

## **The Spine**

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As an energetic vessel, the body is transformed by experiences and affective states, which implicates a change in the physiology and the brain systems (Siegel, 2010). McGilchrist (2009) says that the bidirectionality in the interaction between body and psyche suggests that “the right hemisphere's superiority in the emotional realm is explicitly linked to the close physiological relationship with the body” (p. 69). This notion ties to Jung's (1937/1969) theory that “the separation of psychology from the basic assumptions of biology is purely artificial, because the human psyche lives in indissoluble union with the body” (p. 114). The body constitutes the mode of contact between consciousness and world; it is the milieu wherein I experience narratives and feelings; it is my manner of inserting myself into the world.

In the architecture of my body, the spine is the place of chronic pain and instability. For years my attention rested on the palpable matter, on cause and effect- falls, lifting of heavy objects, and gravity's pull all contribute to deterioration and inflammation. Over the years my awareness has oriented

towards a co-constructed, dynamic, interrelating, and yet unpredictable relationship between external experiences and their interiority anchored in the body. I began noticing curious synchronicities between beginnings and eruption of the pain in my lower back. Bringing attention to the spine, my curiosity rests on what the spine holds, to its voice and rhythms, and the nuances and images that give rise to the feelings and the embodied experience of the spine.

The word “spine” comes from the botanical word meaning “thorn” or “prickle.” Each individual vertebra has a dorsal projection called a spine and at the same time the heartwood (duramen) of a tree, like a backbone as a whole, is also known as its spine. One of the more important symbols to the ancient Egyptians was the djed pillar, which suggests both tree and spine. The hieroglyphic sign for the djed pillar means “enduring,” “stable.” ... The cerebrospinal fluid, flowing within the protection of the spinal column toward the organs of generation, was identified by the ancient Greeks and Romans with the “stuff of life.”... and it may not be surprising in this context to read Jung's statement that the collective unconscious itself “is localized anatomically in the subcortical centers, the cerebellum and the spinal cord” (CW 9.1, para 282). This “vital link” is in fact what gives to the psyche its stability, gives to the personality what we call “backbone,” a fortitude able to support the weight of an authentic life. ARAS (2023a)

When the pain in my back flares, no movement is possible. It's an extraordinary embodied felt experience of the brain telling the legs to move, but the spine, carrying the information, is unwilling to relay the message. I freeze.

The image that comes forth (refer to image A) is the undulating fluid spine at the top, in juxtaposition to the blocked, geometric, concrete-like shape at the base of the spine. What is above no longer connects to what is below. Von Franz (1997) says that when individuals “come to understand that the solution is to be found within their own psyche and not in some outer thing, the worry diminishes, the restless dragon is appeased” (p. 53). Open/closed and blocked/fluid are part of experience in many levels; I wonder if the spine, when unmoving and in closed posture, confronts me with the negotiation and the transitions that life demands, a reckoning with the dualities and opposite tendencies.

Further amplification of the spine points to the djed column.

According to Eric Newmann, the many meanings of the djed column [a pillar-like figure in Egyptian hieroglyphics] symbolize essential features of the principle of integration that leads to “duration;” “transformation,” and the “ascent” from mere biology to consciousness.... Sacred poles (and in the human body, the backbone) unite symbolically what is below with what is above, earth with heaven-or the ego with the realm of the archetypes. This “vital link” is in fact what gives to the psyche its stability, gives to the personality what we call “backbone,” a fortitude able to support the weight of an authentic life. (ARAS, 2023a)

Imbued in this amplification is the idea that staying present in life, requires balancing stillness with movement, contracting with expanding, alertness with carelessness, doing with being-rhythms of inner movements and outer motivations that help one to become intimate with oneself.

In the body, the movement repertoire of the spine is flexing, extending, rotating, aligning, and undulating. The spine carries the theme of the posture in life, the tensions, and fears that are carried in life. What the spine reveals may be that finding balance and flexibility in living and tolerating the opposites brings about aliveness, whereas leaning into fears and the unknown forecloses and arrests life and growth.

Elsewhere in the symbol of the spine opens and links to Chakras, the centers for the essential life force surrounding, permeating and emanating from within particular parts of the human body. The first chakra represents the foundational basis of human existence that we share with other animals, psyche meeting soma. The Kundalini, or “serpent energy” of Shakti, is coiled at the base of the spine until it begins to be unleashed and travels upward through the spine. The heat and energy released in this process manifest the awakening of consciousness. Whereas the base chakra at the bottom of the spine is holding the as-yet-unawakened, latent potential of Kundalini, the seventh, or crown chakra, represents the awakened psychic possibilities of self realization, the gods conjoined. The crown chakra signifies the ultimate refinement and differentiation of expanded consciousness for an embodied human being. ARAS (2023b).

