

A Depth of Beginning

Notes on Kabbalah



Colin Low

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The immense quantity of useful information and opinion available on the WWW is, in most cases, provided freely, for the general good of all.

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Colin Low, 8th. May 2001

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Preface

The domestic cat is a curious creature. Anyone who has lived with a cat will have become accustomed to finding the creature on top of the wardrobe, in the attic, beneath the bed, under the floorboards, and inside each and every cardboard box that appears in the home.

Human beings are curious creatures too, every bit as curious as cats, and differ only in being less fascinated by the interiors of empty cardboard boxes. For many people the urge to explore is as vital as eating, drinking and sleeping.

Kabbalah is part of an ancient tradition of exploration. The domain of exploration is the human condition. For some people the experience of living in the world is not enough; because we are self-conscious we can observe ourselves in the process of living, and we can observe ourselves observing ourselves, and immersed in this introspective hall-of-mirrors, people have attempted to find meaning and make of sense of it. Morality, ethics, metaphysics, theology, science and mysticism are consequences of a long tradition that places human existence inside a larger framework. The truth, as Chris Carter observes, is out there.

The urge to explore is as strong today as it ever was. It is an individual impulse that cannot be satisfied gratuitously through books or television. For some people the need to explore the human condition is urgent and instinctive... and personal. It is the personal element that distinguishes received knowledge from first-hand experience, and it is the root of wisdom. Should you live a moral life because you were instructed in morality, or can you find an inner wellspring of morality? Can we ground our lives in a context that is not completely arbitrary? Is there a home for our hearts that does not insult our intelligence?

We live in a deeply confused age. A plethora of full-time professional experts in every subject has disenfranchised the majority of people from genuine inquiry. Pick up a book on any subject, work through its references into the heart of the subject, and you will discover a world of com-

plexity that is utterly intimidating and alienating. There is so much to know.

My primary motivation is to learn at first hand. It is important to learn what other people have learned, but too many people have lived and died for me to learn more than a small fraction of what they have learned. There is a prodigious supply of information, facts, opinions, theories, suppositions, and doctrines, but the wisdom needed to sort through the mountain of trash in the hope of finding a gold nugget is not supplied.

Kabbalah is part of a long tradition of learning about the human condition that devotes as much time to the heart as to the head. The head can be catered for *en-masse* - this is what schools and universities do - but the heart is always intensely personal. The head can be taught in lectures and instructed from books, but the heart has to live each experience from the inside.

Kabbalah comes from a time when people lived less in their heads. Kabbalah has been practised since Crusaders were riding to the Holy Land in the early Middle Ages, and its underpinnings go back another fifteen hundred years to a time when Rome was a one-chariot town on the banks of the Tiber. There are elements that date from a time when Jews were living in Babylon in the time of the Assyrian kings, and there are borrowings, buried deep within, that go back as far as Sumer and Akkad five thousand years ago.

Kabbalah is capable of touching the soul in a way that very few things can. It contains much that went out of fashion two hundred years ago when it seemed that human reason could provide answers to all meaningful questions. It contains much that has been actively suppressed by established religions - and even Judaism has gone through phases of trying to limit the influence and accessibility of Kabbalah. Kabbalah brings the subjective and personal element back to learning (hence attempts to suppress it). Unlike science, which studies the natural world in a way which factors out the subjectivity of

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human consciousness, Kabbalah takes 'consciousness-acting-in-the-world' to be a legitimate field of study, and the world of the Kabbalist extends beyond the world of natural science to include a larger world of direct mystical apprehension. It includes God.

From the point of view of Enlightenment rationality, as embodied by thinkers such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant, Kabbalah is a reversion to a discredited metaphysical view of existence that projects human values onto a universe that is utterly alien to human values.

From the point of view of a modern Kabbalist, Hume and Kant are just as dated; the astounding success of modern physical theories, particularly quantum mechanics and general relativity, shows that human beings do indeed have a deep and penetrating understanding of the natural world through the medium of mathematics, just as Plato proposed two and a half thousand years ago. We reason about the natural world and create exceedingly complex technologies on the basis of that reasoning. Our minds *can* function as a simulacrum of the external world. The Kabbalistic doctrine that the human being is a microcosm, a perfect miniature simulation of the world at large, contains more than a grain of truth - it is at the heart of modern epistemology.

What does this book propose to achieve? What are its goals?

If a chemist from the twentieth century could step into a time-machine and go back two-hundred years, he or she would feel a kinship with the chemists of that period. The glass apparatus would be cruder, the chemicals less refined, and there would be considerable differences in terminology, underlying theory, and laboratory procedures, but a chemist today still shares much in common with the chemists of the past. However, despite this kinship, chemists have not been *trapped* in the past, and the subject as it is studied today is very different from the chemistry of two hundred years ago.

Kabbalah has existed for nine hundred years, and like any living discipline it has evolved through time, and it continues to evolve. One aspect of this evolution is that it is necessary for living Kabbalists to present what they understand by Kabbalah so that Kabbalah itself continues to live and continues to retain its usefulness to each new generation. If Kabbalists

do not do this and become trapped in the past, then it becomes a dead thing, an historical curiosity, as was virtually the case within Judaism by the nineteenth century.

These notes were written with that intention: to present one view of Kabbalah as it is currently practised, so that people who are interested in Kabbalah and want to learn more about it are not limited to texts written hundreds or thousands of years ago, or for that matter, modern texts written about texts written hundreds or thousands of years ago. For this reason these notes acknowledge the past, but they do not defer to it. There are many adequate texts for those who wish to understand Kabbalah as it was practised in the past.

These notes have another purpose. The majority of people who are drawn towards Kabbalah are not historians; they are people who want to know enough about it to decide whether they should use it as part of their own personal exploration into the condition of being human. These notes may be brief, but there is enough information not only to make that decision, but also to move from theory into practice.

I should emphasise that what I present here is one interpretation of Kabbalah out of many. I leave it to others to present their own variants and I make no apology if the material is biased towards a particular point of view. It is easy, when looking at history from a great distance, to see homogeneity where there was none, and when looking at a tradition as long-lived and complex as Kabbalah there is a temptation to over-simplify and create for the modern reader the fiction of an homogeneous, monolithic and internally consistent tradition called 'The Kabbalah'. There never was such a thing. The variety of viewpoints, interpretations and practices was (and still is) bewildering.

A version of these notes was published originally on the Internet over the period 1990-1992, and ASCII versions of the text can be found on a number of Internet and bulletin board servers. This version has been completely revised and greatly extended.

I would like to thank M.S. and the T.S.H.U. for all the fun.

And the title? It comes from the *Sepher Yetzirah*:

Preface

“Ten sephirot of nothingness: Their measure is ten which have no end. A depth of beginning, a depth of end ...”

Colin Low 2001

Notes on Kabbalah

Introduction

The word “Kabbalah” is derived from a root which means “to receive or accept” and is often used synonymously with the word “tradition”. There are many alternative spellings of the word, the two most popular being Kabbalah and Qabalah, but Cabala, Qaballah, Qabala, Kaballah (and so on *ad nauseam*) are also seen. The choice of spelling in these Notes was made as a result of a poll of the books on my bookcase, and it should not be taken as highly significant.

If Kabbalah means “tradition”, then historically the core of the tradition was the attempt to penetrate the inner meaning of the Bible, which was taken to be the literal (but heavily veiled) word of God.

The act of reading sacred texts, such as the Bible (*Tanakh*) and Talmud, is a vital activity in Judaism. Torah scholars were and are respected and admired as leaders of their communities. These documents are seen as having an almost holographic complexity, and rather than having a single agreed meaning, they were scrutinised and referred to in order to yield new meanings to deal with every kind of situation. Vast commentaries were written and referred to. Ingenious interpretations and insights were accumulated, and often printed around the text of the Bible so that it becomes a kind of early hypertext.

In these circumstances it was natural for secret or initiated traditions of interpretation to arise, traditions grounded in the Jewish religion but which encouraged more daring speculations about the nature of God, the creation, and the role of human beings in it.

The earliest documents associated with Kabbalah come from the period ~100 to ~1000 A.D. and describe the attempts of “Merkabah” mystics to penetrate the seven halls (Hekaloth) of creation in order to reach the Merkabah (throne-chariot) of God. These mystics appear to have used what would now be recognised as familiar methods of shamanism - fasting, repetitious

chanting, prayer, posture - to induce trance states in which they fought their way past terrible seals and guards to reach an ecstatic state in which they “saw God”. Documents such as the *Greater Hekhalot* describe the heavenly halls that must be negotiated to reach the throne of God, and provide clues as to how to pass the various guardian spirits.

A highly influential document, the *Sepher Yetzirah*, or “Book of Formation”, was written during the earlier part of this period, probably during the late Roman empire, and may have originated in Palestine. It is an extremely terse and enigmatic document that has been the subject of many commentaries since the earliest times. It appears to be theurgic. It describes how God made the world using numbers and letters, and implies that a person can acquire some of the divine creative power by understanding numbers and letters.

By the early Middle Ages more theosophical developments had taken place, chiefly a description of “processes” within God, and the development of an esoteric view of creation as a process in which God manifests in a series of *emanations*, or *sephiroth*. This doctrine of the *sephiroth* can be found in a rudimentary form in the *Sepher Yetzirah*, but by the time of the publication of the book *Bahir* in the 12th. century CE it had reached a form not too different from the form it takes today. The doctrine of *sephirothic* emanation and the use of the word “Kabbalah” as a description for a particular mystical tradition is believed to come from Provence in the south of France, from the school of Isaac the Blind, who is widely credited with being “the father of Kabbalah”.

A motive behind the development of the doctrine of emanation can be found in the questions:

“If God made the world, then what is the world if it is not God?”

“If the world is God, then why is it imperfect?”

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It was necessary to bridge the gap between a pure and perfect being and a manifestly impure and imperfect world by a series of “steps” in which the divine light was successively diluted. The result shares something in common with developments in Platonism, a system of philosophy which was influential from classical Greek times until the Renaissance. Platonism also tried to resolve the same difficulty by postulating a “chain of being” which bridged the gap between the perfection of God, and the evident imperfection of the world of daily life.

The most influential Kabbalistic document, the *Sepher ha Zohar* or *Book of Splendour*, was published in the latter half of the thirteenth century by Moses de Leon (1238-1305 CE), a Spanish Jew. The *Zohar* is a series of separate documents covering a wide range of subjects, from a verse-by-verse esoteric commentary on the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), to highly theosophical descriptions of processes within God. There are some who believe the *Zohar* dates back to the Roman occupation of Palestine, but many scholars believe it was written by Moses de Leon and passed-off as an earlier text. The *Zohar* has been widely read and was highly influential within mainstream Judaism.

One of most interesting characters from the early period was Abraham Abulafia (1240-1295 CE), who believed that God cannot be described or conceptualised using everyday symbols. Like many Kabbalists he believed in the divine nature of the Hebrew alphabet and used abstract letter combinations and permutations (“*tzeruf*”) in intense meditations lasting many hours to reach ecstatic states. Because his abstract letter combinations were used as keys or entry points to altered states of consciousness, failure to carry through the manipulations correctly could have a drastic effect on the Kabbalist. In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [39] Scholem includes a fascinating extract from a description of one such experiment. Abulafia is unusual because (controversially) he was one of the few Kabbalists to provide explicit written details of practical techniques.

An important development in Kabbalah was the Safed school of mystics headed by Moses Cordovero (1522-1570 CE) and his successor Isaac Luria (1534-1572 CE). Luria, called “The Ari” or Lion, was a highly charismatic leader who exercised almost total control over the life of the school, and has passed out of history and

into myth as a saint. Emphasis was placed on living in the world and bringing the consciousness of God through *into* the world in a practical way. Practices were largely devotional.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Judaism as a whole was heavily influenced by Kabbalah, but two influences caused its decline. The first event was the mass defection of Jews to the cause of the heretic and apostate pseudo-messiah Shabbatai Tzevi (1626-1676 CE), an event Scholem calls “the largest and most momentous messianic movement in Jewish history subsequent to the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba Revolt.” The Shabbateans included many prominent rabbis and Kabbalists, and from this point on Kabbalah became inextricably mired with suspicions of heresy.

A second influence was the rise in Eastern Europe of a populist Kabbalism in the form of Chasidism, and its eventual decline into superstition (in the eyes of its rationalist opponents), so that by the beginning of this century a Jewish writer was able to dismiss Kabbalah as an historical curiosity.

Jewish Kabbalah has vast literature of many thousands of texts, most of which have not been translated into English.

A development which took place almost synchronously with the translation and publication of key texts of Jewish Kabbalah was its adoption by many Christian mystics, magicians and philosophers. Some Christians thought Kabbalah held keys that would reveal mysteries hidden in the scriptures, others tried to find in Kabbalah doctrines which might be used to convert Jews to Christianity.

There were some who recognised in the Kabbalah themes with which they were already familiar in the literature of Hermeticism and Neoplatonism. Renaissance philosophers such as Pico della Mirandola were familiar with Kabbalah and mixed it with Gnosticism, Pythagoreanism, Neo-platonism and Hermeticism to form a snowball which continued to pick up traditions as it rolled down the centuries. It is probably accurate to say that from the Renaissance on, virtually all European occult philosophers and magicians of note had a working knowledge of some aspects of Kabbalah.

Non-Jewish Kabbalah has suffered greatly from having only a limited number of source texts to work from, often in poor translations,

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and without the key commentaries which would have revealed the tradition associated with the concepts described. It is pointless to criticise non-Jewish Kabbalah (as many writers have) for misinterpreting Jewish Kabbalah. After 500 years it should be recognised as a parallel tradition with many points of correspondence and many points of difference.

Very little information has survived about the Practical Kabbalah, but there is abundant evidence that it involved a wide range of practices and included practices now regarded as magical - the fact that so many Kabbalists denounced the use of Kabbalah for magical purposes is evidence in itself (even if there were no other) that the use of these techniques was widespread. It is highly likely that many ritual magical techniques were introduced into Europe by Kabbalists or their less scrupulous camp followers.

The most important medieval magical text is the *Key of Solomon*, and it contains the elements of classic ritual magic - names of power, the magic circle, ritual implements, consecration, evocation of spirits etc. Its name and contents suggest at the very least a Jewish influence. No one knows how old it is, but there is a reasonable suspicion that its contents preserve techniques which might well date back to Solomon.

The combination of non-Jewish Kabbalah and ritual magic has been kept alive outside Judaism until the present day, although it has been heavily adulterated at times by Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism, Rosicrucianism, Christianity, Tantra and so on.

The most important "modern" influences in the English-speaking world are the French magician Eliphas Levi, and the English "Order of the Golden Dawn". At least two members of the Golden Dawn (S.L. Mathers and A.E. Waite) were knowledgeable Kabbalists, and three Golden Dawn members have popularised Kabbalah - Aleister Crowley, Israel Regardie, and Dion Fortune. Dion Fortune's "Order of the Inner Light" has also produced a number of authors: Gareth Knight, William Butler, and William Gray to name but three.

An unfortunate side effect of the Golden Dawn is that while Kabbalah was an important part of its "Knowledge Lectures", surviving Golden Dawn rituals are a syncretist hodgepodge of symbolism in which Kabbalah seems to play a minor or nominal role, and this has led to Kabbalah being seen by many modern occult-

ists as more of a theoretical and intellectual discipline, rather than a potent and self-contained mystical and magical system in its own right.

Some of the originators of modern witchcraft (e.g. Gerald Gardner, Alex Saunders) drew heavily on medieval ritual and Kabbalah for inspiration, and it is not unusual to find modern witches teaching some form of Kabbalah, although it is generally even less well integrated into practical technique than in the case of the Golden Dawn.

To summarise, Kabbalah is a mystical and magical tradition which originated nearly one thousand years ago and has been practiced continuously during this time. It has been practiced by Jew and non-Jew alike for about five hundred years. On the Jewish side it has been an integral and influential part of Judaism, and has once more come into vogue after two centuries of neglect¹. On the non-Jewish side it has created a rich mystical and magical tradition with its own validity, a tradition which has survived despite the prejudice generated through co-existing within a strongly Christian culture.

The tradition continues, and in what follows you will find an introduction to the tradition as I received it, plus whatever personal insights I am able to offer.

1. It was nurtured during the last two centuries in many East European Chassidic communities, most of which were devastated by the Holocaust.

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The Tree of Life

At the root of the Kabbalistic view of the world are three fundamental concepts and they provide a natural place to begin. These concepts have more than one name; for the moment I will refer to them as *consciousness*, *force* and *form*. These words are used in an abstract way, as the following examples illustrate:

- high pressure steam in the cylinder of a steam engine provides a force. The engine is a form which constrains the force.
- a river runs downhill under the force of gravity. The river channel is a form which constrains the water to run in a well defined path.
- someone wants to find a way to the centre of a garden maze. The hedges are a form which constrain that person's ability to walk as they please.
- a diesel engine provides the force which drives a boat forwards. A rudder fixes its course in a given direction.
- a politician wants to change the law. The legislative framework of the country is a form which he or she must follow.
- water sits in a bowl. The force of gravity pulls the water down. The bowl is a form which gives its shape to the water.
- a stone falls to the ground under the force of gravity. Its acceleration is constrained to be equal to the force divided by the mass of the stone.
- I want to win at chess. The force of my desire to win is constrained within the rules of chess.
- I see something in a shop window and have to have it. I am constrained by the conditions of sale (do I have enough money, is it in stock).
- cordite explodes in a gun barrel and provides an explosive force on a bullet. The gas and the bullet are constrained by the form of the gun barrel.
- I want to get a passport. The government

won't give me one unless I fill in lots of forms in precisely the right way.

- I want a university degree. The university won't give me a degree unless I attend certain courses and pass various assessments.

In these examples there is something which is causing change to take place ("a force") and there is something which causes change to take place in a defined way ("a form"). Without being too pedantic it is possible to identify two different types of example here:

- examples of natural physical processes (e.g. a falling stone) where the force is one of the natural forces known to physics, such as gravity, and the form is some combination of physical laws which constrain the force to act in a well defined way (e.g. all stones fall with the same acceleration).
- examples of people wanting something, where the force is some ill-defined concept of "desire", "will", or "drives", and the form is one of the forms we impose upon ourselves (the rules of chess, the law of the land, polite behaviour).

Although the two types of example appear to be "only metaphorically similar", Kabbalists see no fundamental distinction between them. There are physical *forces* which cause change in the natural world, and there are corresponding psychological forces which drive us to change both the world and ourselves, and whether these forces are natural or psychological they are rooted in the same place: consciousness.

Similarly, there are *forms* which the physical world obeys (natural laws), and there are completely arbitrary forms people create for their own purposes - the rules of a game, the shape of a mug, the design of an engine, the syntax of a language. To the Kabbalist these forms are also rooted in the same place: consciousness.

It is a Kabbalistic axiom that there is a prime cause which underpins all the manifestations of force and form in both the natural and psychological world, and that prime cause can be

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referred to as *consciousness*. It would be a mistake to read too much into the word at this stage, but it is worth noting that in traditional Kabbalah the primal, first principle of being or consciousness is synonymous with the idea of the Godhead.

Consciousness is indefinable. We know we are conscious in different ways at different times - sometimes we feel free and happy, at other times trapped and confused; sometimes angry and passionate, sometimes cold and restrained - but these words describe *manifestations* of consciousness. *Being* happy, *being* confused, are both aspects of *being*.

We can define the manifestations of consciousness in terms of the manifestations of consciousness, just as a dictionary uses words to describe other words - I am happy when I feel good and I am not sad. This is about as useful as defining an ocean in terms of waves and foam. Anyone who attempts to define consciousness itself tends to come out of the same door as they went in. We have many words for the phenomena of consciousness - thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires, emotions, motives and so on - but few words for the underlying states of consciousness which give rise to these phenomena, just as we have many words to describe the surface of a sea, but few words to describe its depths.

Kabbalah provides a vocabulary for states of consciousness underlying the phenomena of consciousness, and one of the purposes of these notes is to explain this vocabulary, not by definition, but mostly by metaphor, example and analogy. The only genuine method for understanding what the vocabulary means is by attaining various states of consciousness in a predictable and reasonably objective way, and Kabbalah provides practical methods for doing this, methods which are outlined later in these notes.

A fundamental premise of the Kabbalistic model of manifest reality is that there is a pure, primal, and indefinable state of divine being or divine consciousness, which manifests as an interaction between force and form. This is virtually the entire basis for the Kabbalistic view of emanation, and almost everything I have to say from now on is based on the trinity of consciousness, force, and form.

Consciousness comes first, but hidden within it is an inherent duality; there is an energy asso-

ciated with consciousness which causes change (force), and there is a capacity within consciousness to constrain that energy and cause it to manifest in a well-defined way (form). This

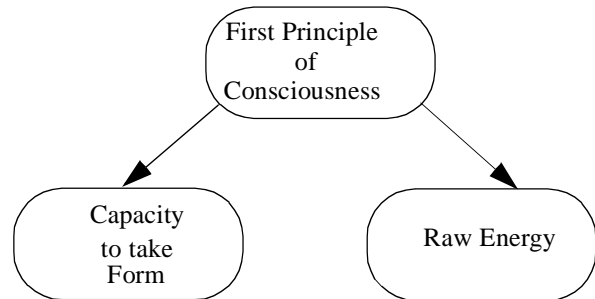


Figure 1: The Prime Duality

duality is shown in Figure 1. The examples at the beginning of this chapter were chosen to demonstrate the interplay of force and form in real life.

What do we get out of raw energy and an inbuilt capacity for form and structure? Is there another hidden potential within this trinity waiting to manifest? What Kabbalah suggests (and this idea will be developed in detail at a later stage) is that force and form become “locked” together, like baking a cake. You start off with flour, sugar, eggs, water and so on, but what comes out of the oven isn’t what went in. Force and form interact to produce something which is neither force nor form, but something quite distinct from either, something which I will call “matter” although that is something of an oversimplification. By matter I mean “the stuff of the real world”.

Something resembling this view can be found in physics. Physicists talk about “energy”, and use the concept of energy almost like money - every form of matter has its equivalent in energy (this is the basis for $E = mc^2$), but what distinguishes different kinds of matter are the laws which determine its behaviour. Again, we can see here a duality between “energy”, the raw unformed stuff from which everything is composed, and “form”, the natural laws which determine how energy behaves in different circumstances, the rules which distinguish a proton from an electron.

What Kabbalah suggests (and modern physics most certainly does not!) is that matter and

The Tree of Life

consciousness are the same stuff, and differ only in the degree of structure imposed - matter is consciousness expressed in the intermixing of force and form, but so heavily structured and constrained by form that its behaviour becomes describable using the regular and simple laws of physics. This is shown in Figure 2.

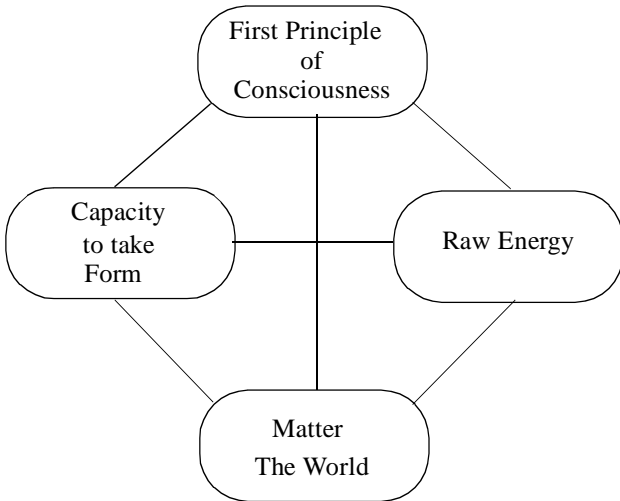


Figure 2: The Garden of Eden

The glyph in Figure 2 is the basis for a kabbalistic diagram called the *Etz Chaiim*, or *Tree of Life*. The first principle of being or consciousness is called *Keter*, which means Crown. The raw energy of consciousness is called *Chokmah* or Wisdom, and the capacity to give form to the energy of consciousness is called *Binah*, which is sometimes translated as Understanding, and sometimes as Intelligence. The outcome of the interaction of force and form, the physical world, is called *Malkhut* or Kingdom. This is shown below in Figure 3.

This quaternary is a Kabbalistic representation of God-the-Knowable, in the sense that it the most abstract representation of God we are capable of comprehending. Paradoxically, Kabbalah also contains a notion of God the infinite, the transcendent and the unknowable which transcends this glyph, and is called *En Soph*. *En Soph* means “without end” and is used to signify the unmanifest ground from which all manifest being springs, the earth in which the Tree of Life is rooted. There is not much more I can say about *En Soph*, and what I can say I will postpone for later.

God-the-Knowable has four aspects, two male

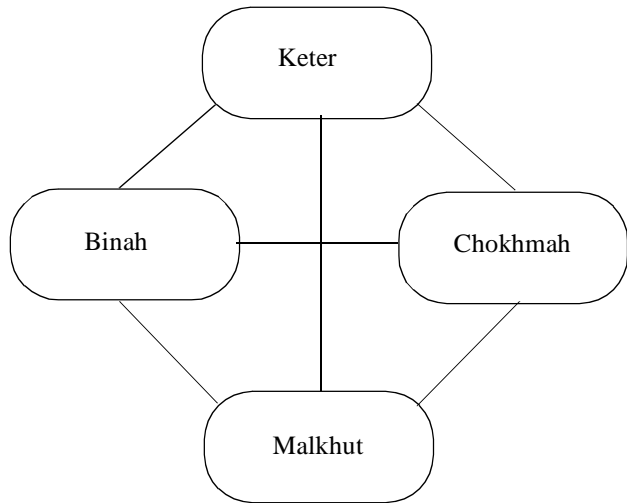


Figure 3: The Garden of Eden

and two female: Keter and Chokmah are both represented as male, and Binah and Malkhut are represented as female. One of the titles of Chokmah is *Abba*, which means Father, and one of the titles of Binah is *Imma*, which means Mother, so you can think of Chokmah as God-the-Father, and Binah as God-the-Mother. Malkhut is the daughter, the female spirit of God-as-Matter, and it would not be wildly wrong to think of her as Mother Earth. And what of God-the-Son? Is there also a God-the-Son in Kabbalah? There is, and this is the point where Kabbalah tackles the interesting problem of thee and me.

The glyph in Figure 2 is a model of consciousness, but not of self-consciousness, and self-consciousness throws an interesting spanner in the works. Self-consciousness is like a mirror in which consciousness sees itself reflected. Self-consciousness is modelled in Kabbalah by making a copy of Figure 2.

Figure 4 is Figure 2 reflected through self-consciousness. The overall effect of self-consciousness is to add an additional layer to Figure 2 as shown in Figure 5. Fig. 2 is sometimes called “the Garden of Eden” because it represents a primal state of consciousness. The effect of self-consciousness as shown in Fig. 4 is to drive a wedge between the First Principle of Consciousness (*Keter*) and that Consciousness realised as matter and the physical world (*Malkhut*). This is called “the Fall”, after the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From a

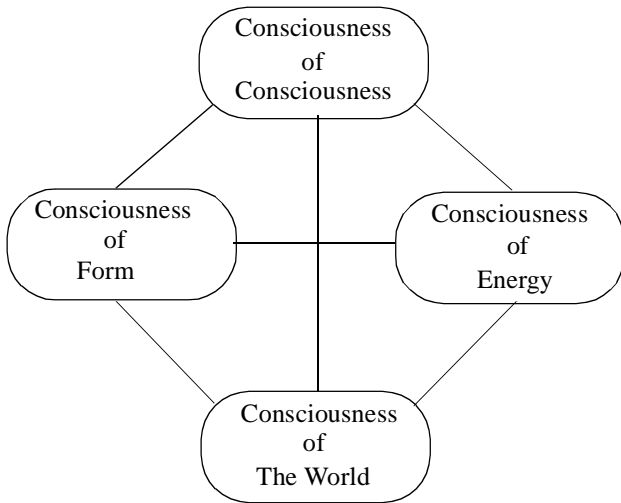


Figure 4: Self-Consciousness

Kabbalistic point of view the story of Eden, with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the serpent and the temptation, and the casting out from the Garden has a great deal of meaning in terms of understanding the evolution of consciousness.

Self-consciousness introduces four new states of consciousness: the Consciousness of Consciousness is called *Tipheret*, which means Beauty; the Consciousness of Force/Energy is called *Netzach*, which means Victory or Firmness; the Consciousness of Form is called *Hod*, which means Splendour or Glory, and the Consciousness of Matter is called *Yesod*, which means Foundation. These four states have readily observable manifestations, as shown below in Fig. 6:

Figure 5 is almost the complete Tree of Life, but not quite - there are still two states missing. The inherent capacity of consciousness to take on structure and objectify itself (Binah, God-the-Mother) is reflected through self-consciousness as a perception of the limitedness and boundedness of things. We are conscious of space and time, yesterday and today, here and there, you and me, in and out, life and death, whole and broken, together and apart. We see things as limited and bounded and we have a perception of form as something “created” and “destroyed”. My car was built a year ago, but it was smashed yesterday. I wrote an essay, but I lost it when my computer crashed. My granny is dead. The river changed its course. A law has

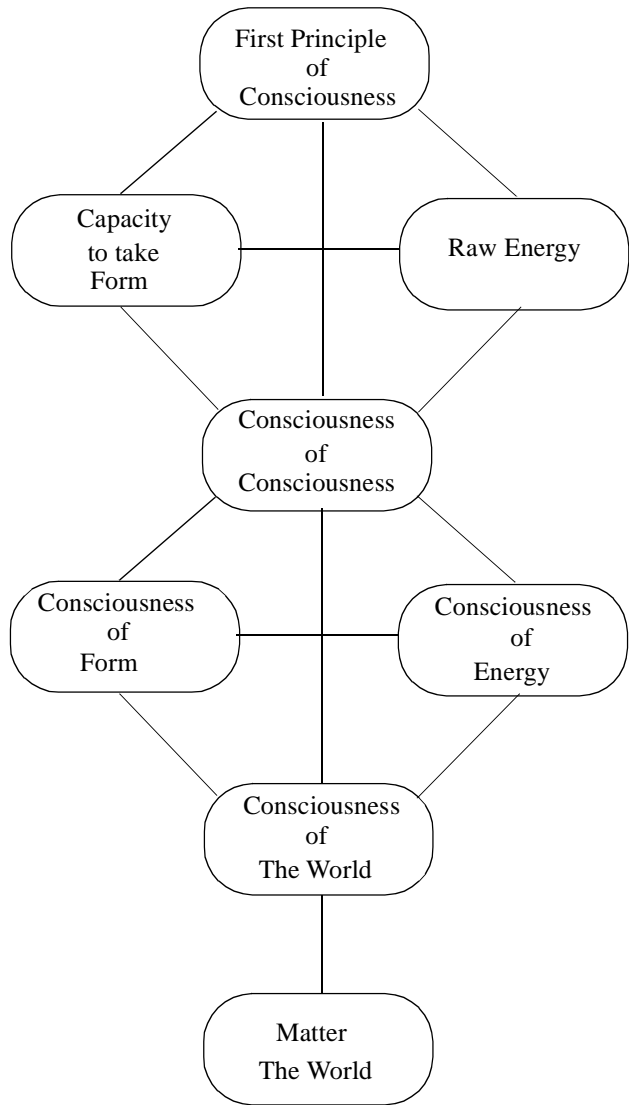


Figure 5: The Fall

been repealed. I broke my coffee mug.

The world changes, and what was here yesterday is not here today. This perception acts like an “interface” between the quaternary of consciousness which represents “God”, and the quaternary which represents a living self-conscious being, and two new states are introduced to represent this interface. The state which represents the creation of new forms is called *Che sed*, which means Mercy, and the state which represents the destruction of forms is called *Gevurah*, which means Strength. This is shown in Fig. 7.

The objectification of forms which takes place in a self-conscious being, and the consequent

The Tree of Life

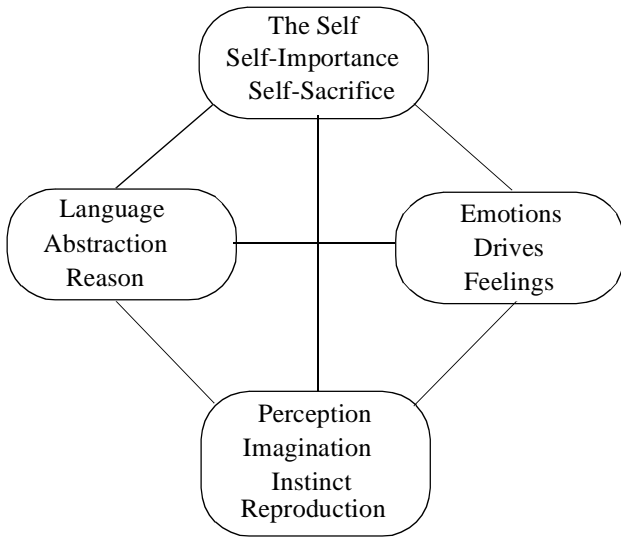


Figure 6: Self-Consciousness

tendency to view the world in terms of limitations and dualities (time and space, here and there, you and me, in and out, God and Man, good and evil...) produces a barrier to perception which most people rarely overcome, and for this reason it has come to be called the *Abyss*. The Abyss is also marked on Figure 7.

I have left out one important detail from the structure of the Tree. There is an eleventh “something” which is definitely *not* a sephira, but is often shown on modern representations of the Tree. A Kabbalistic “explanation” runs as follows: when Malkhut “fell” out of the Garden of Eden (Fig. 2) it left behind a “hole” in the fabric of the Tree, and this “hole”, located in the centre of the Abyss, is called *Daat*, or Knowledge. *Daat* is *not* a sephira; it is a hole. This may sound like gobblede-gook, and in the sense that it is only a metaphor, it is. *Daat* is located in the abyss on the central path between Keter and Tipheret.

The diagram in Figure 7 is called the Tree of Life. Rather than simply present the Tree without any kind of rationale, I have employed a “constructionist” approach to explain its structure, and I believe it is original, but the essence of my rationale can be found in the *Sepher ha Zohar* under the guise of the Macroprosopus and Microprosopus, although in this form it is less accessible to many readers. My attempt to show how the Tree of Life can be derived out of pure consciousness through the interaction of an abstract notion of force and form was not

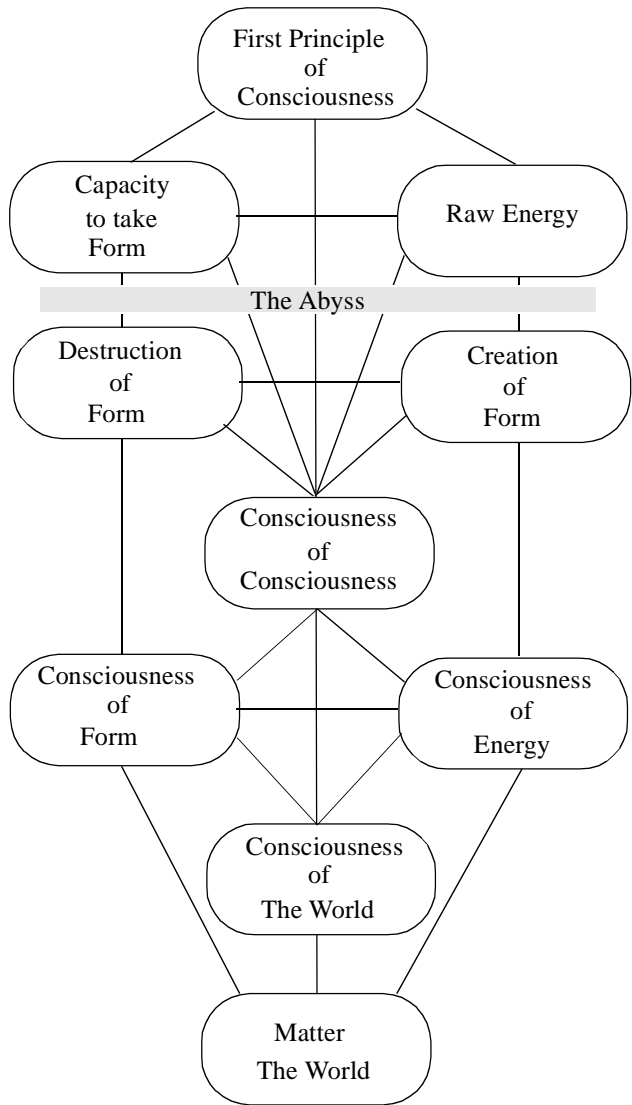


Figure 7: The Tree of Life

intended to be a convincing exercise from an intellectual point of view - the Tree of Life is primarily a gnostic rather than a rational or intellectual explanation of divinity and its interaction with the physical world.

The Tree of Life is composed of 10 states or *sephiroth* (*sephiroth* plural, *sephira* singular) and 22 interconnecting paths, making a total of 32 “paths”. These are the “thirty two paths of wisdom” discussed in the *Sepher Yetzirah*. The age of this diagram is unknown. There is enough information in the 13th. century *Sepher ha Zohar* to construct the diagram, and the doctrine of the sephiroth has been attributed to Isaac the Blind in the 12th. century, but we have no certain

Notes on Kabbalah

knowledge of its origin.

The origin of the word “sephira” is unclear - it is almost certainly derived from the Hebrew word for “number” (SPhR), but it has been attributed to the Greek word for “sphere” and also to the Hebrew word for a sapphire (SPhIR). With a characteristic aptitude for discovering hidden meanings everywhere, Kabbalists find all three derivations useful, so take your pick.

In the language of earlier Kabbalistic writers the sephiroth represented ten primeval emanations of God, ten foci through which the energy of a hidden, absolute and unknown Godhead (*En Soph*) propagated throughout the creation, like white light passing through a prism. The sephiroth can be interpreted as aspects of God, as states of consciousness, or as nodes akin to the Chakras in the occult anatomy of a human being. The 22 paths interconnecting the sephiroth on the Tree also have a rich body of associations.

From an historical point of view the doctrines of sephirothic emanation and the Tree of Life are only a small part of an extensive body of Kabbalistic speculation about the nature of divinity and our part in creation. To concentrate on the Tree is to ignore an equally rich body of speculation on Adam Kadmon, the divine or archetypal human being. There are many, many aspects of Kabbalah which I have not explored in these notes, and to concentrate exclusively on one small part of Kabbalah may seem short sighted to the academic, but to a practising Kabbalist life is short, the Kabbalah is there to be used, and so I have chosen to concentrate on a part of the Kabbalah which has survived to the present day. The Tree of Life continues to be used in the Twentieth Century because it has proved to be a useful and productive symbol for practices of a magical, mystical and religious nature. Modern Kabbalah in the Western Esoteric Tradition is largely concerned with the understanding and practical application of the Tree of Life.

The following Chapter will continue to develop a broad understanding of what the Tree represents, before going on to examine the nature of each sephira in detail.

