

# The Tree of Life

This is a universal symbol found in many mythological and spiritual traditions around the world. It has existed since the beginning of history in paintings, engravings, embroideries, sculptures, or prints. The Tree of Life is both a masculine symbol, visibly phallic symbol, and feminine, bearing sustenance.

**Note** – do not confuse this with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Book of Genesis. The Tree of Life is the tree whose fruit gives eternal life to all who might obtain it.

## Symbolism

The symbol of the Tree of Life includes qualities such as strength, wisdom, beauty, protection, redemption, and bounty. It is also a symbol to obtain focus in a quest to find knowledge and awareness.

The Tree of Life illustrates the interconnectedness of life. In addition, it represents a person's personal growth into a unique human being as different experiences shape them into who they truly are.

Moreover, it signifies rebirth. In the fall, trees tend to lose their leaves and enter a hibernation-like state. And, in the spring, the tree awakens with amazing colour and leaves appear like it is being born again.

The symbol of the tree of life represents qualities like wisdom, strength, protection, beauty, bounty, and redemption. The symbol is also used to represent the 'Creator'. This tree is associated with the creator because it offers protection and supports abundant fruit production & regeneration. The analogy can also be used to describe the life of humans. It is said that humans develop 'roots' of beliefs and 'branch out' by means of wisdom. The 'trunk' i.e. the mind & body keep the roots of beliefs and branches of wisdom connected with each other.

## Tree of Life in Different Cultures

There are different theories and mythologies associated with the tree of life in different cultures. Take a look:

**Christianity** The tree of life is mentioned in the 'Book of Genesis'. It is believed that the tree was planted in the 'Garden of Eden'. Abrahamic religions associate the tree of life with paradise. It is believed that the tree was planted by the Abrahamic God.

In Christianity, the tree of life is a tree that bears fruits which grant immortality. As per the beliefs held by Catholic Christians, humanity which is free of sins and corruption is symbolized by the tree of life. The Mormon bible has a slightly different view of the tree of life. According to the Mormons, tree of life symbolises love. The tree is also mentioned in the 'Book of Revelation'. It is believed that the tree possesses healing properties.

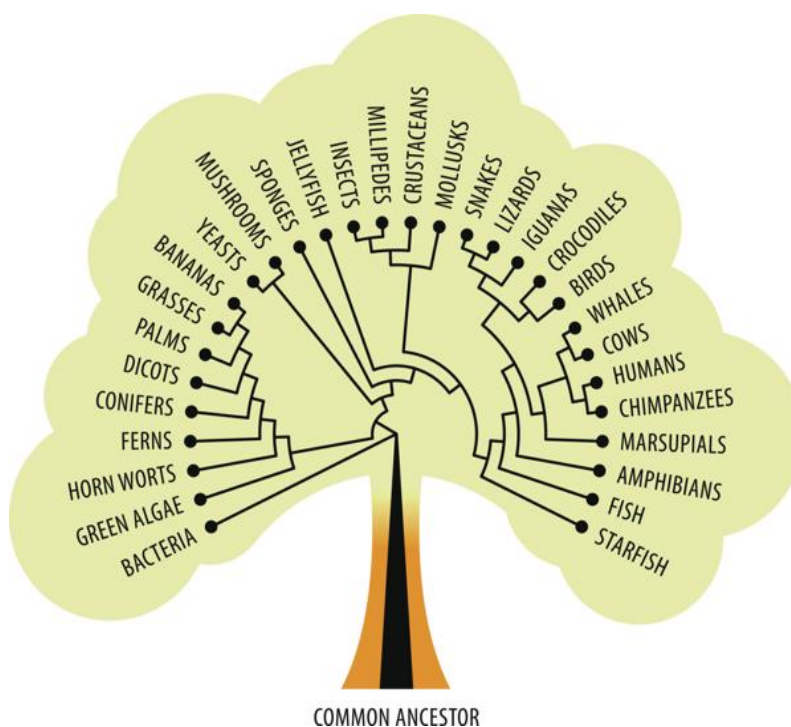
**Judaism** The concept of the tree of life as understood from Jewish commentaries can be explained as follows: the tree of life sustains and nourishes life. A garden planted by Yahweh contained different kinds of plants which bore fruits. The tree of life was at the center of this garden.

