

## THE CIRCLE OF LIFE AND THE GREAT OAK

### The circle of life

The circle of life can be seen as an arch. The arch begins from the cradle and it draws its line all the way to the grave. From there it dives to the other side: to the invisible, incomprehensible and formless. When a new life begins, the arch appears again to this world. This is the eternal circle of a human family. New born babies entering the world and old people just about to leave to the unknown are in opposite points. Both of them cross the invisible border. A figure of a tree represents this circling of life and death. Not so long ago, every family used to have their own very special tree, inside of which the souls of the fore-parents were believed to live. In the respected tree were combined the living and the dead as one soul entity. The family histories are often illustrated as trees. Ancient fore-parents are the roots, and from there the chain of generations goes up towards the new branches.

### The great oak

This entity of circles are linked with the universe – or cosmos – kept together by the Great Oak, also known as the Iron World Tree. The cycle of nature, like the cycle of life, consists of both life and death. Man and Nature have the same godly origin, and that's why the life of a man and the cycle of nature reflect each others. Also in the nature, the crossing moments – beginnings and endings, high and low points – are the most sacred and most meaningful moments. It is told that the Great Oak is born in the midsummer when there is the most of light, and that it dies in a moment of wolf in the middle of the darkest winter. In Finland, also most of the children were and still are being born in midsummer.

The roots of the Great Oak are deep rooted in the earth of the North, and its top reaches above the stars. In the folk tradition, the Great Oak is sometimes seen as a tree which combines the earth and the sky. Seen this way, the Oak has in itself two opposites: heaven and earth, life and death, masculine and feminine. The human soul as well as a human family consists also of these opposites. On the other hand, the dark earth of the North and the glimmering of heavenly lights illustrate the fundamental dualism of a man: the ability for good and bad. The bad is the darkness of the roots, chaos and mud, and the good is brightness of the sky, harmony, light and air. When the oak is cut in the story, its nature is well described: the Oak gives tools for both good and bad. Its branches cause happiness and love for the one who takes them, but the woodcuts are taken by the witch of the North, and they cause illnesses and death.