**Quadratos: Four Path, Four Questions, Four Metaphors**

**Who is Alexander Shaia? His story**

Who is Alexander Shaia? He was born and raised as a Maronite Catholic of Lebanese ancestry, and grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. He attended the University of Notre Dame intending to go to seminary and become a Catholic priest, but the more rational way of approaching theology confused him, and he decided to study cultural anthropology with a focus on indigenous peoples instead.

He learned that there was a four-stage process from childhood to adulthood in each of the cultures: (1) entering, involving ignorance and loneliness; (2) pitfalls or trickery; (3) dawning understanding, even ecstasy, and (4) keys to maturation and serving the community.

He synthesized his learnings from cultural anthropology with the thought of Christian writers such as Henri Nouwen, Morton Kelsey and John Dunne and learned of the mysticism in Western thought. He also studied Joseph Campbell and C. G. Jung.

He finally entered seminary to become a priest, but the seminary did not prove to be for him. He had to start over. He became a staff member of a Catholic parish and helped implement the ancient rite of Christian baptism, which included a four-fold process. He did this for ten years.

He then entered a doctoral program in clinical psychology and learned about “Sandplay” from a Swiss Jungian analyst, Dora Kalff, a devout Christian, and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhist meditation. He found once again a four-fold process of growth.

He then looked to see if others had noticed this four-fold pattern of growth. He noted how storytellers identified four parts of a process: (1) hearing the summons, (2) enduring obstacles, (3) receiving the boon, and (4) returning to community.

Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck describes four stages of community formation: (1) pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness and genuine community.

Matthew Fox, a former Roman Catholic priest and now an Episcopal priest names his four-fold process: Via Positivia, Via Negativia, Via Creativia and Via Transformativa.

He explored other religious traditions. In Judaism he found: (1) escaping slavery in Egypt, (2) wandering in the wilderness, (3) arriving in the Promised Land, and (4) creating a fruitful home there.

In Buddhism he compared the journey to the Four Noble Truths. In Hinduism he compared it to the epic account of Shiva, Parvati and Ganesha.

Shaia became convinced that the fourfold inner pilgrimage is a universal spiritual truth whose imprint can be found across time, geography, culture and religious tradition with the following stages:

1. The inquirer begins on a spiritual journey.
2. The journey brings a time of trial, often involving pitfalls and sometimes trickery, but always bringing new and hard-won understanding.
3. The gift of enlarged comprehension, wholeness, and greater perspective is gained, sometimes suddenly and often with the sense of outside assistance.
4. Some actual practice of the wisdom gained is required to bringing that knowledge back to the community or those who follow the journey.

In reading the book, The Four Witnesses, by Robin Griffth-Jones, an Anglican priest and scholar, he learned how the four gospel accounts had been directed to specific communities of early Christians. Each community had a different critical spiritual question based on their circumstance. He realized then that each gospel was organized around “a different metaphorical landscape.”

Matthew, writing after the Great Temple of Jerusalem had fallen, uses the metaphors of mountain, rock and stone.

Mark, directing his gospel to Christians under the sentence of death, uses the metaphor of wilderness and Jewish historical equivalents for wilderness – deserts and bodies of water.

John’s gospel, likely written as a study for baptism, uses the metaphor of garden, often explicitly the Garden of Eden.

Luke’s gospel, written to the burgeoning communities of new Christians throughout the Mediterranean, has a core metaphor that is less apparent – the road: everything in Luke happens *between* places.

Shaia had wondered, “Why was the Sunday reading cycle of the gospels read from Matthew, Mark, then John (at Lent and Easter), then Luke? He noticed the pattern but could not find anyone who could explain it. Who created the pattern originally and did it have some truth?

He came to believe that “four early communities wrestled with four distinct set of challenges when faced with four distinct sets of historical circumstances that prompted four deep questions requiring answers.”

“There are four universal paths to spiritual maturity.”

“There are four necessary levels to reach psychological maturity.”

“The four gospels in ancient sequence disclose the full internal/eternal journey, the great and immutable design, the heart of God that moves all creation.

He could see in his own spiritual journey the four-fold path. When he went to Notre Dame to study to become a Roman Catholic priest, he lost his dream and had to start out again on a quest. That quest took him to study cultural anthropology, clinical psychology while continuing to serve in the church. It was difficult but fruitful. Finally, he came to the realization of new insight of how the four gospels were a whole and addressed the spiritual journey. And now he is sharing his insight with others, so they too can benefit from his experience and insights, and he is now on the road.

**The Inner Pilgrimage**

1. Loss of meaning and beginning the journey for meaning.
2. Time of testing, trial until new sense of meaning is gained.
3. An epiphany of greater comprehension and wholeness is gained, often suddenly and with help.
4. A practice of wisdom gained to bring the knowledge to others.