The meaning of the tree of life as perceived by people from different faiths, belief systems, and cultures resonates with a simple yet strong message of staying connected and united. The symbol indicates that all forms of life are connected through cosmic energy and that humans should live in harmony with the rest of the world.

**Buddhist Beliefs** The Bodhi-tree (wisdom-tree), according to Buddhists, is the Tree of Enlightenment. It was beneath the Bodhi-tree that Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment. The Bodhi-tree is considered as a place where one can seek refuge from worldly desires.

**Islam** The Tree of Immortality is mentioned in the Quran and is different from the Biblical account insofar as only one tree is mentioned in Eden which was forbidden to Adam and Eve by Allah. The Hadith do mention other trees in heaven and while the tree symbol plays a fairly minor role in the Quran, it became an important symbol in Muslim art and architecture and is also one of the most developed symbols in Islam. In the Quran, there are a trio of supernatural trees: The Infernal Tree (Zaquum) in Hell, The Lote Tree (Sidrat al-Muntaha) of the Uttermost Boundary and the Tree of Knowledge which is in the Garden of Eden. In the Hadith, the different trees are combined into one symbol.

## Darwin's Tree of Life



Darwin proposed a tree of life which is symbolic of the common ancestral origin of all living beings. The relation or link between birds and dinosaurs is depicted with the help of this tree. It is also possible to establish an analogy between biological classification system and the concept of tree of life. The biological classification system can help in tracing any given species to its roots i.e. Eukarya, Bacteria, or Archea.

## The Tree of Life Concept

The tree of life concept is pretty simple and straightforward. It is a visual metaphor in which a tree represents your life and the various elements that make it up—past, present, and future. By labelling these parts, you not only begin to discover (or perhaps rediscover) aspects of yourself shaped by the past, but you can then begin to actively cultivate your tree to reflect the kind of person you want to be moving forward.

(This exercise is probably better kept for Explorer Scouts and Ranger Guides)

## Activity:

Try drawing a Tree of Life - or even your own - see the attached sheets.

## Links to Scout Badges

### Beavers:

#### My Skills Challenge - 3. Do two creative activities

- paint a picture



#### Creative Activity Badge

- try a craft  
even painted on glass or plate



### Cubs:

#### Our Skills Challenge -

3. Pick two creative things to try, and show your leader what you've done.



**Artist Activity Badge** - could be one of the three activities; could be made as a clay model



### Scouts:

#### Creative Activity Badge:

Decorate a material (such as wood, metal or glass) by engraving or etching. You could even try painting metal with cold enamel.



#### Artist Activity Badge -

1. Paint, draw or illustrate each of these:

- a scene from a story



### Explorers:

#### Creative Arts Activity Badge

1. Perform or exhibit the work you have completed.

Examples of possible activities might be:

- art



## Links to Girlguiding Badges

### Most!

**It could be extended, especially for younger members.**

- a) How many trees can you see from your window? Can you name them all?
- b) Make a start on a family tree, go back at least 4 generations.
- c) Make a papier mache tree, decorate it.
- d) Using your performing skills, put on a short show to illustrate the idea of "The Tree of Life" .
- e) With adult supervision, carve a piece of wood to represent an animal.
- f) With adult supervision, using poker work on a piece of scrap wood draw a tree, or make a useful sign.
- g) Make a picture of a tree using fallen leaves.
- h) Plant an acorn, look after it until it grows big enough to plant in a suitable place.
- i) Write a poem about the Tree of Life, or about a tree which is special to you.
- j) Thinking about the Tree of Life write a short essay (about 150/200 words) about the knowledge you would like to have and why.
- k) Draw your own Tree of Life with the branches showing what is important to you.

**Which badges could you use these for?**

Researched by