The Tree of Life

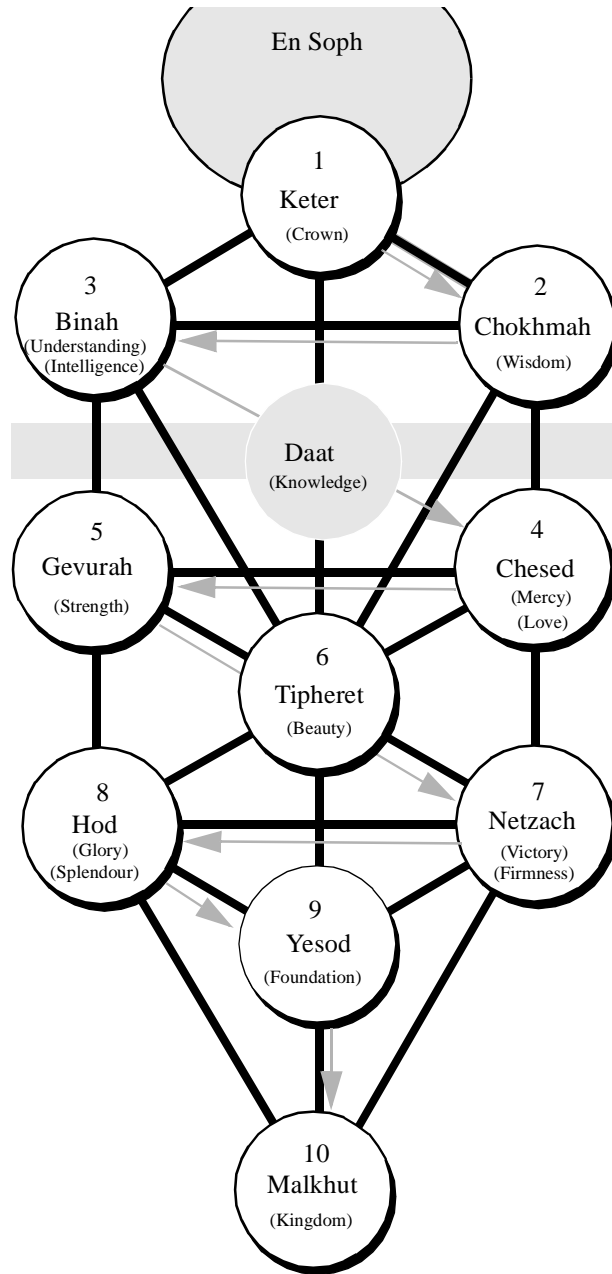


Figure 8: The Tree of Life

Notes on Kabbalah

The Pillars & The Lightning Flash

In Chapter 2 the Tree of Life was derived from three concepts, or rather one primary concept and two derivative concepts “contained” or “concealed” within it. The primary concept was called *consciousness*, and it was said to “contain” within it the two complementary concepts of *force* and *form*.

This Chapter builds on these ideas by introducing the three Pillars of the Tree, and uses the Pillars to clarify a process called the Lightning Flash. It should not come as a surprise to find that the three Pillars are called ... the Pillar of Consciousness, the Pillar of Force, and the Pillar of Form. The Pillar of Consciousness (see Figure 9) contains the sephiroth Keter, Tipheret, Yesod and Malkhut. The Pillar of Force contains the sephiroth Chokhmah, Chesed and Netzach. The Pillar of Form contains the sephiroth Binah, Gevurah and Hod.

The classification of sephiroth into three Pillars is a way of saying that each sephira in a Pillar partakes of a common quality which is “inherited” in a progressively more developed and structured way from of the top of a Pillar to the bottom. Tipheret, Yesod and Malkhut share with Keter the quality of “consciousness in balance” or “synthesis of opposing qualities”, but in each case it is expressed differently according to the increased degree of structure imposed.

Likewise, Chokhmah, Chesed and Netzach share the quality of force, or energy, or expansiveness. Binah, Gevurah and Hod share the quality of form, definition and limitation. As one moves down the Tree from Keter to Malkhut, force and form are combined together. The symbolism of the Tree has something in common with a production line, with molten metal coming in one end and finished cars coming out the other.

In older Kabbalistic texts the Pillars are referred to as the Pillars of mildness, mercy and severity, and it is not immediately obvious how the older jargon relates to the new. To the medieval Kabbalist (and this is a recurring metaphor

in the *Zohar*) the creation, considered as an emanation of God, is a delicate *balance* between two opposing tendencies: the mercy of God - the outflowing, creative, life-giving and sustaining tendency in God, and the severity or strict judgement of God - the limiting, defining, life-taking and ultimately wrathful or destructive tendency in God. The creation is “energised” by these two tendencies as if stretched between the poles of a battery. Modern Kabbalah makes a half-hearted attempt to remove the more obvious anthropomorphisms in the descriptions of “God”; mercy and severity are misleading terms, apt to remind one of a man with a white beard. Even in medieval times the terms had distinctly technical meanings as the following quotation shows [39]:

“It must be remembered that to the Kabbalist, judgement [Din - judgement, another title of Gevurah] means the imposition of limits and the correct determination of things. According to Cordovero the quality of judgement is inherent in everything insofar as everything wishes to remain what it is, to stay within its boundaries.”

I understand the word “form” in this sense - it is that which defines *what* a thing is, the structure whereby a given thing is distinct and different from every other thing. A square is not the same as a triangle - their *forms* are different.

The complementary concepts of consciousness and force are difficult (if not impossible!) to define, because one can only define the *form* of something. Of necessity I use the word “consciousness” in a sense so abstract that it is virtually meaningless, and according to whim I use the word God instead, where it is understood that both words are placeholders for something which is potentially knowable in the gnostic sense only. Consciousness can be *defined* only according to the *forms* it takes, in which case we are defining the forms, *not* consciousness. The same qualification applies to the word “force”.

Notes on Kabbalah

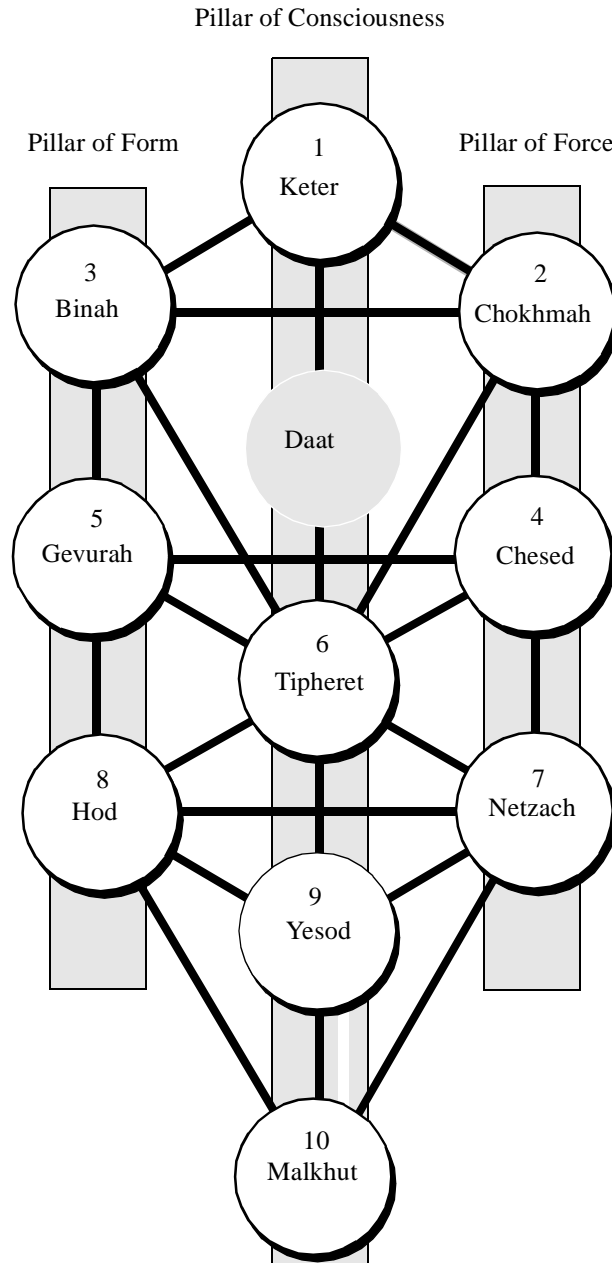


Figure 9: The Three Pillars & The Lightning Flash

My inability to define two of the three concepts which underpin the structure of the Tree is a nuisance. This is the reason why I introduced the concepts of force and form in the previous Chapter by the use of many examples.

I will now return to the metaphor of the Tree as a production line, with molten metal coming in at one end (Keter), and finished cars coming out the other (Malkhut). The conveyor belt zig-zags across and down the Tree in a pattern called the Lightning Flash. The following dis-

cussion describes the path taken by the Lightning Flash as it moves down the Tree from Keter to Malkhut.

In the beginning ... was Something. Or Nothing. It does not matter which term one uses, as both are equally meaningless in this context. "Nothing" is probably the better of the two terms, because I can use "Something" in the next paragraph. Kabbalists call this Nothing *En Soph* which literally means "no end" or infinity,

The Pillars & The Lightning Flash

and understand by this a hidden, unmanifest God-in-Itself.

Out of this incomprehensible and indescribable Nothing came Something. Probably more words have been devoted to this moment than any other in Kabbalah, and it is easy to make fun the effort which has gone into elaborating the indescribable, so I won't ... but in return I am not going provide a justification for why Something came out of Nothing. It just did. A point crystallised in the En Soph.

In some versions of the story the En Soph "contracted" to "make room" for the creation (e.g. Isaac Luria's doctrine of *tsimtsum*), and this is probably an important clarification for those who have rubbed noses with the hidden face of God, but for the purposes of this discussion it is enough that a point crystallised. This point was the crown of creation, the sephira Keter, and within Keter was contained all the unrealised potential of the creation.

An aspect of Keter is the raw creative force of God which blasts into the creation like the blast of hot gas which keeps a hot air balloon in the air. Kabbalists are quite clear about this; the creation didn't just happen a long time ago - it is happening all the time, and without the influx of creative force to sustain it the creation would crumple like a deflated balloon. The force-like aspect within Keter is the sephira Chokhmah and it can be thought of as the will of God, because without it the creation would cease to *be*. The creation is maintained by this ravaging, primeval desire to *be*, to become, to change, to exist, to evolve. The experiential distinction between Keter, the point of emanation, and Chokhmah, the creative outpouring, is elusive and it is difficult to say anything which would be meaningful. In the tradition, Keter, although manifest within the En Soph, is hidden from us, and Chokhmah is the first true manifestation.

Force by itself achieves nothing; it needs to be contained, and the balloon analogy is appropriate again. Chokhmah contains within it the necessity of Binah, the Mother of Form. The person who taught me Kabbalah (a woman as it happens) told me Chokhmah (Abba, the Father) was God's prick, and Binah (Aima, the Mother) was God's womb, and left me with the picture of one half of God continuously ejaculating into the other half. It is a vivid and appropriate metaphor, and one with a long history of use in Kabbalah. The author of the *Zohar* also makes

frequent use of sexual polarity as a metaphor to describe the relationship between force and form, or mercy and severity, although the most vivid sexual metaphors are reserved for the marriage of the Microprosopus and his bride, the Queen and Inferior Mother, the sephira Malkhut.

The sephira Binah is the *Mother* of Form. Form exists within Binah as a potentiality, not as an actuality, just as a womb contains the potential of a baby. Without the possibility of form, no thing would be distinct from any other thing; it would be impossible to distinguish between things, impossible to have individuality or identity or change. The Mother of Form contains the potential of form within her womb and gives birth to form when a creative impulse crosses the Abyss to the Pillar of Force and emanates through the sephira Chesed. Again we have the idea of "becoming", of outflowing creative energy, but at a lower level.

The sephira Chesed is the point at which form becomes perceptible to the mind as an inspiration, an idea, a vision; that "Eureka!" moment immediately prior to rushing around shouting "I've got it! I've got it!". Chesed is that quality of genuine inspiration, a sense of being "plugged in" which characterises visionary leaders who lead the human race into every new kind of endeavour. It can be for good or evil. A leader who can tap petty malice and vindictiveness and channel it into a vision of a genocidal new order is just as much a visionary as any other. The positive interpretation of Chesed is the humanitarian leader who brings about genuine improvements to our common life.

No change comes easy; as Cordovera points out "everything wishes to remain what it is". The creation of form is balanced by the preservation and destruction of form in the sephira Gevurah. Any impulse of change is channelled through Gevurah, and if it is not opposed then something will be destroyed. If you want to make paper you cut down a tree. If you want to abolish slavery you have to destroy the culture which perpetuates it. If you want to change someone's mind you have to destroy that person's beliefs about the matter in question. The sephira Gevurah is the quality of strict judgement which opposes change, destroys the unfamiliar, and corresponds in many ways to an immune system within the body of God.

There has to be a balance between creation

Notes on Kabbalah

and destruction. Too much change, too many ideas, too many things happening too quickly can have the quality of chaos (and can literally become that), whereas too little change, no new ideas, too much form and structure and protocol can suffocate and stifle. There has to be a balance which “makes sense” and this “idea of balance” or “making sense” is expressed in the sephira Tipheret.

Tipheret embodies the idea of wholeness, of balance in a dynamic sense of reconciling many opposing forces, and represents an instinctive morality, which is not present by default in the human species. It isn't based on cultural norms and it doesn't have its roots in upbringing (although it is easily destroyed by it). Some people have it in a large measure, and some people are, to all intents and purposes, completely lacking in it. It doesn't necessarily respect conventional morality: it may laugh in its face.

I can't say what it is in any detail, because it is peculiar and individual, but those who have it have a natural quality of integrity, soundness of judgement, an instinctive sense of rightness, justice and compassion, and a willingness to fight or suffer in defence of that sense of justice. Tipheret is a paradoxical sephira because in many people it is simply not there. It can be developed, and that is one of the goals of initiation, but for many people Tipheret is a room with nothing in it.

Having passed through Gevurah on the Pillar of Form, and found its way through the moral filter of Tipheret, a creative impulse picks up energy once more on the Pillar of Force via the Sephira Netzach, where the energy of “becoming” finds its final expression in the form of “vital urges”. Why do we carry on living? Why bother? What is it that compels us to do things? An artist may have a vision of a piece of art, but what actually compels the artist to paint or sculpt or write? Why do we want to compete and win? Why do we care what happens to others? The sephira Netzach expresses the basic, vital, creative urges in a form we can recognise as drives, feelings and emotions.

Netzach is pre-verbal; ask a child why he wants a toy and the answer will be “I just do”.

“But why,” you ask, wondering why he doesn't want the much more “sensible” toy you had in mind. “Why don't you want this one here.”

“I just don't. I want this one.”

“But what's so good about that one.”

“I don't know what to say ... I just like it.”

This conversation is not fictitious and is quintessentially Netzach. The structure of the Tree of Life posits that the basic driving forces which characterise our behaviour are pre-verbal and non-rational; anyone who has tried to change another person's basic nature or beliefs through force of rational argument will know this.

After Netzach we go to the sephira Hod to pick up the final imprint of form. Ask a child why they want something and they say “I just do”. Press an adult and you will get an earful of “reasons”. We live in a culture where it is important (often essential) to give reasons for the things we do, and Hod is the sephira of form where it is possible to give shape to our desires in terms of reasons and explanations. Hod is the sephira of abstraction, reason, logic, language and communication, and a reflection of Binah, the Mother of Form in the human mind. We have an innate capacity to abstract, to go immediately from the particular to the general, and we have an innate capacity to communicate these abstractions using language, and it should be clear why the alternative translation of Binah is “intelligence”; Binah is the “intelligence of God”, and Hod underpins what we generally recognise as intelligence in people - the ability to grasp complex abstractions, reason about them, and articulate this understanding using some means of communication.

The synthesis of Hod and Netzach on the Pillar of Consciousness is the sephira Yesod. Yesod is the sephira of interface, and a comparison with computer peripheral interfaces is appropriate: between the computer programs running on a computer and the real world are various interfaces, such as a mouse, a visual display, a printer, a keyboard and so on. Yesod is sometimes called “the Receptacle of the Emanations”, because it interfaces the emanations of all three Pillars to the sephira Malkhut, and it is through Yesod that the final abstract form of something is realised in Matter.

Form in Yesod is no longer abstract. It is explicit, but not yet individual - that last quality is reserved for Malkhut alone. Yesod is like the mold in a bottle factory - the mold is a realisation of the abstract idea “bottle” in so far as it expresses the shape of a particular bottle design in every detail, but it is not itself an *individual* bottle.

The Pillars & The Lightning Flash

The final step in the descending process is the sephira Malkhut, where God becomes flesh, and every abstract form is realised in actuality, in the “real world”. There is much to say about this, but I will save it for later.

The process I have described is called the Lightning Flash. The Lightning Flash runs as follows: Keter, Chokmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tipheret, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, Malkhut. If you trace the Lightning Flash on a diagram of the Tree you will see that it has the zig-zag shape of a lightning flash. The sephiroth are numbered according to their order on the lightning flash: Keter is 1, Chokmah is 2, and so on. The “Sepher Yetzirah” [24] has this to say about the sephiroth:

“When you think of the ten sephiroth cover your heart and seal the desire of your lips to announce their divinity. Yoke your mind. Should it escape your grasp, reach out and bring it back under your control. As it was said, ‘And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning,’ in such a manner was the Covenant created.”

The quotation within the quotation comes from *Ezekiel* 1.14, a text which inspired a large amount of early Kabbalistic speculation, and it is probable that the Lightning Flash as described is one of the earliest components of the idea of sephirothic emanation.

The Lightning Flash describes the creative process, beginning with the unknown, unmanifest hidden God, and follows it through ten distinct stages to a change or manifest effect in the material world. It can be used to describe *any* change - lighting a match, baking a cake, walking the dog - and students of Kabbalah may be set the exercise of analysing any arbitrarily chosen event in terms of the Lightning Flash.

Because the Lightning Flash can be used to understand the inner process whereby the phenomenal world changes and evolves, it is a key to practical magical work. Because it is intended to account for *all* change it follows that *all* change is *equally* magical, and the word “magic” is essentially meaningless (but nevertheless useful for distinguishing between “normal” and “abnormal” states of consciousness, and the modes of causality which pertain to each).

It also follows that the key to understanding our “spiritual nature” does not belong in the

spiritual empyrean, where it remains inaccessible, but in the routine and unexciting little things in life. There is a real sense in which lighting a match, baking a cake, or walking the dog are all connected with the deepest spiritual realities. The view that the Tree of Life and the Lightning Flash describe how everything is continuously created leads to a view that everything is equally “spiritual”, equally “divine”, and there is more to be learned from simple daily routines than there is in a spiritual discipline which puts you “here” and God “over there”.

The Lightning Flash ends in Malkhut, the world of matter where we live our lives as human beings, and it can be followed through the hidden pathways of creation like Blake’s “golden thread”, until one arrives back at the source.

This introduction to the sephiroth via the Lightning Flash has provided only the bare bones of a description of each sephira. The next Chapter provides detailed information (“correspondences”) for each sephira, and then in Chapter 5 we will follow the Lightning Flash from Malkhut back up to Keter by examining the qualities of each sephira in detail.

Notes on Kabbalah

Sephirothic Correspondences

The correspondences are a set of symbols, associations, metaphors and qualities which provide a handle on the elusive something a sephira represents. Some of the correspondences are hundreds of years old, many were concocted this century, and some are my own; some fit very well and are obviously appropriate, and some are obscure. Oddly enough it is often the most obscure and ill-fitting correspondence which is most productive - like a Zen riddle it perplexes and annoys the mind until one arrives at the right place more in spite of the correspondence than because of it.

There are few canonical correspondences. Some of the sephiroth have alternative names, some of the names have alternative translations, the mapping from Hebrew spellings to the English alphabet varies from one author to the next, and inaccuracies and accretions are handed down like the family silver. I keep my Hebrew dictionary to hand but guarantee none of the English spellings.

The correspondences I have given are as follows:

1. The Meaning is a translation of the Hebrew name of the sephira.
2. The Planet in most cases is the planet associated with a sephira. In some cases it is not a planet at all (e.g. the fixed stars). The planets are ordered by decreasing apparent motion - the sun and moon are included, so this is one correspondence which pre-dates Copernicus.
3. The Element is the physical element (earth, water, air, fire, aethyr) which has most in common with the nature of the Sephira. Only the five Lower Face sephiroth have been attributed an element.
4. Briatic colour. This is the colour of the sephira as seen in the world of Creation, Briah. There are colour scales for the other three worlds in the literature (e.g. [35]) but I don't use them in my own practical work.
5. Magical Image. Useful in meditations;

some are astute.

6. The Briatic Correspondence is an abstract quality which says something about the essence of the way the sephira expresses itself.
7. The Illusion characterises the way in which the energy of a sephira clouds one's judgement; it is something which is *obviously* true at the time. Most people suffer from one or more of these according to their temperament.
8. The Obligation is a personal quality which is demanded of an initiate at this level.
9. The Virtue and Vice describe the energy of the sephiroth as it manifests in a positive and negative sense through the personality.
10. Klippot is a word which means "shell". In medieval Kabbalah each sephira was "seen" to be adding form to the sephira which preceded it in the Lightning Flash (see Chapter 3). Form was seen to be an accretion, a shell around the pure divine energy of the Godhead, and each layer or shell hid the divine radiance a little bit more, until God was buried in form and exiled in matter, the end-point of the process. At the time, attitudes to matter were tainted with Gnostic and Manichean notions that matter was evil, a snare for the spirit, and consequently the Klippot or shells were "demonised" and actually turned into demons - some books give lists of Klippotic demons. The correspondences I have given here restore the original idea of a shell of form without the corresponding force to activate it - it is the lifeless, empty husk of a sephira devoid of force.
11. The Command refers to the Four Powers of the Sphinx, with an extra one added for good measure.
12. The Spiritual Experience is just that.
13. The Titles are a collection of alternative

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- names for the sephira. Most are very old.
14. The God Name is a key to invoking the power of the sephira in the world of emanation, Atzilut.
 15. The Archangel mediates the energy of the sephira in the world of creation, Bria.
 16. The Angel Order administers the energy of the sephira in the world of formation, Yetzira.
 17. The Keywords are a collection of phrases which summarise key aspects of the sephira.

Sephirothic Correspondences

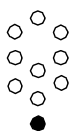


Table 1: Malkhu t

Meaning	Kingdom
Number	10
Colour	Brown (citrine, russet red, olive green, black)
Briatic Correspondence	Stability
Magical Image	A young woman crowned and sitting on a throne
Titles	The Gate; Gate of Death; Gate of Tears; Gate of Justice; The Inferior Mother; Malkah, the Queen; Kallah, the Bride; the Virgin.
Element	Earth
Virtue	Discrimination
Vice	Avarice; Inertia
Illusion	Materialism
Klippot	Stasis
Obligation	Discipline
Command	Keep silent
God Name	Adonai ha Aretz, Adonai Malekh
Archangel	Sandalphon
Angel Order	Ishim
Planet	Cholem Yesodeth (The Breaker of the Foundations, the sphere of the elements)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of the Holy Guardian Angel
Keywords	The real world, physical matter, the Earth, Mother Earth, the physical elements, the natural world, sticks & stones, possessions, faeces, practicality, solidity, stability, inertia, heaviness, bodily death, incarnation.

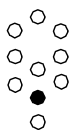


Table 2: Yeso d

Meaning	Foundation
Number	9
Colour	Purple
Briatic Correspondence	Receptivity, perception
Magical Image	A beautiful man, very strong (e.g. Atlas)
Titles	The Treasure House of Images, the Receptacle of the Emanations
Element	Aethyr
Virtue	Independence

Sephirothic Correspondences

Table 2: Yesod (Continued)

Vice	Idleness
Illusion	Security
Klippot	Zombieism, robotism
Obligation	Trust
Command	Go!
God Name	Shaddai el Chai
Archangel	Gabriel
Angel Order	Cherubim
Planet	Levanah (Moon)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of the Machinery of the Universe
Keywords	Perception, interface, imagination, image, appearance, glamour, the Moon and tides, the unconscious, instinct, illusion, hidden infrastructure, dreams, divination, anything as it seems to be and not as it is, mirrors and crystals, the "Astral Plane", Aethyr, glue, secret doors, tunnels, sex & reproduction, the genitals, cosmetics, instinctive magic (psychism), the shamanic tunnel.

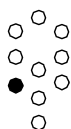


Table 3: Hod

Meaning	Glory, Splendour
Number	8
Colour	Orange
Briatic Correspondence	Abstraction
Magical Image	An Hermaphrodite
Titles	-
Element	Air
Virtue	Honesty, truthfulness
Vice	Dishonesty
Illusion	Order
Klippot	Rigidity, rigid order
Obligation	Learn
Command	To Will
God Name	Elohim Tzabaoth
Archangel	Raphael
Angel Order	Beni Elohim
Planet	Kokab (Mercury)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of Splendour

Sephirothic Correspondences

Table 3: Hod (Continued)

Keywords	Reason, abstraction, communication, conceptualisation, logic, the sciences, language, speech, money (as a concept), mathematics, medicine & healing, trickery, writing, media (as communication), pedantry, philosophy, Kabbalah (as an abstract system), protocol, the Law, ownership, territory, theft, "Rights", ritual magic.
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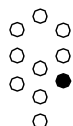


Table 4: Netzach

Meaning	Victory, Firmness
Number	7
Colour	Green
Briatic Correspondence	Nurture
Magical Image	A beautiful naked woman
Titles	-
Element	Water
Virtue	Unselfishness
Vice	Selfishness
Illusion	Projection
Klippot	Habit, routine
Obligation	Responsibility
Command	To Know
God Name	Jehovah Tzabaoth
Archangel	Haniel
Angel Order	Elohim
Planet	Nogah (Venus)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of Beauty Triumphant
Keywords	Passion, pleasure, luxury, sensual beauty, feelings, drives, emotions - love, hate, anger, joy, depression, misery, excitement, desire, lust; nurture, libido, empathy, sympathy, ecstatic magic.

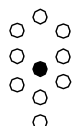


Table 5: Tipheret

Meaning	Beauty
Number	6
Colour	Yellow
Briatic Correspondence	Centrality, wholeness
Magical Image	A child, a king, a sacrificed god

Sephirothic Correspondences

Table 5: Tipheret (Continued)

Titles	Rachamin, charity; Melekh, the King; Zoar Anpin, the lesser countenance; the Microprosopus; the Son
Element	Fire
Virtue	Devotion to the Great Work
Vice	Pride, self-importance
Illusion	Identification
Klippot	Hollowness
Obligation	Integrity
Command	To Dare
God Name	Aloah va Daat
Archangel	Michael
Angel Order	Malachim
Planet	Shemesh (Sun)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of Harmony, Knowledge & Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel
Keywords	Harmony, integrity, balance, wholeness, centrality, the Self, self-importance, self-sacrifice, identity, the Son of God, a King, the Great Work, the Philosopher's Stone, the Sun, gold, the solar plexus

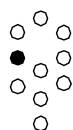


Table 6: Gevurah

Meaning	Strength
Number	5
Colour	Red
Briatic Correspondence	Power
Magical Image	A mighty warrior
Titles	Din, justice; Pachad, fear
Element	-
Virtue	Courage and energy
Vice	Cruelty
Illusion	Invincibility
Klippot	Bureaucracy
Obligation	Courage and loyalty
Command	-
God Name	Elohim Gevor
Archangel	Kamael (sometimes Samael)
Angel Order	Seraphim

Sephirothic Correspondences

Table 6: Gevurah (Continued)

Planet	Madim (Mars)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of Power
Keywords	Power, justice, retribution (eaten cold), the Law (in execution), cruelty, oppression, domination & the Power Myth, severity, necessary destruction, catabolism, martial arts

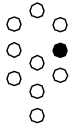


Table 7: Chesed

Meaning	Mercy
Number	4
Colour	Blue
Briatic Correspondence	Authority
Magical Image	A mighty king
Titles	Gedulah, magnificance, love, majesty
Element	-
Virtue	Humility and obedience
Vice	Tyranny, hypocrisy, bigotry, gluttony
Illusion	Being right (self-righteousness)
Klippot	Ideology
Obligation	Humility
Command	-
God Name	El
Archangel	Tzadkiel
Angel Order	Chasmalim
Planet	Tzadekh (Jupiter)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of Love
Keywords	Authority, leadership, creativity, inspiration, vision, excess, waste, secular and spiritual power, submission and the Annihilation Myth, obliteration, the atom bomb, birth, service, spiritual love

Table 8: Daat

Meaning	Knowledge
Correspondences	Daat does not manifest positively and it is not appropriate to think of it in the same sense as a sephira.
Keywords	Hole, tunnel, gateway, doorway, Janus, black hole, vortex.

Sephirothic Correspondences

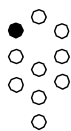


Table 9: Binah

Meaning	Understanding , Intelligence
Number	3
Colour	Black
Briatic Correspondence	Comprehension
Magical Image	An old woman (possibly in mourning) on a throne.
Titles	Aima, the Mother; Ama, the Crone; Marah, the bitter sea; Khorsia, the Throne; the Fifty Gates of Understanding; Intelligence; the Mother of Form; the Superior Mother.
Element	-
Virtue	Silence
Vice	Inertia
Illusion	Death
Klippot	Fatalism
Obligation	-
Command	-
God Name	Elohim
Archangel	Cassiel
Angel Order	Aralim
Planet	Shabbathai
Spiritual Experience	Vision of Sorrow
Keywords	Limitation, form, constraint, heaviness, slowness, inertia, old-age, infertility, incarnation, karma, fate, time, space, natural law, the womb and gestation, darkness, boundedness, enclosure, containment, fertility, mother, weaving and spinning, death (annihilation)

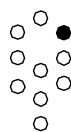


Table 10: Chokhmah

Meaning	Wisdom
Number	2
Colour	grey, white flecked with silver
Briatic Correspondence	Revolution
Magical Image	A bearded man
Titles	Abba, the father
Element	-
Virtue	Good

Sephirothic Correspondences

Table 10: Chokhmah (Continued)

Vice	Evil
Illusion	Independence
Klippot	Arbitrariness
Obligation	-
Command	-
God Name	Jah
Archangel	Ratziel
Angel Order	Ophanim
Planet	Mazlot (the Zodiac, the fixed stars)
Spiritual Experience	Vision of God Face-to-Face
Keywords	Pure creative force, life-force, the wellspring, the erect phallus and ejaculation, standing stones, fountains, the fountain and water of Life, springs

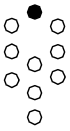


Table 11: Keter

Meaning	Crown
Number	1
Colour	Brilliant white
Briatic Correspondence	Unity
Magical Image	A bearded man seen in profile
Titles	Ancient of Days, the Greater Countenance (Macroprosopus), the White Head, Concealed of the Concealed, Existence of Existences, the Smooth Point, Rum Maalah, the Highest Point, and many, many more
Element	-
Virtue	Attainment
Vice	-
Illusion	Attainment
Klippot	Futility
Obligation	-
Command	-
God Name	Eheieh
Archangel	Metatron
Angel Order	Chaioth ha Qadesh
Planet	Rashith ha Gilgalim (the first swirlings, the Big Bang)
Spiritual Experience	Union with God

Sephirothic Correspondences

Table 11: Keter (Continued)

Keywords

Unity, union, all, pure consciousness, God, the God-head, manifestation, beginning, source, emanation

The Sephiroth

This chapter provides a detailed look at each of the ten sephiroth and draws together material scattered over previous chapters.

Malkhut

Malkhut is the Cinderella of the sephiroth. It is the sephira most often ignored by beginners, the sephira most often glossed over in Kabbalistic texts, and it is not only the most immediate of the sephira but it is also the most complex, because Malkhut is the final expression of form. Contemplate the incredible variety of biological life and the amazing variety of human manufactures and you will understand how Malkhut is the final expression of an underlying unity through infinite forms of diversity. For sheer inscrutability Malkhut rivals Keter - indeed, there is a Kabbalistic aphorism that "Keter is in Malkhut, and Malkhut is in Keter, but after another manner".

The word Malkhut means "Kingdom", and the sephira is the culmination of a process of emanation whereby the creative power of the Godhead is progressively structured and defined as it moves down the Tree and arrives in a completed form in Malkhut. Malkhut is the sphere of matter, substance, the real, physical world.

Malkhut is a veil that conceals. In the least compromising versions of materialist philosophy (e.g. Hobbes) there is nothing beyond physical matter. From this viewpoint the Tree of Life above Malkhut does not exist: our feelings of identity and self-consciousness are no more than the by-product of chemical reactions in the brain, and the mind is a complex automata which suffers from the disease of metaphysical delusions.

Kabbalah is *not* materialist, but when we examine Malkhut by itself we find ourselves immersed in matter, and it is natural to think in terms of physics, and chemistry and molecular biology. The natural sciences provide the most accurate models of matter and the physical

world that we have, and it would be foolish to imagine that Kabbalah can provide better explanations of the nature of matter than those available to us as a result of the natural sciences. For practical purposes the average university science graduate knows (much) more about the material stuff of the world than the medieval Kabbalist ever did, and a grounding in modern physics is as good a way as any to approach the inexhaustible mysteries of Malkhut.

For those who are not comfortable with physics there are alternative, more traditional ways to approach Malkhut. The magical image of Malkhut is that of a young woman crowned and throned. The woman is Malkah, the Queen, Kallah, the Bride. She is the Inferior Mother, a reflection and realisation of the superior or supernal mother Binah. She is the Queen who inhabits the Kingdom, and the Bride of the Microprosopus, the King who is also the Son of God. She is the *Anima Mundi*, the World-Soul. She is the Shekhinah, the indwelling spirit of God in matter. She is Gaia, Mother Earth, but of course she is not only the substance of this little planet; she is the body of the entire physical universe.

Some care is required when assigning Mother/Earth goddesses to Malkhut, because some of them correspond more closely to the superior mother Binah. There is a close and deep connection between Malkhut and Binah which results in the two sephiroth sharing similar correspondences, and one of the oldest Kabbalistic texts [24] has this to say about Malkhut:

"The title of the tenth path [Malkhut] is the Resplendent Intelligence. It is called this because it is exalted above every head from where it sits upon the throne of Binah. It illuminates the numinosity of all lights and causes to emanate the Power of the archetype of countenances or forms."

One of the titles of Binah is Khorsia, or Throne, and the image which this text provides is that Binah provides the framework upon which Malkhut sits. We will return to this later.

Notes on Kabbalah

Table 12:

Element	Fire	Air	Water	Earth
God Name	Elohim	Jehovah	Eheieh	Agla
Archangel	Michael	Raphael	Gabriel	Uriel
Elemental King	Djinn	Paralda	Nichsa	Ghob
Elemental	Salamenders	Sylphs	Undines	Gnomes

Binah contains the potential of form in the abstract, while Malkhut is the fullest realisation of form, and both sephiroth share the correspondences of heaviness, limitation, finiteness, inertia, avarice, silence, and death.

The female quality of Malkhut is often identified with the Shekhinah, the female spirit of God in the creation, and Kabbalistic literature makes much of the (carnal) relationship of God and the Shekhinah. Waite [41] mentions that the relationship between God and Shekhinah is mirrored in the relationship between man and woman, and provides a great deal of information on both the Shekhinah and what he quaintly calls “The Mystery of Sex”.

After the exile of the Jews from Spain in 1492, Kabbalists identified their own plight with the fate of the Shekhinah, and she is pictured as being cast out into matter in much the same way as the Gnostics pictured Sophia, the outcast divine wisdom. The doctrine of the Shekhinah within Kabbalah and within Judaism as a whole is complex and it is something I don't feel competent to comment on further; more information can be found in [39] & [41].

Malkhut is the sphere of the physical elements and Kabbalists still use the four-fold scheme which dates back at least as far as Empedocles and probably to the Ark. The four elements correspond to four readily observable states of matter:

solid	earth
liquid	water
gas	air
plasma	fire/electric arc (lightning)

In addition it is not uncommon to include a fifth element so rarefied and arcane that most people (myself included) have difficulty saying

what it is. The fifth element is aethyr (or ether) and is sometimes called spirit.

The quantity of material which has been written about the elements in occult and astrological literature is enormous, and rather than reproduce in bulk what is relatively well-known I will provide a rough outline so that those readers who aren't familiar with Kabbalah will realise I am talking about approximately the same thing as they have seen before. A detailed description of the traditional medieval view of the four elements can be found in Barrett's *The Magus* [2]. The hierarchy of elemental powers can be found in 777 [8] and in the Golden Dawn material [35] - I have summarised a few useful items below. The elements in Malkhut are arranged as shown in Figure 10 below:

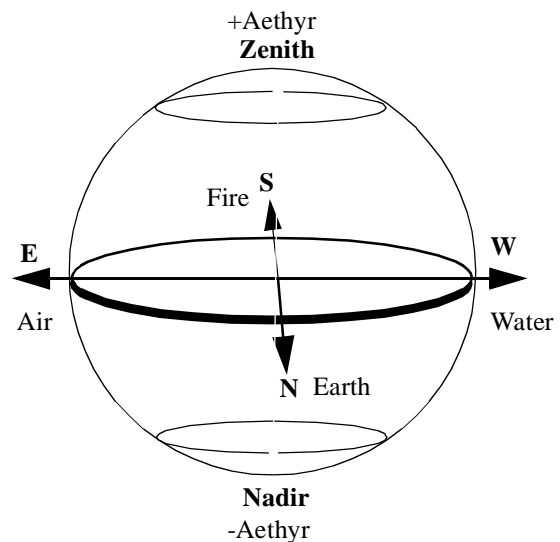


Figure 10: The Elements & the Cardinal Points

The Sephiroth

The cardinal points have been rotated through 180 degrees from their customary directions so that it is easier to see how the elements fit on the lower face of the Tree of Life - see Figure 11. Aethyr is shown as the centre of the circle, but has been split into positive Aethyr at the zenith, and negative Aethyr at the nadir.

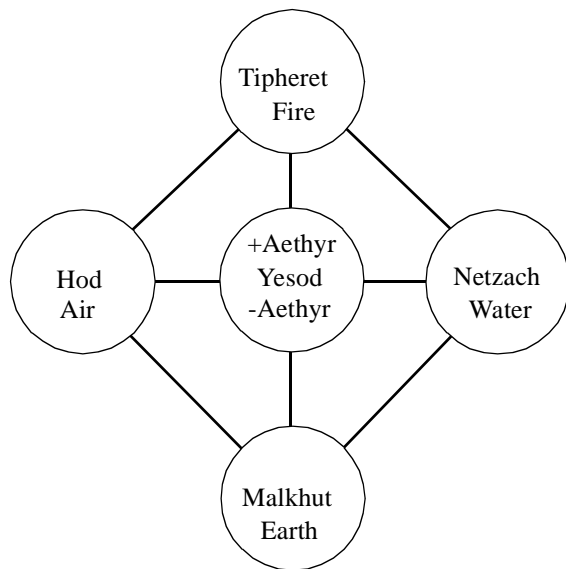


Figure 11: The Circle Cross
- the Elements on the Tree

It is important to distinguish between the elements in Malkhut, where we are talking about real substances (the water in your body, the breath in your lungs), and the elements on the Tree, where we are using traditional correspondences *associated* with the elements, e.g.:

Earth	solid, stable, practical, down-to-earth
Water	sensitive, intuitive, emotional, caring, nurturing, fertile
Air	vocal, communicative, intellectual
Fire	energetic, daring, impetuous
+Aethyr	glue, binding, plastic
-Aethyr	unbinding, dissolution, disintegration

The elements in Malkhut are real. You can stub your toe on a stone, you can drown in the sea, and you can set your house on fire (fanned by a strong east wind no doubt). If you attempt to work with the elements in Malkhut you are working with the stuff of the physical world. Malkhut is not an inner mystical state - it is

really there.