**Matthew** wrote for the Messianic Jews of Great Antioch. The crisis was caused by the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. The metaphor for their experience was climbing the great mountain, or rock or stone. The question they had to face was, “How do we face change?”

**Mark** wrote for the Messianic Jews of Rome. The crisis was caused by the great fire in Rome which Nero blamed them for causing, leading to persecution and martyrdom. The metaphors for their experience were “wilderness” and “stormy seas.” The question they had to face was, “How do we move through suffering?”

**John** wrote for the early Christians of Ephesus. The crisis was the danger of self-righteousness and spiritual immaturity due to quick spread of the Christian faith among diverse peoples. The metaphor for their experience was the “garden” based on the euphoria of being in a “Garden of Eden” state. The question they had to face was, “How do we receive joy?”

**Luke** wrote for the early Christians of Great Antioch, at a time a bit later than Matthew. The crisis was caused by the Roman legal sanctions against Christians in the empire. The metaphor for their experience was “on the road” because they had no place they could call home in the Roman Empire. The question they had to face was, “How do we mature in service?”

**Biblical Scholarship**

**How do we understand the Biblical discrepancies?**

**Shaia’s Understanding:**

1. The gospel accounts are not so much biographies of Jesus, but are proclamations of Jesus the Christ alive in the lives of Messianic Jews and early Christians.
2. Each gospel account addresses the core questions of an early Christian community.

**The Ancient Mystery of the Gospel Sequence**

1. Christianity was illegal until about 315 C.D.
2. Five major centers of Christian influence emerged while Christianity was illegal.
3. 20 ecumenical councils were held in the 4th Century to organize Christianity.
4. 50 gospel accounts where present until there were four approved gospel accounts.
5. What explains the Lectionary Cycle over a three year period?
6. Judaism had a three year lectionary cycle for reading the Torah, known as the Palestinian Cycle.
7. The Christian lectionary cycle is based on Matthew, Mark and Luke with pieces of John’s account read in Lent and Easter
8. Could it be that the lectionary cycle was created to assist the faithful in the spiritual journey with the four questions?
9. Begin the journey with the question of change based on Matthew’s account.
10. Continue the journey with the question of addressing suffering based on Mark’s account.
11. Persevere in the journey with the question of how to receive joy in the garden based on John’s account.
12. Complete the journey with the question about maturing in service on the road with Luke’s account.
13. In the 600’s in response to 200 years of attacks from northern warlords, a Pope sought to simplify the story of Jesus the Christ from a three year lectionary to a one year lectionary, and resulted in a uniform 52 week lectionary. Thus the spiritual journey of the three year lectionary cycle was lost.
14. In the 1940’s the Roman Catholic Church opened its libraries for research and rediscovered the ancient three year lectionary.
15. In 1969 the Roman Catholic Church reinstituted the three year lectionary.
16. Ten years later many Protestant churches instituted a three year lectionary, including most mainline Protestant churches.
17. Shaia believes the four-fold sequence of the gospels: Matthew to Mark to John to Luke holds the internal and eternal map of spiritual transformation.

**The Gospel of Matthew: Climbing the Great Mountain, How do we face change? The first path**

1. Matthew’s gospel account was written two to five years after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans.
2. The Temple represented the center of Jewish life.
3. The image of the mountain – Jerusalem and the temple was on Mount Moriah.
4. Matthew taught that Jesus taught of a new temple within the individual.
5. Joseph, Mary’s husband, was used as an example of a person having to deal with disappointment and change, when he discovered Mary was with child.
6. Joseph was advised by an angel in a dream to take Mary as his wife, which was against tradition.
7. However, Joseph listened to the message of the angel even though it was against family practice and tradition.
8. Thus, like Joseph, the Messianic Jews of Antioch were called to learn that change requires this kind of attentive listening of the heart.
9. The gospel was written to encourage the Messianic Jews to turn away from tradition and turn to what the Spirit was saying to them about Jesus the Christ and their lives.

**The Gospel of Mark: Crossing the Story Sea, How do we move through suffering? The second path**

1. The Messianic Jews of Rome became blamed for the Rome’s fire.
2. Centurions went door to door looking for Messianic Jews.
3. They were tortured and murdered in the Circus Maximus.
4. They were asked to identify other Messianic Jews.
5. They asked, “Was their faith in Jesus the Christ worth martyrdom?
6. Mark shared how Jesus the Christ’s suffering had a greater purpose and so would their suffering have a greater purpose.
7. The stories of Jesus the Christ crossing the sea raised the fear of the disciples, just as the Messianic Jews of Rome would live with fear. The disciples were called to live with faith, as would be the Messianic Jews of Rome.
8. The Second Path requires endurance. And endurance is supported by our practice of prayer and meditation.