Connected in the body to the spine, Kundalini, and the root chakra, I think of the archetypal theme of death and reb linking to the concept of renewal, of the transformation and reincarnation of the personality imbued in the individuation process.

The created art images hold great significance in that the body organ carries a symbolic repertoire tied to a larger message held by the unconscious psyche. As Eigen (2018) says, it's "an ache trying to let you know something about its existence. An ache trying to let you know something about your existence. The background unknown speaking to you" (p. 37).

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Shambhala



Image A

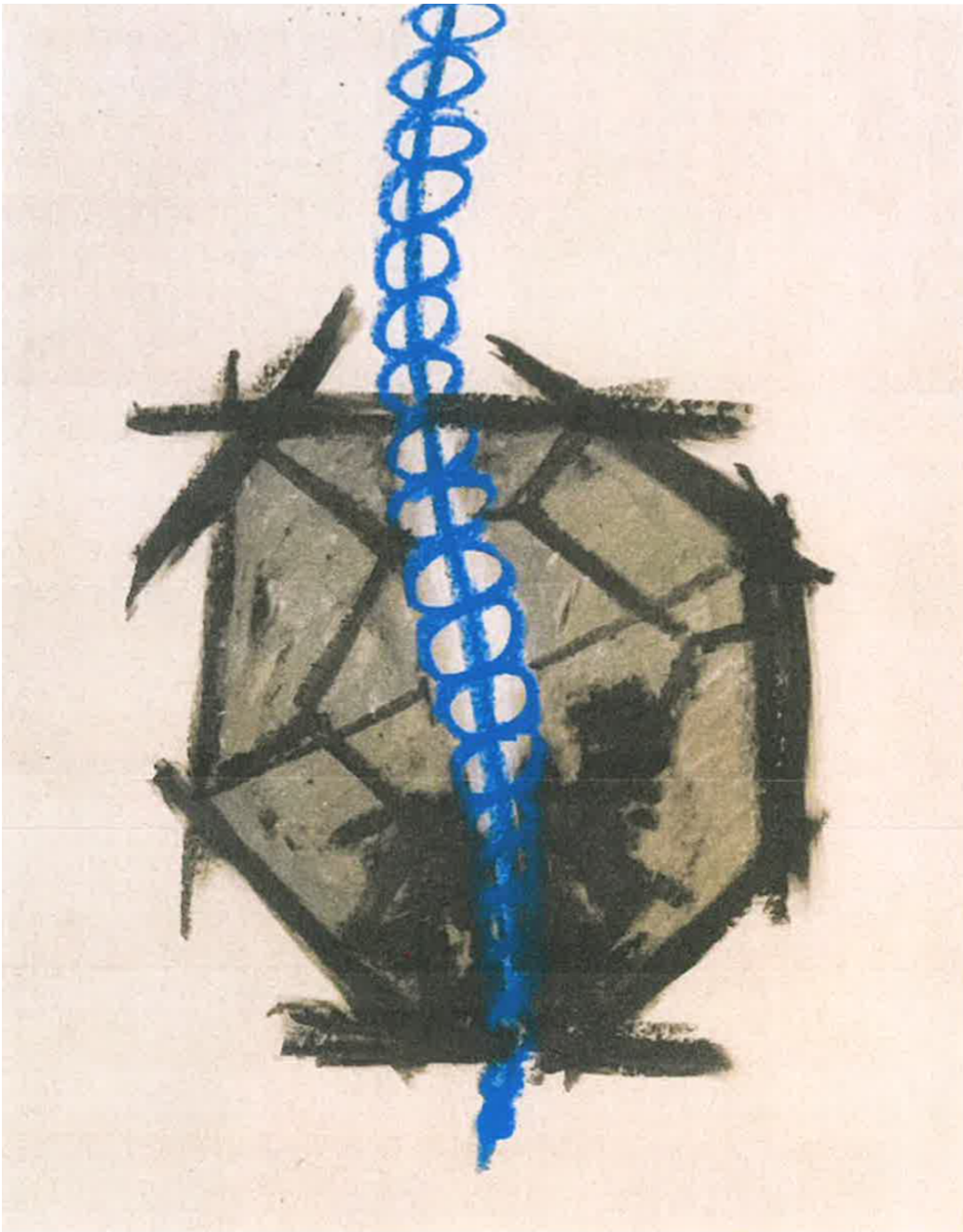


Image B