The pseudo-element of Aethyr or Spirit is enigmatic, but it can be thought of in terms of the forces which bind matter together. It is almost certainly a coincidence (but nevertheless interesting) that just as there are four elements there are four fundamental forces (gravitational, electromagnetic, weak nuclear & strong nuclear) known to date, and current belief among theoretical physicists is that they can be unified into one fundamental force - that is, the properties of matter are an expression of four forces which are really the same thing. Sometimes I like to think that the four elements are the four forces, and the one unifying force is aethyr.

On an even more arcane tack, Barret [2] has this to say about Aethyr:

“Now seeing that the soul is the essential form, intelligible and incorruptible, and is the first mover of the body, and is moved itself; but that the body, or matter, is of itself unable and unfit for motion, and does very much degenerate from the soul, it appears that there is a need of a more excellent medium:- now such a medium is conceived to be the spirit of the world, or that which some call a quintessence; because it is not from the four elements, but a certain first thing, having its being above and beside them. There is, therefore, such a kind of medium required to be, by which celestial souls [e.g. forms] may be joined to gross bodies, and bestow upon them wonderful gifts. This spirit is in the same manner, in the body of the world, as our spirit is in our bodies; for as the powers of our soul are communicated to the members of the body by the medium of the spirit, so also the virtue of the soul of the world is diffused, throughout all things, by the medium of the universal spirit; for there is nothing to be found in the whole world that hath not a spark of the virtue thereof.”

Aethyr underpins the elements like a foundation and its attribution to Yesod should be obvious, particularly as it forms the linking role between the ideoplastic world of “the Astral Light” [26] and the material world. Aethyr is thought to come in two flavours - positive Aethyr, which binds, and negative Aethyr, which unbinds. Negative Aethyr is something like the Universal Solvent - it requires some care in its handling!

Notes on Kabbalah

Working with the physical elements in Malkhut is one of the most important areas of applied magic, dealing as it does with the basic constituents of the real world. The physical elements are tangible and can be experienced in a direct way through recreations such as caving, diving, parachuting or firewalking. Our bodies themselves are made from physical matter, and there are many meditational exercises which can be carried out using the elements as a basis for work on the body. For example, concentration on the element of fire can be used to resist the bodily effects of cold. If you can stand his manic intensity (Exercise 1: boil an egg by force of will) then Bardou [1] is full of many ideas on this subject.

Malkhut is often associated with various kinds of intrinsic evil. To understand this attitude (which I do not share) it is necessary to confront the same question as thirteenth century Kabbalists: can God be evil? The answer to this question was (broadly speaking) “yes”, but Kabbalists have gone through many gyrations in an attempt to avoid what was for many an unacceptable conclusion. It was difficult to accept that famine, war, disease, prejudice, hate, or death could be a part of a perfect being, and there had to be a way to account for evil which did not contaminate divine perfection. We know that our physical existence is a mixed experience: perhaps the problem was something to do with our embodiment in physical matter?

This viewpoint is akin to sweeping evil under the carpet, and in the case of Kabbalah the carpet has tended to be Malkhut. Malkhut became the habitation for evil spirits.

If one examines the structure of the Tree without prejudice, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that evil is quite adequately accounted for; there is no need to shuffle evil to the lower periphery of the Tree like a cleaner without a dustpan. The emanation of any sephira from Chokmah downwards can manifest as good or evil depending on circumstances and the point of view of those affected by the energy involved. This appears to have been understood even at the time of the writing of the *Zohar*, where the mercy of God is constantly contrasted with the severity of God, and the author makes it clear that one tendency has to balance the other - you cannot have the mercy without the severity.

On the other hand, the severity of God is per-

sistently identified with the rigours of existence (form, finiteness, limitation), and while it is true that many of the things which have been identified with evil are a consequence of the finiteness of things, of being finite beings in a world of finite resources governed by natural laws with inflexible causality, it is not correct to infer (as some have) that form itself is *intrinsically* evil.

The notion that form and matter are *intrinsically* evil, or in some way imperfect or not a part of God, may have reached Kabbalah from a number of sources. Scholem comments [39]:

“The Kabbalah of the early thirteenth century was the offspring of a union between an older and essentially Gnostic tradition represented by the book “*Bahir*”, and the comparatively modern element of Jewish Neo-Platonism.”

There is the possibility that the Kabbalists of Provence (who wrote or edited the *Bahir*) were influenced by the Cathars, a late form of Manicheism. Whether the source was Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Manicheism or some combination of all three, Kabbalah has imported a view of matter and form which distorts the view of things portrayed by the Tree of Life, and so in some interpretations Malkhut ends up as a kind of cosmic outer darkness, a bin for all the dirt, detritus, broken sephira and dirty handkerchiefs of the creation. Form is evil, the Mother of Form is female, women are most definitely and indubitably evil, and Malkhut is the most female of the sephira, therefore Malkhut is most definitely evil...quod erat demonstrandum. Or so it was concluded by some.

By the time we reach the late 19th. century and the time of S.L. Mathers and the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Golden Dawn, there is a complete Tree of evil demonic Klippot *underneath* Malkhut as a reflection of the “good” Tree above it. This may have something to do with the fact that meditations on Malkhut can easily become meditations on Binah, and meditations on Binah have a habit of slipping into the Abyss, and once in the Abyss it is easy to trawl up enough junk to imagine one has “discovered” an averse Tree “underneath” Malkhut.

This view of the Klippot, or Shells, as active, demonic evil has become pervasive, and as people put more energy into the demonic Tree, the less there is for the original. Abolish the Klippot as demonic forces, and the Tree of Life comes alive with its full power of good *and* evil. The following quotation from Bischoff [3] (speaking

The Sephiroth

of the Sephiroth) provides a more rational view of the Klippot:

“Since their energy [of the sephiroth] shows three degrees of strength (highest, middle and lowest degree), their emanations group accordingly in sequence. We usually imagine the image of a descending staircase. The Kabbalist prefers to see this fact as a decreasing alienation of the central primeval energy. Consequently any less perfect emanation is to him the cover or shell (Qlippah) of the preceding, and so the last (furthest) emanations being the so-called material things are the shell of the total and are therefore called (in the actual sense) Klippot.”

This is my own view; the shell or Qlippah of something is the accretion of form which it accumulates as energy comes down the Lightning Flash. If the shell can be considered by itself then it is a dead husk of something which could be alive - it preserves all the structure but there is no energy in it to bring it to life. One can imagine a man who walks into ten shops and in each shop he buys a coat and puts it on. By the time he arrives in the tenth shop he is so laden down by coats he can hardly move. Are the coats evil? Are they demonic? Or are they just coats, dead things, coverings?

With this interpretation the Klippot are to be found everywhere: in relationships, at work, at play, in ritual, in society. Whenever something dies and people refuse to recognise that it is dead, and cling to the lifeless husk of whatever it was, then you find a Qlippah. The Qlippah of Malkhut is what you would get if the Sun went out: stasis, life frozen into immobility.

In keeping with the belief that matter is evil, Malkhut has not one but two vices. The first vice of Malkhut is Avarice, not only in the sense of trying to acquire material things, but also in the sense of being unwilling to let go of anything, even when it has become dead and worthless. It is common to find people who cling to the past by surrounding themselves with artifacts and memories, rather than living in the present.

The other vice of Malkhut is Inertia, in the sense of “active resistance to motion; sluggish; disinclined to move or act”. It is visible in most people at one time or another, and tends to manifest when a task is new, necessary, but not particularly exciting, when there is no excitement or “natural energy” to keep one fired up, and one has to keep on pushing right to the fin-

ish. For this reason the obligation of Malkhut is (has to be) self-discipline.

The virtue of Malkhut is Discrimination, the ability to perceive differences. The ability to perceive differences is a necessity for any living organism, whether it is a bacterium able to sense the gradient of a nutrient, or a youngster working out how much money to wheedle out of his parents. As Malkhut is the final realisation of form, it is the sphere where our ability to distinguish between differences is most pronounced.

The capacity to discriminate is fundamental to our survival. It is so important that it works overtime and finds boundaries and distinctions everywhere - “you” and “me”, “yours” and “mine”, distinctions of “property” and “value” and “territory” are intellectual abstractions on one level (i.e. not real) and fiercely defended realities on another (i.e. very real indeed).

The quality of discrimination specific to Malkhut is often defined as the ability to discriminate between “the real and the unreal”. I am not going to attempt a definition of real and unreal, but it is the case that much of what we think of as real is unreal, and much of what we think of as unreal is real, and we need the same discrimination which leads us into the mire of irrelevant distinctions to lead us out again.

Some people think skin colour is a real measure of intelligence...but many do not. Some people think gender is a real measure of ability; many do not. Many people judge on appearances; some do not. There is clearly a difference between a bottle of beer and a bottle of urine, but is the colour of the *bottle* important? What *is* important? What differences are real, and what differences matter? How much energy do we devote to things which are “not real”. Should I care about “property” and “territory” and “status”, and if I do care, to what extent. Where do I start caring, and where do I stop caring (i.e. drawing the line). Am I able to perceive how much I am being manipulated by a fixation on unreality? Are my goals in life “real”, or will they look increasingly silly and immature as I grow older? For that matter, is Kabbalah “real”? Does it provide a useful model of reality, or is it the remnant of a world-view which should have been put to sleep centuries ago?

One of the primary exercises for an initiate into Malkhut is a thorough examination of the question “What is real?”. The ability to discrimi-

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nate, to find important differences which have been glossed over, to ignore differences which are superficial and irrelevant, is absolutely vital to the kind of self-analysis which forms a basis for the initiatory techniques described later in this book.

There is no easy way to acquire discrimination and there is no easy way to divide reality into the real and the unreal. One way is to study the mechanics of perception and cognition in the company of other people, to take common beliefs such as “what goes up must come down” or “all men are rapists”, and to try to understand how we form internal models of the world from the information presented to us. It is useful to discuss this with other people, because their model of a situation will almost certainly differ from your own. A possible written source is the work of Arthur Korzybski, usually labelled “General Semantics”, which attempts to make people aware of the distinctions between their internal models of reality and the world on which they are based. There are doubtless other, equally useful ways of approaching the problem of “what is real”.

The Spiritual Experience of Malkhut is variously the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel (HGA), or the Vision of the HGA, depending on whom you believe. I will place my money on the Vision of the HGA in Malkhut, and the Knowledge and Conversation in Tipheret.

What is the HGA? According to the Gnosticism of Valentinus, each person has a guardian angel who accompanies that individual through their life and reveals the gnosis; the angel is in a sense the “divine Self”. This belief is a part of the Kabbalistic tradition I received, so some part of Gnosticism lives on. It is also a part of the Jewish tradition, which records many attempts to contact a *maggid*, or spiritual teacher.

The current tradition concerning the HGA almost certainly entered the Western Esoteric Tradition as a consequence of S.L. Mather’s translation [28] of *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, which contains full details of a lengthy ritual to attain the Knowledge and Conversation of the HGA. This ritual has had an important influence on twentieth century magicians; it is often attempted and occasionally completed. The purpose of contacting the HGA is to establish a genuine and fulfilling link with a source of knowledge or wisdom which comes

from within, and is not dependent on buying the latest book or meeting a fashionable guru.

The powers of Malkhut are invoked by means of the names *Adonai ha Aretz* and *Adonai Melekh*, which mean “Lord of the World” and “The Lord who is King” respectively.

The power is transmitted through the world of Creation by the archangel Sandalphon, who is sometimes referred to as “the Long Angel”, because his feet are in Malkhut and his head in Keter, which gives him an opportunity to discuss the state of the Creation with Metatron, the Angel of the Presence.

The angel order of Malkhut is the Ishim or Ayshim, sometimes translated as the “souls of fire”, supposedly the souls of righteous men and women.

In concluding this section on Malkhut, it worth emphasising that I have chosen deliberately not to explore some major topics because there are sufficient threads for anyone with an interest to pick up and follow for themselves. The image of Malkhut as Mother Earth provides a link between Kabbalah and a numinous archetype with a deep significance for some. The image of Malkhut as physical substance provides a link into the sciences, and it is the case that at the limits of theoretical physics one’s intuitions seem to be slipping and sliding on the same reality as in Kabbalah. The image of Malkhut as the sphere of the elements is the key to a large body of practical magical technique which varies from yoga-like concentration on the bodily elements, to nature-oriented work in the great outdoors. Lastly, just as the design of a building reveals much about its builders, so Malkhut can reveal a great deal about Keter - the bottom of the Tree and the top have much in common.

Yesod

Yesod means “foundation”, and the sephira represents the hidden infrastructure whereby the emanations from the remainder of the Tree are transmitted to the sephira Malkhut. Just as a large building has its air-conditioning ducts, service tunnels, conduits, electrical wiring, hot and cold water pipes, attic spaces, lift shafts, winding rooms, storage tanks, and a telephone exchange, so does the Creation; the external, visible world of phenomenal reality rests (metaphorically speaking) upon a hidden foundation of occult machinery.

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Meditations on the nature of Yesod tend to be filled with secret tunnels and concealed mechanisms, as if the Creation was a Gothic mansion with a secret door behind every mirror, a passage in every wall, a pair of hidden eyes behind every portrait, and a subterranean world of forgotten tunnels leading who knows where. For this reason the Spiritual Experience of Yesod is aptly named "The Vision of the Machinery of the Universe".

Many Yesod correspondences reinforce the notion of a foundation, of something which lies behind, supports and gives shape to phenomenal reality. The magical image of Yesod is of "a beautiful naked man, very strong". An image which springs to mind is that of a man with the world resting on his shoulders, like one of the misrepresentations of the Titan Atlas (who actually held up the heavens, not the world). The angel order of Yesod is the Cherubim, the Strong Ones; the archangel is Gabriel, the Strong or Mighty One of God, and the God-name is Shaddai el Chai, the Almighty Living God. The idea of a foundation suggests that there is a substance which lies behind physical matter and "in-forms it" or "holds it together", something less structured, more plastic, more refined and rarefied, and this "fifth element" is often called aethyr.

I will not attempt to justify aethyr in terms of current physics (the closest concept I have found is the hypothesised Higgs field). It is a convenient handle on a concept which has enormous intuitive appeal to many magicians, who, when asked how magic works, tend to think in terms of a medium which is directly receptive to the will, something which is plastic and can be shaped through concentration and imagination, and which transmits their artificially created forms into reality. Eliphas Levi called this medium the "Astral Light". It is also natural to imagine that mind, consciousness, and the soul have their habitation in this substance, and there are volumes detailing the properties of the "Etheric Body", the "Astral Body", the "Causal Body" [33], [34] and so on. It is always questionable whether one should take such ideas literally, but there is value in working with the kind of natural intuitions which occur spontaneously and independently in a large number of people - there is often power in these intuitions. It is a mistake to invalidate them because they sound cranky.

When I talk about aethyr or the Astral Light, I mean there is an ideoplastic substance which is subjectively real to many magicians, and explanations of magic at the level of Yesod revolve around manipulating this substance using desire, imagination and will.

The fundamental nature of Yesod is that of *interface*; it interfaces the rest of the Tree of Life to Malkhut. The interface is bi-directional; there are impulses coming down from Keter, and echoes bouncing back from Malkhut. The idea of interface is illustrated in the design of a computer system.

A computer runs programs. You can load up a game program and interact with it as if it was a little world in its own right, driving cars or flying planes or blowing up bridges with air-to-ground missiles. If the monitor is switched off, the program continues to run. You can unplug the joystick or the keyboard or the mouse, and the program will still be there, but you cannot interact with it any more. People who have tried to install computer software will know that it often doesn't work unless you install the correct "drivers" to interface the program to your peripheral devices. A computer is nothing more than a source of heat and repair bills unless it has peripheral interfaces and device drivers to interface the world outside the computer to the world "inside" it; add a keyboard and a mouse and a monitor and a printer, install the appropriate driver software, and you have opened the door into another reality.

Our own senses have the same characteristic of being a bi-directional interface through which we experience the world, and for this reason the senses correspond to Yesod, and not only the five traditional senses; the "sixth sense" and the "second sight" are given equal status. Yesod is also the sphere of instinctive psychism, of clairvoyance, precognition, divination and (to some extent) prophecy. It is also clear from accounts of lucid dreaming (and the author's personal experience) that we possess an ability to perceive an inner world as vividly as the outer, and to Yesod belongs the inner world of dreams, daydreams and vivid imagination. One of the titles of Yesod is "The Treasure House of Images".

To Yesod is attributed Levanah, the Moon, and the lunar associations of tides, flux and change, occult influence, and deeply instinctive and sometimes atavistic behaviour - possession,

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mediumship, lycanthropy.

Although Yesod is the foundation and it has associations with strength, it is by no means a rigid scaffold supporting a world in stasis. Yesod supports the world in the same way that the sea supports all the life which lives in it, and just as the sea has its irresistible currents and tides, so does Yesod. Yesod is the most “occult” of the sephiroth, and next to Malkhut it is the most magical, but compared with Malkhut its magic is of a more subtle, seductive, glamorous and ensnaring kind. Magicians are drawn to Yesod by the idea that if reality rests on a hidden foundation, then by changing the foundation it is possible to change the reality. The magic of Yesod is the magic of form and appearance, not substance; it is the magic of illusion, glamour, transformation, and shape-changing.

The most commonplace but sophisticated examples of this are to be found in modern marketing, advertising, image consulting, and in what politicians refer to as “spin”. I do not jest. My tongue is not even slightly in my cheek. The following quote was taken from this morning’s paper [40], in an article about the importance of corporate image:

“The majority of people continue to misunderstand and think that it is just a logo, rather than understanding that a corporate identity programme is actually concerned with the very commercial objective of having a strong personality and single-minded, focused direction for the whole organisation, “ said Fiona Gilmore, managing director of the design company Lewis Moberly. “It’s like planting an acorn and then a tree grows. If you create the right *foundation* (my italics) then you are building a whole culture for the future of an organisation.”

I don’t know what Ms. Gilmore studies in her spare time, but the idea that it is possible to manipulate reality by manipulating symbols and appearances is entirely magical.

Although the corporate changes are cosmetic, those responsible for creating a corporate image argue that a redesign of a company’s uniform or name is just the visible sign of a much larger transformation. The same article on corporate identity continues as follows:

“The scale of the BT relaunch is colossal. The new logo will be painted on more than 72,000 vehicles and trailers, as well as 9,000 properties. The company’s 92,000 public payphones will get new decals,

and its 90 shops will have to changed, right down to the yellow door handles. More than 50,000 employees are likely to need new uniforms or “image clothing”.

Note the emphasis on *image*. The company in question (British Telecom) is an ex-public monopoly with (at the time of writing) an appalling customer relations problem, so it is repainting its vans and changing the colour of its door handles! This is Yesodic magic on a gigantic scale.

Image manipulators gain most of their power from the mass-media. The mass-media correspond to two sephiroth: as a medium of communication they belong in Hod, but as a foundation for our perception of reality they belong in Yesod. Today most people form their model of what the world (in the large) is like via the media. There are a few individuals who travel the world sufficiently to have a model based on personal experience, but for most people their model of what most of the world is like is formed by newspapers, radio and television. That is, the media have become an extended (if inaccurate) instrument of perception. Like our “normal” means of perception the media are highly selective in the variety and content of information provided, and they can be used by advertising agencies and other manipulative individuals to create foundations for new collective realities. For example an advertising agency may attempt to manipulate your *perception* of a product by manipulating its *image*. Some products are nothing more than image. It is well known that the material cost of many very expensive perfumes is negligible. What is being sold is image, and this is widely acknowledged.

While on the subject of changing perception to assemble new realities, the following quote by “Don Juan” [5] has a definite Kabbalistic flavour:

“The next truth is that perception takes place,” he went on, “because there is in each of us an agent called the assemblage point that selects internal and external emanations for alignment. The particular alignment that we perceive as the world is the product of a specific spot where our assemblage point is located on our cocoon.”

One of the titles of Yesod is “The Receptacle of the Emanations”, and its function is precisely as described above - Yesod is the assemblage point which assembles the emanations of the internal

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and the external.

In addition to the deliberate, magical manipulation of foundations, there are other important areas of magic relevant to Yesod. Raw, innate psychism is an ability which tends to improve as more attention is devoted to creative visualisation, focused meditation (on Tarot cards for example), dreams (e.g. keeping a dream diary), and divination. Divination is an important technique to practice even if you feel you are terrible at it (and especially if you think it is nonsense), because it reinforces the idea that it is permissible to “let go” and intuit meanings into any pattern.

Many people have difficulty doing this, feeling perhaps that they will be swamped with unreason (recalling Freud’s fear, expressed to Jung, of needing a bulwark against the “black mud of occultism”), when in reality their minds are swamped with reason and could use a holiday.

If Yesod is related to perception, then divination is about perceiving something meaningful where others see random patterns. The future isn’t in the pattern of tea leaves, it is in the patterns triggered in our minds when the treasurehouse of images is stimulated. Divination is like letting Yesod off the leash, free to run around and sniff out rabbits. Any divination system can be used, but systems which emphasise pure intuition are best (e.g. Tarot, runes, tea-leaves, flights of birds, patterns on the wallpaper, smoke - I heard of a Kabbalist who threw a cushion into the air and carried out divination on the basis of the number of pieces of foam stuffing which fell out).

Because Yesod is a kind of aethyric reflection of the physical world, an image of and precursor to reality, mirrors are an important tool for Yesodic magic. Quartz crystals are also used, partly because of the traditional use of crystal balls for divination, but also because quartz crystal and amethyst have a peculiarly Yesodic quality in their own right. The average New Age shop filled with crystals, Tarot cards, silver jewellery (lunar association), perfumes, dreamy music, and all the glitz, glamour and glitter of a magpie’s nest, is like a temple to Yesod.

Mirrors and crystals can be used passively as foci for receptivity, but they can also be used actively for certain kinds of aethyric magic - there is an interesting book on making and using magic mirrors which builds on the kind of

elemental magical work carried out in Malkhut [6].

Yesod has an important correspondence with the sexual organs. The correspondence occurs in three ways. The first way is that when the Tree of Life is placed over the human body, Yesod is positioned over the genitals. The author of the *Zohar* is quite explicit about “the remaining members of the Microprosopus”, to the extent that the relevant paragraphs in S.L. Mather’s translation of “The Lesser Holy Assembly” remain in Latin to avoid offending Victorian sensibilities.

The second association of Yesod with the genitals arises from the union of the Microprosopus and his Bride. This is another recurring theme in Kabbalah, and the symbolism is complex and refers to several distinct ideas, from the relationship between husband and wife, to a highly metaphorical view of an internal process within the body of God: e.g [29].

“When the Male is joined with the Female, they both constitute one complete body, and all the Universe is in a state of happiness, because all things receive blessing from their perfect body. And this is an Arcanum.”

or, referring to the Bride:

“And she is mitigated, and receiveth blessing in that place which is called the Holy of Holies below.”

or, referring to the “member”:

“And that which floweth down into that place where it is congregated, and which is emitted through that most holy Yesod, Foundation, is entirely white, and therefore is it called Chesed. Thence Chesed entereth into the Holy of Holies; as it is written Ps. cxxxiii. 3 ‘For there Tetragrammaton commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.’”

It is not difficult to read a great deal into paragraphs like this, and there are many more in a similar vein. Suffice to say that the Microprosopus is often identified with the sephira Tipheret, the Bride is the sephira Malkhut, and the point of union between them is obviously Yesod.

A third and more abstract association between Yesod and the sexual organs arises because the sexual organs are a mechanism for perpetuating the *form* of a living organism. In order to come close to the abstract sense of what is happening in sexual reproduction it is necessary to take an odd and seemingly irrelevant

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diversion by asking the question "What is a computer program?"

A computer program indisputably begins as an idea: someone decides they want to write a program to do something. Like a story or a song, a program is not a material thing, but it can be written down in various ways; as an abstract specification in set theoretic notation akin to pure mathematics, or as a set of recursive functions in lambda calculus, or it could be written in several different high level languages - Pascal, C, Prolog, LISP, ADA, BASIC etc. Are they all the same program? A story or a novel can be translated into several different languages - French, German, Russian; do we accept each different translation as being "the same story"? If I read a novel by Tolstoy in English, am I reading the same story as a person who reads the same novel in Russian? Most people would say "Yes", despite the fact that the actual text is completely different. The same issue arises with music: if I play "Amazing Grace" on a tin whistle and you play it with a mouth organ, is it the same tune? Despite the fact that the instruments sound different, most people would say yes. It is clear that we have definitions of identity which go much deeper than the superficial appearances of a thing.

Computer scientists have wrestled with this problem of identity. They have tried to show that versions of a program written in two different languages are in some deep sense functionally identical. It isn't trivial to do this because it asks fundamental questions about language (any language) and about meaning, but it is possible in limited cases to produce two apparently different programs written in different languages and assert that they are identical. Whatever a program is, it seems to exist, like a novel or a song or a story, independently of any particular language.

So what is the program, and where is it? I don't know. We only recognise the existence of programs or stories or song when we express them in some way, by writing or singing. Suppose we write a program down. We could do it with a pencil. We could punch holes in paper. We could plant trees in a pattern in a field. We can line up magnetic domains. We can burn holes in metal foil. I could have it tattooed on my back. We can transform it into radically different forms by passing it through other programs designed to transform it from one

language to another. This is the same as a novel, which can be written on paper, or inscribed on sheets of metal, or baked into clay tablets. A novel obviously isn't tied to any physical representation either. What about the computer a program runs on? Well, it could be a conventional one made with electronic chips etc....but there are lots of different kinds and makes of computer, and they can all run the same program. You can walk into a computer games shop and buy the same computer game to run on several radically different types of computer.

It is also quite practical to build computers which *don't* use electrons - you could use mechanics or fluids or ball bearings - all you need to do is produce something with the functionality of a simple abstract device called a "Turing machine", and that isn't hard. So not only is a program not tied to any particular physical representation, but the same goes for the computer itself, and what we are left with is two puffs of smoke. On another level this is crazy; we know computers are real, they do real things in the real world, and the programs which make them work are obviously real too....aren't they?

We could now apply the same kind of scrutiny to living organisms, and the mechanism of reproduction. We could take a good look at nucleic acids, enzymes, proteins etc., and ask the same kind of questions. Where is the human being in a strand of DNA? A human being isn't in the chemicals any more than the program is in its code or a novel is in the printed words: the form of the human being is somehow represented by a pattern, and the chemicals in DNA are just one way of expressing that pattern. The technology now exists to read the pattern in DNA, encode it so that the pattern can be sent down a telephone, and turned back into DNA at the other end. At some point the *form* of a human being was flying down a telephone wire.

What I am suggesting is that if you try to get close to what constitutes a living organism you end up with another puff of smoke, and a handful of chemicals which could just as well be ball-bearings or marks in clay or the notes from a tin whistle....

The thing (form) that is being perpetuated through sexual reproduction is something quite abstract and immaterial; it is an abstract form preserved and encoded in a particular pattern of chemicals. If I was asked which was more real,

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the transient collection of chemicals used to encode our genetic information, or the abstract form itself, I would answer “the form”.

But then, I am a Kabbalist, and I would say that. I do find it astonishing that there are any hard-core materialists left in the world. All the important stuff seems to exist at the level of puffs of smoke, what Kabbalists call form. Roger Penrose, one of the most eminent mathematicians living has this to say [30]:

“I have made no secret of the fact that my sympathies lie strongly with the Platonic view that mathematical truth is absolute, external and eternal, and not based on man-made criteria; and that mathematical objects have a timeless existence of their own, not dependent on human society nor on particular physical objects.”

“Aha!” cry the materialists, “At least atoms are real.” Well, they are until you start pulling them apart with tweezers and end up with a heap of equations which turn out to be the linguistic expression of an idea. As Einstein said, “The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible”, that is, capable of being described in some linguistic form.

I am not trying to convince anyone of the “rightness” of the Kabbalistic viewpoint. What I am trying to do is show that the process whereby form is impressed on matter (the relationship between Yesod and Malkhut) is not arcane, theosophical mumbo-jumbo; it is an issue which is alive and kicking. There are hard and unresolved philosophical questions about the nature of form and its relationship to matter which have been ignored for too long. The closer we get to “real things” (and that certainly includes living organisms), the better the Kabbalistic model looks (that form precedes manifestation, that there is a well-defined process of form-ation with the “real world” as an outcome).

To return to where we left off, to the correspondence between the sephira Yesod and the genitals, sexual intercourse is about transferring genetic information. Genetic information is the complete description of the form and functioning of an organism. It isn't the bottle, but it is the mould from which many bottles come.

The Illusion of Yesod is security, the kind of security which forms the foundation of our personal existence in the world. On a superficial level our security is built out of relationships, a

source of income, a place to live, a vocation, personal power and influence etc, but at a deeper level the foundation of personal identity is built on a series of accidents, encounters and influences which create the illusion of who we are, what we believe in, and what we stand for.

There is a warm, secure feeling of knowing what is right and wrong, of doing the right thing, of living a worthwhile life in the service of worthwhile causes, of having a uniquely privileged vantage point from which to survey the problems of life (with all the intolerance and incomprehension of other people which accompanies this insight). Conversely, there are feelings of despair, depression, loss of identity, and existential terror when a crack forms in the illusion, and reality shows through - what Castaneda calls “the crack in the world”.

The smug, self-perpetuating illusion which masquerades as personal identity at the level of Yesod is the most astoundingly difficult thing to shift or destroy. It fights back with all the resources of the personality, and it will enthusiastically embrace any ally which will help to shore up its defences - religious, political or scientific ideology; psychological, sociological, metaphysical and theosophical claptrap (e.g. Kabbalah); the law and popular morality; in fact, any beliefs which give it the power to retain its identity, uniqueness and integrity. Because this parasite of the soul uses religion (and its esoteric offshoots) to sustain itself they have little or no power over it and become a major part of the problem.

There are various ways of overcoming this personal demon (Carroll [4], in an essay on the subject, calls it Choronzon), and the two I know best are the cataclysmic and the abrasive.

The first method involves a shock so extreme that it is impossible to be the same person again, and if enough preparation has gone before then it is possible to use the shock to rebuild oneself.

In some cases this doesn't happen. It is observable that many people with very rigid religious beliefs talk readily about having suffered traumatic experiences, and the phenomenon of hysterical conversion among soldiers suffering from war neuroses is well known. In some cases the cataclysmic method is a valid method for bringing about initiation, but it may produce severe trauma, depending on the person and the nature of the shock.

The other method, the abrasive, is to wear

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away the demon of self-importance, to grind it into nothing by doing (for example) something for someone else for which one receives no thanks, praise, reward, or recognition. The task has to be big enough and awful enough to become a demon in its own right and induce feelings of compulsion (I have to do this), helplessness (I'll never make it), indignation (what's the point, it's not my problem anyway), rebellion (I won't, I won't, not any more), more compulsion (I can't give up), self-pity (how did I get into this?), exhaustion (Oh no! Not again!), despair (I can't go on), and finally a kind of submission when one's demon hasn't the energy to put up a struggle any more and simply gives up. Both techniques, the cataclysmic and the abrasive, are legitimate and time-honoured tools of initiation.

The Virtue of Yesod is independence, the ability to make our own foundations, to continually rebuild ourselves, to reject the security of comfortable illusions and confront reality without blinking.

The Vice of Yesod is idleness. This can be contrasted with the inertia of Malkhut. A stone is inert because it lacks the capacity to change. People however can change ... and can't be bothered. At least, not today.

Yesod has a dreamy, illusory, comfortable, *seductive* quality, as in the Isle of the Lotus Eaters - how else could we live as if death and personal annihilation only happened to other people?

The Klippotic aspect of Yesod occurs when foundations are rotten and disintegrating and only the superficial appearance remains unchanged - Wilde's story of Dorian Gray springs to mind. We also see something like this in traumas where the brain is damaged and the person is dead as far as their social existence is concerned, but the body remains and carries out basic instinctive functions.

Organisations are just as prone to this as people.

Hod & Netzach

"Objects contain the possibility of all situations. The possibility of occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object. Form is the possibility of structure."

Wittgenstein

"Since feeling is first who pays any attention to the syntax of things will never

wholly kiss you."

E.E. Cummings

The title of the sephira Hod is sometimes translated as Splendour and sometimes as Glory. The title of the sephira Netzach is usually translated as Victory, sometimes as Endurance, and occasionally as Eternity. Although there have been many attempts to explain the titles of this pair of sephiroth, I am not aware of a convincing explanation.

The two sephiroth correspond to the legs and like the legs are normally taken as a pair and not individually. They complement each other but are not opposites any more than force and form are opposites. This pair of sephiroth provide the first example of the polarity of form and force encountered when ascending back up the lightning flash from the sephira Malkhut. Form and force are thoroughly mixed together at the level of Hod and Netzach: the force aspect represented by Netzach is differentiated (an example of form) into a multitude of forces, and the form aspect represented by Hod acts dynamically (an example of force) by synthesising new forms and structures. Both sephiroth represent the plurality of consciousness at this level, and in older texts they are referred to as the "armies" or "hosts". To understand why they are referred to in this way it is necessary to look at an archaic aspect of Kabbalistic symbolism whereby the Tree of Life is a representation of kingship.

One of the titles of Tipheret is Melekh, or king. This king is the child of Chokmah (Abba, the father) and Binah (Aima, the Mother) and hence a son of God who wears the crown of Keter. The kingdom is the sephira Malkhut, at the same time queen (Malkah) and bride (Kallah). In his right hand the king wields the sword of justice (corresponding to Gevurah), and in his left the sceptre of authority (corresponding to Chesed), and he rules over the armies or hosts (Tzabaot), which are Hod and Netzach.

The use of kingship as a metaphor to convey what the sephiroth mean obscures as much as it reveals, but it is an unavoidable piece of Kabbalistic symbolism, and the attribution of Hod and Netzach to the "armies" does capture something useful about the nature of consciousness at this level: consciousness is fragmented into innumerable warring factions, and when there is no rightful king ruling over the kingdom of the soul (a common state of affairs), then the

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armies elect a succession of leaders from the ranks, who wear a lopsided crown and occupy the throne only for as long as it takes to find another claimant. I will have more to say about this.

A psychological interpretation of Hod is that it corresponds to the ability to abstract, to conceptualise, to reason, to communicate, and this level of consciousness arises from the fact that in order to survive we have evolved a nervous system capable of building internal representations of the world.

I can drive around London in a car because I possess an internal representation of the London street system. I can diagnose faults in the same car because I have an internal representation of its mechanical and electrical systems and how they might fail. I can type this document without looking at the keyboard because I know where the keys are positioned, and your ability to read what I have written pre-supposes a shared understanding about the meaning of words and what they represent.

Our nervous systems possess an absolutely basic ability to create internal representations out of the information we perceive through our senses. It is also an absolutely basic characteristic of the world that it is *bigger* than my nervous system. I cannot possibly create *accurate*, internal representations of the world, and one of the meanings of the verb “to abstract” is “to remove quietly”. This is what the nervous system does: it quietly removes most of what is going on in the world in order to create an abridged and abstract representation of reality with all the important (important to me) bits underlined in highlighter pen. This is the world “I” live in: not in the “real” world, but an internal reality synthesised by my nervous system.

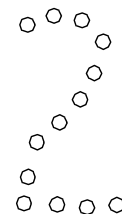
There has been a lot of philosophising about this, and it is difficult to think about how our nervous systems *might* be distorting or even manufacturing reality without a feeling of unease. I am personally reassured by the everyday observation that most adults can drive a car on a busy road at eighty miles per hour in reasonable safety. This suggests that while our synthetic internal representation of the world isn't accurate, it isn't at all bad.

Abstraction does not end at the point of building an internal representation of the external world. My nervous system is quite content to treat my internal representation of the world as

yet another domain over which it can carry out further abstraction, and the subsequent new world of abstractions as another domain, and so on indefinitely, giving rise to the principal definition of “abstraction”: “to separate by the operation of the mind, as in forming a general concept from consideration of particular instances”. As an example, suppose someone asks me to watch the screen of a computer and to describe what I see. I have no idea what to expect.

“Hmmm...lots of dots moving around randomly...different colour dots...red, blue, green. Ah, the dots seem to be clustering...they're forming circles...all the dots of each particular colour are forming circles, lots of little circles. Now the circles are coming together to form a number...it's 3. Now they're moving apart and forming another number...its 15...now 12..9..14. They've gone.....that was it..3, 15, 12, 9, 14. Is it some sort of test? Do I have to guess the next number in the series? What are the numbers supposed to mean? What was the point of it? Hmmm..the numbers might stand for letters of the alphabet...let's see. C..O..L..I..N. It's my name!”

The dots on the screen are real - there are real, discrete, measurable spots of light on the screen. I could verify the presence of dots of light using a light meter. The colours are synthesised in the retina of my eye; different elements in my eye respond to different frequencies in the light and give rise to an internal experience we label “red”, “blue”, and “green”. The colours do not exist in the light: they exist in my perception of light, created by the eye itself. The circles do not exist: given the nature of the computer output on the screen, there are only individual pixels, and it is my nervous system which constructs circles. The numbers do not exist either: it is only because of my particular upbringing (which I share with the person who wrote the computer program) that I am able to distinguish patterns standing for abstract numbers in patterns of circles e.g



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And once I begin to reason about the *meaning* of a sequence of numbers I have left the real world a long way behind: not only is “number” a complex abstraction, but when I ask a question about the “meaning” of “a sequence of numbers” I am working with an even more “abstract abstraction”. My ability to happily juggle numbers and letters and decide that there is an identity between the abstract number sequence “3, 15, 12, 9, 14” and the character string “COLIN” is one of those commonplace things which any person might do. It illustrates how easy it is to become completely detached from the external world and function within an internal world of abstractions which have been detached from anything in the world for so long that they are taken as real without a second thought.

In parallel with our ability to structure perception into an internal world of abstractions we possess the ability to communicate facts about this internal world. When I say “The cup is on the table”, another person is able to identify in the real world, out of all the information reaching their senses, something corresponding to the abstraction “table”, something corresponding to the abstraction “cup”, and confirm the relationship of “on-ness”.

Why are the “cup” and “table” abstractions? Are they not real? They are abstractions because the word “cup” (or table) does not uniquely specify any particular cup in the world. When I use the word I am assuming the listener already possesses an internal representation of an abstract object “cup”, and can use that abstract representation of a cup to identify a particular object in the context within which my statement was made.

We are not normally conscious of this process, and don’t need to be when dealing with simple propositions about real objects in the real world. I think I know what a cup is, and I think you do too. If you don’t know, ask someone to show you a few.

Life becomes a lot more complicated when we deal with complex abstractions that are defined purely by agreement with other people and have no real-world referent. What is a “contract”, a “treaty”, a “loan”, “limited liability”, a “set”, a “function”, “marriage”, a “tort”, “natural justice”, a “sephira”, a “religion”, “sin”, “good”, “evil”, and so on (and on).

We reach agreement about the definitions of

these things using language. In some cases, for example, a mathematical object, the thing is completely and unambiguously defined using language, while in other cases (for example “good”, “sin”) there are no universally accepted definitions. Life is further complicated by a widespread lack of awareness that these internal abstractions *are* internal. It is common to find people projecting internal abstractions onto the world as if they were an intrinsic part of the fabric of existence, and as objectively real as the particular cup and the particular table I referred to earlier. Marriage is no longer a contract between a man and a woman; it is an estate made in heaven. What is heaven? God knows. And what is God? Trot out your definitions and let’s have an argument - that is the way such questions are answered.

A third element which goes together with abstraction and language to complete the essence of the sephira Hod is reason, and reason’s formal offspring, logic. Reason is the ability to articulate and justify our beliefs about the world using a base of generally agreed facts and a generally agreed technique for combining facts to infer valid conclusions.

