The Yew in the Grove

by

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LXV:I.39 All they understand not that thou and I are fashioning a boat of mother-of-pearl. We will sail down the river of Amrit even to the yew-groves of Yama, where we may rejoice exceedingly.

The word *yew* is derived from the Proto-Germanic *īwa-*, (**Eiwaz** or **Eihaz**). The way the word was originally used seems to refer to the color brown and the reconstructed name of the Rune: Ēihaz or Ēiwaz again, from the Proto-Germanic and also, Ēoh in the Anglo-Saxon. A common spelling of the rune is sometimes associated with the World-Ash Wonder Tree; Yggdrasil. The term Ēoh has a strong phonetic similarity to IAO, the Greek and Thelemic name for God. And the phonetic similarity of *Eiwaz* and *Eihaz* to the praeter-human intelligence that communicated Liber AL to Crowley suggests the idea that Aiwaz is connected to this particular heaven of Liber LXV; the "yew-groves of Yama" in his capacity of Crowley's Holy Guardian Angel.

Aiwass or Aiwaz also present a variant on spelling as is found with the Yew Rune. Crowley however, considered Aiwaz to be a Sumerian intelligence; it being interesting to note that the Norse mythology establishes a heaven called *Summerland*. For Liber LXV this might be an equivalent to the "yew groves of Yama." And of course, there is the World Ash Wonder Tree noted in the Gnostic Mass of the GCL that is sometimes considered to be a Yew.

The Yew is sacred to Hecate, and the Crone aspect of the Triple Goddess; both are guardians of the Underworld, death and the afterlife. Therefore, it is a conducer for astral projection and skrying. In hot weather it gives off a resinous vapour which shamans inhaled to gain visions. The enormous size of a mature Yew tree and their exceptional longevity are characteristics that lend themselves to being revered. This coupled to the way in which the branches of an ancient Yew bend to rest on the ground and the

poisonous nature of its seeds and foliage, make it understandably worshiped. There are more than several toxins in history that have also a means to psychic transcendence; the mushroom being one of great renown.

The yew (*Taxus Brevifolia*) was sometimes known as the "tree of death." Its poisonous nature was often noted in ancient Greek literature. In fact, the name Taxus comes from the Greek word taxon, which translates to poison or toxin. Its poisonous foliage has made it both a symbol of death as its lifespan connected this with immortality. The tree has a reddish-brown bark that cracks open to reveal dark red "scars", suggesting Mars or Horus. And its two-tone leaves are dark green and glossy on one side, as they are yellow-green and opaque on the other. The green and female energy (reminiscent also of the Green Language) along with the yellow and male energy has Alchemical implications.

The Yew Tree has a well-known, long life span. And it seems there are yews that have aged two-thousand or more years in Great Britain; similar to the Giant Redwoods in the western U.S. The longevity of these Yew trees approximate the length of an Astrological Age. Indeed, the Yew was quite proliferate in Europe 10,000 years ago[1] and some of the largest Yews found around Great Britain today, were actually planted during the pre-Christian, Celtic era; the Celts holding the Yew to be sacred.

The Yew is a dioecious plant having the male and female reproductive organs borne on separate individuals of the same species. Yew trees are supposedly able to produce a toxin or growth retardant that prevents other young trees forming under their canopies. This is especially apparent in pure yew woodland.

From Liber LXV:

I.13: Wolf's bane is not so sharp as steel; yet it pierceth the body more subtly.
I.14: Even as evil kisses corrupt the blood, so do my words devour the spirit of man.
I.15: I breathe, and there is infinite dis-ease in the spirit.
I.16: As an acid eats into steel, as a cancer that utterly corrupts the body; so am I unto the spirit of man.
I.17: I shall not rest until I have dissolved it all.
I.39: All they understand not that thou and I are fashioning a boat of mother-of-pearl. We will sail down the river of Amrit even to the yew-groves of Yama, where we may rejoice exceedingly.

In Asturian tradition and culture the yew tree has had a real link with the land, the people, the ancestors and the ancient religion. It was tradition on All Saints Day to bring a branch of a yew tree to the tombs of those who died recently so they will find the guide in their return to the Land of Shadows. The yew tree can be found near chapels, churches and cemeteries since ancient times as a symbol of the transcendence of death, and is usually found in the main squares of the villages where people celebrated the open councils that served as a way of general assembly to rule the village affairs.

[1] Significant in that this is the Age of Taurus, where the Sphinx and the ancient Gnosis of Hermes are thought to have originated.

