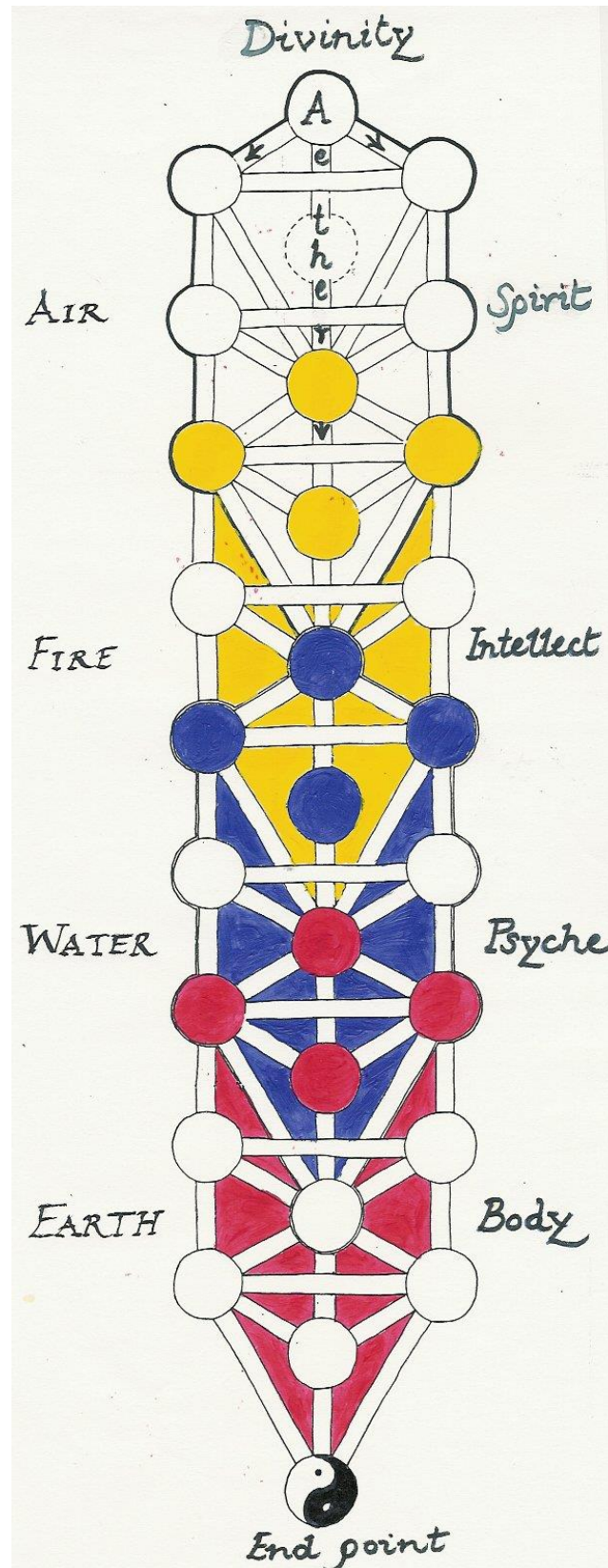
fish vessels, precisely the shape used in Sacred Art for the *mandorla*, or radiance surrounding the Virgin Mary - so the Goddess is still built in here, but invisibly.



With a ruler, join up the dots to form the basic 11-pointed Sephiroth, or Tree of Life (be precise about where they go under or over). Below is a version by Warren Kenton in his beginner's book on *Kabbalah*, by far the clearest exposition. Note that again the Crown of Wisdom lies at the top of this Tree of Life too. Then you can label it and colour it in.



This is the Universe, but it can also describe the different levels in yourself, from body to Spirit. One can then fill out more detail to form a Four-Fold internested *Sephiroth*, with a mini-Tree of Life each for the Worlds of Body, Psyche, Mind and Spirit as below, wonderful for showing how the Four Worlds interpenetrate. I am not giving any commentary on these Sephiroth - for amplification, read the Introduction to Cosmokrator, obtainable via its website - and of course the books of Warren Kenton.



I have run out of time, and can say no more - but the New Year message is to work on re-establishing hierarchy in your life - the modern tendency is to bring everything down to one level - but this is not how the Cosmic Mother is, or how you are! In reality you are your own miniature Sephiroth inside the body of the Goddess as the City of Wisdom. I end with a more poetic version of the Sephiroth by assigning the planets to its 11 positions - quite unobtrusively -on the tail of a peacock (in Greek mythology Zeus' consort, Sky Goddess Mother Juno was symbolised by this spectacular bird). This one is framed and on the wall in my hallway. You may not be able to see the planetary symbols on this version - but you get the general idea!



A full exposition of the Planets and Signs allocated to the Sephirothic levels will be given in *Cosmokrator Book 7*, which unfortunately is not likely to be ready for another 3-4 years...



HAPPY CHRISTMAS



*Madonna and Child by Masaccio*