If reason is considered as one out of a number of possible processes for establishing what is true about the world we live in, for establishing which models of reality are valid and which are not, then it has been phenomenally successful. In its heyday there were those who saw reason as the most divine faculty, the faculty in humankind most akin to God, and that legacy is still with us - the words “unreasonable” and “irrational” are often used to attack and denigrate someone who does not (or cannot) articulate what they do or why they do it.

There is of course no “reason” why we should have to articulate or justify anything, even to ourselves, but the reasoning machine within us demands an “explanation” for every phenomenon, and a “reason” for every action. This is a characteristic of reason - it is an obsessive mode of consciousness. Another characteristic of reason is that it operates on the “garbage-in, garbage-out” principle: if the base of given propositions a person uses to reason about are garbage, so are the conclusions - witness what two thousand years of Christian theology has achieved using sound dialectical principles inherited from Aristotle.

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The sephira Hod on the Pillar of Form represents the active synthesis of abstract forms in consciousness, and abstraction, language and reason are prime examples. In contrast, the sephira Netzach on the Pillar of Force represents affective states of consciousness that influence how we act and react: these are variously designated as needs, wants, drives, feelings, moods and emotions.

It is difficult to write about affective states, to be clear on the distinction between a need and a want on one hand, or a feeling or a mood on the other. I find it particularly difficult because the essence of sadness is *being* sad, the essence of excitement is the *feeling* of excitement, the essence of desire is the aching, lusting, overwhelming *feeling* of desire, and being too precise about defining feelings is in the essence of Hod, *not* Netzach.

These things are incommunicable. They can be produced in another person, but they cannot be communicated. It is possible to be clinical and abstract and precise about the sephira Hod because an abstract clinical precision captures that aspect of consciousness perfectly, but when attempting to communicate something about Netzach one feels tempted to try to communicate the feelings themselves, a task more suited to a poet or a musician, an actor or a dancer. Please accept this unfortunate limitation in what follows, a limitation not necessarily present when Kabbalah is learned at first hand from someone.

Netzach is on the Pillar of Force, but in reaching Netzach the Lightning Flash has already passed through Binah and Gevurah on the Pillar of Form and so it represents a force conditioned and constrained by form; when we talk about Netzach we are talking about the different ways force can be shaped and directed, like toothpaste squeezed out of a tube. The toothpaste we are talking about is something I will call “life force” or “life energy”. As a rule, when I have a lot of it I feel well and full of vitality, and when I don’t have much I feel unwell, tired, and vulnerable.

To continue the somewhat phallic toothpaste metaphor, the magnitude of pressure on the tube corresponds to my vitality; the direction in which the toothpaste comes out corresponds to a need or a want; and the shape of the nozzle corresponds to a feeling. All three factors, pressure, direction and nozzle determine how the

toothpaste comes out; that is, we could say that there are three factors giving a *form* to the toothpaste (or life-energy).

It may seem sloppy and unnecessarily metaphysical to imply that all needs, wants and feelings are merely conditions of manifestation of something more basic, some “unconditioned force”, but Kabbalah is primarily a tool for exploring internal states, and there are internal states (certainly in my experience) where this force is experienced directly with much less differentiation, hence the need for clumsy metaphors involving toothpaste.

Textbooks on psychology define a need as an internal state which results in directed behaviour, and discuss needs such as thirst, hunger, sex, stimulation, proximity seeking, curiosity and so on. These things are interesting, but for virtually everyone such basic and inherent needs are in the nature of “givens” and don’t provide much individual insight into the questions “why do I behave differently from other people?”, or “should I change my behaviour?”, or more interesting still “to what extent do I (or can I) influence my behaviour?”. In addition to inherent needs it is useful also to look at needs which have been acquired (that is, learned), and for convenience I will call them “wants” because people are usually conscious of “wanting” something specific.

To give some examples, a person might want:

- to buy a bar of chocolate.
- to go to the toilet.
- to own a better car.
- to have a sexual relationship with someone.
- to live forever.
- to be thinner (more muscular, taller, whiter, browner...).
- to read a book.
- to gain social recognition within a particular group.
- to win in sport.
- to go shopping.
- to go to bed.

Not only are these “wants” the sort of thing many people want, but these “wants” can all occur concurrently in the same person. Some wants may have been simmering away on a back burner for years, but there can be an astonishing variety of pots and pans waiting for an immediate turn on the stove. The average person’s consciousness zips around the kitchen like

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a demented short-order cook, stirring this dish, serving that one, slapping a pot on the stove for a few minutes only to take it off and put something else on, throwing whole meals in the bin only to empty them back into pots a few minutes later. The choice of which pot ends up on the hot plate depends largely on mood and accident.

Some people may plan their lives like military campaigns but most don't. Most people have far more wants than there are hours in the day to achieve them, and those which are actually satisfied on a given day is more a function of accident than design. Careers are thrown away (along with status and security) in a moment of sexual infatuation; the desire to eat struggles against the desire to be slim; the writer retires to the country to write the great novel and does everything but write; the manager desperately tries to finish an urgent report but finds himself dreaming about a car he saw in the car park; the student abandons an important essay on impulse to go out with friends.

A thread of energy is randomly cycled around an arbitrary list of needs and wants to produce the mixed-up complexity of the average person. Each activity is quickly replaced by another as the person attempts to reconcile all his wants and drives. Unfortunately there is no requirement that wants should be internally consistent or complementary; some wants can be in direct opposition, such as the desire to smoke and the desire to give up smoking.

Each want can be treated as a distinct mode of consciousness - I can eat a slap-up meal one day and thoroughly enjoy it, while the next day I can look in the mirror and swear never to touch another pizza again. It is as if two separate beings inhabited my body, the one who loves pizzas and the one who wants to be thin, and each makes plans independently of the other. Only the magical glitter dust of unbroken memory sustains the illusion that I am a single person¹.

When I view my own wants and actions dispassionately I can conclude that there is a host or army of independent beings jostling inside

me, a crowd of artificial elementals individually ensouled with enough of my energy to bring one particular desire to fruition. I cope with the semi-chaotic result of mob rule by using the traditional remedy: public relations.

I put together internal press releases (various rationalisations and justifications) to convince myself, and others if need be, that the mess was either due to external circumstances beyond my control (I didn't have time last night), the fault of other people (you made me angry), or inevitable (I had no choice, there was no alternative). In cases where even my public relations don't work I erect a shrine to the gods of Guilt and make little offerings of sorrow and regret over the years.

This is normal consciousness for most people. It is a kind of insanity. Every day new wants are kicked off in response to media advertising or peer pressure, and old wants compete with each other in a zero-sum game. Wants rush to and fro on the stage of consciousness like actors in the closing scenes of Julius Caesar - alarums and excursions, bodies litter the stage, trumpets and battle shouts in the wings, Brutus falls on his sword, Anthony claims the field - perhaps this is why the sephira is called Victory!

Having said this, I should point out that it is not desire or wants or drives which create the insanity - Kabbalah does not place the value judgement on desire that Buddhism does (that desire is the cause of suffering, and by inference, something to be overcome). The insanity arises from mob-rule, from the bizarre internal processes of justification, rationalisation and guilt, and from the identification of Self with the result. I will return to this when discussing the sephira Tipheret, as the mis-identification of Self with an arbitrary mob is a key element in the discussion on Tipheret.

It is worth noting that the idea that the human mind is a collective is increasingly the orthodox scientific position. This arises from a number of separate lines of enquiry. Researchers working on artificial intelligence find this an appealing model, and this viewpoint has been expressed by Marvin Minsky, one of the most influential pioneers in the field, in his *Society of Mind*. The leading cognitive scientist Daniel Dennet also describes this idea in *Consciousness Explained* [9], which he terms the "Many Drafts" model of consciousness, and contrasts it with the popular view which he terms the "Cartesian Theatre"

1. If memory blackouts *did* occur, one might quickly conclude that separate personalities *were* present. Something of this nature occurs in trance, possession and mediumistic states.

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model. Studies of lesions in the brain have provided detailed evidence of the many bizarre ways in which cognition can be affected by organic defects, and Oliver Sacks provides popular and moving observations from several case histories in *The man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* [37]. Lastly, detailed evidence from a wealth of neurophysiological studies using modern scanning equipment is providing precise maps not only of the localisation of brain function, but many of the modular inter-relationships.

Netzach also corresponds to our feelings, emotions and moods, because this background of “psychological weather” strongly conditions the way in which we think and behave. Regardless of what I am doing, my energy will manifest differently when I am happy than when I am not. Sometimes moods and emotions are triggered by a specific event, and sometimes they are not: free-floating anxiety and depression are common enough, and free-floating happiness may be less common but it happens.

There are hundreds of words for different moods, emotions and feelings, but most seem to refer to different degrees of intensity of the same thing, or the same feeling in different contexts, and the number of genuinely distinct internal dimensions of feeling appears to be small. Depression, misery, sadness, happiness, delight, joy, rapture and ecstasy seem to lie along the same axis, as do loathing, hate, dislike, affection, and love. It is an interesting exercise to identify the genuinely, qualitatively different feelings you can experience by actually conjuring up each feeling. I have tried the experiment with a number of people, and you will probably find there are less than 10 distinct feelings.

The most immediate and personal correspondences for Hod and Netzach are the psychological correspondences: the rational, abstract, intellectual and communicative on one hand and the emotional, motivational, intuitive, aesthetic, and non-rational on the other. The planetary and elemental correspondences mirror this: Hod corresponds to Kokab or Mercury, and the element of Air, while Netzach corresponds to Nogah or Venus, and the element Water.

The Virtue of Hod is honesty or truthfulness, and its Vice is dishonesty or untruthfulness. One of the consequences of being able to create abstract representations of reality and commu-

nicate some aspect of it to another person is that it is possible to *misrepresent* reality, or to put it bluntly, lie through your teeth.

The Illusion of Hod is order, in the sense of attempting to impose one’s sense of order upon the world. This is very noticeable in some people - whenever something happens they will immediately pigeonhole it and declare with great authority “it is just another example of XYZ”. A surprising number of people who claim to be rational will claim “there’s no such thing as (ghosts, telepathy, free lunches, UFO’s)” without having examined the evidence one way or the other. They are probably right, and I have no personal interest either way, but it is not difficult to distinguish between someone who carefully weighs the pros and cons in an argument and readily admits to uncertainty, and someone with a firm and orderly conviction that “this is the way the world is”.

The illusion of order occurs because people confuse their internal representation of the world with the world itself, and whenever they are confronted with something from the real world they attempt to fit it into their internal representation in a way that avoids having to reorganise anything.

The illusion of order (that everything in the world can be neatly classified) relates closely to the Klippot of Hod, which is rigidity, or rigid order. As children we start out with an open view of what the world is like, and by the time we reach our late teens or early twenties this view has set fairly solid, like cold porridge - there are few minds more full of certainties than that of an eighteen year old.

A good critical education sometimes has the effect of stirring the porridge into a lumpy gruel, but it gradually starts to set again (unless the heavy hand of fate stirs it up), and by middle age most people have an inflexible view of the world. It is generally recognised, particularly in the sciences, that a deeply ingrained sense of “how things are” is the greatest obstacle to progress. This is why computer geniuses are often depicted as alienated adolescents - it is a symbol of the need for intense adaptability in one of the fastest changing and most complex areas of technology.

If you hear some kids listening to music and find yourself thinking “I don’t know what they find in that noise!” then it’s happening to you too. If find yourself looking back to a time when

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everything was so much better than it is today and find yourself declaring “nostalgia isn’t what it used to be” then you will know that the porridge has set very cold and very stiff. Rigid order is not only having a firm view of “how the world is”; it is also losing the capacity to change, it is becoming frozen in a particular view of things, like a fly trapped in amber.

The Vision of Hod is the Vision of Splendour. There is regularity and order in the world - it’s not all an illusion - and when someone is able to appreciate natural order in its abstract sense, via mathematics for example, it can lead to a genuinely religious, even ecstatic experience. The thirteenth century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia developed a rigorous system of Hebrew letter mysticism based on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, their symbolic meanings, and their abstract relationships when permuted into different “names of God”. Many hours of intense concentration were spent combining letters according to complex rules which generated highly abstract symbolic meanings and insights, leading to ecstatic experiences.

The same sense of awe can come from mathematics and science - the realisation that gravitational dynamics in three dimensions is geometry in four dimensions, that plants are living fractals, that primes are the seeds of all other numbers; these simple insights are just as likely to lead towards an intense vision of the splendour of the world made visible through the eye of the rational intellect.

The Virtue of Netzach is unselfishness, and its Vice is selfishness. Both the Virtue and the Vice are an attitude towards things-which-are-not-me, specifically, other people and living creatures.

If I was surrounded by a hundred square miles of empty desert then my attitude to other living things wouldn’t matter, but I am not, and nothing I do is without some consequence; my own needs, wants and feelings invariably have an effect on people, animals and plants, who all want to live and have some level of needs and wants and feelings too. Unselfishness is simply a recognition of others’ needs. Selfishness taken to an extreme is a denial of life, because it denies freedom and life to anything which gets in the way. Selfishness is the principle that my needs come first. Netzach lies on the Pillar of Force and is an expression of life-energy, so to deny life is a perversion of the force symbolised by

Netzach, hence the attribution of selfishness to the Vice.

The Vision of Netzach is the Vision of Beauty Triumphant. Whereas the Vision of Splendour corresponding to Hod is a vision of complex abstract relationships, symmetry, and mathematical elegance, the Vision of Beauty Triumphant is purely aesthetic and firmly based in the real world of textures, smells, sounds, and colours, an appropriate correspondence for Venus, the goddess of sensual beauty.

Suppose two housebuyers go to look at a house. The first is interested in the number of rooms, the size of the garage, the house’s position relative to local amenities, the price, the number of square metres in the plot, and whether the windows are double-glazed. The second person likes the decoration in the lounge, the colour of the bathroom, the wisteria plant in the garden, the cherry tree, the curving shape of the stairs, and the sloping roof in one of the bedrooms. Both people like the house, but the first likes various abstract properties associated with the house, whereas the second likes the house itself. Suppose the same two people buy the house and decide to do ritual magic. The first person wants white robes because white is the colour of the powers of light and life. The second wants a green velvet robe because it feels and looks nice. The first reads lots of books on how to carry out a ritual, while the second sits under the cherry tree in the garden and does something which feels right at the time.

The first person has continued to make choices based on an abstract notion of what is correct, while the second makes choices based on what *feels right*. Both are driven by an internal sense of “rightness”, but in the first case it is based on abstract criteria, while in the second it is based on personal aesthetic notion of beauty.

The Vision of Beauty Triumphant has a compelling power. It is pre-articulate and inherently uncritical, and at the same time it is immensely biased. A person in its grip will pronounce judgement on another person’s taste in art, literature, clothes, music, decor or whatever, and will do it with such a profound lack of self-consciousness that it is possible to believe good taste is ordained in heaven. This person will mock those who surround themselves with rules, regulations, principles, and analysis, the “syntax of things” as E. E. Cummings puts it,

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and instead exhibit a whimsical spontaneity, a penetrating (so they believe) intuition, and a free spirit in tune with ebb and flow of life.

There are those who might complain about their astounding arrogance, fickleness, unreliability, and the never-ending flow of unshakable and prejudiced opinions delivered with a magisterial authority, but those who complain are (clearly) anal-retentive nit-pickers and don't count. For a total immersion in the nightmare of a purely aesthetic vision one should read Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.

The Illusion of Netzach is projection. We all tend to perceive feelings and characteristics in other people which we find in ourselves, and when we guess right it is called "empathy" or "intuition". When we guess wrong it is called "projection", because we are incorrectly ascribing our feelings, needs, motives, or desires to another person and interpreting their behaviour accordingly. It is as if we were "projecting" our own feelings onto the world like a film projector.

Some level of projection is unavoidable, and at best it can be balanced with a critical awareness that it can occur. Nevertheless, projection is insidious. Projection usually "feels right", and the strength of feeling associated with a projection can easily overwhelm any intellectual awareness.

One of the most overwhelming forms of projection accompanies sexual desire. Why do I find one person sexually attractive and not another? Why do I find some characteristics in a person sexually attractive but not others? In my own case I discovered that when I put together all the characteristics I found most attractive in a person a consistent picture emerged of an "ideal person", and every person I had ever considered as a possible sexual partner was instantly compared against this template. In fact there was more than one template, more than one ideal, but the number was limited and each template was very clearly defined, and most importantly, each template was internal. My sexual (and often many other feelings) about a person were based on an apparently arbitrary internal template.

This was crazy. I found my sexual feelings about a person would change depending on how they dressed or behaved, on how well they "matched the ideal". It became obvious that what I was in love with did not exist outside of

myself, and I was trying to find this ideal in everyone else. Each one of these "templates" was a living aspect of myself which I had chosen not to regard as "me", and in compensation I spent much of my time trying to find people to bring these parts to life, like a director auditioning actors and actresses for a part in a new play. If a person previously identified as ideal failed to live up to my notion of how they should be ideally behaving then I would project a fault on them: there was something wrong with *them!* Madness indeed.

The Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung recognised this phenomenon and gave these idealised and projected components of our psyche the title "archetype". Jung identified several archetypes, and it is worth mentioning the major and most influential, as they can often be found in cases of projection.

The Anima is the ideal female archetype. She is part genetic, part cultural, a figure molded by fashion and advertising, an unconscious composite of woman in the abstract. The Anima is common in men, where she can appear with riveting power in dreams and fantasy, a projection brought to life by the not inconsiderable power of the male sexual drive. She might be meek and submissive, seductive and alluring, vampish and dangerous, a cheap slut or an unattainable goddess. There is no "standard anima", but there are many recognisable patterns which have a powerful hold on particular men. Male sexual fantasy material (found on the top shelf in newsagents for example) is amazingly predictable, cliched, and unimaginative, and contains a limited number of stereotyped views of women which are as close to a "lowest common denominator anima" as one is likely to find.

The Animus is the ideal male archetype, and much of what is true about the Anima is true of the Animus. There are differences; the predominant quality in the Anima is her appearance and behaviour, while the predominant quality in the Animus is social power and competence. In the interests of sexual equality it is worth mentioning that female romantic fantasy material is also amazingly predictable, cliched and unimaginative, and contains a limited number of stereotyped views of men which are as close to a "lowest common denominator animus" as one is likely to find.

The Shadow is the projection of "not-me" and contains forbidden or repressed desires and

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impulses. In most men the Anima is repressed and in most women the Animus is repressed, and so both form a component of the Shadow. However, the major part of the Shadow is composed of forbidden impulses, and the Shadow forms a personification of evil. Much of what is considered evil is defined socially and the communal personification of evil as an external force working against humankind (such as Satan) is widespread.

The Persona is the mask a person wears as a member of a community where a large proportion of his or her behaviour is defined by a role such as doctor, teacher, manager, accountant, lawyer or whatever. Projection occurs in two ways: firstly, someone may be expected to conform to a role in a particularly rigid or stereotyped way, and so suffer a loss of individuality and probably incur a degree of misplaced trust or prejudice. Secondly, many people identify with a role to the extent that they carry that role into all aspects of their private lives. This "projection onto self" is a form of identification - see the section on Tipheret.

The archetype of Self at the level of Hod and Netzach is usually projected as an ideal form of person: that is, someone will believe that he or she is highly imperfect, but it is possible to attain an ideal state of being in which this same person is kind, loving, wise, forgiving, compassionate, in harmony with the Absolute, and other pick'n'mix saintly attributes. This projection of perfection will fasten on a living or dead person, who then becomes a hero, heroine, guru, or master, with grossly inflated abilities.

This projection may also fasten on a vision of "myself made perfect". The projected vision of "myself made perfect" is common (almost universal) among those seeking "spiritual development", "esoteric training", and other forms of self-improvement, and in almost every case it is based on an abstract ideal. The person affected by this condition will probably insist that the human ideal has actually existed in certain rare individuals (usually long dead saints and gurus, or someone who lives a long way off), and that is the sort of person he or she wants to be.

It should be comical, but it isn't. There is more to say about this and it will keep till the section on Tipheret.

The Klippot or shell of Netzach is habit and routine. When behaviour, with all its potential for new experiences and new ways of doing

things, becomes locked into patterns which repeat over and over again, then the life energy, the force aspect of Netzach is withdrawn and what remains is the dead, empty shell of behaviour. Just as the Klippot of Hod is rigid order, the petrification of one's internal representation of reality, so the Klippot of Netzach is the petrification of behaviour.

The God Names of Hod and Netzach are Elohim Tzabaoth and Jehovah Tzabaoth respectively, which mean "God of Armies", but in each case a different word is used for "God". The name "Elohim" is associated with all three sephiroth on the Pillar of Form and represents a female (metaphorically speaking) tendency in that aspect of God¹.

The Archangels are Raphael and Haniel. The Archangel of Hod is sometimes given as Michael, but many authors prefer Raphael (Medicine of God) by reason of the association of Mercury with medicine and healing. Besides, Michael has perfectly good reasons for residing in Tipheret, as his name is often interpreted as "who is like unto God", and Tipheret is a reflection of Keter.

This sort of thing can give rise to an amazing amount of hot air when Kabbalists meet. For those who wonder how far back the confusion goes, Robert Fludd (1574-1607) plumped for Raphael, whereas two hundred years later Francis Barrett, author of *The Magus*, preferred Michael. The co-founder of the Golden Dawn, S.L. Mathers, went for both depending on which text you read.

Kabbalah isn't an orderly subject and those who want to impose too much order on it are falling into the illusion of ... I leave this as an exercise to the reader.

The Angel Orders of the two sephiroth are the Beni Elohim, meaning Children of the Gods, and the Elohim, sometimes translated "Gods and Goddess". There is no suspicion of polytheism here - the names reflect the idea of "Hosts" and the plurality of consciousness.

The triad of sephiroth Yesod, Hod and Netzach comprises the triad of "normal consciousness" as we normally experience it in ourselves and most people most of the time. This

1. The elucidation of God Names can become phenomenally complex and obscure, with long excursions into gematria and textual analysis of the Pentateuch, and this is a quagmire I have determined to avoid.

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level of consciousness is intensely magical; try to move away from it for any length of time and you will discover the strength of the force and form sustaining it.

It is not an exaggeration to say that most people are completely unable to leave this state, even when they want to, even when they desperately try to. The sephira Tipheret represents a state of being which unlocks the energy of “normal consciousness” and is the subject of the next section.

Tipheret

“Nothing is left to you at this moment but to burst out into a loud laugh”

From “The Spirit of Zen” by Alan Watts

The sephira Tipheret lies at the heart of the Tree of Life, and like Rome, all paths lead to it. Almost. Tipheret has a path linking it to every sephira with the exception of Malkhut. If the Tree of Life is a map then the sephira titled Tipheret, Beauty, or Rachamin, Compassion, clearly represents something of central importance. What does it represent?

Can you imagine in your mind’s eye what it might be? Do you feel anything within you when you contemplate Tipheret? If asked could you define what it stands for? Well, if you can do any or all of these things you are almost certainly barking up the wrong Tree. As Alan Watts comments [42]:

“The method of Zen is to baffle, excite, puzzle and exhaust the intellect until it is realised that intellection is only thinking *about*; it will provoke, irritate and again exhaust the emotions until it is realised that emotion is only feeling *about*, and then it contrives, when the disciple has been brought to an intellectual and emotional impasse, to bridge the gap between second-hand conceptual contact with reality, and first-hand experience.”

The sephira Tipheret presents the student of Kabbalah with a conundrum. Whatever you say it is, it isn’t; whatever you imagine it to be it isn’t; whatever you feel it might be, it isn’t. It is an empty room. There is nothing there. The modes of consciousness appropriate to Hod, Yesod and Netzach respectively are not appropriate to something which is clearly and unambiguously shown on the Tree as being distinct from all three. So what is it?

The student is told that the Virtue of Tipheret

is Devotion to the Great Work. What is this “Great Work”? The student is told solemnly that in order to find the answer he or she should obtain the Spiritual Experience of Tipheret, which is the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. So the student runs off and duely reports (after some work in the library perhaps) that the Great Work is the raising of a human being to perfection. Or it is the saving of the planet from industrial pollution. Or it is the retrieval and perpetuation of knowledge, or perhaps it is the spiritual redemption of humanity. The student then burns enough frankincense to pay off the Somalian national debt, records endless conversations with the Holy Guardian Angel in his or her magical record, and impresses all and sundry with an unbending commitment to the Great Work.

This enthusiasm, commitment, personal sacrifice and sense of moral purpose leads to the development of a special kind of person: someone who might be referred to colloquially as “a complete arsehole”. A person thus afflicted can become pious, preaching, and judgemental, a humble servant of the highest powers, but with a blind spot of intolerance. Those who inhabit the vicinity of such moral incandescence may have reason to recall that the Vice of Tipheret is self-importance and pride.

A student might spend years running around in circles, bringing to the planet the benefits of advanced spiritual consciousness, and this seems to be a necessary exercise. People need to sweat various personal obsessions out of their systems, and the empty room of Tipheret is an excellent set on which to act out a personal drama. If the devotion to the Work is genuine, and if Tipheret and the HGA are invoked with passion and determination, then sooner or later the hand of fate intervenes and the student has the shit knocked out of him or her in a big way.

An attempt to penetrate the nature of Tipheret does seem to bring about that state which the Greeks called “hubris”, an overweening arrogance, self-importance and pride, and eventually the inevitable happens and one’s life comes crashing down around one’s ears.

The resulting mess varies from person to person. In some people every idea about what is important is turned upside down, while in others an emotional attachment to habits, lifestyle, possessions or relationships turns to dust. The daemon of the false self is dealt a massive blow

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and sent reeling, and in that moment there is a chance for real change and the dawning of the golden sun of Tipheret.

This is my personal interpretation the word "Initiation". There is a state of being represented by the sephira Tipheret which is absolutely distinct from what most people experience as normal consciousness. Once attained, the change is irreversible and permanent and it causes a permanent change in the way life is experienced. When it occurs it is recognised instantly for what it is ... as if every cell in one's body shouted simultaneously "So *that's* all there is to it!"

This state has been widely documented in many parts of the world, and Alan Watts' book [42] is as guarded and explicit on the subject as any worthwhile book is likely to be.

The symbolism of Tipheret is three-fold: a king, a sacrificed god, and a child. This three-fold symbolism corresponds to Tipheret's place on the Extended Tree (see Chapter 8), where it appears as Keter of Assiah, Tipheret of Yetzirah, and Malkhut of Briah, and to these three aspects correspond the king, the sacrificed god, and the child respectively.

One interpretation of this symbolism is as follows: if the kingdom is to be redeemed then the king (who is also the son of God - see below) must be sacrificed, and from this sacrifice comes a rebirth as a child. This is a metaphor of initiation. It is also markedly Christian in symbolism, an aspect many Christian Kabbalists have not failed to elaborate upon, but it would be a mistake to make too much out of the apparent Christian symbolism. The king, the child and the son are synonyms for Tipheret in the earliest Kabbalistic documents (e.g. the *Zohar*), and the introduction of divine kingship and the sacrificed god into modern Kabbalah probably owes more to the publication of "The Golden Bough" [14] in 1922 than it does to Christianity.

The theme of death and rebirth is an important element in many esoteric traditions, and provides continuity between modern Kabbalah and the mystery religions and initiations of the Mediterranean basin. The initiatory rituals of the Golden Dawn [35], an organisation which did much to reawaken interest in Kabbalah, were loosely inspired by the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter and Persephone - at least to extent that the Temple officers were named after the principal officers of the Eleusinian myster-

ies.

The Golden Dawn Tipheret initiation was, like most Golden Dawn rituals, a witch's brew of symbolism, but it was strongly based on the mysteries of the crucifixion and the resurrection - at one point the aspirant was actually lashed to a cross - and took place in a symbolic reconstruction of the vault and tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz. The following extract [35] gives the flavour of the thing:

"Buried with that Light in a mystical death, rising again in a mystical resurrection, cleansed and purified through Him our Master, O Brother of the Cross and the Rose. Like Him, O Adepts of all ages, have ye toiled. Like Him have ye suffered tribulation. Poverty, torture and death have ye passed through. They have been but the purification of the Gold."

Gold is a Tipheret symbol, being the metal of Shemesh, the Sun, which also corresponds to Tipheret. Gold is incorruptible and symbolises a state of being which is not "base" or "corrupt". It is a symbol of initiation, of a state of being compared to which normal consciousness is corruptible dross.

I do not wish to go any further into this kind of symbolism - there is a great deal of it. It is possible to write at great length and succeed in doing little more than losing the reader in a web of symbolism so dense and sticky that the inner state one is pointing at becomes a sterile thing of words and symbols. I wanted to provide an idea of how a large amount of exotic symbolism has accreted around Tipheret, but that is all. The state indicated by Tipheret is real enough, and the lashing comfortably-off, middle-class aspirants to a cross in a wooden vault at the local Masonic Hall and prattling on about poverty, torture and death is somewhat wide of the mark.

In the traditional Kabbalah the sephira Tipheret corresponds to something called Zoar Anpin, the Microprosopus, or Lesser Countenance. There is also something called Arik Anpin, the Macroprosopus, or Greater Countenance, and this is often used as a synonym for the sephira Keter. The symbology connected with the Greater and Lesser Countenances is extremely complex: the "Greater Holy Assembly", one of the books of the *Zohar*, is largely a detailed description of the cranium, the eyes, the cheeks, and the hairs in the beard of both the Greater and Lesser Countenances.

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In a crude sense the Macroprosopus is God, and the Microprosopus is man made in God's image, hence the symbolism, but this is too simple. The Microprosopus is also the archetypal man Adam Kadmon, a mystical concept which should not be confused with a real human being. Adam Kadmon is androgynous, male and female, Adam-and-Eve in a pre-manifest, pre-Fall state of divine perfection. The symbolism of the Macroprosopus, Microprosopus, and Adam Kadmon appears to exist independently of the concept of sephirothic emanation, and it is probably fair to say that the former was more highly developed during the Zoharic period of Kabbalah, while the latter is used almost exclusively at the present time - I have yet to encounter a modern Kabbalist with much practical insight into the thirteen parts of the beard of the Macroprosopus.

Another rich set of symbols associated with Tipheret comes from the divine name of four letters YHVH, usually anglicised as Jehovah or Yahweh. The letter Yod is associated with the supernal father Chokhmah, and the letter He is associated with the supernal mother Binah. The letter Vov is associated with the son of the mother and father, and is both the Microprosopus and the sephira Tipheret (sometimes Daat). The final He is associated with the daughter (and bride of the son), the sephira Malkhut. Tipheret is thus the "child" of Chokhmah and Binah, and also "the son of God". In Hebrew the letter Vov can represent the number 6, and in Kabbalah this refers to Chesed, Gevurah, Tipheret, Netzach, Hod and Yesod, the six sephiroth which correspond to states of human consciousness and hence also to the Microprosopus. With a typical Kabbalistic flexibility they can also stand for the six days of Creation¹.

The illusion of Tipheret is Identification. When a person is asked "what are you", they will usually begin with statements like "I am a human being", "I am a lorry driver", "I am Fred Bloggs", "I am five foot eleven". If pressed further a person might begin to enumerate personal qualities and behaviours: "I am trustworthy", "I lose my temper a lot", "I am afraid of heights", "I love chesecake", "I hate dogs".

It is common for people to identify what they

are with the totality of their beliefs and behaviours. Often they will defend the sanctity of these beliefs and behaviours to the death - a person might have behaviours which make their life an utter misery and still cling to them with a grip like a python. This inability to stand back and see behaviour or beliefs in an impersonal way produces a peculiar ego-centricity. The sense of personal identity is founded on a set of beliefs and behaviours which are largely unconscious (that is, a person may be unaware of being grotesquely selfish, or pompous, or attention-seeking) and at the same time seem to be uniquely special and sacred.

When behaviour and beliefs are unconscious and incorporated into a sense of identity it becomes impossible for someone so afflicted to make sense of other people. Such a person cannot take into account aspects of his or her behaviour that are unconscious, and so is unaware of the impact on other people. For example, if I am selfish, but unaware of this, I will need to invent explanations for why other people dislike me. I may need to fabricate a world of explanations to explain behaviour in other people which is a direct result of my (unconscious) selfishness.

The sense of identity becomes a kind of "Absolute" against which everything is compared, and judgements about the world become absolute and almost impossible to change, even when we realise intellectually the subjectivity of our position.

Referring to this projection of the unconscious onto the world Jung [20] comments:

"The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one. Projections change the world into one's unknown face."

In summary, the illusion of Tipheret is a false identification with a set of beliefs or behaviours. It can also be an identification with a social mask or Persona, something discussed in the section on Netzach. So we return to the original question: "what are you?". Is there an answer? If the answer is to be something which is not an arbitrary collection of ephemera then you are not your behaviours - behaviour can be changed; you are not your beliefs - beliefs can be changed; you are not your role in society - your role in society can change; you are not your body - your body is continually changing.

Out of this comes a sense of emptiness, of hol-

1. This symbolism was incorporated into the glyph on the title page of this book.

lowness. The intellect attempts to solve the koan of koans “Who or what am I?”, but has no anchor to hold on to. Is there no centre to my being, nothing which is *me*, no axis in the universe, no morality, no good, no evil? Do I live in a meaningless, arbitrary universe where any belief is as good as any other, where any behaviour is acceptable so long as I can get away with it? This sense of emptiness or hollowness is the Klippot or shell of Tipheret, Tipheret as the Empty Room with Nothing In It. The psychologist C.G. Jung [21] provides a memorable and moving description of how his father, a country parson, was progressively consumed by this feeling of hollowness and spiritual aridity. There can be few fates worse than to devote a life to the outward forms of religion without ever feeling one touch of that which gives it meaning.

The God Name of Tipheret is Jehovah Aloah va Daat, or simply Aloah va Daat. It is often translated as “God made manifest in the sphere of the mind”. The Archangel is sometimes given as Raphael, but I prefer the attribution to Michael, long associated with solar fire. His name “Who is like God” reinforces the upper/lower relationship between Keter and Tipheret. The angel order is the Malachim, or Kings.

To cover all of the traditional material related to Tipheret is to cover most of Kabbalah. Tipheret is at the centre of a complex of six sephiroth which represent a human being. This is not a modern interpretation, an “initiated” interpretation of obscure medieval documents. Kabbalah has always been deeply concerned with the dynamics of the relationship between God and the Creation, between God and a human being, and the descriptions of the Macroprosopus and Microprosopus in the *Zohar* are a bold attempt to grasp something ineffable using a language built from the most immediate of metaphors: the human body.

According to both the *Bible* and to Kabbalah, a human being is in some sense a reflection of God. To the extent that Kabbalah is an outcome of genuine mystical experience, it is a description of the dynamics of the relationship between a human being and God, and more importantly it is a description of something *real*. Even if you don't like the look of the word “God” (I don't) Kabbalah is trying to express something important about a relatively inaccessible dimension of

human experience. Tipheret is a reflection of Keter and represents the “image of God”, the “God within”, whatever you take that to mean.

Tipheret is a symbol of centrality, balance, and above all, wholeness. It can be an empty room, a gaping emptiness, or it can be the heart and blazing sun of the Tree. It is the symbol of a human being who lives in full consciousness of the outer and the inner, who denies neither the reality of the world nor the mystery of self-consciousness, and who attempts to reconcile the needs of both in a harmonious balance.

Gevurah and Chesed

“The chief foundations of all states, new as well as old or mixed, are good laws and good arms; and because there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there must needs be good laws, I will omit speaking of the laws and speak of the arms.”

Machiavelli

“God is the great urge that has not yet found a body but urges towards incarnation with the great creative urge.”

D.H. Lawrence

The title of the sephira Gevurah is translated as “strength”, and sometimes as “power”. The sephira is also referred to by its alternative titles of Din, “justice”, and Pachad, “fear”. The title of the sephira Chesed is translated as “mercy” or “love”, and it is often called Gedulah, “majesty” or “magnificence”.

Gevurah and Chesed lie on the Pillars of Form and Force respectively, and possess a more definite and generally agreed symbolism than most of the sephiroth. Chesed stands for expansiveness and the creation and building-up of form, what can very appropriately be referred to as anabolism, and Gevurah stands for restraint and both the preservation of form, and the breaking-down (or catabolism) of form.

Within the symbolism of the Kabbalah the most explicit and concrete expression of form occurs in Malkhut, the physical world, and as it takes a conscious being (e.g. thee and me) to comprehend the world in terms of forms which are built-up and broken down, so Chesed and Gevurah express something vital about our conscious relationship with the external, material world. When I see something beautiful being created I may well think this is “good”, and

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when I see the same thing being wantonly destroyed, I would probably think this is “bad”.

This type of thinking pervades early Kabbalistic writing. In his commentary on the *Bahir*, Aryeh Kaplan writes [23]:

“The concept of Chesed-Love is that of freely giving, while that of Gevurah-Strength is that of restraint. When it is said that Strength is restraint, it is in the sense of the teaching “Who is strong, he who restrains his urge”. It is obvious that man can restrain his nature, but if man can do so, then God certainly can. God’s nature, however, is to do good and therefore, when He restrains His nature, the result is evil. The sephira of Gevurah-Strength is therefore seen as the source of evil.”

The *Zohar* also contains many references to the “rigorous severity” of God (another synonym for Gevurah) and its being the source of evil in the creation. However, when one considers that the creation and uncontrolled growth of a cancer would correspond to Chesed, and the attempts of the immune system to contain and destroy it would correspond to Gevurah, it should be clear that it is not useful to consider creation and destruction purely in terms of good and evil. It is useful to look at a living, organic system as a *balance* between these two opposed tendencies, and in Kabbalah the Creation is pictured as a living, organic system: the Tree of Life.

The most vivid metaphors for Chesed and Gevurah come from a time when European societies were ruled by kings and queens, when, in principle at least, the ultimate authority and power in society rested in a single individual. Chesed corresponds to the creative aspects of leadership, and early texts are one-sided in characterising this by love, mercy and majesty. Gevurah corresponds to the conservative aspects of leadership, to the power to preserve the status-quo, and the power to destroy anything opposed to it.

These two aspects go hand-in-hand. Try to change anything of consequence in society, and someone will invariably oppose that change. To bring about change it is often necessary to have the power to over-rule opposition. Consensus is an impossibility in society - there will always be someone whose opinions are at best ignored and at worst suppressed. Chesed and Gevurah represent respectively the kingly obligation to

seek what is good for the many, and the power to judge and punish those opposed to the will of the king. The following description of Margaret Thatcher comes from Nicholas Ridley, a minister in her cabinet [36]:

“She governed with superb style, carrying every war into the enemy’s camp, seeking to destroy rather than contain the opposition, and determined to blaze a radical trail. But she never let power corrupt her; nor did she ever fail to be compassionate and kind as a human being.”

Whether this description is accurate or not is irrelevant to this discussion. What it does do is capture in two sentences something essential about the traditional image of a great leader: the balance between power, strength and militancy on one hand, and humanitarianism, compassion and caring on the other. This is very much a model of divine kingship (or queenship!): a king who loves and cares for his people and seeks to bring about “heaven on earth”, but at the same time punishes transgression, and fights for and preserves what is good and worth preserving.

Kabbalists thought of God in this way. God loves us (so the argument goes), and the mercy and benignity of God is represented by the sephira Chesed, but at the same time God has made his laws known to humankind and will judge and punish anyone who opposes these laws. Read the book of *Proverbs* in the *Bible* if you want to enter into this view of reality.