The yew is often found in church yards from England and Ireland to Galicia; some of these trees are exceptionally large (over 3 m diameter) and may be over 2,000 years old. The Christian church commonly found it expedient to take over these existing sacred sites for churches. It is sometimes suggested that these were planted as a symbol of long life or trees of death. One reason that the yews were planted was to discourage farmers and drovers from letting their animals wander into the burial grounds, with the poisonous foliage being the disincentive.

It was used by various religions, and certain yew objects such as drinking-cups are still regarded as having a certain spiritual potency. It was used medicinally to treat viper bites, hydrophobia (rabies) and heart ailments, and as an abortifascient (a *substance used to induce abortion).* This perhaps, solves the conundrum presented in Liber Laiad; that being: once the Magickal Childe is formulated in the curcurbit during sexual magick, how does one retrieve the implanted seed? As well, in several of the GCL biological texts, ideas on cellular development and its relation to cancer are presented. See I.16 quoted above, from Liber LXV.

The precursors of chemotherapy drug Paclitaxel can be derived from the leaves of European Yew, which is a more renewable source than the bark of the Pacific Yew (*Taxus brevifolia*). This ended a point of conflict in the early 1990s; many environmentalists, including Al Gore, had opposed the harvesting of paclitaxel for cancer treatments. Docetaxel (another taxane) can then be obtained by semi-synthetic conversion from the precursors. In the Central Himalayas, the plant is used as a treatment for breast and ovary cancer. In 1021, Avicenna introduced the medicinal use of Taxus baccata L

for phytotherapy in *The Canon of Medicine*. He named this herbal drug as "Zarnab" and used it as a cardiac remedy. This was the first known use of a calcium channel blocker[2] drug, which were not in wide use in the Western world until the 1960s.

The foliage and seeds contain several toxic alkaloids, in particular, the poisonous *taxine*; found in the wood, bark, foliage and seeds. Also, old and desiccated foliage are more poisonous than young and fresh foliage. Symptoms include excitation, hyperventilation, and tachycardia, followed by deceleration of the heart, hypotension, nausea, stomach pains, cramps, giddinesses, colic, violent diarrhoea, dizzy spells, convulsions, coma and death. The fruit is edible and consists of an egg-shaped seed, enveloped by a fleshy cup-shaped aril that turns bright red as it ripens. The arilles, removed from their seeds, have diuretic and laxative effects.

See the quotes from LXV above. Also, think about the physical strain with the onrush of illumination...what poisons...toxins...entheogens do in the psychedelic and psycho-physical transformation of the body. Thinking about the body, of which the senses take in data at a purely physical level before the brain processes it. It is at this level that the emotions arise and are then interpreted by the brain. The emotions then are the analysis of the sensory data with the intellect of course, being the analysis of the emotions. Now, think of the body as composed of so many cells, each with their own mitochondria (mitachlorians in Star Wars terminology). The mitochondria are a symbiosis of eukyrotes and prokyrotes; living beings in their own rite, which means there is some consciousness in them. Mother and Sri Aurobindo worked to bring these cells to full independent consciousness.

So again, at the body level, there is a consciousness of which our brains are not necessarily cognizant. And this is the level where the emotions are produced. On can almost hear Obi Wan Kenobi saying to look: "Trust your feelings."

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[2] **Calcium channel blockers** are a class of drugs and natural substances that disrupt the calcium (Ca^{2+}) conduction of calcium channels. It has effects on many excitable cells of the body, such as cardiac muscle, i.e. heart, smooth muscles of blood vessels, or neurons. The main clinical usage of calcium channel blockers is to decrease blood pressure. It is for this action that they are used in individuals with hypertension.

Appendix

The Medical Significance of Taxane

In more recent history, the yew tree has come to the forefront of medical research due to the discovery of the anti-cancer agent taxol in the 1960's, a most promising cancer drug that can be isolated mostly from the bark of the yew. This anticancer agent, known as taxol, can be extracted from the bark of the Pacific yew. It is a chemotherapeutic drug that has been shown to be extremely effective against ovarian cancer and may assist in the treatment of other forms of the disease. Like all such drugs, taxol inhibits the correct expression of the genetic code. In fact, taxol actually inhibits the production of daughter cells by halting the mitotic process. Generally, taxol freezes the parent cancer cell in a mitotic stage before it can fully differentiate into its daughter cells. In order for the daughter cells to form, a microtubule spindle fiber must form, the chromosomes must separate and the tubulin that composes the microtubules of the spindle must decompose. When taxol is introduced into the dividing cell, it binds to the tubulin molecule in the microtubules and effectively makes these tubules indestructible. The cell therefore cannot complete mitosis and is frozen in this intermediate stage. This consequently will halt the rapid growth of cancerous tumors and leave malignant cells benign.

