



## *Mary Magdalene and the 4 Paths:* *An Ancestral Wisdom Understanding of the Events of the* *Last days of Jesus*

One of the deepest mystical understandings is found in a variety of cultural contexts. That knowledge is that there are four processes or paths that every being must live into to become whole. Matthew Fox teaches this as core to Creation Spirituality and outlines them as the following:

1. Via Positiva – The Path of Blessing
2. Via Negative – The Path of Darkness / Disequilibrium / Dissolution
3. Via Creativa – The Path of Creativity
4. Via Transformativa – The Path of Transformation

It is possible to get “stuck” in any one of these and not complete the experience and its knowledge, but we are expected to live into each as a process of growth and development.

- **The Path of Blessing**
- All things start from a place of essential goodness / wholeness / blessing
  - In Judeo-Christian understanding, this comes most strongly through God’s “blessing” of Creation each “day” and calling it good.

It is basic to our humanity that most people want things in life to start out with a sense of openness, and good, and to pass that forward to children and others.

- **The Path of Trouble / Dissolution / Darkness**
- Anytime we are engaged in “doing,” questions will arise; others will have differing opinions; breakdown in processes happen.
  - Life processes are like that, there are times of growing and fruitfulness and times of dying and decay. The life of Summer leads inevitably to the dormancy of Winter.
  - Disequilibrium in the system will bring change

During these times we often enter a period of struggle; a questioning of ourselves and our understandings. Think about the process of individuation. As children we are (mostly) part of a family unit of some sort, which is a center of blessing and security, but there comes a time when we begin to see things differently and want to become our own person. This is often a time of struggle within the family.

- **The Path of Creativity**

- Most often what comes from the difficulties of the previous movement, is a new sense of creativity, and movement. The person establishes a new sense of themselves; the company finds a new way to do things or a new product for development and the broken heart finds a new relationship.
  - This might even lead to an opening of new artistic creativity.

- **The Path of Transformation**

- This is when the new sense of creativity (and its outcomes) begin to move into the world for greater change. It is when the now individuated child moves into life as their own person and contributes. At its best, it is when the prophetic side of us emerges and we begin to transform the world with a whole new paradigm of open energy.

### **Let's look at Mary Magdalene and her relationship to Jesus during the last days of his life.**

- Regardless of what their relationship actually was, Mary seems to have been the only disciple to take seriously Jesus' own statements about his going to Jerusalem to die.
  - It is Mary who anointed his body for death
  - By doing this she put the coming trauma in a context of blessing and shared communal and personal intimacy
  - She honored his wholeness and healing gifts while acknowledging that this presence was about to be taken away.
  - This was the **Path of Blessing** being lived out through the sacramental action of anointing with oil
- Mary Magdalene was the one woman is stated by all four Gospels to have been at the cross and/or to know where the body was laid.
  - She is stated by Mark and Matthew to have stood at a distance with the other women and by John to have been at the foot of the cross.
  - Both are likely true as she met the trauma and terror of the moment head on, working to accept its reality and helping and comforting others to do the same.

- There was no denial of the pain and anguish, but a deep acceptance that the kind of man (of blessing) Jesus had been was threatening to the established order.
- This was **The Path of Disequilibrium and Darkness** being lived out culturally and personally.
- She was recorded by Matthew as spending some time in vigil at the tomb.
  - She was there as new creative life was being formed in the darkness
  - All new things start in this hollowed out place, like seeds planted to reach toward the light.
  - Her tears and warmth softened the cold hard soil of his body for new growth of spirit.
  - **The Path of Creativity** was born during that time.
- Mary Magdalene came back the next morning with the intention of finishing what was started only to discover the tomb open.
  - The new creative power was risen and active.
  - It showed in the presence of angelic (positive energy) beings.
  - It showed that what was past was no longer visible (no dead body).
  - It showed in her wonder and astonishment
  - **The Path of Creativity** was fully active
- But more was about to happen
  - Stunned and confused, she saw a man and asked him to show her where the past had been put.
  - **He brought her into the present and then told her to go and transform the world.**
  - A new **Path of Transformation** was loosed upon our world.