Many modern Kabbalists have a more jaundiced view of leadership than medieval Kabbalists, and certainly do not see Chesed as purely the love or mercy of God. In the twentieth century we have seen a succession of leaders harness their vision, creativity and leadership to the four Vices of Chesed, which are tyranny, bigotry, hypocrisy and gluttony. It takes an uncommon skill and vision not only to contemplate the annihilation of entire races, but to create a structure in which this happens. How many people would dream of a socialist utopia where traditional communities are forcibly bulldozed and replaced by dilapidated concrete slums? How many people have the power to make this happen?

You may not *like* this kind of leadership, but it is still leadership, and in its own way it is inspired. A leader may be inspired by a vision, and may have the power to bring that vision into reality, but it is also a fact that the result can become a new definition of evil. Good and evil

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are not static qualities with fixed meanings; in every generation there are exemplars who define for the whole of society the meaning of the words in new contexts. Tamerlane may have built pyramids from human skulls, but what did he know about asset stripping?

Tyranny, bigotry, hypocrisy and gluttony, the vices of Chesed, are the meat and drink of daily newspapers. Tyranny is leadership without authority, an illegitimate or unconstitutional leadership usually oiled with large helpings of cruelty, the Vice of Gevurah.

Bigotry is a quick and easy way to drum up a power base: find a minority group in society, emphasise and magnify to grotesque proportions the differences between them and the rest of society, and use the natural fear of the strange or unfamiliar to do the rest.

Hypocrisy can be found in religious leaders who denounce normal human behaviour as a sin, sin comprehensively in private, and use genuine religious aspirations as an excuse to line their pockets. Hypocrisy can be found in those who talk about the dictatorship of the proletariat in public and buy their luxury goods from exclusive party shops - the collapse of state socialism in Europe has revealed the full extent to which pious utterances about social equality were a cover for almost limitless privileges for the few.

Gluttony is over-consumption, an appetite well in excess of need, and one has only to remember Imelda Marcos's wardrobe to get the idea. It is virtually a fashion among modern tyrants to siphon billions of dollars into Swiss bank accounts - the scale on which men like Idi Amin Dada, Ferdinand Marcos, Baby Doc Duvalier, Mengistu, and Saddam Hussein (to name but a few) were able to beggar nations for their own personal advantage goes so far beyond any rational measure of human need it is hard to comprehend.

When one looks at the worst twentieth century tyrants, men who were directly responsible for the deaths of thousands or millions of people, it is hard to find any Einsteins of evil. One is struck by the sheer ordinariness of these men. Clever, manipulative, politically adept, lucky, exceptional in their ability to climb to the top of the heap, successful in grasping and holding power, but not conscious, plotting allies of a terrible dark power. Behind the brutality, murder, torture, imprisonment, and the apparatus of

oppression one can see a very human vulnerability, self-importance, vanity, folly, insecurity, and greed.

The vices of Chesed are the vices of all the other sephiroth writ large - power magnifies a vice until it becomes a ravening monster. A man with rigid and unbending views on human morality will do no harm if he has no audience, but give him enough power and he will put society in chains which might last a thousand years. A greedy man with enough power can loot an entire country. A petty and irrational bigot with enough power can enslave or annihilate whole races. They say power corrupts, but this is not so; corruption is already within all of us, and we lack only the necessary authority and power to unleash our own personal evil on the world.

The moral is that power needs to be tempered by mercy and love, and the correspondences for Chesed emphasise this so strongly it is easy to for a novice to ignore the appalling negative qualities of Chesed - power without restraint, indiscriminate destruction, everything in excess. The Virtue of Chesed is humility, the ideal of leadership without self-importance and all its accompanying vices. The Spiritual Vision of Chesed is the Vision of Love, love and caring for all living things, and the desire to find a way (be it ever so small - remember humility) to make the world a better place.

There is a strong message in the positive correspondences for Chesed: without humility and love, leadership and power become the instruments of self-importance, and the petty vices of human nature are transformed into monsters of evil which terrorise the human race.

The illusion of Chesed is Right, in the sense of "being right". It is difficult to lead if one sits on every fence and wavers on every question, but no-one is ever right with a capital "R", and anyone who seeks the reassurance of Being Right is evading the essence of responsibility.

The Klippot of Chesed is ideology, not in the philosophical sense, but in the common-use sense of "political ideology". The rationale behind this is that it is very easy to take a creed, or a doctrine, or a dogma, or whatever, and use it as a platform for leadership. When you see a politician (or a religious leader) being interviewed on television, and the response to every question is just the same old empty jargon, the same old formulae, the same old evasions, the

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same old arguments and irrefutable assertions, and you feel you have heard the same thing a dozen times before out of a dozen different mouths, then you are listening to the dead, empty shell of leadership.

The sephira Gevurah is as often misunderstood as the sephira Chesed. The planet associated with Chesed is (appropriately) Tzedek, Jupiter, leader of the gods; the planet associated with Gevurah is Madim, Mars, the god of war and destruction. The magical image of Gevurah is a king in a chariot, or conversely a mighty warrior.

Most novices (particularly young men) take this imagery at face value and envision Gevurah as a very forceful, violent and destructive sephira, and cannot understand why it is positioned on the pillar of form. Almost all novices will attribute the emotion of anger to Gevurah. It is worth recalling from Chapter 3. a traditional Kabbalistic view [39]:

“It must be remembered that to the Kabbalist, judgement [Din - judgement, a title of Gevurah] means the imposition of limits and the correct determination of things. According to Cordovero the quality of judgement is inherent in everything insofar as everything wishes to remain what it is, to stay within its boundaries.”

This is a statement about *form*. The form of something determines what it *is*, in distinction from everything else, and when it no longer has that form, it no longer *is*. Take a table tennis ball and squash it; it stops being a table tennis ball...it stops being a ball. Something still exists in the world, but its form as a *ball* has been destroyed. Take these notes and randomly jumble the letters; the letters still exist, but the notes are gone. These notes are contained in the *form* of the letters; destroy the form of the letters and the notes are also destroyed.

Everything in the world *is* its form. We cannot see the natural substance of the world; we cannot see atoms, and even if we could, we would see protons, neutrons and electrons arranged in different *forms* to create the chemical elements. It has taken physicists most of this century to deduce that the protons, neutrons and electrons are not the “true” stuff of the world, and underneath there might be “quarks”, “leptons” and “gluons” arranged in different *forms* to create the fundamental particles. Is that the end? Are quarks and gluons the “true stuff”, the raw, primal gloop which carries all form? No-one

knows.

Sometimes I think, in common with the earliest Kabbalists, that Malkhut sits upon the throne of Binah, and at no point will we find the raw gloop of Malkhut. Someone will write down an equation and show the properties of quarks and gluons are a natural consequence of the *form* of the equation, and the form of the equation is one of those things beyond any possibility of explanation. “Look” we will say, “The form of all things is a potential outcome of this one equation. The mother of everything that exists can be written down on a piece of paper. Look, here it is!”

There is a deep mystery in form. The world is not made of things, but of patterns. In our minds we accept the reality of these patterns, and forget that the sweet, white stuff we put in our tea and coffee is just one of an infinite number of patterns of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. Carbon is just one of a large number of combinations of protons, neutrons and electrons, and so on. We forget that *War and Peace* is just one of an infinite number of combinations of letters of the alphabet. The patterns are our reality, and I suspect that *only* the patterns are real - there is nothing more real than patterns waiting to be discovered. I have read graduate texts on quantum electrodynamics and quantum chromodynamics, and I find no grey gloop¹ mentioned anywhere.

The view of reality in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* [43] has a deeply Kabbalistic (if one-sided) flavour, the Vision of Splendour of Hod in a distilled form:

“If I know an object I also know all its possible occurrences in states of affairs. (Every one of these possibilities must be part of the nature of the object). A new possibility cannot be discovered later. If I am to know an object, though I need not know its external properties, I must know all its internal properties. If all objects are given, then at the same time all *possible* states of affairs are also given. Each thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs.

Objects contain the possibility of all situations. The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the *form* of an object.”

1. My personal translation of the Greek word *hyle*, the formless substance that embodies form.

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(my italics)

I have digressed this far into the nature of form because I do not believe it is possible to understand either Chesed or Gevurah in depth without understanding the importance of form in Kabbalah, and when talking about form I am not “talking mystical”. Modern science is responsible for the increasing primacy of form over substance, because form can be studied, articulated, comprehended, while substance retreats into the dark shadows of the CERN accelerators and remains elusive.

Programmers work with form; they shape programs out of forms with the same inquisitive delight as a glass-blower handling a blob of molten glass. They talk about objects, and behaviours, and classify objects in hierarchies according to behaviour. They create new objects with a given abstract behaviour; they leave unwanted objects to be tidied up by the “garbage collector”.

There is much more which can be said about this, but as many people are not programmers and most programmers do not admit to being Kabbalists, I must leave this as a trail to be followed. The important point is that when I talk about form I find similar thinking in chemistry, physics, computer science, and Kabbalah; the world of human beings is perceived in terms of form, and form is created and destroyed. That is what Chesed and Gevurah represent.

The sephira Binah is the mother of form. That is, Binah contains within her womb the potential of all form, just as woman in the abstract contains within her womb the potential of all babies. The birth of form takes place in Chesed, and that is why Chesed corresponds to the visionary. The preservation and destruction of form takes place in Gevurah, and that is why Gevurah corresponds to the warrior.

In most societies a warrior takes second place to the Law. The Law comes first, and the warrior swears to defend both the Law and the country. This may sound a little idealistic, but if one takes the trouble to listen to a few oaths of allegiance (e.g. British Police, British Army, Soviet Army) one should find that the essence is to obey, uphold and defend. Nothing about violence, destruction, mayhem or anger. The essence of Gevurah is to uphold and defend - as Cordovero says, “the quality of judgement is inherent in everything insofar as everything wishes to remain what it is, to stay within its

boundaries”. If Cordovero had the jargon he might have talked about “the immune system of God”.

The Virtues of Gevurah are courage and energy. There is a saying among managers that “any fool can manage when things are going well”. The acid test of management is to have the courage to tackle, and essentially destroy, organisations (forms) which no longer work, and to have the energy to keep going against the inevitable opposition.

The Vice of Gevurah is cruelty. Power is seductive, and destruction can be pleasurable. The spiritual experience of Gevurah is the Vision of Power, and the Illusion is invincibility. I don't think these need any explanation.

The Klippot of Gevurah is bureaucracy, in the common-use sense of a system of rules and procedures which has become an end in itself. My most memorable experience of this was the time I went into a social security office to ask whether they could issue me with a social security number.

“You'll have to take a ticket and wait,” said the woman behind the counter.

“But you only have to tell me yes or no,” I protested.

“You'll have to take a ticket and wait!” she snapped.

So I took a ticket and waited for twenty minutes. When my turn came I asked the question again. “Can you issue me with a social security number here?”

“No! Next please!”

This is probably not the best example of the dead hand of bureaucracy at work, as it contains a certain amount of intentional cruelty, but we have all encountered endless forms which *have* to be filled in, pointless procedures which *have* to be observed, interminable delays and so on. The essence of bureaucracy is that there is real power behind it, otherwise we wouldn't suffer the indignities, but the power is locked up and everyone is rendered impotent by the *forms* of bureaucracy.

Gevurah is a hard sephira to work with, as Kabbalistic magicians often discover to their cost. There is absolutely no place for emotion, no place for excess, no place for ego. The warrior works within the Law, and ignorance of the Law is not an excuse. If you don't know what the Law is, don't work with Gevurah. Most people are sloppy in thinking about problems, and

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take what appears to be the simplest and superficially most convenient solution. Gevurah is clinically exact, and if you invoke Gevurah you are invoking well above the level of emotion, particularly *your* emotions, and as you judge, so will you be judged. When you invoke on the Pillar of Form cause and effect will follow without the slightest regard for your feelings. All computer programmers who have sweated throughout the night with a programming error of their own making know the truth of this in their bones.

Associated with Chesed and Gevurah are two tendencies which are so pronounced, readily observed, and deeply rooted that I have called them the Power myth and the Annihilation myth, where I use the word myth in the sense that there is pre-existent, archetypal script in which anyone can play the role of protagonist.

The Power myth features a protagonist who seeks power because power means control. Everything is specified and controlled down to the finest detail to eliminate every possibility of discomfort, surprise or insecurity. The world becomes an impersonal mechanism designed to provide for every demand. The natural world is destroyed to reduce its unpredictability and untidiness. All knowledge is subverted to control. Personal relationships are restricted and formalised to minimise intrusion or any possibility of personal hurt, and are modelled to increase self-importance. Anyone who won't play can be removed or suitably punished. The protagonist lives at the centre of the world.

In the Annihilation myth the protagonist lives for the Cause. The Cause is the most important thing in life. The protagonist prays to be released from the thrall of ego and self-importance that he may better serve the Cause with every atom of his soul. "Yea, I am nothing", he whispers, "Less than the smallest worm in the ground compared with the glory of the Cause. I humble myself before the Cause. I live only to serve the Cause." Pain, suffering and death are mere adornments for the ever-lasting glory of the Cause. The Cause might be the Beloved, the Revolution, the Great Work, the Mistress or Master, or God (to name only a few).

Examples of both these myths in practice are legion; two examples are the package-holiday tourist as an example of the Power myth, and many Christian mystics as an example of the

Annihilation myth. Both myths can be observed in glorious, infinitely repetitive, and predictable detail in S&M fantasies.

The God name associated with Chesed is "El", or Almighty God. The archangel is Tzadkiel, the "Righteousness of God". The angel order is the Chashmalim, or Shining Ones. In *Ezekiel*, *chashmal* is a substance which forms the splendour of God's countenance, and as *chashmal* is the modern Hebrew word for electricity, I find it useful to think of the Chashmalim in terms of crackling thunderbolts - this goes well with the Jupiter correspondence.

The God name associated with Gevurah is Elohim Gibor. All the sephiroth on the Pillar of Form use Elohim in their God names, and in this case it is qualified by "gibor", a word which expresses the qualities of a great hero - strength, might, and courage. The name is sometimes translated as "God of Battles". The archangel is sometimes given as Kamiel/Camael, and sometimes as Samael.

Samael, the "Poison of God" is an angel with a *long* history - see [16], and is essentially the Angel of Death. Samael is not the first choice of angel to invoke when working Gevurah - work on Gevurah is tricky at the best of times - and the Angel of Death does not mess around. Neither does Kamiel, but there is marginally more scope for making mistakes! The angel order is the Seraphim, or Fiery Serpents.

Chesed and Gevurah are the sceptre and sword of a king. There are many statues of medieval kings in British cathedrals which show a king seated with the sceptre of legitimate authority in one hand and the sword of temporal might in the other. In Kabbalah the King corresponds to the sephira Tipheret, the union of Chesed and Gevurah. This is a symbol of a human being in relationship to the world. At the bottom of all initiations is the full consciousness that we are kings and queens with the freedom and power to do anything we please, and total responsibility for the consequences of everything we do. Somewhere between the extremes of power and love each one of us has to find our own balance of right and wrong. Somewhere in a garden, a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil still grows, and still bears fruit.

Daat and the Abyss

“When you look into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you”

Nietzsche

“Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being - like a worm”

Sartre

In modern Kabbalah there is a well developed notion of an Abyss between the three supernal sephiroth of Keter, Chokmah, and Binah, and the seven lower sephiroth. When one examines the progress of the Lightning Flash down the Tree of Life, then one finds that it follows the path structure connecting sephiroth *except* when it makes the jump from Binah to Chesed, reinforcing the idea of a “gap” or “gulf” which has to be crossed. There is an implication that there is an aspect of the godhead which is remote from normal human experience, and this inaccessibility is emphasised with a dark divide.

The notion of an Abyss is extremely old and has found its way into Kabbalah in several different forms, some of which I will attempt to disentangle, and in the course of time they have been mixed together into the notion of “the Great Abyss”. The Great Abyss is one of those things so necessary that like God, if it didn't already exist, it would have to be invented. Like any limit or boundary it tempts people to cross it, and it exerts a perennial fascination.

One of the earliest intimations of the Abyss comes from the *Bible*:

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”

Kabbalists adopted the view that there was a time before the creation characterised by Tohu and Bohu, namely Chaos and Emptiness [16]; the significant point is that even before the creation we have something that has the qualities of an Abyss. It is difficult to paint a picture without a canvas; it is difficult to shine a light without darkness, and it is conceptually awkward to create a universe without an abysmal backdrop of some kind.

Another idea mentioned several times in the Zohar [28] is that there were several failed attempts at creation *before* the present one. These attempts failed because mercy and judgement (e.g. force and form) were not balanced. The resulting detritus of these failed attempts accumulated in the Abyss. Because the frag-

ments or shells (Klippot) of the shattered worlds were the result of unbalanced rigour, severity, or judgement they were considered evil, and the Abyss became a repository of evil spirits not dissimilar from the pit of Hell into which the rebellious angels were cast. One is also reminded of the rebellious Titans in Greek mythology, who were buried as far beneath the Earth as the Earth is beneath the sky.

A story which contributed to the notion of the Abyss was the legend of the Fall. According to a Kabbalistic interpretation of the Biblical myth, at the conclusion of the act of Creation there was a pure state, denoted by Eden, where the primordial Adam-and-Eve-conjoined existed in a state of divine perfection. There are various esoteric interpretations about what the Fall represents, but all agree that after the Fall, Eden became inaccessible, and Adam and Eve were separated and took on bodies of flesh here in the material world.

The Fall is a story about separation from an ideal state, of separation from a world of nearness-to-God, and it is natural to think of this as an exile into darkness. A similar myth of separation from God and exile in a world of matter (and by extension, limitation, finiteness, pain, suffering, death - manifestations of the rigours or evil inherent in God) precedes Kabbalah and can be found in the Gnostic legend of Sophia, the divine Wisdom exiled in matter. This idea of separation or exile from divinity mirrors very closely the way in which the Abyss divides the sephiroth representing a human being (Yesod to Chesed) from the sephiroth representing God (Binah, Chokmah and Keter).

Isaac Luria (1534 -1572) introduced a new element into the notion of the Abyss with his novel development of the idea of *tzimtzum* or contraction. Luria wondered how it was possible for the En Soph, the hidden God, to create something out of nothing if there wasn't any nothing to begin with. If the En Soph (no-end, the infinite) is everywhere, then how can we be distinct from the En-Soph? Luria argued that creation was only possible because a contraction in the En Soph had created an emptiness where God was not, that En Soph had chosen to limit itself by a withdrawal, and this showed that the principle of self-limitation was a necessary precursor to creation. Not only did this explain why the Creation is separate from the hidden God, but it emphasised that the principle of limitation

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was inherent in creation from the very beginning.

Limitation and finiteness, the separation of one thing from another, what early Kabbalists referred to as the severity or “strict judgement” of God was a puzzling quality to introduce into the Creation, given that it is the source of suffering and evil in an abstract and impersonal sense. Luria’s concept of *tsimtsum* suggested that there was no possibility of creation without limitation, that the root of evil lies in the essential nature of the creative act.

Luria elaborated on the Zoharic myth of prior worlds with a description of *shevira*, the “breaking of the vessels”. When the ray of creative light came out of the En Soph and entered the space created by *tsimtsum*, it ignited the three supernal sephiroth, and they were able to contain the force of the light; however, the seven sephiroth below were shattered by the force, and the shells (remembering that the sephiroth are often depicted as garments or vessels, form enclosing force) fell into the abyss. Most of the light was able to return to its source, but some fell with the shells into the abyss, where it remains to this day, trapped in the realm of the Klippot.

Pull together various ideas of the Great Abyss and one ends up with something like a vast, initially empty arena, like a Roman amphitheatre, where the drama of the Creation was enacted. The mysterious En Soph played a brief role as director from the imperial box, only to retire behind a veil at the conclusion of the performance, leaving behind a huge power cord snaking in from the unknown region beyond the arena, and plugged-in to a socket at the rear of the sephira Keter. The lights of the sephiroth blaze out and illuminate the centre of this vast arena. At the periphery of the arena, far from the lights of manifestation, there is a deep darkness where all the cast-off detritus and spoil of the creation was deposited by weary angels and left to rot. A strange life lives there.

The situation was more-or-less as described above when in 1909 Aleister Crowley decided to “cross the Abyss” and added to the mythology of the Abyss with the following description [7]:

“The name of the Dweller in the Abyss is Choronzon, but he is not really an individual. The Abyss is empty of being; it is filled with all possible forms, each equally inane, each therefore evil in the only true sense of the word - that is, meaningless

but malignant, in so far as it craves to become real. These forms swirl senselessly into haphazard heaps like dust devils, and each chance aggregation asserts itself to be an individual and shrieks ‘I am I!’ though aware all the time that its elements have no true bond; so that the slightest disturbance dissipates the delusion just as a horseman, meeting a dust devil, brings it in showers of sand to the earth.”

I was struck when reading this by the similarity between Crowley’s description above and the section on Hod and Netzach in which I described the chaos of a personality under the control of the “hosts” or “armies” of those two sephira, where a host of forms of behaviour compete for the right to be “me”. Crowley continues:

“As soon as I had destroyed my personality, as soon as I had expelled my ego, the universe to which it was indeed a frightful and fatal force, fraught with every form of fear, was only so in relation to the idea ‘I’; so long as ‘I am I’ all else must seem hostile. Now that there was no longer any ‘I’ to suffer, all these ideas which had inflicted suffering became innocent. I could praise the perfection of every part; I could wonder and worship the whole.”

Crowley appears to equate crossing the Abyss with a loss of ego, a component of many mystical experiences. He suggests the Abyss is a place where consciousness becomes encapsulated and separated from the rest of life, the point at which the duality of “me and not-me” occurs.

Whether the word “crossing” is meaningful when describing changes in awareness or consciousness, whether the mystic encounters one Abyss or many, and whether Crowley’s interpretation is a good and meaningful one, are all questions which should not be taken for granted. There are interpretations of the Tree where there are several “Abysses” (see Chapter 7), and in this interpretation it is possible to define an abyss as “a discontinuous change in consciousness”.

Another twentieth-century Kabbalist who added to the ever-expanding notion of the Abyss was Dion Fortune, in her theosophical work *The Cosmic Doctrine* [13]. The form of this work appears to have been inspired by H.P. Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*, and certainly lives up to Fortune’s claim that it was “designed to

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train the mind, not to inform it.”

Fortune describes three processes arising out of the Unmanifest (i.e. En Soph). Ring Cosmos is an anabolic process underlying the creation of forms of greater and greater complexity. Ring Chaos is a catabolic process underlying the destruction and recycling of form. Ring-Pass-Not is a limit where catabolism turns back into anabolism. She visualised this as three great rings of movement in the Unmanifest, with the motion associated with Ring Cosmos spiralling towards the centre, the movement of Ring Chaos unwinding towards the periphery, and the dead-zone of Ring-Pass-Not defining the outer limit of Ring Chaos. The point at which Ring Chaos is bounded by Ring-Pass-Not is the point where everything is reduced to its simplest components, an abyss of unbeing, a cosmic compost heap where form is digested under the dominion of the Angel of Death and turned into something fertile where new growth can take place.

The similarity between Fortune’s description of Ring Chaos and what in programming is called a “reference-counting garbage collector” is interesting, given that she was writing in the 1930’s. Many programming languages allow new programming structures to be created dynamically, thus allowing the creation of more and more complex structures (forms). At the same time there is a mechanism to reclaim unused resources so that the system does not run out of memory or disc space, and the normal scheme is that if a structure is not referenced by any other structure, recycle it. In Fortune’s language, if you want to destroy something, you

“make a vacuum round it. You prevent opposition from touching it. Then, being unopposed, it is free to follow the laws of its own nature, which is to join the motion of Ring Chaos.”

There is an intuition here that things which are not “connected” (in a metaphysical sense) to the rest of the universe are reclaimed by joining the circulation of Ring Chaos and are recycled back into the Unmanifest. This is the abyss of un-being, the collapse of our individual Trees back into Keter and the extinction of Keter in the unknowable voidness of the En Soph.

A final example of an abyss is one which differs from previous examples in that it brings to the fore the relationship between us, the created, and the Unmanifest, the En Soph itself.

Kabbalistic writers agree that the Unmanifest is not nothing; on the contrary, it is the hidden wellspring of being, but as it is “not manifest being” it combines the words “not” and “being” in a conjunction which can be apprehended as a kind of abyss. Scholem [39] discusses this “nothingness” as follows:

“The primary start or wrench in which the introspective God is externalised and the light that shines inwardly made visible, this revolution of perspective, transforms En Soph, the inexpressible fullness, into nothingness. It is in this mystical “nothingness” from which all the other stages of God’s gradual enfolding in the Sefiroth emanate, and which the kabbalists call the highest Sefira, or the “supreme crown” of Divinity. To use another metaphor, it is the abyss which becomes visible in the gaps of existence. Some Kabbalists who have developed this idea, for instance Rabbi Joseph ben Shalom of Barcelona (1300), maintain that in every transformation of reality, in every change of form, or every time the status of a thing is altered, the abyss of nothingness is crossed and for a fleeting mystical moment becomes visible.”

It should be clear from the previous examples that the Abyss is a metaphor for a number of intuitions or experiences. It is useful to make the following distinctions:

- the Abyss of nothingness
- the Abyss of separation (from God)
- the Abyss of knowledge (Daat)
- the Abyss of un-being (or un-becoming)

The perception that being and nothingness go hand-in-hand is something Sartre studied in great depth [38], and many of his observations on the nature of consciousness and its relationship to negation or nothingness are among the most perceptive I have found. His arguments are lengthy and complex, and I do not wish to summarise them here other than to say that he viewed nothingness as the necessary consequence of a special kind of being he calls “being-for-itself”, the kind of being we experience as self-conscious human beings.

The Abyss of separation can be experienced as a separation from the divine, but it can also be experienced quite acutely in one’s relationships with others and with the physical world itself. Much of what we perceive about the world and other people is an illusion created by the

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machinery of perception. Strip away the trick, Yesod becomes Daat, and a yawning abyss opens up where one is conscious less of what one knows than of what one does not, and it is possible to look at a close friend and see something more alien, remote and unknown than the surface of Pluto. This experience is closely related to the Abyss of knowledge, which is discussed in more detail in the discussion on Daat below.

The Abyss of un-being is the direct perception that at any instant it is possible to not-be. This perception goes beyond the contemplation or awareness of physical death; it is the direct apprehension of what Dion Fortune calls “Ring Chaos”, that un-being is less a state than a process, that at every instant there is an impulse, a magnetic attraction towards total self-annihilation on every level possible. The closer one moves towards the roots of being, the closer one moves towards the roots of un-being. The final annihilation of the duality of being and nothingness brings one back to the mystery of the En Soph.

Daat means “Knowledge”. In early Kabbalah Daat was a symbol of the union of Wisdom (Chokhmah) and Understanding (Binah). The book of Proverbs is rich mine of material on the nature of these three qualities, material which forms the basis of many ideas in the Zohar and other Kabbalistic texts. For example, Proverbs 3.13:

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding...She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he founded the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew”

And Proverbs 24.3:

“Through wisdom is a house builded; and by understanding is it established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all pleasant and precious riches.”

In the *Bahir* [23] and *Zohar* [29] Daat represents the symbolic union of wisdom and understanding, and is their offspring or child. The Microprosopus, often symbolised by Tipheret, is also the symbolic child of Chokhmah and Binah, and there is some room here for confu-

sion. According to the *Zohar* however, Daat has a specific location in the Microprosopus, namely in one of the three chambers of the brain, from where it mediates between the higher (Chokhmah and Binah) and the lower (the six sephiroth or “chambers” of the Microprosopus - see the reference to Proverbs 24.3 above).

I have often puzzled about the difference between wisdom, understanding and knowledge, and it was not clear to me why knowledge is the natural outcome of wisdom and understanding. When I read Proverbs that I realised that wisdom was being used in the sense of something *external*, something which is received from someone else.

As children we were told “do this” or “don’t do that”, and often couldn’t question the wisdom of the advice because we lacked the understanding. I once had a furious row with my father about building a liquid fuel rocket engine in our house, using petrol and hydrogen peroxide as the propellant. In retrospect it does seem like a remarkably well conceived plan for burning down a house. My father flatly refused to let me do it. I couldn’t understand the problem - I was going to be careful.

I now *know*, because I *understand* the stupidity of what I was trying to do, the *wisdom* of his refusal. His advice was wise; he understood the nature of the risk far better than I did. I didn’t understand the risk, so what now seems like good common sense seemed like uncompromising obstruction. I didn’t *know* what I was doing because I didn’t *understand* the risk, and so my father’s *wisdom* fell on deaf ears. Received wisdom cannot be integrated into oneself unless there is the capacity to understand it, and having understood, it becomes real knowledge which can be passed on again as wisdom to someone else.

For early Kabbalists the ultimate wisdom was external. It was the wisdom of God the Father as expressed in the Torah, and by attempting to understand this wisdom (and that is what Kabbalah was) they could arrive at the only knowledge truly worth having. The story of my argument with my father is like the person who struggles to come to terms with the *wisdom* of a Holy Book, who rejects its commandments because they lack the wider *understanding* of life and the purpose of creation, and in consequence is incapable of *knowing* God. Perhaps that is why Daat is not a sephira: the separation of wis-

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dom and understanding results in an absence of knowledge of God.

One of the unattributable pieces of Kabbalah I was taught was that Daat is the hole left behind when Malkhut fell out of the Garden of Eden. If you examine the derivation of the Tree of Life in Chapter 2, closely you will see that I have based some of it on this observation. The development of the notion of Daat as a “hole” appears to have originated this century. Gareth Knight, for example [25], provides a complete set of correspondences for Daat, most of which I dislike personally, but one at least is appropriate: he gives the magical image of Daat as Janus, god of doorways. Kenneth Grant [15], with his florid imagination, sees Daat as a gateway through to “outer spaces beyond, or behind, the Tree itself” dominated by Klippotic forces.

There is a deep correspondence between sephiroth in the lower face of the Tree and sephiroth in the upper face - this idea is developed later in a chapter on the Four Worlds. If you examine the symmetries of the Tree, you should see why Malkhut, Tipheret and Keter are linked, why Hod and Binah are linked, why Chokmah and Netzach are linked, and most importantly for the purposes of this discussion, that there is a correspondence between Yesod and Daat.

These are not just simple geometric symmetries. They express some important relationships which are experientially verifiable, and in terms of what makes most sense in Kabbalah and what does not, these relationships are important. Daat and Yesod, at different levels, are like two sides of the same coin. Jam the machinery of perception as I said above, and Yesod can become Daat.

The following quotation is taken from an bona-fide anthropological article [27] attempting to explain some of the characteristic features of cave art:

“Moving into a yet deeper stage of trance is often accompanied, according to laboratory reports, by an experience of a vortex or rotating tunnel that seems to surround the subject. The external world is progressively excluded and the inner world grows more florid. Iconic images may appear on the walls of the vortex, often imposed on a lattice of squares, like television screens. Frequently there is a mixture of iconic and geometric forms. Experienced shamans are able to plunge

rapidly into deep trance, where they manipulate the imagery according to the needs of the situation. Their experience of it, however, is of a world they have come briefly to inhabit; not a world of their own making, but a spirit world they are privileged to visit.”

This will come as no surprise to anyone who has read Michael Harner’s “The Way of the Shaman” [18]. There on page 103 (plate 8) is a beautiful picture of the tunnel vortex, complete with prisms. When I first saw this picture I was surprised and recognised it instantly from my own meditations. When I showed it to my wife her reaction was the same. The tunnel-vortex appears to be an important ingredient of magical and mystical experience, and it appears in a very precise context. In Kabbalah the shamanic tunnel would be attributed to the 32nd. path connecting Malkhut to Yesod; this path connects the real world to the underworld of the imagination and the unconscious, and is commonly symbolised by a tunnel. However, using the symmetry of the Tree, this path also corresponds to the path connecting Tipheret across the Abyss, through Daat, to Keter. The tunnel/vortex at this level is no longer subjective, because this level of the Tree corresponds to the noumenal reality underpinning the phenomenal world, and links individual self-consciousness to something greater. Just as Yesod represents the machinery of sense perception, so Daat can flip over to become the Yesod of another level of perception, not sense perception, but something completely different that seems to operate out of the “back door” of the mind; this is objective knowledge, what is sometimes called gnosis.

To conclude this section I would like to indulge in some speculation as to why there is a quasi-sephira called Knowledge located by convention in the Abyss. Why?

As I programmer I am continually aware of the gulf between abstract ideas, such as the number two and its physical representations in the world. Here are a few different ways of representing the same abstract idea:

2, II, ..., two, deux, oo, blurg

The number two can be represented in an infinite number of ways. The final representation in the list, “blurg”, is a way of writing “two” in a new language I have just invented. Now that I have said this you can use it in your arithmetical

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calculations. For example, $1+1 = \text{blurg}$.

Only when you share some understanding of my language can you *begin* to guess that a particular mark in the world represents the number two, and the situation is even worse than it might seem. A basic theorem of information theory states that the optimum way of expressing any piece of information is one where the symbols occur completely randomly. I could take this paragraph, pass it through an optimal text compressor and the same piece of text would be indistinguishable from random garbage. Only I, knowing the compression procedure, could extract the original message from the result.

Whatever we call information appears to exist independently of the physical world, and uses the world of chalk marks, ink marks, magnetic domains or whatever like a rider uses a horse. To me the gulf between the abstraction (the number 2) and its physical representation (the various marks I can make) is irreconcilable. Between the physical world and the world of the mind is an abyss.

I do not believe I am indulging in “new physics” or anything vaguely suspect - this is meat and drink to the average programmer, who spends most of his or her time transforming abstractions from one symbol set to another.

Let us take a slightly different approach which leads to the same place from the opposite direction. There is a mathematical proof that there is no largest prime number. I know that proof. No dissection of my brain will ever reveal the proof to someone who does not know it.

I am prepared to bet a large quantity of alcohol that it is theoretically impossible to find this information in my head; the proof that there is no largest prime number will never be extracted even if you assume a neurologist capable of mapping every atom in my brain. Evolution tends towards optimality, and I think the proof of this theorem will be encoded optimally to look like random garbage. Perhaps someone will discover the chemical Rosetta Stone which enables the perfect neurologist to decode the information in my brain but it seems unlikely to me even in principle. The ideas in my head, like the number 2, exist independent of the chemical marks used to represent them, and while I can tell you what they are, you will not find them in your microscope.

There is an abyss here. It is an abyss of knowl-

edge. There is a gulf between the world where we make arbitrary physical marks to represent abstract notions, and the abstract notions themselves. You cannot *know* the contents of my mind by probing it with physical instruments.

In Kabbalah this particular abyss is called the abyss of Assiah; it is the first in a series of abysses. The next abyss is the abyss of Yetzirah. There are further abysses, and this should be clearer when I discuss the Four Worlds and the Extended Tree. The Abyss and Daat go together because the Abyss sets a limit on what can be *known* from below the Abyss; the abyss is an abyss of knowledge, and Daat is the hole we fall into when we try probe beyond. Can the nature of God be expressed in terms of anything human? No. God is as human as a cockroach, as human as a lump of stone, as human as a star, as human as empty space. So how can you *know* anything about God? You have as much chance of finding God using the apparatus of reason as the neurologist has of finding my mind with a scalpel.

Only when Daat flips over to become the Yesod of another world can you *know* anything about it, but unfortunately the fiery speech of angels is like leprechaun's gold: by the time you've taken it home to show to your friends, you've nothing but a purse of dried leaves.

Binah, Chokhmah, Keter

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord

The triad of Binah, Chokhmah and Keter are a Kabbalistic representation of the manifest God. A discussion on this triad presents me with a problem. The problem is that while I have used the word “God” in many places in these notes, I have done so with a sense of unease, understanding that the word means so many different things to so many people that it is effectively meaningless. I have chosen to use the word “God” as a placeholder for personal experience, with the implicit assumption that the reader understands that “God” is a personal experience, and not an ill-defined abstraction one “believes in”. This view is not novel, but there are still many people who are uncomfortable with the idea of experiencing (as opposed to “believing in”) God.

A second assumption implicit in the use of the word “God” as a placeholder, is that it stands *only* for experience; your experience, and hence

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your God, is as valid as mine, and as there are no formal definitions, there is no scope for theological debate or dispute. This leaves me with nothing more to say.

However.....these notes were intended to provide some insight into Kabbalah, and it would be odd, having begun to write them, to turn around and say “sorry, I won’t say anything about the three supernal sephiroth”.

I think I have to say something. Balanced against this is my original intention, at every stage in these notes, to relate the objects of discussion to something real, to make a personal contribution by adding my own understanding to the subject rather than pot-boiling the same old material. I cannot see how to put flesh on the bare bones of the supernal sephiroth without discussing my own conception of God and whatever personal experience I might have.

I am loth to do this. To begin with, it isn’t fair on those people who study and use Kabbalah (many Jewish) who do not share my views, and secondly, remembering the parable of the blind men and the elephant, impressions of God tend to be shaped by the part one grabs hold of, and how close to the bottom you are.

Like it or not, my explanations of the supernal sephiroth are going to be lacking in substance. I can only ask you, the reader, to accept that the primary purpose of Kabbalah has always been the direct, personal experience of the living God, a state Kabbalists have called *devekut*, or cleaving to God, and the way towards that experience comes, not from a studious examination of the symbolism of the supernals, but from the practical techniques of Kabbalah to be discussed in a later chapter.

The title of the sephira Binah is translated as “understanding”, and sometimes as “intelligence”. The title of the sephira Chokhmah translates as “wisdom”, and that of Keter translates as “crown”. These three sephiroth are often referred to as the supernal sephiroth, or simply the supernals, and they represent that aspect of God which is manifest in creation. There is another aspect of God in Kabbalah, the “real God” or En Soph. Although En Soph is responsible for the creation of the universe, En Soph manifests to us only in the limited form of the sephira Keter.

An enormous amount of effort has gone into “explaining” this process: a book on Kabbalah

[32] in my possession devotes eight pages to the En Soph, twelve pages to the supernal trio of Keter, Chokhmah and Binah, and five pages to the remaining seven sephiroth, a proportion which seems relatively constant throughout Kabbalistic literature.

Briefly, the hidden God or En Soph crystallised a point which is the sephira Keter. In most versions (and this idea can be found as far back as the *Bahir* [23]) the En Soph “contracted” (tsimtsum) to “make room” for the creation, and the crystallised point of Keter manifested within this “space”. The sephira Keter is like a seed planted in nothingness from which the creation springs, and some Kabbalists draw the Tree of Life “upside down” to show Keter at the bottom of the Tree, rooted in the soil of the En Soph, with the rest of the sephiroth forming the trunk, branches and leaves. Another metaphor shows Keter connected to the En Soph by a “thread of light”, a metaphor I used somewhat whimsically in the section on “Daat and the Abyss”, where I portrayed the Tree of Life as a lit-up Christmas tree with a power cord snaking out of the darkness of the En Soph and through the abyss to Keter.

Like the Moon, Keter has two aspects, manifest and hidden, and for this reason its magical image is that of a face seen in profile: one side of the face is visible to us, but the other side is turned forever towards the En Soph.