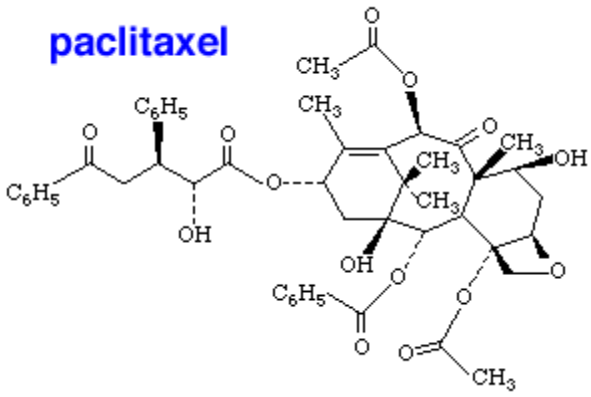

Image from **Lawrence and Jenkins, 1992**

Taxol, also known as paclitaxel, is classified as an unusual diterpene having a taxene skeleton. This complicated molecule is an exciting new possibility in the pharmacologist's struggle to find the perfect anticarcinogen. The mechanism in which taxol exhibits its action is rather unique. Most other anti-mitotic drugs, such as the vinca alkaloids and colchicine, depolymerize the mitotic spindle. They actively break it down so the cell cannot replicate itself. With drugs of this type, cancer cells cannot replicate while the drug is present in the body, but once the drug is removed from the cell, it can once again replicate.

Taxol, on the other hand, actually induces polymerization of the microtubule spindle fibers to a point at which they are so stable that they cannot be broken down and the cell is effectively permanently frozen in the process of dividing. Taxol and its analogues are the only such compounds that act as mitotic spindle stabilizers.

Like DNA, microtubules are ubiquitous cellular components. Microtubules are in dynamic equilibrium with their basic protein components, the tubulin dimer. Whereas most anti-mitotic agents seem to shift this equilibrium back towards the soluble tubulin dimers, taxol shifts the equilibrium toward stabilized microtubule assembly. Basically, taxol does not bind to free tubulin dimers, but rather it preferentially binds to tubulin dimers that are components of the microtubule and effectively locks them into the microtubule conformation. Taxol has one other general effect. In concentrations as low as 0.05 micromoles/L, taxol seems to create the perfect cellular environment for pushing the aforementioned equilibrium towards microtubule assembly. Remarkably, taxol-treated microtubules are stable even after treatment with calcium or low temperatures, conditions that usually promote disassembly.

For taxol to be clinically useful, it must be administered in concentrations ranging from 0.1-10 micromoles/L. These concentrations of taxol produce several dramatic effects in microtubular organization. First of all, cells treated with taxol organize the arrays of disorganized microtubules into parallel bundles. Secondly, in addition to freezing the normal, microtubular, mitotic spindle, the taxol-treated cell often contains other centers of microtubular organization known as asters. In normal cells, centrioles organize most of the microtubules into the mitotic spindle. In addition, centrioles produce asters, which are smaller microtubular radiations that anchor the centriole within the cell's cytoplasm. In the taxol-treated cell, several more asters are formed at various locations within the cell serving to further strengthen the cell's structure and preventing, in a different manner, cell separation. These properties are what make taxol such a special compound.

Cancer is an inevitable disease. So long as people live, cancers will occur. There will never be a vaccine that someone can invent in order to prevent one from ever getting cancer. The disease is a mutation, and mutations are impossible to prevent because of their inherent random nature. While taxol may not be the end all cure for cancer, it is definitely a significant move towards a highly effective treatment. To this we owe all the thanks to a simple little yew tree called *Taxus brevifolia*.

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Taxus brevifolia

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By Tim Partridge

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Taxus baccata

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxus_baccata

The Yew: Sacred Tree of Transformation and Rebirth

By Glennie Kindred

(Originally published Samhain 1997)

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The Ancient Yew

http://www.geocities.com/ancientyew2003/

Molecular cloning of a cytochrome P450 taxane 10b-hydroxylase cDNA from Taxus and functional expression in yeast

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