Mary Magdalene became the vehicle, the messenger, and the Apostle to show us what walking through deep transformation is like and how it can be accomplished with grace. She was present through the most difficult days of suffering and trauma, and so, became the one to see the first fruits of God's new Creation and Transformation.

—

—

One possible reason for Mary to be able to do this, to hold Jesus in such a way as to be “present” with him throughout the ordeal of his death and on to his rising again, may be found in a meditative/prayer practice they shared.

During the time of Jesus, one of the most common meditative practices was centered on the Throne of God. It started with Moses' vision of the sapphire throne, and was picked up later by Elijah, then Isaiah in his vision, and Ezekiel with his Chariot Throne of wheels within wheels. Bruce Chilton is convinced that Jesus was a master at Chariot meditation.

John had forged a path into the mysteries of the divine mind through meditation. He was a part of the ancient rabbinic tradition that focused on the first chapter of Ezekiel. This text describes the Chariot, the moving Throne of God. The Chariot was the source of God's energy and intelligence, the origin of his power to create and destroy. By meditating in the Chariot, John and his disciples aspired to become one with God's Throne.

Ezekiel had prophesized in the wake of the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, when both the Davidic throne and God's Throne on earth, Mount Zion, had been destroyed. In response to the destruction, Ezekiel envisioned the *heavenly* Throne of God, where Yahweh still abided (Ezekiel 1:4-28), the many wheeled Chariot of fire. In developing his conception of the Throne, Ezekiel used the biblical tradition that began with Moses, the first prophet to see the Throne during his ecstatic vision while receiving the Torah from heaven (Exodus 24:9-10). The throne appears again in biblical tradition when Elijah, still alive, is translated into heaven by a divine, fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11-12). Later, Isaiah sees an enormous Throne, hovering above Mount Zion, on which God sits, the flaming hem of his garments trailing into the Temple (Isaiah 6:1-5). Ezekiel brought these epiphanies together by conceiving of the divine Throne as a chariot. . . The Chariot was to become the master symbol of Jewish mysticism. (*Rabbi Jesus*, pp. 50-51)

Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot was accompanied by the sound of roaring waters, imbued with the energy of the initial creation. A crystal rainbow shone above the surreal and frightening spectacle of the beasts. Above that was God's sapphire-like Throne (Ezekiel 1:22-28), the primeval reality, the vortex of creation itself that was timeless, still present and moving with stormy force.

John taught Jesus and his other disciples to meditate on Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot. . . Ezekiel's words had to be memorized, his description of the Chariot mastered in all its detail, before meditation could even begin. The initiate's mind had to be on the text's meaning, not on the mechanics of recitation. . . The disciples had to master the text's intonation and cadence. The musical phrasing of the words . . . was deemed essential to clear the way for divine realization. "Look at what you listen to!" Jesus told his own disciples later in his life (Mark 4:24).

As Jesus mastered the techniques of envisioning the Chariot, John began to teach him the secrets of God's Spirit, which flowed from the Chariot through all creation. (*Rabbi Jesus*, pp. 52-53)

Chilton also maintains that Jesus went on in his life to train those who followed him in the tradition that he had learned.

Rabbi Jesus trained his disciples—including Mary Magdalene, from the time she met him in Galilee through the period of his final pilgrimage to Jerusalem—in the tradition of the *Merkavah*, the Chariot. They attuned themselves to the divine Chariot, helped by scriptures they memorized, disciplines they handed on by word of mouth, and examples of their master's teaching and practice that they emulated. Astonishment in God's presence became their way of life. (*Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, page 78).

As an interesting aside, Chilton mentions that Mary Magdalene may have been very aware of Chariot meditation before she met Jesus, and that it was a part of why she anointed. His thoughts come from following the path of a work called *The Testament of Job* in which Job is a Chariot meditator which is why he was known as a righteous man and was able to work through his sufferings and still talk with God. The tradition, as understood around the time of Jesus, held that the three daughters of Job moved to the area of Magdala and had a ministry of anointing.