Keter has many titles: Existence of Existences, Concealed of the Concealed, Ancient of Ancients, Ancient of Days, Primordial Point, the Smooth Point, the Point within the Circle, the Most High, the Inscrutable Height, the Vast Countenance (Arik Anpin), the White Head, the Head which is not, Macroprosopus. Taken together, these titles imply that Keter is the first, the oldest, the root of existence, remote, and its most accurate symbol is that of a point. Keter precedes all forms of existence, precedes all differentiation and distinction, precedes all polarity. Keter contains everything in potential, like a seed that sprouts and grows into a Tree, not once, but continuously. Keter is both root and seed. Because it precedes all forms and contains all opposites it is not *like* anything. You can say it contains infinite goodness, but then you have to say that it contains infinite evil. Wrapped up in Keter is all the love in the world, and wrapped around the love is all the hate. Keter is an outpouring of purest, radiant light, but

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equally it is the profoundest stygian dark.

And it is none of these things; it precedes all form or polarity, and its Virtue is unity. It is a point without extension or qualities, but it contains all creation within it as an unformed potential. The *Zohar* [29] is filled with references to Keter, and it is difficult to be selective, but the following quote from the "Lesser Holy Assembly", is clear, simple, and subtle:

"He (Keter) hath been formed, and yet as it were He hath not been formed. He hath been conformed so that he may sustain all things; yet is He not formed, seeing that He is not discovered.

When He is conformed He produceth nine Lights, which shine forth from Him, from his conformation.

And from Himself those Lights shine forth, and they emit flames, and they rush forth and are extended on every side, like as from an elevated lantern the rays of light stream down on every side.

And those rays of light, which are extended, when anyone draweth near unto them so that they may be examined, are not found, and there is only the lantern alone."

Polarity is contained within Keter in the form of Chokhmah and Binah, the Wisdom and Understanding of God, and Kabbalists have represented this polarity using the most obvious of metaphors, that of male and female. Chokhmah is Abba, the Father, and Binah is Aima, the Mother, and the entire world is seen as the child of the continuous and never-ending coupling of this divine pair. The following passage is taken again from the "Lesser Holy Assembly":

"Come and behold. When the Most Holy Ancient One, the Concealed with all Concealments (Keter), desired to be formed forth, He conformed all things under the form of Male and Female; and in such place wherein Male and Female are comprehended.

For they could not permanently exist save in another aspect of the Male and Female (their countenances being joined together).

And this Wisdom (Chokhmah) embracing all things, when it goeth forth and shineth forth from the Most Holy Ancient One, shineth not save under the form of Male and Female. Therefore is this Wisdom extended, and it is found that it

equally becometh Male and Female.

ChKMH AB BINH AM: Chokhmah is the Father and Binah is the Mother, and therein are Chokhmah, Wisdom, and Binah, Understanding, counterbalanced together in the most perfect equality of Male and Female.

And therefore are all things established in the equality of Male and Female, for were it not so, how could they subsist!

This beginning is the Father of all things; the Father of all Fathers; and both are mutually bound together, and the one path shineth into the other - Chokhmah, Wisdom, as the Father; Binah, Understanding, as the Mother.

It is written, Prov. 2.3: 'If thou callest Binah the Mother.'

When They are associated together They generate, and are expanded in truth.

And concerning the continuing act of procreation:

"Together They (Chokhmah & Binah) go forth, together They are at rest; the one ceaseth not from the other, and the one is never taken away from the other.

And therefore is it written, Gen 2.10: 'And a river went forth from Eden' - i.e. properly speaking, it continually goeth forth and never faileth."

A river or spring metaphor is often used for Chokhmah, to emphasise the continuous nature of creation. The primary metaphor is that of a phallus - Chokhmah is the phallus which ejaculates continuously into the womb of Binah, and Binah in turn gives birth to phenomenal reality. Phallic symbols - a standing stone, a fireman's hose, a fountain, a spear, belong to Chokhmah, and womb symbols - a cauldron, a gourd, a chalice, an oven, belong to Binah. In an abstract sense, Chokhmah and Binah correspond to the first, primal manifestation of the polarity of force and form. To repeat a metaphor I have used previously, Binah is a hot-air balloon, and Chokhmah is the roaring blast of flame which keeps it in the air.

The metaphor is not completely accurate: Binah is not form: she is the Mother of Form - she creates the condition whereby form can manifest. The colour of Binah is black, and she is associated with Shabbatai ("rest", from the same root as Shabbat, the Sabbath), the planet Saturn.

The symbolism of Binah is twofold: on one

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hand she is Aima, the fertile mother of creation, and on the other hand she is the mother of finiteness, limitation, restriction, boundaries, time, space, law, fate, and ultimately, death. In this form she is often depicted as Ama the Crone, who broods (like many pictures of Queen Victoria) in her black widow's weeds on the throne of creation. One of the titles of Binah is Khorsia, the Throne. The magician and Kabbalist Dion Fortune had a strongly intuitive grasp of Binah, not just as a sphere of a particular kind of emanation, but as the Great Mother herself, as the following rhyme from her novel *Moon Magic* [11] shows:

"I am she who ere the earth was formed
Was Rhea, Binah, Ge.

I am that soundless, boundless, bitter sea
Out of whose deeps life wells eternally.

Astarte, Aphrodite, Ashtoreth - Giver of
life and bringer in of death;

Hera in heaven, on earth Persephone;
Diana of the ways, and Hecate - All these
am I, and they are seen in me. The hour of
the high full moon draws near; I hear the
invoking words, hear and appear -
Shaddai El Chai and Rhea, Binah, Ge - I
come unto the priest who calleth me - "

One of the oldest correspondences for Binah is the element of water, and she is called Marah, the bitter sea from which all life comes and must return. She is also the Superior or Greater Mother; the Inferior or Lesser Mother is the sephira Malkhut, who is better symbolised by nature goddesses of the earth itself - e.g. the trinity of Kore, Demeter, and Persephone.

The Tree of Life has many goddess symbols, and it is not always easy to see where they fit:

- Binah is the Great Mother of All, with symbols of space, time, fate, spinning, weaving, cauldrons and other womb-like symbols.
- Malkhut is the Earth as the soil from which life springs, matter as the basis for life, the spirit concealed in matter, best symbolised by goddesses of this earth, fertility and vegetation.
- Yesod in its lunar aspect is the Moon, a hidden reality with the ebb and flow of secret tides, illusion, glamour, and sexual reproduction, and is sometimes invoked in the form of a lunar goddess - Selene, Artemis etc.
- Gevurah is on the Pillar of Form. The whole Pillar has a female aspect, and Gevurah is

sometimes invoked in a female form as Kali, Durga, Hecate, or the Morrigan, although it must be said that all four goddesses also share some correspondences more appropriate to Binah.

- Netzach has the planet Venus as a correspondence, and its aspect of sensual pleasure, luxury, sexual love and desire is sometimes invoked through a goddess such as Venus or Aphrodite.

The Spiritual Experience of Binah is the Vision of Sorrow. As the Mother of Form Binah is also the Mother of finiteness and limitation, of determinism, of cause and effect. Every quality comes forth hand-in-hand with its opposite: life and death, joy and despair, love and hate, order and chaos, so that it is not possible to find a firm anchor in life. For each reason to live I can find, buried like a worm in an apple, a reason not to live. The Vision of Sorrow is a vision of a life condemned to tramp along the circumference of a circle, forever denied a view of the unity of the centre. At its most extreme the creation is seen as an evil trick played by a malign demiurge, a sick, empty joke, or a joyless prison with death the only release. The classic vision of sorrow is that of Siddhartha Gautama. Tolstoy records [19] a terrible and enduring psychic experience which contains most of the elements associated with the worst Binah can offer - it drove him to the very edge of suicide.

The Illusion of Binah is death; that is, the vision of Binah may be compelling, but it is one-sided, a half-truth, and the finiteness it reveals is an illusion. Our own personal finiteness is an illusion.

The Klippot of Binah is fatalism, the belief that we are imprisoned in the mechanical causality of form, and not only are we incapable of changing or achieving anything, but even if we could, there wouldn't be any point. Why try to be happy - happiness leads inexorably to sadness. Why try to build and create - it all ends in decay and ruin soon enough. As the fatalistic author of *Ecclesiastes* says, all is vanity.

The Vice of Binah is avarice. Form is only one-half of the equation of life - change is the other half - and to try to hold onto and preserve form at the expense of change would be the death of all life.

The Virtue of Binah is silence. Beyond form there are no concepts, ideas, abstractions, or words.

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The Spiritual Experience of Chokhmah is the Vision of God Face-to-Face. The tradition I received has it that one cannot have this vision while incarnate; that is, one dies in the process. Perle Epstein [10] records the story of a Chasidic Rabbi whose custom it was to bid farewell to his family each morning as if it was his last - he feared he might die of ecstasy during the day. In the *Greater Holy Assembly* [29], three Rabbis pass away in ecstasy, and in the *Lesser Holy Assembly* the famous Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai passes away at the conclusion.

There is a fairly widespread belief that to look on the naked face of God, or a God, means death, but fortunately there is no historical evidence to suggest that the majority of Kabbalists died of anything other than natural causes. Having said this, I would not like to underplay the naked rawness of Chokhmah; unconstrained, unconfined, free of form, it is the creative power which sustains the universe. It contains, equally balanced, your life and your death, and as you have your life already, to talk of death is not melodramatic.

The Illusion of Chokhmah is independence. At the level of Binah we seem to be locked in form, separate and finite, but just as death is seen to be an illusion so ultimately is our independence and free-will. We *seem* to be independent, and we *seem* to have free-will, but at the level of Chokhmah we draw our water from the same well.

The Virtue of Chokhmah is good, and the Vice is evil. Regardless of your definition of good or evil, Chokhmah encompasses every possibility of action, circumstance and creation, and modern Kabbalists no longer try to believe God is only Good, and Evil must reside elsewhere. Medieval Kabbalists liked to hedge their bets, but one has only to plumb the bottomless depths of personal good and evil to find they spring from the same place.

The Klippot of Chokhmah is arbitrariness. The raw, creative, unconstrained energy of God at its most primal and dynamic can seem utterly arbitrary and chaotic, and some authors [e.g. [4]] have seen it this way. This removes the "divine will" from the energy and leaves a blind, directionless, and essentially mechanical force which is unbiased in any direction - creation and destruction, order and chaos, who cares? The Kabbalistic view is that this is not so.

Chokhmah contains form (as Binah) *in potential*, and it is not correct to view Chokhmah as a purely chaotic energy. It is an energy biased towards an end - "God's Will", for lack of a better description.

The Spiritual Experience of Keter is Union with God. My comments on the Spiritual Experience of Chokhmah apply also to Keter.

The Illusion of Keter is attainment. We can live, we can change, but there is nothing to attain. Even Union with God is not attainment; we were always one with God, and *knowing* that we are changes nothing of any consequence. So long as we live, there is no goal in life other than living itself. As the Kabbalist Rebbe Nachman of Breslov said [10]:

"No matter how high one reaches, there is still the next step. Therefore, we never know anything, and still do not attain the true goal. This is a very deep and mysterious concept."

The Klippot of Keter is Futility. Perhaps the creation was a bad idea. Maybe the En Soph should never have emanated the point-crown of Keter. Perhaps the whole of creation, life, the entire, ghastly three-ring circus we are forced to endure is nothing more than a *complete waste*. The En Soph should suck Malkhut back into Keter, collapse the whole, crazy house of cards, and admit it was all a big mistake.

The God-name of Binah is Elohim, a feminine noun with a masculine plural ending. When we read in the Bible "In the beginning created God...", this God is Elohim. The name Elohim is associated with all the sephiroth on the Pillar of Form, and is taken to represent the feminine aspect of God. The God-name of Chokhmah is Yah (YH), a shortened form of YHVH. The God-name of Keter is Eheieh, a name sometimes translated as "I am", and more often as "I will be".

The archangel of Binah is Tzaphkiel. I have been told this means "Shroud of God", but I have not been able to verify this. If it does not mean "Shroud of God", it most certainly should! The archangel of Chokhmah is Ratziel, the Herald of the Deity. According to tradition, the wisdom of God and the deepest secrets of the creation were inscribed on a sapphire which is in the keeping of the archangel Ratziel, and this "Book of Ratziel" was given to Adam and handed down through the generations [16]. A well-known medieval manuscript with this title

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actually exists. The archangel of Keter is Metatron, the Archangel of the Presence. According to tradition Metatron was once the man Enoch, who was so wise he was taken by God and made a prince among the angels.

The angel orders of Binah, Chokhmah and Keter can be derived directly from the vision of Ezekiel. In the Biblical text, Ezekiel describes successively the Holy Living Creatures, then the great wheels within wheels, and lastly the throne-chariot (Merkabah) of God. The vision of Ezekiel had a great influence on early Kabbalah, and it is no coincidence that the angel order of Binah is the Aralim, or Thrones, the angel order of Chokhmah is the Auphanim or Wheels, and the angel order of Keter is the Chiaoth ha Qadesh, or Holy Living Creatures. The forms of the Chiaoth ha Qadesh - lion, eagle, man and ox - have survived to this day in many Christian churches, and can be found on the "World" card of most Tarot packs.

It is difficult to grasp the nature of Chokhmah and Binah from symbols alone, just as it is difficult to grasp interstellar distances, or the heat output of a star, or the number of stars in a galaxy, or the number of galaxies visible to us. The scale of the physical universe observed by astronomers is staggering; there are something like a hundred stars *in our galaxy alone* for every person on this planet.

When I think of Chokhmah and Binah I attempt to think of them on this scale. The physical universe where we have our home, considered as Malkhut, is vast, mysterious, and contains inconceivable energies. To consider the Father and Mother of creation on any less a scale seems arrogant to me. Which brings us to the question "Can one experience, or be initiated into, the supernal sephiroth?".

If the Kabbalah is to be considered as based on experience, and not an intellectual construction, then the answer has to be "yes". The supernals represent something real. What do they represent? Is it possible to "cross the Abyss"? The answers to these questions depends on which Kabbalistic model one chooses to use, and precisely how one interprets the Tree of Life. For the sake of argument I have chosen three alternative models:

- Model A: the sephira Malkhut represents the whole physical universe; the sephiroth from Yesod to Chesed (the Microprosopus)

represent a sentient, self-conscious being; the supernals represent the God of the whole universe, God-in-the-Large.

- Model B: the Tree of Life is a model of human consciousness; the supernals represent the God within, God-in-the-Small.
- Model C: the Tree of Life exists in the four worlds of the creation, namely Atzilut, Briah, Yetzirah, and Assiah. When talking of "the Tree", we are talking about the tree of normal human experience, "the Tree of Yetzirah"; "The Abyss" is in fact "the Abyss of Yetzirah" only.

All three models can be found in Kabbalistic writing, and it is rarely clear which version an author is using at any given time. I admit the fault myself. Model A differs radically from Models B and C. Model A is an all-embracing model of everything, whereas in Models B and C the Tree has been applied recursively to a component of the whole, namely a human being considered a divine spark. This is a valid (if confusing) Kabbalistic technique: take a whole, and find a new Tree in each of its components and apply the method recursively until you generate enough detail to explain anything. This idea is summed up in the aphorism: "there is a Tree in every sephiroth".

Is it possible to experience the supernals in Model A? Is it possible to be at-one-ment with the God of a billion, billion suns? I would say that it is only possible to experience them at a remove via the paths crossing over the Abyss from Tipheret; that is, as a living, incarnate being my consciousness rises no further up the Pillar of Consciousness than Tipheret (or Daat), and it is only possible to apprehend the supernals via the linking paths. To experience the consciousness of Binah in this model would be tantamount to being able to modify the physical constants of nature - Planck's constant, the speed of light, the Gravitational constant, the ratio of masses of particles etc. - the consequences don't bear thinking about! To experience Chokhmah would be to experience the force which underpins a billion galaxies. I do not believe even the most arrogant twentieth century magician would claim to have achieved either of these initiations - the continuing existence of the planet is probably the best evidence for that!

Model B is a model of the Microprosopus (e.g. a human being) as a *complete Tree*. There is some

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evidence in the *Zohar* that the author thought about Macroprosopus and Microprosopus in precisely this way, with references to “the greater Chokhmah” and “the lesser Chokhmah”. Model C is substantially similar to Model B, but cast in a slightly different mould.

With this interpretation it is certainly possible to consider “the lesser Chokhmah” as an accessible state of consciousness, but “the Greater Chokhmah” remains as in Model A; that is, we can experience the God within, “God-in-the-Small”, and experience our essential unity with all other living beings considered as “Gods-in-the-Small”, but beyond that lies a greater mystery, that of “God-in-the-Large”. We may each be a chip off the old block, but individually we are not *identical* with the old block.

This discussion may seem arcane, but there is a natural tendency in people to exalt spiritual experience to the highest level, which does nothing more than inflate and devalue the currency of the language we use to describe these experiences. The universe is too large, too mysterious, and too full of infinite possibilities of wonder for anyone to claim a full initiation into Malkhut, far less Keter.

Lastly, it is worth asking “what is God?”. What does the Kabbalistic trinity of Keter, Chokhmah and Binah represent in reality? I have deliberately avoided mentioning an enormous amount of Kabbalistic material on these three sephiroth because it is not clear whether it contributes to a genuine understanding. How useful, for example, is it to know that the name Binah (BINH) contains not only IH (Yod, He), the letters representing Chokhmah and Binah, but also BN, Ben, the son? There is a level of understanding Kabbalah which is intellectual, and capable of almost infinite elaboration, but it leads nowhere.

What experience or perception does the word “God” denote? If there is nothing which is not God, why are so many people searching for God? Why do so many people feel apart from God?

I was browsing in my local occult bookshop recently, a shop which contains a catholic selection of books covering Eastern religions, astrology, Tarot, shamanism, crystals, theosophy, magick, Celtic and Grail traditions, mythology, Kabbalah, witchcraft, and so on. I am not sure what I was looking for, but despite a couple of hours of browsing I certainly did not find it.

What *did* strike me was the extent to which so many of these books were written to make human beings feel good about themselves.

There is a smug view permeating occult literature that “spiritual” human beings are a little bit more “advanced” or “developed” than the pack, that they are “moving along the Path” towards some kind of “enlightenment”, “cosmic consciousness”, “union with God”, “divine love”, or one of many more fantastic and utterly sublime goals. It is all so empowering and affirming and cosy. Even in the less starry-eyed and gushy works the view is predominantly, almost exclusively human-centred, and I found it difficult to avoid the impression that the universe was designed as a foam-padded playground for human souls to romp around in. There is more than a little truth in Marx’s statement that religion is the opium of the people, and a cynic might justify a claim that occultism and esoteric religion are little more than a security blanket for unfortunate people who cannot look reality in the face.

Where are the books which say:

“You are an insignificant speck in a universe so vast you cannot even begin to comprehend its scale.

All human experience and knowledge is parochial, insignificant and largely irrelevant on a universal scale, and your personal contribution even more so.

Your occult pretensions amount to nothing and are carefully designed to protect you from any experience of reality.

There are no Masters or Powers, no Secret Chiefs, no Inner Plane Adepts, no Messiahs, and God does not love you.

The only thing you possess is your life, and with it the joy and mystery of living in a universe filled to the brim with life, where little is known and much remains to be discovered.

When you die, you are dead.”

I do not concur with this position in its entirety, but it is a valid position to adopt, and one which is not strongly represented in esoteric and occult literature. Why not? Perhaps people do not want to buy books which say this.

I will venture an opinion which reflects my own experience; as such it has no general validity, but it is worth recording nevertheless.

I believe that many of the religious, esoteric and occult traditions currently extant are unconsciously designed to protect human beings from

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experiencing God and lead towards experiences which are valid in themselves but which are biased towards feelings of love, protection, peace, safety, personal growth, community and empowerment, all wrapped up in a strongly human-centred value system where positive *human* feelings and experiences are emphasised. Far from leading people into some kind of congruence with the reality of the world, religious beliefs can act in the opposite direction. I believe that people are apart from God by choice, that they cannot find God because *they do not want to*.

It is difficult to justify this belief without resorting to an onion-skin model of the psyche, that underneath the surface, unsuspected and virtually inaccessible, is a layer which does its best to protect us from the existential terror of confronting things as they really are.

As a child I was terrified of the dark. The dark itself was not malign, but I was deeply afraid, and in my case it was fear which determined my relationship with the dark, not any quality of the dark itself. So it is with God - it is our deeply buried and unrecognised fear which determines our relationship with God. We read books, go to the cinema and theatre, argue, invent new things, throw parties, play games, search for God, live and love together, and bury ourselves in all the distractions of human society in a frenetic and unceasing effort to avoid layers of fear - fear of solitude, fear of rejection, fear of disease, decay and disintegration, fear of madness, fear of meaninglessness, arbitrariness and futility, fear of death and personal annihilation. When we avoid contact with the terrible emotions evoked, so we insulate ourselves from genuine experience.

Like an audience in a cinema, we can live in the absorbing fantasy world of twentieth century human society and forget that it is dark, cold and raining outside in the street. Like the cinema audience we will have to leave our seats sooner or later. Underneath all our fears is the fear of opening the door which conceals an awful truth: that we were never truly separate from God, that the Abyss is of our own making, and that we have wilfully, and with great energy and persistence, chosen *not to know this*.

The Letters & the Paths

According to the *Sepher Yetzirah* there are thirty two paths of wisdom: these are the ten sephiroth and twenty-two paths. The twenty-two paths connect the sephiroth on the Tree of Life into a symmetrical lattice or network. It is natural and intuitive to regard the sephiroth as “places” and the paths as “connections” or “transitions” between places, as if the Tree was a space-station-like structure of ten rooms and twenty-two corridors.

Whether this simple intuition is accurate is open to question. The paths could equally well denote relationships and symmetries between sephiroth, just as lines drawn between people can be used to denote marriage or sexual partners, similar birth dates, or astrological signs, food preferences, home towns or any one of a large number of potential relationships between individuals. In a possible confirmation of this view there are interpretations of the structure of the Tree which emphasise groupings of three sephiroth, usually referred to as “triads”, and larger-scale views of the Tree such as the Three Pillars and the two Faces also suggest that the “paths as corridors” interpretation is not the whole story.

In a volume devoted to the paths [25], Gareth Knight takes the intuitive view that “while a Sefira stands primarily for an objective state, a Path is the subjective experience one undergoes in transferring consciousness from one Sefira, or state, to another”. Dion Fortune [12] interprets a path as the “equilibrium of the two Sephiroth it connects”. Halevi [17] takes the view that as the Tree is a structure based on balance, an impulse of imbalance causes changes to propagate throughout the Tree, and the paths describe how imbalances are propagated and equilibrated, according to a process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In his commentary on the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Kaplan [24] comments that early Kabbalists viewed the thirty two paths as different states of consciousness. All of these views on the nature of the paths contain useful

insights.

It is difficult to discuss the twenty two paths without discussing the *Sepher Yetzirah*, because it is from the few enigmatic chapters of the *Yetzirah* that much of the material associated with the paths is drawn:

Ten Sefirot of Nothingness
And 22 Foundation Letters:
Three Mothers,
Seven Doubles
And Twelve Elementals.

It was the *Yetzirah* which established the twenty two paths as the twenty two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, it was the *Yetzirah* which grouped the letters into three, seven and twelve (like the paths on the Tree), and it was the *Yetzirah* which established a large number of correspondences traditionally associated with the paths. The primary association of each path on the Tree of Life is a letter from the Hebrew alphabet, and from the correspondences given in the *Yetzirah* a host of further correspondences follow. For this reason the study of the traditional correspondences for the paths begins with the Hebrew alphabet.

The Letters

The Hebrew alphabet is composed of twenty-two letters. Many Kabbalists believed (and still believe) these letters are the instruments used by God to create the world. They are innately sacred and contain within them all the mysteries of creation.

According to Hebrew Legend as recorded in the *Aggadah*, the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible) pre-dated the creation of heaven and earth and formed a kind of architectural blueprint, written in letters of black fire on white fire. In the *Zohar* there is a story told of how the letters of the Hebrew alphabet individually petition God for the privilege of being the first letter in the *Torah* (the honour went to the letter *Beth*). The mysterious and holy names of God, which

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represent the manifestations of God in the Creation, can be expressed directly with this primordial script.

Devout Jews believe in the sacredness of the *Torah* as the revelation of God's word, and it is a small step from this to the belief that a person who understood the power of the letters and who knew how to form the divine names in the mind and on the tongue, had some measure of divine power (although its use for personal gain was roundly condemned by Kabbalists in the orthodox rabbinic tradition). To Kabbalists the letters glow with life and meaning, dancing in patterns, combining and recombining to spell out the secrets of the hidden realm of the divine. The power of the divine name lives on in many popular stereotypes of the mage, the sorcerer and the magician.

Can we take seriously the claim that the Hebrew script is the original language of the creation? Must we leave this claim as a matter of faith, or can we look at it rationally? Should we care whether a belief like this is rational - after all, reason is our servant, not our master.

For myself, I cannot accept this as a matter of faith. We live on a planet with many cultures, many religions, and many sacred scripts, some with an equal claim to being the original language of the creation (Sanskrit for example). It is difficult for a rational person to take this kind of claim seriously. How many original and divine languages of creation can there be? No doubt there are beings on a planet several dozen light years away who also believe something similar about *their* script. It is not *impossible* that the script of a small tribe in Palestine might be the original language of creation, but in the face of many competing claims this does seem unlikely.

It is possible to try to ignore this issue by writing-off Kabbalistic letter and word mysticism as an historical dead-end, in the same way that we no longer believe that the world is flat and we no longer believe the sun goes around the earth. The problem with doing this is that Kabbalah is absolutely permeated with a belief in the sacredness of the word; it is at the heart of Kabbalah. To take the sacredness of words and letters out of Kabbalah would be like pulling the petals off a flower.

For a long time I stuck my head in the sand, unwilling to admit the validity of letter mysticism, but as a result of some personal experiences I began to wonder whether Kabbalists

were saying something about language in general, about a mystery they had comprehended and experienced through the agency of the *Hebrew* alphabet. I wondered whether many languages, not just Hebrew, conceal something deeply magical and mysterious about the nature of consciousness and our experience of the world. This was a view I could sympathise with but in order to explain this I will need to make a digression into the world of the computer programmer. Why computer programming? Because computer programming is the most sophisticated method we have for building a *simulacrum of the world employing pure language*.

Anyone who has played the computer games readily available from any high street shop will know how far programming has advanced in providing a simulation of reality. For the price of a home computer anyone can experience many of the complexities of flying an aeroplane, driving a racing car, or commanding a tank. The versions available in the high street are only games, but we know that highly advanced and much more realistic simulators are used for training pilots, soldiers and astronauts.

This advance has been made within the last fifteen years, and there is no reason why programmers should not continue to provide more and more sophisticated simulations, to the point where we may begin to have serious arguments about "reality". The significant point is that we can build highly detailed and realistic simulations of reality. That this should be possible is far from obvious. The more one thinks about it, the less obvious it becomes. *How* this is possible?

The original authors of this success were physicists. Since the Renaissance individuals have been slowly accumulating more and more information about the detailed physical properties of the world. There is the apocryphal story about how Galileo climbed the Leaning Tower of Pisa to find out whether a heavy object would fall faster than a light object (it doesn't). Tycho Brahe (who wrote an important text on magic) spent years plotting the orbits of planets using crude instruments. The slow accumulation of information about the behaviour of falling objects was codified by Isaac Newton (another Hermetic Kabbalist) in his *Laws of Motion*. Kepler (inspired by the mysticism of the Platonists) used Brahe's data to show that planetary orbits were elliptical, and Newton went on to

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deduce the Law of Gravity from Kepler's work. Newton, and many others, studied how light propagates, how it reflects off surfaces and how it refracts through glass.

Physicists were able to provide compact descriptions of these phenomena using mathematics, and most of the content of a modern university course in physics consists of learning how the behaviour of the world can be expressed in a mathematical form, and how to predict how things will behave in known circumstances.

You may not have thought that advanced mathematics was a language, but it is.

This is the foundation of computer simulation. Programmers are able to incorporate the mathematical descriptions of the real world into programs to produce life-like graphics. Programmers purloin the mathematical transformations used in perspective geometry, so that solid, three dimensional objects seen on a graphics display "look right" as they move around. Programmers use the laws of motion to describe how objects move. Programmers use the laws of reflection and refraction to model the effects of light sources, so that scenes have shadows and shading just as in real life. The result of all this effort might be an aeroplane flight simulator program.

What programmers do is to take existing mathematical descriptions of how the world behaves and use them in their programs. The fact that it works so well demonstrates that something essential about the appearance and behaviour of the world *has been captured in a language and communicated from one group of people (physicists and mathematicians) to another group (programmers)*.

The situation can be summarised as follows:

1. We can observe the world we live in and express certain regularities of behaviour (and the natural world is *very* regular) using a the language of mathematics.
2. We can use that language to recreate the behaviour of the world and so produce increasingly realistic computer simulations which look like the world and behave like the world.

This is extraordinary. It is remarkable that we should be capable of modelling the world, a capability as extraordinary as the fact of self-consciousness. Why should language have *anything* to do with the way the world looks and

behaves? It is sometimes assumed that the primary purpose of language is social and it evolved because a group that communicates is better at surviving. We can imagine a situation two million years ago where a species of primates used their grunts and howls to coordinate their hunting, and gradually evolved language because it made them better at doing things than they were without language.

It is a big step however, from being able to say "my finger hurts" or "hand me my mammoth spear" to being able to simulate an aerial dog-fight using differential calculus and affine transformations. Why should a series of noises uttered by a tribe of jumped-up monkeys have anything at all to do with the laws of the physical world? This fact is remarkable and it is so remarkable that it has caught the attention of most thoughtful physicists. Einstein was astonished that we can describe the world with the language of mathematics. To the novice the fact that we can describe how the world behaves is just one of those things. To the most famous and erudite physicists it is a genuine mystery. Most things in life are like that: don't bother them and they won't bother you, but once you start taking a good hard look and ask why, the house of cards collapses.

There is a possibility, and I offer it as a hypothesis: that language and rationality evolved because our brain and nervous system are adapted to "the way the world is" in the same way that a leopard has spots and a polar bear is white. Like other animals we have evolved a colouring appropriate to our environment, and this colouring is much more than skin-deep.

We know how well our bodies are adapted. The electro-optical system in my eyes is far superior to the best broadcast quality television cameras, and my liver routinely carries out chemical processes that would earn me a Nobel prize if I knew how it did it. Our bodies are warehouses of biochemical and physical knowledge we have only begun to explore. The extent of our adaptation to the world goes far beyond our current ability to comprehend. Why should the extent of our adaptation stop at physiology and go no further? If our bodies (and our cells, and our genes) are a complex apparatus evolved to make sense of the world, and we take for granted the excellence of the eye or the ear or the liver in doing their jobs, then why not

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the brain? If the eye is a survival adaptation to light, and the ear a survival adaptation to sound, then what is language? What is self-consciousness? What is rationality?

My hypothesis is that language is something more than a series of grunts to expedite hunting, and perhaps, like the eye and the ear and the liver, it is an evolutionary adaptation to the "way the world is". But ... if we examine the evolutionary adaptations an animal has made then we can say something about its environment. Perhaps there is something about the deep structure of reality to which we have an adaptation. Our senses are an adaptation to the phenomena of the world; are our minds an adaptation to a deeper structure, a form behind the appearance?

This might explain why physicists have had so much success in modelling how the world works. My hypothesis is that human beings developed linguistic ability for precisely the same reason that a leopard has spots, or a giraffe has a long neck: abstraction, reason and language are the ultimate survival adaptations because they are the keys to something. At a superficial level they are the keys to unlock technology - in the course of time physics becomes engineering, and engineers build our planes and our cars and our computers. But there may be more.

I suspect that at the roots of language there is something as deeply hidden as the pea under the forty mattresses of tired and restless princess, something a rational mystic working beyond the limits of rational consciousness might grasp. Study the eye and one can learn about optics; study the roots of language at the roots of consciousness, and what might one discover about the world?

Kabbalists were unusual mystics because they lived in the community and contributed to it. They were married men with families to support and businesses to run. Many were masters of Jewish law and tradition and responsible for settling disputes in the community. At a time when books were rare and expensive, they were literate men who memorised vast tracts of the *Torah* and *Talmud*. Many were multi-lingual and were as familiar with the literature of Islam as they were with the literature of Christianity. Some (such as Nachmanides) were required to defend their communities against hostile attack in public "disputations" with leading scholars.

In the main, these men were the leading intellectuals in their communities. They were trained to read the *Torah* and to appreciate the arguments, discussions and nuances of interpretation that had accumulated over the centuries. As experts on law and tradition they were required to provide judgements on fine points of law, and developed a lawyer's insight into the subtleties of language. They were mystics whose lives were dominated by language. They believed in the sacredness of their language and found a deep mystery in it, a mystery with its origin in the farthest roots of awareness.

Whether the Hebrew alphabet and language have a particular and peculiar quality to be found in no other language must remain an open question. For myself I cannot take this simply as a matter of religious belief. However, I no longer dismiss the possibility that Kabbalists found deep secrets in their letter meditations, in their practice of *tzeruf* (letter permutations), and in their contemplations of the sacred names of God.

A physicist who studies the human eye can unlock many of the secrets of optics, and it does not seem unreasonable that a person who follows the trail of language back to its source in the roots of consciousness might discover something fundamental about the world itself. With this interpretation the Biblical statement that man is made in the image of God makes sense. The words of the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus state something similar: "that which is below is like that which is above, and that which is above is like that which is below". The maxim that the microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm no longer sounds like mystical mumbo-jumbo. It is stating something which should be obvious: not only are our bodies sophisticated instruments, but so are our minds, and our self-consciousness is a key whereby we can comprehend the world¹ by comprehending ourselves. It no longer seems to me to be an unreasonable hypothesis to say that the mind is

1. I am treading on the toes of the famous German philosopher Hegel here, who argued that all history could be viewed as an ongoing process of self-revelation within God. If the world and ourselves are an embodiment of God, a close inspection of either will lead us back to the same place. There are many points of contact between Kabbalah and Hegel, not least of which is his well known dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. This was a well-known technique of scriptural interpretation, and a process amply illustrated in the structure of the Tree of Life.

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an evolutionary adaptation to reality, and language is a key to its comprehension.

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet are all consonants. Even letters such as *alef* and *ayin* which at first sight appear to be vowels are not.

The written language did not originally show the vowels; these were added between the seventh and tenth centuries by the Masorites, a group which standardised the texts of the Bible. Because the text was sacred and could not be altered, the vowels were indicated by adding various dots and dashes above and below the consonants.

The consonants represent different ways in which the pure sound of the larynx is modulated by movements in the mouth and throat. The vowels are shaped by the consonants. This resembles the duality of force and form which I presented at in the first chapter as the basic duality underpinning the Kabbalistic worldview. If the vowels are the water in a river, then the consonants are the guiding riverbank. If the vowels represent the desire to win at chess, then the consonants are the rules of the game. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet can be viewed as twenty-two ways of shaping sound, as representations of form. This view is given substance in the *Yetzirah* [24]:

Twenty-two Foundation letters:
He engraved them, He carved them,
He permuted them, He weighed them,
He transformed them,
And with them, He depicted all that was
formed and all that would be formed.
Twenty-two Foundation letters
He engraved them with voice
He carved them with breath
He set them in the mouth
In five places
Alef Chet He Ayin in the throat
Gimel Yud Kaf Kuf in the palate
Dalet Tet Lamed Nun Tav in the tongue
Zayin Samekh Shin Resh Tzadi in the
teeth
Bet Vav Mem Peh in the lips.

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* the consonants were not treated as arbitrary tokens, as individually uninteresting components of words. Each letter had a unique role in the formation of everything in

the world, as if “formation” was a twenty-two dimensional space with a letter allocated to each axis. They are classified according to the way in which they are shaped in the mouth. This suggests (unsurprisingly) that the primary key to understanding the letters is in their sounds, individually and in combination. Each sound corresponds to an aspect of formation, and when this is understood and the correct internal connections are made, the letters can be used in various combinations in magical procedures. Each sound becomes a trigger for an aspect of consciousness which is active in determining the form of reality.

A complex and dangerous exercise along these lines documented in Kabbalistic literature is the formation of a golem, or artificial being. The use of letter combinations and vowel sounds leads into complex, and by all accounts dangerous, meditative and magical practices called *Chokhmah ha-Tzeruf*, the science of letter combinations. The leading exponent of this method was Abraham Abulafia (1240-1295), who used these techniques to access a level of ecstatic consciousness where prophecy occurs.

Abulafia is one of the most unusual and interesting of Kabbalists because he is one of the few Kabbalists to leave (relatively) detailed accounts of practical meditative techniques, the publication of which evoked considerable hostility from his contemporaries, to the extent that Abulafia was forced to move his residence on a number of occasions. Abulafia believed himself to be in possession of the same meditative techniques used by the Biblical prophets and produced several manuscripts containing inspirational material received while in high meditational states. He writes with authority and clarity, and the descriptions of altered states and their characteristics to be found in his works (and in works of his disciples) have a convincing stamp of authenticity.

Abulafia states that there are two principle techniques in Kabbalah: meditations on the ten sephiroth, and a more powerful technique based on the twenty-two letters. His technique was the latter, and he appears to have been the heir to an authentic tradition concerning the practical application of the *Sepher Yetzirah*. His techniques are complex and require a good knowledge of Hebrew and gematria, as well as the ability to sustain concentration throughout lengthy meditations; they are not appropriate

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א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת	Aleph	Ox	1
	Beth	House	2
	Gimel	Camel	3
	Daleth	Door	4
	He	Window	5
	Vau	Peg, nail	6
	Zain	Weapon	7
	Cheth	Fence	8
	Teth	Serpent	9
	Yod	Hand	10
	Kaph	Palm (of hand)	20 (500)
	Lamed	Ox-goad	30
	Mem	Water	40 (600)
	Nun	Fish	50 (700)
	Samekh	Prop	60
	Ayin	Eye	70
	Peh	Mouth	80 (800)
	Tzaddi	Fish-Hook	90 (900)
	Qoph	Back of Head	100
	Resh	Head	200
	Shin	Tooth	300
	Tau	Cross	400

Table 12: The Hebrew Alphabet

Mothers	Doubles	Elementals
Aleph	Beth	He
Mem	Gimel	Vau
Shin	Daleth	Zayin
	Kaph	Cheth
	Pe	Teth

Table 13: Yetziratic Groupings

The Letters & the Paths

Resh	Yod
	Tau
	Lamed
	Nun
	Samekh
	Ayin
	Tzaddi
	Qoph

Table 13: Yetziratic Groupings

::

Mother	Sound	Element	Season	Body
Aleph	Breath	Air	Spring & Autumn	Chest
Mem	Hum	Water	Winter	Belly
Shin	Hiss	Fire	Summer	Head

Table 14: Mother Letters

Double	Planet	Day	Quality	Body	Direction
Beth	Moon	Sunday	Wisdom Folly	R. eye	South
Gimel	Mars	Monday	Wealth Poverty	R. ear	North
Dalet h	Sun	Tuesday	Fertility Barrenness	R. nostril	East
Kaph	Venus	Wednesday	Life Death	L. eye	Up
Pe	Mercury	Thursday	Dominance Submission	L. ear	Down
Resh	Saturn	Friday	Peace War	L. nostril	West

Table 15: Double Letters

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Tau	Jupiter	Saturday	Grace Ugli- ness	Mouth	Centre
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Table 15: Double Letters

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Ele- mental	Foun- dation	Zodiac	Month	Body	Direc- tion
He	speech	Aries	Nissan	R.foot	Up.E
Vau	thoug ht	Taurus	Iyar	R.kid- ney	NE
Zayin	motio n	Gemini	Sivan	L.foot	Lo.E
Cheth	sight	Cancer	Tam- muz	R.hand	Up.S
Teth	hear- ing	Leo	Av	L.kid- ney	SE
Yod	action	Virgo	Elul	L.hand	Lo.S
Lamed	coi- tion	Libra	Tishrei	gall bladder	Up.W
Nun	smell	Scorpio	Chesh- van	intes- tines	SW
Samek h	sleep	Sagitta- rius	Kilsev	pan- creas?	Lo.W
Ayin	anger	Capri- corn	Tevet	liver	Up.N
Tza- ddi	taste	Aquar- ius	Shevat	stom- ach	NW
Qoph	laugh- ter	Pisces	Adar	spleen	Lo.N

Table 16: Elemental Letters

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Double	Planet
Beth	Mercury
Gimel	Moon
Daleth	Venus

Table 17: Golden Dawn Attributions

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Kaph	Jupiter
Pe	Mars
Resh	Sun
Tau	Saturn

Table 17: Golden Dawn Attributions

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for a beginner. The practical technique given in these notes (ritual invocation of sephiroth through the divine names of God, combined with meditation on the correspondences and their significance in everyday life) is simpler to acquire but effective if persevered with.

Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numeric value. Some letters have two numeric values depending on whether they occur in the middle or at the end of a word. Each letter also has a literal meaning (for example, the letter 'Shin' literally means 'a tooth'). These letters are given in Table 12. The *Yetzirah* groups the letters into 3 mothers, 7 doubles, and 12 elementals as shown in Table 13. In the *Yetzirah* the three mothers have the correspondences shown in Table 14.

The correspondences for the seven doubles are in Table 15. The seven doubles are also associated with seven universes, seven firmaments, seven lands, seven seas, seven rivers, seven deserts, seven weeks, seven days of creation, seven years, seven sabbaticals, and seven jubilees.

The correspondences for the twelve elementals are in Table 16.

Different versions of the Sepher Yetzirah contain different correspondences for many letters; the correspondences above are from the Gra version as listed by Kaplan [24], who should be referred to for alternatives.

It should be noted that the well-known Golden Dawn correspondences for the paths differ from all the sources listed by Kaplan when it comes to allocating the planets to the double letters. In the Golden Dawn scheme the double letters were written in increasing numerical order and allocated to the planets in order of increasing exaltation, as shown in Table 17.

This collection of correspondences is all very well, but what do they tell us about the Tree of Life? How do they fit on the paths as they are drawn, and can we ascribe a meaning to them which complements the rich and well-developed correspondences associated with the sephiroth? Herein, as the saying goes, lies a mystery.

A commonly accepted scheme is the Golden Dawn attribution of letters to paths (Figure 12), but it suffers from a glaring deficiency: the Hebrew letters are divided into 3 mothers, 7 doubles and 12 elementals, and the paths on the Tree are divided into 3 horizontals, 7 verticals

and 12 diagonals. Tradition (for example, the attribution according to Isaac Luria) follows this by matching mothers to horizontals, doubles to verticals, and elementals to diagonals. The Golden Dawn scheme does not.

Given that the geometric structure of the Tree appears to be a direct interpretation of the text of the *Yetzirah*, this strikes me as somewhat perverse!

The Golden Dawn scheme has been much used, much written about, and one cannot deny that many people have found it useful, but it is open to the criticism that something vital has been lost along the way, and I think it would be a mistake to approach Kabbalah with the view that the Golden Dawn attribution of letters to paths is beyond question.

Doubtless, many readers will have reached to point of asking (like the author!) "well, what is the right answer!"

I do not know.

There are many possible answers. A traditional attribution like that of Isaac Luria (Figure 13) might seem like a safe bet, but in the absence of keys to these attributions they must remain cryptic - it is a large step from the bare bones of an attribution to building a workable internal representation of that attribution, and there are few pointers to help.

The Paths

There are two well-known schemes for organising the paths on the Tree. The first scheme is the scheme used throughout these notes, and I will refer to it as the "normal" scheme. It is the older of the two, and can be seen in Figure 12. The second scheme is attributed to the Safed school of Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria, and can be seen in Figure 13.

Both schemes differ only on the placing of two paths: in the "normal" scheme there are paths connecting Hod and Netzach to Malkhut, while in the Lurianic scheme these paths do not exist, and instead there are paths from Chokhmah to Gevurah, and from Binah to Chesed.

In both schemes there are three horizontal paths, seven vertical paths, and twelve diagonal paths. Does the division into 3, 7 and 12 signify anything useful? What can we deduce purely by looking at the Tree itself?

The three horizontal paths connect sephiroth which (in a sense) represent polar opposites - force and form (Chokhmah and Binah), creation

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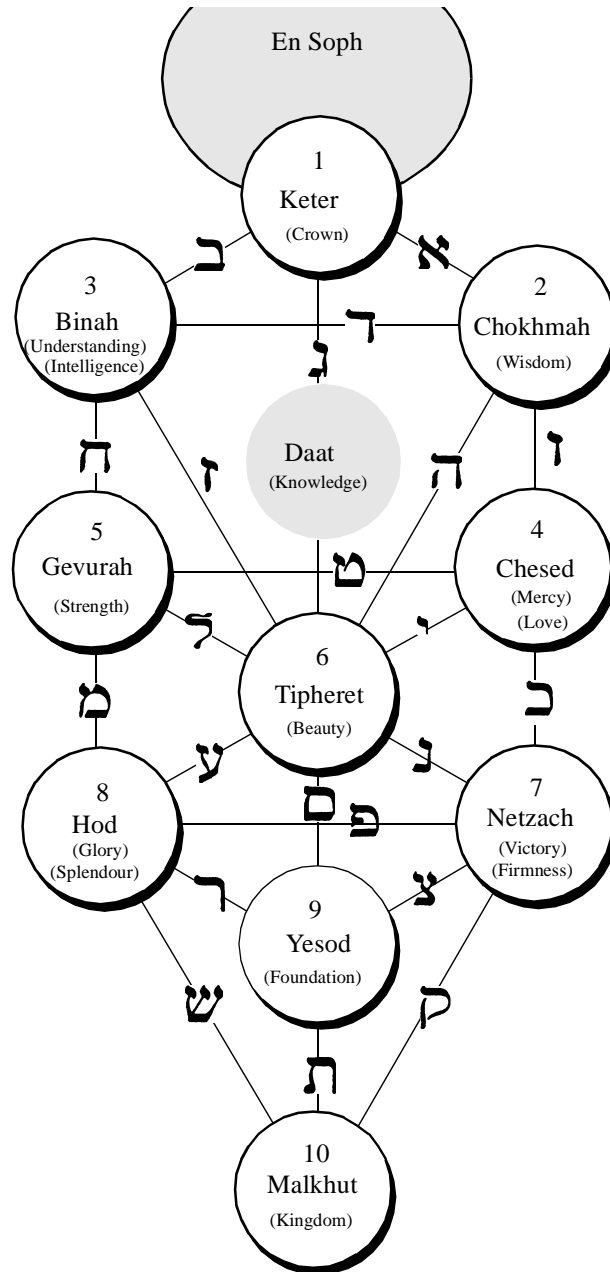


Figure 12: The Letters on the Tree
The Tree of Emanation -
Golden Dawn Attributions

and destruction (Chesed and Gevurah), and at a lower level (Netzach and Hod), force and form once more. It is this division of unity into polar opposites which energises the Tree.

The seven vertical paths create the three vertical pillars of the Tree and communicate a quality of force, form or consciousness down the appropriate pillar through levels of increasing form.

The diagonal paths connect a side pillar with the central pillar. Each path connects a balanced state to an unbalanced state, or vice versa depending on the direction it is traversed.

The following presentation on the paths is original and uses a method which is not often employed in modern Kabbalah, although something similar can be found in some manuscripts of the *Sepher Yetzirah*. The method is to examine

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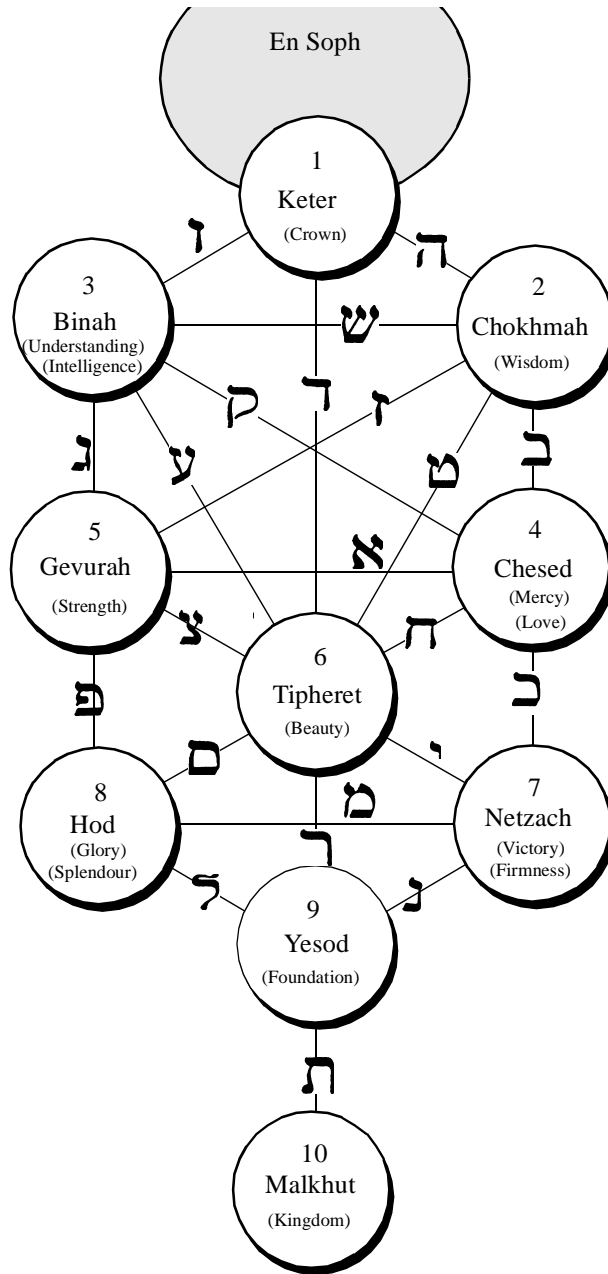


Figure 13: The Letters on the Tree
Isaac Luria's Tree of Return

and describe the change in consciousness caused by traversing a path from one sephira to another. This is well worth attempting as it can clarify one's understanding of the sephiroth, and it illustrates the dynamics of moving consciousness around the Tree. This is a practical exercise of great value, and rather than view my exposition as an attempt to be definitive (it is not), you should view it as illustrative of a practical meditative technique.

My first step was to strip each sephira from its

symbols in an attempt to describe, in modern language, the essence of the sephira in as succinct a form as possible. This is not so difficult: the Tree is profound, and like many profound symbols (and much of modern physics), it can be reduced to a remarkably simple form.

The next step was to meditate on the two sephira at either end of a path, and to make the transition in consciousness as many times as it took to capture the essence of the transition. The nature of the transition depends on the direction

The Letters & the Paths

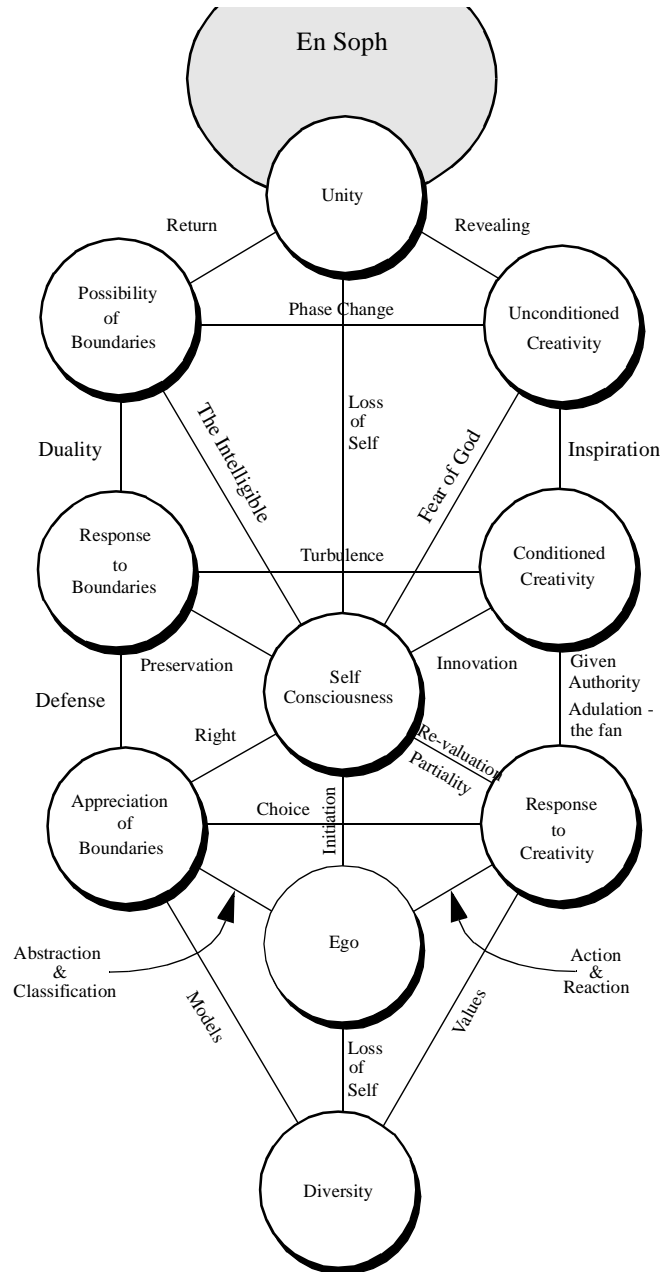


Figure 14: The Paths

in which one traverses the path, and in the examples below I have tended to consider one direction only.

It is important in an exercise like this to have a deep familiarity with the sephiroth - not only with the symbols and correspondences, but with the underlying essence of a sephira as it underpins consciousness. An awareness of this essence is achieved by invocation of the sephi-

rothic powers as outlined in the chapter on Practical Kabbalah. If you want to carry out this kind of exercise yourself, I would recommend using simple ritual and invocation of the sephiroth as a precursor.

The characterisation of the sephiroth is given in Figure 14.

Keter is Unity.

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Chokhmah is Unconditioned Creativity, the divine creative emanation in its purest form. Although Chokhmah is unconditioned, it contains within it the possibility of structure as Binah.

Binah is the Mother of Form and the possibility of boundaries. By boundary I mean the idea of difference, differentiation, form or structure in the abstract. A boundary contains the idea of *separation* - The One becomes Many. Binah is the most abstract root of differentiation.

Chesed is Conditioned Creativity. It inherits the creative impulse of Chokhmah but cannot depart from the constraints imposed by Binah. Binah limits what is possible, and the creativity of Chesed must operate within these limits.

Gevurah is Response to Boundaries. The primary Gevuric concern is transgression. Cross the line and according to tradition, the Severity of God will find you. The boundaries are everywhere: in the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) of Judaism, in criminal law, in accounting rules and tax regulations, in social convention, and in the rules of soccer. Break the rules, and a Gevuric consciousness somewhere will call you to account.

Tipheret is Self-Consciousness. The Unity of Keter is sundered into the plurality of individual consciousness. Because consciousness is separate, it becomes concerned with its own boundaries, self-definition, unique identity. This narrative of identity coalesces and solidifies as the ego.

Netzach is Response to Creativity. The creative impulses of Chesed are evaluated at the level of basic emotional response and accepted or rejected. John F. Kennedy's proposal that the USA should place a man on the moon is an example of how creative proposals and impulses coming from Chesed can galvanise thousands into saying "Yes - we *will* do that!".

Hod is Appreciation of Boundaries. Novels, drama, dance, opera, music, fine art, law, culture, myth, and the entire corpus of human scientific knowledge, provide domains for consciousness to explore and become absorbed in, even lost in. It is the boundaries between things that define what a thing is, and as consciousness chooses one thing over another so it learns to value and appreciate boundaries.

Yesod is Ego. The Ego is differentiated from Self by the inflexible affective responses of Netzach, the unquestioning intellectual fixa-

tions of Hod, and the treadmill of perception. Consciousness spins a web to run around on and becomes trapped in the web of its own manufacture.

Malkhut is Diversity, the culmination of a process of differentiation and increasing structure that begins with the Unity of Keter.

This characterisation of the sephiroth is succinct but captures the essence of how the unity of Keter is broken up and expressed through a process of formation, so that force is increasingly constrained going down the pillar of force, form becomes increasingly defined going down the pillar of form, and consciousness increasingly fragmented going down the pillar of consciousness. When the Tree of Life is stripped of myth, allegory, symbol and a dense web of Biblical allusion, this is what remains, and this essence can be found in the Kabbalah from the earliest times.

The motivation behind this exegesis is the idea of *separation*. The Kabbalist wishes to cleave to God, but is separate. Each morning the Kabbalist of old would declare that the God of Israel is One, but the world we live in clearly contains a plurality of forms. The structure of language, so vital to the Kabbalist, creates sharp boundaries where we might perceive a continuum. The Kabbalist seeks to repair the fallen state of the creation by carrying out unifications (*yichudim*). Everywhere one looks in the traditional Kabbalah one finds a constant awareness that the creation is a long way from the unity of God, that things have become separated, and that the process down the lightning flash to Malkhut represents an increasing alienation from God.

At the very limit of this alienation are the husks, the Klippot, the world of unclean shells who embody in the meaning of the word *Klippot* (shell, husk, as in the covering of a nut) the idea of a separation.

When I use the word "boundary" I am thinking along these lines - a conceptual separation of one thing from another.

An analogy I find useful is the breakup of a smooth (laminar) fluid flow into a whirling chaos of vortices that become increasingly detailed as the flow proceeds. Examples are the flow of air over an aircraft wing, smoke from a cigarette, or the flow of water out of a tap. There is only a smooth flow of air, and yet it spins into large vortices, and these into progressively finer

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vortices, until the air becomes a confused mess of movement on every scale. As the doggerel goes:

“Big whorls have little whorls
That feed on their velocity,
And little whorls have smaller whorls
And so on to viscosity.”

Nowhere is there anything but air (or water), and yet the movement of one part relative to another creates structure, and when we look we can see boundaries. The movement of a turbulent fluid (for example, a rising plume of smoke) forms an excellent meditation. This is the best metaphor I know of to illustrate how something can be one and many at the same time.

And now to the paths

Yesod to Malkhut - Loss of Self

I find bookstores intimidating. Each book is a large investment in time, experience, and often identity - a person may encapsulate a lifetime in one text. When I am faced with so many opinions (often contradictory), I experience a deepening sense of stress and nausea and oppression as waves of otherness erode my sense of self. Something similar happens in a large shopping mall, where I can become so absorbed in external variety I become unconscious of myself.

Malkhut is otherness. Normally we experience it from the viewpoint of the ego, which cushions the feelings of otherness by reducing the external world to a manageable size - family, a few friends, the workplace, and a sprinkling of books, films and TV programmes selected to reduce the stress of the unfamiliar.

Almost all of the world is outside of ourselves, but we cannot see it when it threatens the autonomy of the ego. The historical parallel to this initiation was the switch from an anthropomorphic model of the universe, with man at the spiritual centre of creation, to the heliocentric model where human beings are an accident of evolution.

This path is a Copernican revolution in consciousness.

Hod to Malkhut - Models

The structure of human perception makes it difficult to see things as they really are. This problem appears in philosophy as the problem of the “thing-in-itself” - what we see is a product of a complex perceptual process, and not the

thing-in-itself. The philosopher Kant asserted that we could never perceive the thing-in-itself - our experience of the world would be necessarily conditioned by fundamental “categories” of perception, such as the perception of things embedded in time and space.

In addition to such basic categories of perception there are models that are part of the social consensus at a given time. At the present time these include “male”, “female”, “solid”, “liquid”, “global warming” and so on. Although these are approximations, such models are useful and so they persist until something better comes along.

The initiation of this path is the conscious awareness of what Korzybski called “awareness of abstraction”, the process of turning the diversity of Malkhut into something the individual human consciousness finds tractable. Part of this awareness is understanding the social categories of perception we individually use to pigeon-hole the world, and also how we communicate these personal models as “the truth”.

Netzach to Malkhut - Values

Value is a human construct. Malkhut is devoid of values. The popular myth of Richard the Third on the field of Bosworth, that he lost the battle because his horse lacked a horseshoe nail, equates that one missing nail with the price of an entire kingdom, hence Shakespeare’s “My kingdom for a horse!”.

The value of things depends on personal and social circumstances. We have all experienced times when something insignificant - a safety pin, a piece of string, a drawing pin, a pair of tweezers, five more minutes, a nail, becomes paramount.

This path is about the instantaneous feelings aroused by things. These feelings colour our experience of the world like a paint-by-numbers kit - we unconsciously associate value with everything we experience. Much behaviour follows on from this unconscious valuation, and so we are motivated by forces that are often beyond our control. This is of course the basis for advertising, which tries to create positive valuations for products and services.

Hod to Yesod - Abstraction and Classification

This path relates to the path from Hod to Malkhut, as both are about imposing structure upon an unknown world. The path from Hod to Malkhut attempts to see the world as it “really is”,

but this path includes the internal world of the imagination. It is considerably richer.

You are in bed at night and you are woken by a noise. You strain to hear further sounds, and you do. Your fear of intruders latches on to these noises, and you begin to construct a scenario where an armed intruder is attempting to gain entry into the house. Each further noise adds weight to the developing narrative, and you begin to react emotionally - breathing quickens, heart pounds.

We have all experienced fear in the night, and the last time it happened to me it was a badger hunting for food down the side of the house. I was prepared for a life-or-death struggle with a potential assailant. I could have arrived at the correct answer, but my senses had been filtered through an imaginary scenario and I had constructed the wrong answer.

The essence of this path is understanding how perception is an active process, and our beliefs, imagination, prejudices, fears, desires and so on influence how we construct the world from our senses.

A large part of what we “know” is learned from other people. The mass-media functions as a kind of giant, extended Yesod, feeding millions simultaneously to create an artificial “consensus reality”. Much of what is received through the media is accepted without question, so when I hear that X is a dangerous terrorist, my automatic response is to accept this information. With increasing age I grow cynical and understand that most information is manipulation, but I do not have time to deconstruct every piece of information that comes my way, and I do feel a need to be informed.

What is important is not the search for objective truth, but the realisation that we are not automata, and we are not constituted for objectivity.

Netzach to Yesod - Action and Reaction

When someone you know well appears with a new hairstyle, there is a moment of unfamiliarity and surprise, and then a reaction. The process of evaluating and reacting to new stimuli is continuous and we are barely aware of it most of the time. The verbal awareness (whether honest or not) comes later, and may take some time, as when tasting a new food, or smelling a perfume.

Netzach to Hod - Choice

There is a saying that “feelings tell us what to think”. The justification for this is that a purely rational being would be incapable of making choices in many real-life situations. There would be too many choices, and too little data on which to evaluate these choices. One sees this sometimes in the workplace - a very analytic person may be good at drawing up lists of choices, each choice with its pros and cons, but may find it difficult to choose one option over another. Someone with a more defined “gut feel” can skim through the list and say “we’ll go with that one”.

The future is only lightly constrained by the present. At one time it was thought that the mechanics of the world were deterministic, that the future could be predicted exactly from the present, but now we know that this is not so. Complex systems tend to evolve on the edge of chaos, where minute differences can make a profound difference to their future state. At the level of human beings and human society, free-will and choice determine the form of the world we live in.

The path between Netzach and Hod is one of the three horizontal paths corresponding to the three mother letters (*aleph*, *mem*, *shin*) in the Hebrew alphabet. These paths express duality, the dynamics of force and form. The tension of manifestation is expressed through these paths: they are literally the “mothers of form”.

Whenever a person is presented with a choice, and chooses, he or she determines the future of the world.

Tipheret to Hod - Right

The consciousness associated with Tipheret can observe the workings of the psyche without being absorbed into its function. There is a detachment of *being* from *modes-of-being*.

When consciousness moves into Hod, that detachment is lost. Consciousness is dominated by the structure of things, by definitions, by boundaries, by rules, by the articulation of what is and what is not.

I could have named this path “articulation”, but articulation is rarely a shopping list, and is usually an articulation of *what is*. That is why I called this path “right” - consciousness falls out of an uncommitted state into a state where it articulates “what is”; that is, what is right or correct, and what is wrong, unfounded, mis-

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guided, irrational, incorrect.

Tipheret to Netzach - Re-evaluation, partiality

This path is the affective mirror of the path from Tipheret to Hod. Consciousness ceases to observe the process of valuation and becomes absorbed into it. It ceases to observe feelings and experiences them directly.

There is a loss of consciousness. This is usually unavoidable. This is the point at which many mystical systems come unstuck. It is easier to be detached from emotional evaluation and partiality in highly controlled, highly isolated situations (e.g. in a monastery), but it is harder in domestic situations involving (for example) one's children. One has to care, has to make choices. For myself, I feel that detachment is misguided, that making choices is the most important thing we can do in our lives. What we can do, and should do, is make sure important choices engage as much of our being as possible, that we take our feelings back to Tipheret, once, twice, many times if we have the luxury of time, to re-consider the value we place on things. We should do the same with our past actions, and that way we can learn to act with wisdom, and not from impulse.

Tipheret to Gevurah - Preservation

Gevurah is God's judgement and severity. It is the energy which maintains and preserves, and corresponds to the immune system in the human body.

If the movement from Tipheret to Hod is about articulating what is correct and incorrect, right and wrong, reasonable and crazy, then the movement from Tipheret to Gevurah is a more pronounced movement in a similar direction, to where these principles descend from the sphere of the divine and are articulated and preserved in society.

The movement from Tipheret to Gevurah is a commitment to preserving and defending something. If consciousness has been properly centered in Tipheret then this commitment might be something to do with (for example) human rights, equality, discrimination, fairness and so on.

Tipheret to Chesed - Innovation

The idea that human beings are equal is a bizarre innovation. It certainly is not obvious, as human beings differ in almost every respect - tone of voice, agility, knowledge, skills, height,

weight and so on. Even identical twins differ in many ways.

This idea was not subscribed to in classical times. It does not resonate in many cultures today. Nevertheless, this idea has become pervasive throughout the Western world.

In order to see human beings as equal we need to see each one as containing some essence that is more important than all the obvious differences between people. People like to be different, like to be unique. We need to ignore the surface and focus on an identity that lies below the surface.

The assertion of human equality is grounded in religious perception, and is based not on the equality of *soma* or *psyche*, but on the existence of a divine principle manifesting through each one of us. It is this internal divinity that makes us equal.

I see the original articulation that "all human beings are equal" as an example of movement from Tipheret to Chesed. A spiritual insight, based on the direct perception of the spiritual essence of each person, is declared publicly and in the course of time creates a massive shift in global human consciousness. Our human rights legislation is now rooted in this basic belief in human equality.

Tipheret to Binah - The Intelligible

"The Intelligible" is a term that derives from the Platonic school of philosophy that was current in the classical world from the time of Plato to the closure of the Platonic Academy in Athens by the emperor Justinian nearly 1000 years later.

It signifies that which can be apprehended through the eye of the rational intellect.

The development of technology is the most tangible evidence that there is a substructure of constancy in the natural world which we can learn through various investigative disciplines - physics, chemistry, biology, geology etc. This "substructure of constancy" is far from being obvious, and it is only within the last few hundred years that we have begun to elucidate the deep underlying principles.

There is a view that science is a social construct, that the various theories and explanations that compose science are the outcomes of social processes that maintain various groups in positions of power and authority. There may be some truth in this some of the time, but our abil-

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ity to create complex, almost magical artifacts such as mobile telephones and computers shows how flawed this view can be. These artifacts exist because our theories and explanations are sufficiently congruent to nature at a very deep level.

In other words, there does seem to be a constant world underpinning the fluctuating and often opaque phenomena of the natural world. To the scientist and mathematician there is a real sense of wonder and beauty in being able to penetrate this world. In my own experience it does feel like being in possession of another eye that can see deep within nature.

This is one interpretation of the ancient association of Malkhut (the inferior mother) and Binah (the superior mother), that Binah is the structure of the Intelligible that gives rise to the appearance of reality that we perceive as Malkhut.

At one level the experience of the Intelligible occurs as the Vision of Splendour in Hod. At another level it is the kind of sublime mystical union described by the more mystical of the Platonic philosophers, and it is this experience I have associated with this path.

Tipheret to Chokhmah - Fear of God

In *Proverbs* it states that “The beginning of wisdom (chokhmah) is the fear of the Lord”.

Every person feels the power and immensity, the unpredictability, the beauty and danger of the sea. How much more then can we experience the immensity of God’s outpouring?

We are finite beings with small minds and limited concerns. As one moves from the root of personal identity in Tipheret towards the fount of cosmic manifestation, our personal frailty and insignificance becomes apparent.

Tipheret to Keter - Loss of Self

Keter and Malkhut are duals by tradition, different views of the same thing. Perception is active, and it is an act of will whether one perceives One or Many. The Many is concealed within the One, and the One is concealed within the Many.

For this reason the path from Tipheret to Malkhut (through Yesod) and the path from Tipheret to Keter (through Daat) are also duals. The experiences are superficially different, but when experienced in depth they are the same.

Gevurah to Hod - Defence

This path is the transition from appreciating boundaries (Hod) to responding to them (Gevurah). Many important boundaries are defined socially. When someone tramples over these boundaries they will discover that boundaries are not only defined intellectually, they are maintained by force.

Chesed to Netzach - Adulation, the Fan

This path is the emotional response to creativity, but it is creativity experienced at second hand. We all know how it feels to experience the creativity of another person. The feeling is often very intense, a wave of adulation that can be quite irrational.

Gevurah to Chesed - Turbulence

In the introduction to this description of the paths I used turbulence in a fluid as a metaphor for emergent complexity, a metaphor of the process for how One can become Many.

Turbulence also applies to the human domain, to the process of social change, which is balanced between forces which try to change the status-quo, and forces which try to keep things as they are.

This path contains both ideas: at the higher level it is the outflowing of Chokhmah into Binah; at the lower level it is this process as it takes place in human society.

Binah to Gevurah - Duality

Binah is the mother of form, the root of distinction. Movement down this path is an awareness of separation, of the separation of one thing from another, the root awareness of being different and distinct.

The development of this awareness is noticeable in children as they become aware of siblings, possessions, and personal space. “It’s mine!” is the dominant cry. This path really is the “root of all evil”.

Chokhmah to Chesed - Inspiration

Genuine creativity feels divine. That is the origin of the word inspiration - it means “breathing into”, the sense that a divine force has intruded. There was a time when poets would invoke the gods for inspiration.

Chokhmah to Binah- Phase Change

I have used the metaphor of turbulence in a fluid to describe how One becomes Many. The

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path from Chokhmah to Binah is the root of all duality and manifestation. I imagine a hose pumping water into a swimming pool - Chokhmah is the hose (traditionally the image was a spring or fountain) and Binah is the pool (traditionally the image was the sea, or supernal waters).

All metaphors are limited, and I have struggled to find a more eloquent metaphor for this path. There is a phenomenon well-known in the science of complex systems known as *emergent order*. An example might be the growth of snowflakes, or frost patterns on a window, or amethyst crystals in a geode, or clouds in the sky. Emergent order tends to occur at a *critical point* where a system is in transition from one state to another. This transition is known as a *phase change*. A phase change is usually characterised by *chaos*.

The advantage of emergent order, critical points and phase change as metaphors is that these are general concepts that have proven to be extraordinarily productive in science. I propose them as clues for further investigation. They are probably as close as we can come intellectually at this time to comprehending the transition from Chokhmah to Binah.

Binah to Keter - Return

A word often used in the mystical concept of return is *teshuvah*. A Lubovitcher Rebbe explains:

“*Teshuvah* emphasises return. A Jew is inherently good and wishes to do good; it is only because of various reasons for which he is either not responsible or only partially responsible that he committed an evil act. But inherently he is good.

And this is the essence of *teshuvah*, to return to one's source and origin, to one's inner self, and to reveal one's inner self so that it will be the proprietor of one's life.

That is why *teshuvah* is applicable to all, even to the righteous. It means that the *Tzaddik* is also constantly trying to return to his inner self and to reveal it. And *teshuvah* is equally pertinent to the sinner, because no matter how low he has fallen he always has recourse to *teshuvah* since he does not have to create anything new but only to return to his innermost self.”

There is also the sense that “God wishes to know God”, and all revealing in manifestation returns once more to the source. Each impulse of manifestation is reified in Malkhut, and its

impact is distilled through consciousness and returned. The act of living consciously and morally achieves this purpose, the implication being that living is its own purpose. The closer we raise our consciousness to the source, the more we can return our experience of life. This, more than anything, dignifies life, dignifies even the worst suffering, and permits us to find great joy even in pain, illness and death.

Keter to Chokhmah - Revealing

The path from Keter to Chokhmah is the beginning of the revealing that is life. We cannot know all its mysteries. I suspect that God does not know either, that life is its own revealing, the fabric of tomorrow woven from the threads of today. Meaning and purpose are emergent and transitory. They are ephemera we construct, narratives we weave around our projects to sustain the ego.

Our true dignity is in how we live, in how we reveal our own beings.

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The Tarot and the Tree

The arguments concerning the relationship between the Tarot and Kabbalah have produced so much heat it could keep the inhabitants of Moscow comfortable through a Russian winter. The facts are relatively straightforward, but the myth is so compelling, it refuses to lie down and be dead.

The myth, in its most basic form, is that the Tarot cards are a repository of archaic occult wisdom. This is not an immediately obvious premise ... one could just as easily argue that the cards were primarily a form of entertainment adapted to divination.

The basic outline was proposed by a French scholar Antoine Court de Gebelin, writing c.1780, who proposed that the cards were a relic of ancient Egyptian wisdom. With further elaborations, the following myth emerged (and it must be said that there is not the smallest shred of documentary evidence to support it).

The sages of the ancient world were concerned that occult knowledge would be lost to humankind forever. The profound secrets of ancient Egypt, font of esoteric wisdom, would be lost. It was a difficult time - ignorant foreigners were invading the Nile valley and using the priceless scrolls in the library of Alexandria to warm bathhouses (or light cigarettes or roll joints or whatever).

These keepers and guardians of wisdom met in a conclave and decided to conceal their knowledge in a form that would preserve it for all time: as a pack of playing cards for entertainment and gambling. The cards were given to nomadic folks, gypsies, who were believed to come from Egypt. The English name for Romanies is in fact a contraction of Egyptian. The gypsy folk spread this knowledge around Europe and continue to use the cards for fortune-telling and divination.

The myth was added to when another Frenchman called Alliette observed that there are 22 Tarot trump cards, and 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and so the Tarot must contain the secret keys to unravelling the wisdom of Kabbalah.

This idea was given huge impetus by the highly influential French occultist Alphonse Louis Constant (1810 - 1875), who wrote under the pen-name Eliphas Levi. In his *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, Levi provides his version of the relationship between Tarot Trumps and Hebrew letters as shown in Table 18. There are two things to note about this arrangement. Firstly, the Trumps are associated with the letters according to the normal printed numbering of the Trumps, and the normal lexicographic ordering of Hebrew letters. The second thing is that the Fool card, which is unnumbered, has been inserted between 20 (Judgement) and 21 (The World).

Ten years after Levi's death, the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Golden Dawn was founded on the basis of mysterious cypher manuscripts, which contained, among other things, an association of Hebrew letters to the Tarot trumps as shown in Table 19. So what has changed? Well ... the Fool has been moved to the beginning of the sequence, and all the Trumps (except the World) bump up by one letter. The G.D. arrangement also interchanges Strength/Fortitude with Justice to make the astrological correspondences "fit".

There have been claims that the Levi scheme is an exoteric scheme which deliberately conceals the true system, and the G.D. scheme is part of an initiated tradition. Neither of these arrangements can be considered rocket science.

Both schemes have strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the traditional Marseille Tarot, one of the figures falling from the Blasted Tower is distinctly in the shape of an Ayin, and Levi points this out. Several other correspondences look very sound - the Chariot and Zain (weapon), Justice and Cheth (fence - separation, division). Levi makes a strong case for his scheme, and it remains popular in France.

The G.D. scheme also has strong arguments in its favour. One of the strongest arguments is that some of the most influential Tarot pack designs, such as the Colman-Smith/Waite pack

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Table 18: Levi's Attributions

Trump	Letter	Meaning
Juggler	Aleph	Ox
Female Pope	Beth	House
Empress	Gimel	Camel
Emperor	Daleth	Door
Pope	He	Window
Vice & Virtue	Vau	Peg, nail
Chariot	Zain	Weapon
Justice	Cheth	Fence
Hermit	Teth	Serpent
Wheel	Yod	Hand
Strength	Kaph	Palm (of hand)
Hanged Man	Lamed	Ox-goad
Death	Mem	Water
Temperance	Nun	Fish
Devil	Samekh	Prop
Tower	Ayin	Eye
Star	Peh	Mouth
Moon	Tzaddi	Fish-Hook
Sun	Qoph	Back of Head
Judgement	Resh	Head
Fool	Shin	Tooth
World	Tau	Cross

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Table 19: Golden Dawn Attributions

Trump	Letter	Meaning
Fool	Aleph	Ox
Magician	Beth	House
High Priestess	Gimel	Camel
Empress	Daleth	Door
Emperor	He	Window
Heirophant	Vau	Peg, nail
Lovers	Zain	Weapon
Chariot	Cheth	Fence
Fortitude	Teth	Serpent
Hermit	Yod	Hand
Wheel	Kaph	Palm (of hand)
Justice	Lamed	Ox-goad
Hanged Man	Mem	Water
Death	Nun	Fish
Temperance	Samekh	Prop
Devil	Ayin	Eye
Tower	Peh	Mouth
Star	Tzaddi	Fish-Hook
Moon	Qoph	Back of Head
Sun	Resh	Head
Judgement	Shin	Tooth
World	Tau	Cross

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(also called the Rider/Waite pack) have been based on this system. A large number of books have been written “explaining” how marvelously appropriate this scheme is.

An example is Aleister Crowley’s *Book of Thoth*, subtitled *Egyptian Tarot*, published in 1944 shortly before Crowley’s death. Crowley perpetuates the myth that the Tarot cards are the lost books of Thoth, god of occult wisdom, a repository of occult lore handed down from ancient Egypt. There is internal evidence that Crowley knows well that this is not the case, but he goes on to state:

1. The origin of the Tarot is quite irrelevant, even if it were certain. It must stand or fall as a system on its own merits.

2. It is beyond doubt a deliberate attempt to represent, in pictorial form, the doctrines of the Qabalah.

It must be said that the evidence becomes stronger as the cards are pictorially deconstructed and reconstructed to fit the esoteric outlook of the author. Levi, Waite, Crowley, Case and many others have reconstructed the cards according to personal prejudice, so that the “doctrines of the Qabalah” become exceedingly flexible, all-embracing and elastic. I have provided a diagram of the Tree of Life with the Colman-Smith/Waite trumps superimposed, and this can be found overleaf.

In detail, the problem with the Golden Dawn interpretation of the Tarot is this. It depends heavily on the assignment of Hebrew letters to Tarot cards, astrological signs and planets to Hebrew letters, and Hebrew letters to paths on the Tree of Life.

The assignment of cards to letters does not have universal agreement, and several schemes have been proposed - Gareth Knight provides a useful summary of several of these in Volume 2 of *A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism*.

