

# The Benziger Spiral



## *Balance. Growth. Spirit.*

“In nature, when opposing forces meet, spirals ensue.” — Caroline Casey

An archetypal symbol of transcendence, the vortex or spiral represents the conscious life force — an eternal energy that has always existed and will always exist — within all living things. Spirals also symbolize the human journey — both inner and outer — to the Self, and simultaneously toward the Divine. The center of a spiral is the center of the Self as it goes through the forward movement of time, yet never loses its essential, original spirit.

The spiral is all-encompassing, embodying opposite forces with dynamic tension but without conflict. It moves without moving — inward toward the center (the core of understanding, the moment of creation) and at the same time outward toward the larger universe. It has no up or down, forward or backward, left or right; or perhaps more correctly it has all of these, flowing in all directions at once. In this, the spiral represents the balance of extremes — dark and light, hot and cold, wet and dry, departure and return. In the same way that we look back to the most ancient human traditions to forge a new path, the spiral must move backward in order to move forward.

Spirals appear everywhere in nature: in the center of a sunflower, the shells of marine animals, the whorls of our fingerprints, the movements of air and water across the surface of the planet. Our solar system, and beyond that our universe, are understood to be immense, ever expanding spirals. Even our most fundamental genetic information is encoded on a helix, a type of spiral. And from Native American and Celtic cave paintings to the most intricate Tibetan mandalas, down to the very symbol that represents Taoism, every human culture implicitly understands the spiral’s meaning and significance.

The four elements — Earth, Air, Fire and Water — appear within the spiral’s vortex in their archetypal positions. In pre-Christian tradition, Earth corresponds to North; Fire, to South; Air, to East; and Water, to West. The elements help us orient ourselves in the universe. The four elements and four directions call to mind other fours — the four seasons, four winds — but they also represent the four aspects of our nature: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

Visually, the elements converge in the center. The downward V of Earth and inverted V of Fire are an explicit depiction of the Chalice and the Blade, continuing the mark’s theme balancing of opposites: masculine and feminine, active and passive. The negative space between the elemental symbols forms an X, or Chi, which according to Plato’s *Timaeus* represents the soul of the world.

The fifth element, Spirit, is traditionally not represented by a symbol. Instead we find Spirit at the center of the vortex, where the planetary forces and physical elements intersect. Spirit is the totality that unifies the individual elements into a cohesive whole.

Deepening the mark’s significance further is the fact that the spiral surrounding the four elements has three “arms.” Three is a powerfully symbolic number in virtually every culture. In alchemy, the number 3 not only represents the four elements themselves, but also the union of the human with the divine. Three is the union of positive, negative, and neutral; it means stability, perfection, completion, and balance. Four is creation and wholeness, the tangible and the universal.

The interaction of 3 and 4 in a unified symbol layers meaning upon meaning in the same way that the spiral doubles back on itself — going backward to go forward, and constantly evolving while remaining unchanged.