Cynthia Bourgault takes the understanding that Mary Magdalene may have meditated with Jesus in a slightly different direction. She seems to believe that their relationship was one of a kenotic spiritual path, or a giving away of self (self-emptying) which she calls, "conscious love."

. . . in Jesus' vision, "letting go" or "letting be" is the gateway to a fullness so extravagant that it fills the emptiness to bursting, like a rain barrel after a sudden deluge. The *pleroma*, as it's known in Christian mystical tradition—"the very fullness of God"—flows through every nook and cranny of this world, and while the world may ultimately prove to be an illusion, the fullness itself is real.

The name I myself would give to this teaching is "the path of conscious love." I have chosen the name deliberately. I could simply have called it "the kenotic path," identifying it by its dominant methodology. . . "Conscious love" is a good middle ground. It emphasizes the life-affirming and implicitly relational nature of the path, and the word "conscious" makes it clear that the touchstone here is transformation, not simply romance. (*The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*, p. 112)

We have already seen that kenosis is the tie-rod of Jesus's entire teaching, connecting the inner and outer realms of our human experience in a single unified gesture. "Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13) is one of his most celebrated dictums. . .

In an earlier chapter I spoke of the dangers of trying to sever eros and agape into two different species, which is bad theology, and even worse metaphysics. For the great secret of erotic love—which all lovers

instinctively know and which I believe Jesus also knew—is that *agape is in essence transfigured desire*. There are not two loves, one agape based and the other eros based. Rather, agape is what emerges from the refiner's fire when that surging desire to cling, possess, consume the object of one's adoring is subjected to the discipline of kenosis, self-giving love. (*The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*, pp. 120-121)

Rabbi David A. Cooper puts it this way:

In many traditions, the mystical expression of our relationship with the Divine is through eros, the flame of a burning heart. Why? Because when we awaken to the realization that the presence of the Divine is revealed in the fullness of each moment, our hearts melt and the floodgates of our inner yearning open wide.

This is a mystical epiphany. It cannot be rationally explained. Although we cannot cross the barrier between us and that which lies beyond infinity, we can experience in the depths of our beings the realization that for each step we take, the Divine steps with us; each breath we draw is connected with the breath of the universe; and that lover, beloved, and the essence of love itself *are all reflection of exactly the same thing*. In each of these moments we “know” the presence of the Divine, and there is no separation. (*God Is A Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism*, p.68)

The thing here is to put all of these together and not see authors presenting differing understandings, but that the writers are working on similar knowledge from divergent perspectives and using different words.

The Chariot path is about God's generative energy flowing outward and being ever-present. Rather than God holding on to the humans that he had created in love, God let them go and become. Jesus, rather than holding onto his godhood, let it go to become human. This was God's own desire to be with us, to love us in our own way, to be united with us in the way we are, by emptying out and “letting go” and “letting be.” The flaming desire of God that Isaiah saw entering the Temple, became the life of Jesus, who then taught his disciples, including Mary Magdalene, how to take the desire and turn it into self-giving and a reflection of the Divine.

It then becomes that self-giving love that holds Mary to her task of staying with Jesus through the whole of his ordeal, and, in the end, is there when a renewed generative power brings life out of death. In Bourgeault's thought, it may even have been the driving power of that kenotic love expressed by Mary Magdalene that was the catalyst for resurrection.

The Gospel of Mary of Magdala is one of the texts that give a strong sense that during her vigil at the tomb, Mary was meditating and possibly in connection with the spirit of

Jesus. It is also possible that the conversation is from another time, but this is the way it is interpreted by Cynthia Bourgeault. Unfortunately there are missing parts and pages which would make the understanding more clear.

Sources:

Bourgeault, Cynthia - *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*, 2010, Shambala

Chilton, Bruce – *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography, The Jewish Life and Teaching That Inspired Christianity*, 2000, Doubleday

Chilton, Bruce – *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*, 2005, Doubleday

Cooper, Rabbi David A – *God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism*, 1997, Riverhead Books, The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Publishing