**The Gospel of John: Resting in the Glorious Garden, How do we receive joy? The third path**

1. John wrote his gospel account to the Christians in Ephesus at the end of the 1st Century, CE
2. They were already kicked out of the synagogues of Judaism and became known as Christians
3. By this time, Christians were not all Jews.
4. Christianity spread rapidly and their spirits were euphoric and joyful.
5. However, euphoria could lead to self-righteousness and division, and they were in danger of spiritual immaturity.
6. John’s gospel account is full of philosophical speeches by Jesus the Christ, unlike the other accounts.
7. In the three year lectionary, parts of John’s Gospel were read during Lent and Easter seasons.
8. Seekers would receive epiphanies of inspiration but could easily lose it or misunderstand it.
9. These epiphanies help us to see the grace of the gospel and become whole, as we feel in union or one with the Spirit.
10. John’s gospel account is a life-giving oasis after a period of struggle and suffering.
11. The challenge is that Christians are tempted to remain in “the garden” instead of going out in sharing the gospel in service.

**The Gospel of Luke: Walking the Road of Riches, How do we mature in service? The fourth path**

1. Actually, the Gospel of Luke is part of a two volume set, Luke/Acts of the Apostles.
2. It was written in the last part of the 1st Century, CE, as the Messianic Jews were kicked out of the synagogue, and spread to non-Jews despite the rise in persecution.
3. Their challenge was, “How are we to respond to being cast out by Judaism and persecuted by the Roman Empire?” Their response was “to be on the road, be on the journey of compassion and trust in their Christian practice.
4. A motto could be, “Be the change you desire.”
5. A story only found in Luke could be instructive, the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus the Christ was being criticized by the Pharisees and scribes for spending time with tax-collector and sinners, and Jesus responds with three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. The parables reveal the heart of God seeking those who are lost or who lost their way.
6. Shaia emphasizes that we must be grounded in Christian practice in order to serve.
7. We need to reduce and eliminate the ego’s desire to control our lives.

**The Great Sequence – Always Present**

Shaia believes that the four-fold process of the spiritual journey is always present, and can be found in other traditions. The stages are (1) entering, (2) prayer and growth, (3) illumination and (4) commitment to service. He believes this four-fold process was part of the preparation for the ancient baptismal rite which appeared by 300 C.E.

Other examples of “the great sequence” can be found in the pilgrimage to the Holy Land which began in the 4th century CE, and the labyrinth which began in the 12 century CE, when it became too dangerous to go to Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land. People were able to make the four-fold journey in both of these ways:

1. Pilgrim decides to set out on a journey to cross the labyrinth’s threshold
2. Pilgrim embarks on journey, following a circuitous path while praying fervently in the labyrinth
3. Upon arrival in the holy place, or to the center of the labyrinth, the pilgrim spends time there in reflection
4. Pilgrim returns home, or back out of the labyrinth through the pattern, with prayer focused on integration of revelations received into everyday life.

The Mass or the Eucharist also has the four-fold spiritual journey

1. Believer forms the intention to enter the sacred place for Mass and opens her or his heart to inspiration and challenge
2. Scripture reading and sermon charge believer to a process of self-examination
3. Believer experiences union with God in the Holy Communion
4. Blessing, the Missa (to be sent) into the world to serve

**The Unconscious Tragedy of Three**

Shaia says that much of Christian theology and spiritual direction is focused on a three-fold spiritual journey, instead of a four-fold one. For example, he says that Christian theology and spiritual direction focuses on (1) purgation, (2) illumination, and (3) union.

Shaia says that psychology focuses on (1) surrender or commitment, (2) testing or trial and (3) illumination or resolution.

Shaia says that the missing fourth path is the integration of insight in loving service.

Shaia believes that with a three-fold path what happens is that old habits, attitudes or behaviors return and there is regression.

**A Significant Note**

1. It can’t be overstated, Jesus the Christ lives. Some people talk as if Jesus died, was raised and ascended, only to die again. That’s why it is important to talk about Jesus the Christ, who was before, entered into human form in Jesus the Christ, died, was risen and ascended and continues to live.
2. The apostle Paul translate the Aramaic word, “Messiah,” into the Greek word, “Christos”
3. Mark recounted Jesus the Christ as a living, present moment reality for the Messianic Jews of Rome.
4. All four gospel accounts used Jesus the Christ as a present moment reality
5. In the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries those newly baptized had an experience of Christ as a living reality and Christ lived in the believers.
6. The Christians were known as “followers of the way.”
7. The four gospels teach of a universal Jesus, a presence of the eternal Christ with a different face in each gospel.