The assignment of Hebrew letters to astrological signs and planets is based on the *Sepher Yetzirah*, but this is a very old work with many variant editions, and the choice made by the G.D. is certainly not authoritative.

Lastly, the G.D. assignment of Hebrew letters to the Tree of Life is idiosyncratic and somehow loses sight of a common factor in all traditional attributions: that the Hebrew letters are split into 3 mothers, 7 doubles, and 12 elementals,

and the paths on the Tree can be divided into 3 horizontals, 7 verticals, and 12 diagonals. I do not regard this as a trivial defect in the system.

None of this would matter if it was not for the fact that the G.D. system has become the dominant framework for modern Hermetic Kabbalah, and there are many, many books which explain Kabbalah in its terms. It is virtually canonical. The Tarot Trumps are highly eloquent and numinous symbols, and for many people the G.D. assignation of Trumps on the Tree of Life *define* Kabbalah, so that Crowley’s point becomes self-fulfilling - the Tarot *is* an attempt, in pictorial form, to represent the doctrines of Kabbalah ... but it is a novel, ersatz Kabbalah using reconstructed cards that sprang into existence at the turn of the 19th. century. More than anything this has created a substantial divergence between Kabbalah in the Jewish tradition, and what many people now refer to as *Qabalah*, the modern G.D. variant.

It is usually a mistake to lie down in front of a bandwagon, so I will say no more. What I will say is that late Victorian enthusiasm for Tarot as a repository of ancient occult wisdom owes more to romanticism than fact. The earliest cards date from the mid 15th. century. The idea that they encode the doctrines of Kabbalah does not seem even vaguely credible in light of what is known about the history of Kabbalah.

The history of the Jews in Europe from the time of the Crusades until the Renaissance is one of relentless, violent, and often murderous persecution. The Nazis did not invent anti-semitism - they merely refined it. Jews were routinely denied civil rights, rights of residency, and participation in most forms of economic activity. Murder, forced expropriation of property, theft, restrictions on movement, forced conversion, and expulsion were routine. For example, the Black Death was widely believed to be caused by Jews poisoning water supplies, and this was the cause of many massacres and much torture. Volume IV of Graetz’s *History of the Jews* reads like a 400 year holocaust.

Jewish culture, traditions, and religion were despised to the point of total intolerance. In response, Jews became self-protective. There was little mixing of cultures, and even something as important as the Hebrew language, which one might consider essential for studying the *Bible*, was little studied in Christian institutions, and Jews were reluctant to teach it. Study

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and teaching of Kabbalah was limited even among Jews. The idea that medieval Jews would set down the doctrines of Kabbalah on playing cards for public circulation, given the religious prohibition on graven images, is absurd. Completely barking mad.

In his introduction to the Bison Books edition of Johann Reuchlin's *De Arte Cabalistica*, the prominent scholar Moshe Idel find no evidence of a Christian tradition of Kabbalah before Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), who lived at approximately the same time and same place (Northern Italy) as the emergence of the first Tarot decks. The reality is that the dissemination of Kabbalah among a learned non-Jewish elite in Renaissance Italy comes *later* than the first Tarot decks, with most of the substantial exegesis and translation taking place in the early part of the 16th. century.

However, there is the coincidence of time and place. We cannot rule out the *possibility* that a Jewish convert with a knowledge of Kabbalah was involved at some level in the design of an early Tarot deck. Converts such as Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, a.k.a. Flavius Mithridates (c. 1450 - 1489), and Paul Ricci were important as teachers and translators at the end of the 15th. and beginning of the 16th. century.

I think the reasonable conclusion is that unsubstantiated claims about the hoary antiquity of the Tarot should be taken with a pinch of salt. If Tarot cards date prior to the 15th. century, they almost certainly do not contain the doctrines of Kabbalah, and if they date from the 15th. century (as reputable histories maintain), they may contain some Kabbalah, but probably at a superficial, dilettante level.

This exercise of pouring cold water on the myth of the Tarot should not convince you that I have any anything against the combination of the Tarot and Kabbalah. On the contrary - the Tarot provides a wonderful set of visual images in a (relatively) standard form.

There is a nearly forgotten science, a science of the imagination, described by the scholar Francis Yates in her acclaimed *The Art of Memory*, which is based on systems of vivid and inter-related symbols. These systems are often referred to as "memory theatre." Such systems were common up to the time of the Renaissance, and employed by many important thinkers, but the scientific reformation effectively eliminated

this kind of imaginative science. The Hermetic Kabbalah is one of the few places where it survives.

The Tree of Life, with all its many correspondences, is an excellent example of a memory theatre, and the Tarot greatly enriches it. The imaginative space that the combination of the Tarot and the Tree of Life provides is rich, detailed, immensely productive in analysing consciousness. What is important is to put the horse before the cart, to avoid reconstructing the Kabbalah in the image of a reconstructed Tarot. There are many productive ways to use the Tarot in Kabbalah, and my intent is simply to caution the reader against too much immersion in what has become a G.D. orthodoxy.

I would like to provide an example of the Tarot on the Tree which is valuable, intuitive, and does little violence to either the Kabbalah *or* the Tarot. The approach is essentially that described by Dr. Alan Bain in his *Keys to Kabbalah*, and it is a method of using the Tarot on the Tree which I have used in my personal work over many years.

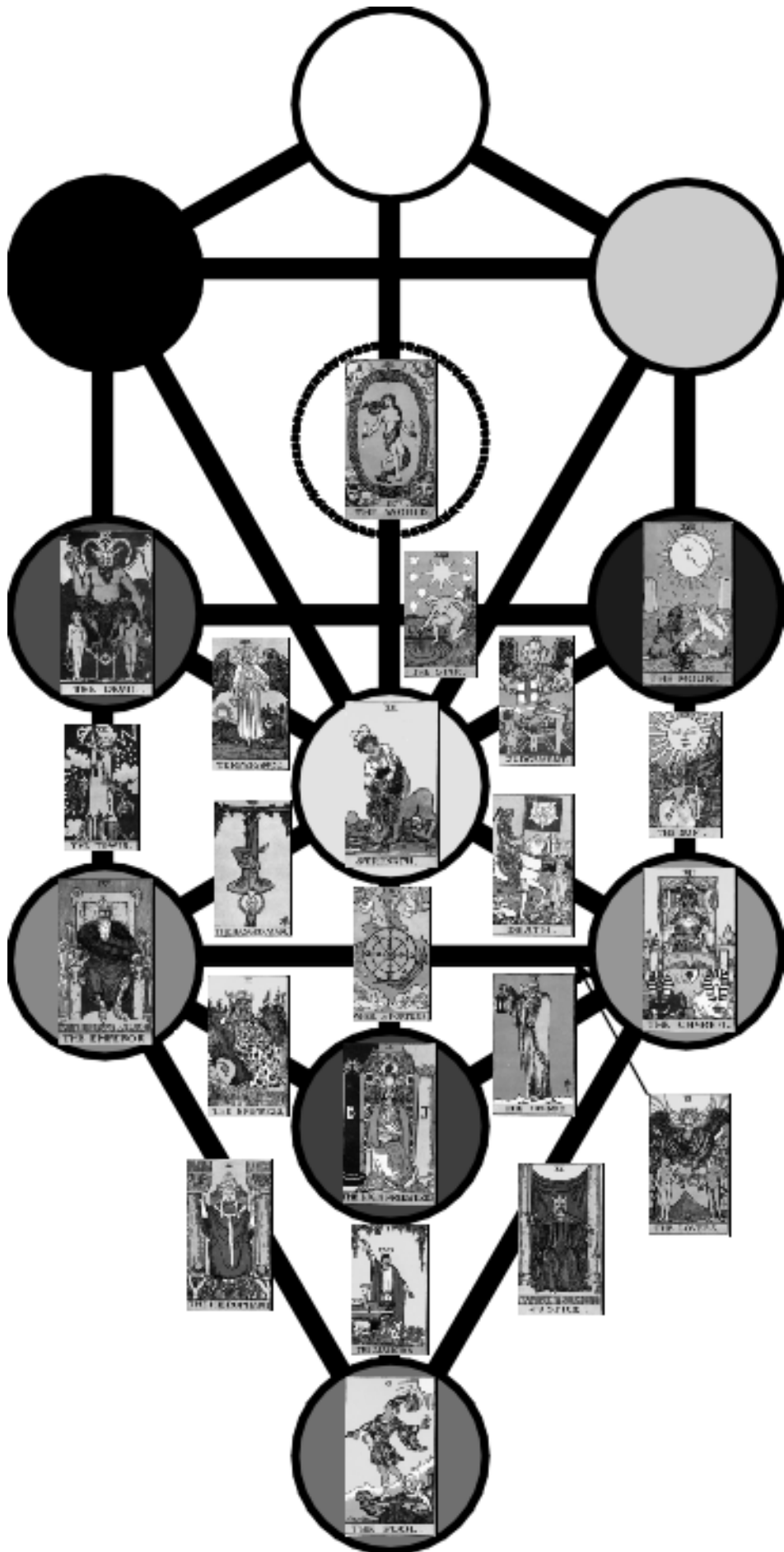
The purpose of this particular scheme is *narrative*: it describes the progress of a typical candidate in the mysteries according to a reverse lightning-flash progress up the Tree of Life. This accords with the practical approach adopted in these Notes, that initiations into the sephiroth are resolved during everyday life. That is, one cannot claim to have understood the nature of a specific sephira until one has experienced its effect on consciousness as part of going about daily life.

This narrative provides an indication, often a remarkably good and accurate indication, of the kinds of mishap that can occur, and of the challenges that must be met in order to make progress up the Tree. It is a Kabbalistic Pilgrim's Progress, with the Tree of Life as the territory, the Tarot as the story, and the aspirant to the mysteries as the pilgrim.

The Tarot Trumps are arranged on the Tree in an ascending lightning flash order as shown overleaf, and the sephiroth are included in this arrangement. The Fool is placed on Malkhut, and the Trumps ascend the lightning flash in traditional order. When there are paths descending from a sephira (e.g. Hod), these paths are filled in before proceeding along the lightning flash.

This scheme will immediately raise the hack-

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les of anyone who thinks the Trumps belong only on the paths ... but it works, works well, and contains several subtle and unexpected surprises that are at least as illuminating as the G.D. version. Trust me.

The sequence begins with the Foolish Man in Malkhut. Not a divine fool, not a holy madman filled with the breath of the holy spirit. Just a Foolish Man or Woman, the sort of person who doesn't know important things and makes foolish mistakes because of this. This Foolish Person, seeking relief from the trials of ignorance, is the actor in the story which now begins.

Malkhut - Foolish Man

Anyone who acts in ignorance of important facts is likely to make mistakes. It isn't a good idea to buy shares in a company which is about to announce that it is trading in the red - you will lose money.

We all make mistakes in areas such as money, sexual partners, trust, vehicles, emotions and so on. It is virtually impossible not to. Teenagers enter into adult life with an unshakable arrogance and self-determination that means that each person is doomed to go through most of the standard repertoire of upsets and disappointments. In this we all begin adult life as Foolish People - there are too many important "facts" about life we learn only through the experience of making mistakes.

In this narrative Malkhut is the everyday world of unchallenged assumptions, of habits and routines, of unexamined ideas, all the clutter of the ages that leads us into folly. The Foolish Man or Woman who makes a conscious choice to leave behind this world must find a way to begin.

Malkhut to Yesod - Magician

Archimedes decided he could move the world with a lever if only he could find a fulcrum. His problem was that the fulcrum was outside the world ... so where was it?

The problem with unexamined ideas is finding a perspective from where one can examine them. Habits and routines need to be replaced with something else. The problem facing the Foolish Man is peculiarly hard because he lacks even the knowledge that would help him begin. The best he can do is put together a collection of

bits and pieces which he believes (or is assured) will be efficacious. The card shows him standing proudly before a table covered with recent acquisitions, totems of efficacy.

He hasn't a clue what to do with them of course.

It is natural for many people to think of the magician as figure of power, control, authority. These are precisely the words used in Hi-Fi magazines to sell speakers to men. This is the vocabulary of the beta male looking to establish himself as an alpha. The things on the magician's table are boy-toys, power totems. The joke is that the Magician has changed nothing within himself, and can only posture with his fine collection of artifacts. Look at the exact analogue of this card, The World. The figure is female, the totems on the table have become the four elemental powers, and the woman dances in harmony with them. The contrast between external totems and internalised competence could not be greater.

The original title of this card was *Le Bateleur*, a mountebank figure, a fairground trickster, a sleight-of-hand artist. This is not a card of power, control and authority; it is a card of superficial illusions. The Foolish Man has progressed in understanding that there are things he can use to improve his position, but they are still external, and he lacks the understanding to do anything other than posture with them.

Yesod - High Priestess

At some point the (aspiring) magician will tire of toys and tricks and look for a genuine tradition capable of real teaching. Whether he will find a suitable tradition depends on luck and judgement - there are hundreds of groups and organisations offering inner knowledge, healing, self-actualisation, and spiritual truths.

The High Priestess is the outward face of occult knowledge - mysterious, glamorous, forbidding, hieratic. She sits between the two pillars of the Temple, and behind her is the veil of the Temple concealing the Holy of Holies¹. In another reading, the veil is the veil of Isis, the

1. The "Holy of Holies" is also a kabbalistic metaphor for the female sexual organs, an association that is clear both in the card and in the traditional correspondences for Yesod.

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division between phenomenal and noumenal reality, between the exoteric and the esoteric.

The High Priestess represents the first, outer initiation into a group or organisation. The Foolish man or woman now enters into some kind of learning or training.

Yesod to Hod - Empress

The Empress represents fertility and growth. The Foolish Man pulls back the veil to the unknown and is confronted with a new world that awaits discovery.

He goes to lectures, attends group meetings, sits at the feet of his guru, purchases books from specialist occult suppliers, learns a new vocabulary, visits power sites, chants, meditates, practices arcane concentration exercises, masters the footwork, goes on a vision quest, dances his animal, and meets many interesting people who give the impression of knowing a lot more than they are prepared to tell.

Hod - Emperor

The Foolish Man is now a Very Knowledgeable Man. He has acquired the vocabulary.

The Emperor card does not represent real empire. The Very Knowledgeable Man has no empire - he has a vocabulary and a superficial understanding of various concepts, but looking back at himself as the Foolish Man he feels superior to his old self, and he feels superior to all the other Foolish Men and Women who have not passed through the veil.

Inwardly he feels that the world would benefit from his newly acquired spiritual consciousness, and is already reappraising the world, thinking "I would do this" and "they should do that". He feels like Solomon, feels that the world should come before his throne seeking advice and opinions, but does not recognise the superficiality of his new knowledge - that it is "head learning", and ungrounded in deep experience.

Hod to Malkhut - Hierophant

The Emperor and Hierophant are two sides of the same coin. As the Emperor, the Foolish Man has mastered the vocabulary (and perhaps the entire literary corpus) of a new discipline. He is Solomon within the empire of his own head, and at some point he will want let the world

know what he has learned.

At this point he will turn into the Hierophant, preaching the gospel to all the other Foolish Men and Women down there in Malkhut. Perhaps he will write a book, or give public lectures, or appear on a TV chat show.

If he has enough charisma he may appear utterly convincing, completely in command of all the relevant concepts, able to cite chapter and verse where necessary.

Hod to Netzach - Lovers

The Foolish Man has now acquired a body of new knowledge, but this knowledge is one-sided. It is so one-sided, it would be better to call it information - the Foolish Man is informed, but not truly knowledgeable.

Being informed is useful when competing in quiz shows, or writing entries for an encyclopedia. It may be the foundation of a career in academia. There is an experiential dimension that is missing, like the schoolchild who can recite all the yearbook facts about Argentina but has never visited the country.

In Hebrew most nouns are derived from verb roots. When, in the book of *Genesis*, it states that "Adam knew his wife Eve", the word used for "knew" is *yada* (Yod, Dalet, Ayin), the verb root for knowledge, *Daat*. There is an ambiguity here between sexual intercourse and the more abstract idea of knowledge. This is revealing and fruitful ambiguity.

The path between Netzach and Hod is a reflection on a lower plane of the path between Chokhmah and Binah (see the Extended Tree). The interaction between Chokhmah and Binah is most commonly represented in traditional Kabbalah as the sexual interaction between a man and a woman, between Abba the Father and Aima the Mother, the primordial lovers. The emanation of the union of Chokhmah and Binah is *Daat*, Knowledge, so the Biblical ambiguity in the story of Adam and Eve is preserved in the upper face of the Tree of Life.

This is the secret of the Lovers card. The lovers are Adam and Eve, who have just eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and have been initiated into the joy and misery of physical existence. Their coupling, their "knowing" of each other, perpetuates physical existence.

The knowledge represented by *Daat* is not information; it is the dynamic, operational

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knowledge embodied in the experience of physical existence, and is something infinitely richer than mere information. It is the difference between a book on baby care, and a baby. Information is dead; *Daat* is *living knowledge*. One should recall that *Daat* is an upper plane reflection of Yesod, the sphere of *Shaddai el Chai*, the Living God.

The Lovers card is in many respects foundational for an understanding of the Tree of Life, as it represents the dynamics of separation, unification, polarity, and manifestation. The dynamics are those of a boat moving through water, where the boat is Chokhmah, the water is Binah, and the turbulent, swirling wake that remains is Daat. The experience of this path is one of the foundational initiatory experiences.

Human beings are, to a greater or lesser extent, selfish and self-centered. The Foolish Man, in the guise of Emperor and Hierophant, may have become an information adept in some domain, but this knowledge is detached from the infinite swirling complexities of real life, where nothing is ever clear, precise or exact. The Foolish Man tries to make the world conform to what he has learned, and does not realise that he has become Procrustes, who invited travellers to sleep in his bed. If they were too short he stretched them, and if they were too long he trimmed their legs to fit.

A major source of dissonance is other people, who may not give two figs for the Foolish Man and his wonderful, intricately consistent knowledge of existence. It may work for him, but not for them. They see him trying to foist a load of nonsense on them, and tell him to go away.

There are many variations on this, but the essence of the situation is emotional conflict. Other people, in their near infinite variety, place the Foolish Man in a position of conflict, and he begins to recognise the limitations of the one-size-fits-all approach to knowledge. He is confronted with his emotional responses to other people, and their emotional responses to him, and perhaps for the first time he begins to realise the necessity to add other people to his worldview - not just intellectually, but acknowledging that the difference between him and them is an important and essential part of the equation.

To an extent the Emperor is unthroned - he now acknowledges, at a deep level, the existence and autonomy of others, and his invincible

sense of a universal order as understood by himself is upset by the realisation this experience is largely subjective and personal¹.

Netzach - Chariot

The Greek philosopher Plato wrote a dialogue, *Phaedrus*, where he likened the human soul to a chariot drawn by two winged horses. One horse is noble, and drawn to the spiritual realms of reason, truth and beauty, while the other horse is ignoble and drawn towards sensuality and base appetites.

Many modern Tarot packs have based their depiction of the chariot upon this allegory. In the Colman-Smith/Waite pack the horses are two sedate-looking sphinxes coloured white and black to make the association with "good" and "evil" impulses more apparent. Even the much older Marseilles pack has dozy horses of differing colour, so the association with Plato's allegory may not be modern.

The Foolish Man has now reached a point where he has begun to understand a fundamental truth of human nature - that feelings tell us what to think. There is no solution to any problem involving people that does not make allowance for the mutable character of human feelings and passions. Purely rational utopias are undone.

This was the great initiation of the Lovers path, and it is reinforced here as he tries to bring the horses under control. He may retain rational and utopian ideals, but he is conscious of the near irresistible forces which condemn him (and other people) to repeat the same old mistakes - smoking, dieting, relationships, greed and so on.

The horses are not reined. He is all dressed up, but the chariot shows no signs of moving very far.

Netzach to Malkhut - Justice

The Foolish Man may be having difficulty in balancing his own nature, but his awareness of imbalance makes it easy for him to spot imbalance in others. He is struggling to bring his horses to rein, so other people ought to be doing

1. This experience has been characterised in postmodern social theory as a "loss of narrative".

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the same thing.

This period is one of intensely judgemental feelings. The Foolish Man has come some way on the path, and can bring considerable experience to bear on the problems of other Foolish Men and Women who are still down there in Malkhut. He compares their blind fumbblings with his own conscious strivings, and sees how clearly they would benefit from his experience. The situation is similar to that of the Hierophant (in a symmetric position) - he looks down into Malkhut, but whereas the Hierophant was content to hold out the promise of hidden knowledge, the Foolish Man now feels fully equipped to judge, to preside over situations like Solomon in his wisdom.

The problem at this point is that the Foolish Man is under the influence of the illusion of Netzach, which is projection. He believes he is seeing and judging objectively, but he is not. On the subject of projection the psychologist C.G. Jung comments:

“While some traits peculiar to the shadow can be recognised without too much difficulty as one’s own personal qualities, in this case (projection) both insight and goodwill are unavailing because the cause of the emotion appears to lie, beyond all possibility of doubt, in the other person.”

He also adds:

“As we know, it is not the conscious subject but the unconscious which does the projecting. Hence one meets with projections, one does not make them. The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one. Projections change the world into a replica of one’s own unknown face”.

Netzach to Yesod - Hermit

At some point the Foolish Man will estrange many of his acquaintances through judgemental behaviour. When he began he was dazzled by the glamour of the High Priestess, but now he realises the people around him are not the fountains of occult wisdom he thought they were. They are just people, with the moral confusion, emotional ambiguity, and personal shortcomings of people everywhere. What he thought was attainment looks suspiciously like ego.

At this point he finds himself alone. This is often an intensely traumatic period of time. He may have invested years in a philosophy, school, tradition, or group, and now it is all over. The dreams remain - the Hermit still carries the light - but they are seen to be unattainable with a particular group of people.

It is a time for recovery, for reassessment, for prioritising, for “chewing the cud”. Often it is a time for recrimination, for continued judgements. There may be a feeling of being deeply burned and scarred. If the Foolish Man can escape the tendency to blame others for everything that has happened then he may be able to take the Death path to Tipheret. It is just as likely that after a time alone he picks up the pieces and starts once more in Yesod.

Yesod to Tipheret - Wheel of Fortune

The Wheel is allocated to the path from Yesod to Tipheret, but shares Yesod with the High Priestess - it is, in a sense, “upper Yesod”.

Buddhists use the Wheel of Samsara to symbolise the recurrence of situations through many, many lifetimes: births, deaths, weeping, pain, suffering, loss. In the tale of the Foolish Man the Wheel symbolises the recurrence of similar situations throughout a lifetime. The situations recur because the foolish man is unaware how his personality shapes his relationship with his environment (which includes other people) and so must construct explanations for the things that happen that portray him as an innocent victim of circumstance.

An example is an alcoholic who finds himself in recurring situations - violence, debt, illness - because of his drinking, but who does not or cannot change his behaviour. Something similar can happen with jealousy, greed, lust, selfishness, dishonesty and so on, but the more subtle the vice, the less willing the Foolish Man is to admit to it, and so he is condemned to suffer its consequences.

It is not the vice that is the issue. It is the unwillingness to take responsibility for the situations it causes. People use three primary mechanisms to evade responsibility: rationalisation (Hod), identification (Tipheret) and justification (Netzach) to evade responsibility.

Rationalisation is the process of providing seemingly rational explanations for behaviour

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which is anything but rational. A person who is late for work because they slept in after a night on the tiles is hardly likely to admit it- they may explain the battery on the car had gone flat, or there was traffic congestion. This is more of an untruth than a true rationalisation.

The mark of rationalisation is that the explanations usually convince no-one other than the person doing the rationalising. Intractable habits often come with long and complex rationalisations, and the person with the rational excuses may become self-righteous and indignant when they are challenged.

Justification tends to work by comparison - behaviour is justified by another person's behaviour. A good example is the elder child who has hit a younger sibling - "but he hit me first" is the usual cry.

Identification is the most insidious. The person justifies his or her behaviour on the basis of belonging to a particular group or type. A man might respond aggressively to a problem because he identifies so strongly with a stereotype maleness that he cannot conceive of an alternative.

In each case behaviour is seen as *necessary*. *There is no alternative*. This the foundation of ego conscious, an identification with behaviour. A change of behaviour is equated to a *loss of identity* and hence is fiercely resisted.

When core behaviour remains unchanged in the face of so-called "spiritual development", negative situations will continue to recur, and each time they do, a similar pattern of blame will occur, usually through rationalisation or justification.

This is the Wheel. The Foolish Man spends time alone in the wilderness, meets another glamorous High Priestess, becomes the Emperor once more, full of new ideas, traverses the Lovers path, fights to gain control of his Chariot, spends more time as the Hermit in the wilderness, and is dumped back into Yesod again.

Some people go round and round this circuit for years. These are the eternal aspirants, the "joiners", people who join groups, go through the full rinse and spin cycle, then fall out in acrimony. There is always something wrong with every system.

The Wheel is not entirely a static situation. Each time round brings some wisdom, some insight.

What is important is that a person begins to recognise that he or she is an accident, a fortuitous collection of behaviours, opinions, excuses, prejudices and knee-jerk responses which are not *necessary* in any sense. If a person clings to this random collection of psychic flotsam and jetsam he could continue to go around on the wheel for a lifetime, always seeking a spiritual growth that never happens. It often takes a strong shock to bring about a major change to a person, a shock that acts as a catalyst for psychic change and growth. Losing one's job, a death, the end of a relationship, a furious row, ill-health - these are the catalysts that can cause the Foolish Man to stop seeing his ego comforts as *necessary*.

Tipheret - Strength

Tipheret to Hod - Hanged Man

Tipheret to Netzach - Death

Tipheret and the paths to Tipheret are discussed together because it is difficult to discuss the place without discussing the process. To an extent, Tipheret *is* process.

In the section on Tipheret I explained that Tipheret is difficult to describe because it is like an empty room. It is precisely because there is nothing in it that Tipheret differs from other sephiroth.

Yesod has something in it - that is why it is a foundation, that is what gives it its strength. Where would we be without some instincts, drives, motivations to get us through the day? Whether our drives are right or wrong is to some extent irrelevant - at least we *do something*. The ego may be a random, historical collection of behaviours, but that is better than *no behaviour*.

The strength of Tipheret is utterly different from that of Yesod, which is based on fixed behaviours viewed as necessary behaviours. There are no fixed points in Tipheret; behaviours are mutable and situational, and while the ego can ape this attitude, it is betrayed by its lack of fluidity in real predicaments. The strength of Tipheret is appropriateness - behaviours are fluidly matched to situations, and not the other way around (which is effectively what happens when rationalisation reconstructs events and rewrites history to satisfy the ego).

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The paths to Tipheret are major upsets. It usually takes a significant shock to knock the ego off the rails for long enough for the Foolish Man to see alternatives.

The path from Hod is the Hanged Man. Fixed ideas are turned on their heads. Grand intellectual schemes turn to dust and ashes. What appear to be irrefutable, universal truths suddenly lack substance, and their inverse propositions seem just as valid. Rationality is betrayed.

The path from Netzach is Death. There is an end to deep emotional attachments. The classic divorce scenario, where a man loses his partner, children, home and even car is an example. Leaving an occult group can be almost as traumatic, as is the failure of a teacher-pupil relationship.

Neither the Hanged Man or Death paths are enough in themselves to sustain the massive re-evaluation of values needed to leave ego behind. It can take years of introspection and a willingness to brave many novel emotional and intellectual circumstances before the strength of Tipheret appears. These are triggers only. The apparently indestructible vessel of the ego hits an iceberg of circumstance and begins to founder. Unlike the *Titanic*, its sinking is not a mathematical certainty, and the crew will perform impossible feats of valour to keep her afloat, creating vast rafts of rationalisation, justification and identification to buoy her up.

Tipheret to Gevurah - Temperance

Tipheret is process, not place or state. The Foolish Man learns to treat each novel situation as an opportunity to remake himself. He no longer has a fixed sense of identity, he no longer identifies with his gender, his social group, his social roles, his nationality, his age, or any convention that tells him what he ought to be. His identity is defined by moral purpose. He decides what he believes to be the best possible outcome for all concerned in each new situation he finds himself in, and adapts himself to achieve that outcome.

This is a difficult path. There are few guidelines, and each situation is handled as it comes. The Foolish Man uses all that he has learned so far to deal with real life. When anger is needed he is angry. When compassion is needed, he is compassionate. When reason is required, he is reasonable. When tears are the only response,

he cries. When endurance is appropriate, he endures.

He can no longer salve his wounds with rationalisation or justification. He is exposed to his faults and failures. There is no retreat from his inadequacies. All he can do is review himself constantly, asking constantly "what is better". There is no best, but there is always something different, something that might be better. He constantly re-invents himself in the light of changing situations.

The Temperance card shows an angel pouring a liquid from one container to another. The Foolish Man is now fluid, lacking any defined sense of what or who he is. He adapts himself to each new situation, and as circumstances change, he moulds himself, keeping what he likes, rejecting anything that serves no purpose.

This fluidity, this constant re-invention, will seem threatening to people who understand that he is capable of attempting anything he chooses to. The only restraint is his innate moral sense of right and wrong, the sense that other people matter, what Kant characterised in his categorical imperative as treating people as ends, not as means. There are risks however ...

Gevurah - Devil

The Foolish Man has abandoned ego games and ego trips, abandoned petty politics and scheming, abandoned intrigue and emotional games. All of this now seems like social theatre, and the vanities of his personality are like flimsy stage sets, an illusion of substance that no longer has the power to convince.

His motivations have changed. He works quietly and steadily on his projects, and does whatever it takes to ensure their success. He will make the tea and coffee while others reap the glory if that is what it takes.

He may not notice that people have begun to look up to him in a way he has never experienced before. He is so unconcerned with vanity that he cannot see that people have begun to look to him for advice, for help, for praise.

Some people can spend their whole lives manoeuvring for power, but what they achieve may be tawdry. They may be mocked, even despised behind their backs.

We know that behind the figureheads of any organisation are people who are the real hearts, who are admired because they are good at what

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they do. These are people who excite a genuine, unqualified, and often universal admiration because of their skill, commitment, dedication to the task, and essential humility. Sometimes people like this lack the charisma and the knack for political intrigue, and take the rear seat by choice. The Foolish Man finds himself in a different position.

The Foolish Man senses his awakening power, and accepts power as a new challenge. He never sought this power - it sought him, a truly novel situation. He finds that if he chooses to lead, people will follow him.

This is an important moment on the path. At the beginning of his path the Foolish Man dressed in his robes and played at being the magician. He had no genuine power - it was a conceit. During his time on the Wheel he may have intrigued and found a transitory sense of importance, but there was little lasting satisfaction in it - the power that people grant can easily be taken away. There is always a deep insecurity. Now he is in a completely novel situation, because the power that comes from inner composure can never be removed, except perhaps in illness and death.

This marks the point at which solitary personal development ends. The Foolish Man does not exist in isolation, and understands now that too much introspection is a kind of cowardice, that one can only grow so far in isolation from the world. He understands that his personal spiritual growth is linked to his ability to thrive in larger situations, not only accepting power and responsibility, but using power in pursuit of his goals.

The idea of the solitary mage is more of a schizoid fantasy than a reality. A person is free to act in isolation only to the extent to which he is ineffectual or harmless. The real power in this world exists in extended social groups, and always has - an individual matters only so far as he has a congregation who will support his views.

The Foolish Man now comes into his full inheritance of free-will, and its attendant problem: what to do with it? In the past his psyche, its needs, and its goals, were an accident of history and circumstance, but now he can no longer hide behind the shield of "necessity". He is aware that his decisions are made in full consciousness, that other people look to him for guidance, and he takes full responsibility for

outcomes. This is a heady brew to drink. He is, in a very general sense, satanic. He has free-will, and he is unencumbered by moral baggage. He is potentially a great power for good, or a terrible power for evil. He is free to choose.

In traditional Kabbalah the sephira Gevurah is the root of the powers of the "left side", and the seat of the "evil inclination". Its angel is often given as Samael, sometimes interpreted as "poison of god". If God is One, then the root of evil is duality, the separation of that which should be united.

It hard for us, living in a world of duality, to know what is good and what is evil, or to act without doing as much evil as good. The Foolish Man finds himself mired in uncertainty and ambiguity - he thought he was acting for God, but finds himself unwittingly chained to the devil.

Gevurah to Hod - Blasted Tower

The Foolish Man has chosen to play in high-stakes card games. He finds that he is no longer a master of his own destiny ... he gave that up when he stopped contemplating his navel, threw his chips down on the table, and picked up a hand of cards. The other players in the game are just as smart as he is.

Many people who look for occult training have no experience of the big games being played in this world, games which can determine the quality of life for millions of people. It is easy to ignore Palestine or biotechnology or abortion or global warming or computer networking or disease or million other issues because they are not "spiritual". Aren't they? If the entire universe is a manifestation of God, then in what way is human misery not a spiritual issue?

The Foolish Man finds that the problems of existence are not being solved by angels or spiritual masters: they are being solved by himself and a host of other people, and not everyone has risen above selfishness. It is a high-stakes game, and bad things can happen.

The Foolish Man may come unstuck. It happens. All rock climbers accept that they are going to fall off the rock. All aeroplane pilots accept that they may crash. Motorcyclists fall off their bikes. We see politicians fall from grace with monotonous regularity. Politicians cannot all be venal; we must accept that many begin

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with the best intentions, but are tempted in various ways, and make mistakes.

The Blasted Tower is a terrible experience that can throw the Foolish Man back onto the Wheel. If he has retained his integrity he may climb back swiftly, but if he has been corrupted by the experience of power, and many are, he may not recover.

Gevurah to Chesed - Star

A common metaphor in traditional Kabbalah is that of the river which waters the whole of creation. It flows from a spring in Chokhmah and brings life to all the spheres.

The Star card echoes this idea. In its original form it may have portrayed the yearly Nile flood, associated with the goddess Isis and the rising of the star Sothis (Sirius, the Dog Star). The yearly flood brought water and fertile silt and enabled Egypt to become one of the great cradles of civilisation.

The card emphasises the inter-relatedness of life, that no thing lives in isolation. We are all dependent on external sources of sustenance. We may not be able to draw precise lines of good and evil, but we do know that all life needs life, and no universal philosophy based on predation or destruction can possibly succeed in the long term.

The Foolish Man emerges from the struggles of Gevurah and finds reassurance in this insight. For a time he despaired of finding any moral foundation for action. He began to question the value of doing anything. Now he returns to drink from the waters of life, and replenish his soul.

The Foolish Man becomes aware of a larger picture. When his perceptions were dominated by dualities, by a profound sense of right and wrong, he was effective, but he was always exposed to rational doubt. The things he fought for and the things he opposed were like lines drawn on the surface of water.

In the larger picture there is only life, and the need to preserve as much of its balance and diversity as possible. He begins to see both sides of every issue, but is no longer paralysed by questions of "either this or that". He sees that truth is also process, an evolutionary dynamic that never stands still in any one place.

The Foolish Man is now approaching a place reached by few people. His consciousness is no

longer dominated by hard boundaries, by divisions between things, by a clear sense of identity, by strong feelings of right and wrong. Neither is it moved by fixed sentiment, nor swayed by transient emotion. His goals remain clear, but his methods become inscrutable.

Chesed - Moon

If the Foolish Man reaches Chesed (and he may not) it will be because he is able to articulate something that transcends himself. He finds a medium in which to express himself, and in doing so he captures something that can be shared by many. He becomes a conduit.

He could be a writer, a demagogue, an artist, a dancer, a poet, a businessman, a scientist, or a guru. What matters is that for a time he is able to grasp and articulate something unique. He opens his mind to the unknown, and gives birth to something new.

The Moon card is downright spooky. It shows two dogs howling at a huge moon raining drops of liquid which have been interpreted as blood. In the distance are two pylons forming a gateway with a clear road marked. In the foreground in a pool with a lobster-like creature emerging.

In this interpretation the gateway is Daat, and the moon belongs both to Daat and the overlapping Yesod of Briah. The Foolish Man has traversed a path which has led from the limited world of his Ego to the greater world of his Self. He has gone beyond himself and taken part in human society. Now he finds the path goes beyond the place where humanity currently is. He finds himself on the edge of the abyss, staring into the congealing futures of the human race and all living things. The possibilities for tomorrow unroll before him. This is a genuinely scary place to be.

There are individuals who propel themselves to the boundaries of human thought and expression. In many cases this happens through circumstance rather than intent, and the lives of deeply creative people are often blighted with abusive relationships, loss, alienation, mental illness and drugs. By exploring beyond the currency of thought and expression, these individuals are a driving force in the evolution of humanity - the novelty that they express becomes the commonplaces of the next generation.

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The Foolish Man is in the rare position of driving himself to the edge of the abyss by intent. He has chosen to be there. Whether he hooks any large fish from the deeps depends on his talent and nerve.

Chesed to Netzach - Sun

The world is full of celebrities who had their day of glory and who have been trying to milk the moment for decades. Sustained creativity is unusual, but one-hit wonders are not.

Creativity is a bird that roosts where it will, and at the smallest disturbance it flies off and preens its feathers on another branch. This is hard for the Foolish Man; one moment he is being hailed for his unique contribution to human existence - he is in the papers, he is on the lecture circuit, he appears on talk shows - and then he finds himself on the slow slide into obscurity.

The Sun card recalls the minor movie or theatre celebrity who keeps his press clippings, his billboards, his autographed pictures, and all the tangible proofs that he was "big in his day". He lives in a declining circle of admirers who remember. For decades he basks in the warm glow of his salad days.

If the Foolish Man tries to milk the creative moment he falls off the path and begins a long, slow descent back onto the Wheel and the warm sentimental glow of Netzach. It can be a terrible journey - one should recall how Margaret Thatcher fell from being the dominant force in British politics into complete irrelevancy within a couple of years.

Chesed to Tipheret - Last Judgement

Business leaders at the top level of business rarely stick around in one position for more than four or five years. It is acknowledged that even the most creative leaders can make only a limited contribution for a limited time, and then it is time to hand on the torch and let someone else have a turn. Many of our most important institutions (such as government) acknowledge that particular people are right for a particular moment, and leaving the reins of power in the hands of people who have gone past their creative best is asking for stagnation, complacency, and abuse of power - the vices of Chesed are tyranny, gluttony, hypocrisy and bigotry.

The Foolish Man has to know the right time to stand down. If he does not, he goes down the Sun path - there is a brutal inevitability at this level. He has to clear his desk, pack his bag, say goodbye to chauffeur and the courtesy car, shake hands with the administrative staff, and join the undistinguished masses once more.

This path is like the Hermit path below it, but many times more traumatic. Compared with the public life he has lead, it really is a little death, a sepulchre.

When the Foolish Man steps down he subjects himself to a stringent self-assessment. He has to: Gevurah and Chesed are unbalanced extremes and he will have done many things which, on reflection, he wishes he had not. This is the Last Judgement - a balancing up as the centre of gravity of his life returns to Tipheret.

Tipheret to Daat - World

The Foolish Man may go around the Tipheret - Gevurah - Chesed - Tipheret loop many times. This is a higher order analogue of the lower Yesod - Hod - Netzach - Yesod cycle which I characterised as "being on the Wheel". He may have many opportunities to experience the Blasted Tower or Wheel paths.

If he is fortunate he will experience, just as he did on the Wheel, a new possibility of consciousness. This is what Kabbalists call *neshamah*, the divine part of a human being, the part that according to tradition, survives death.

The path from Tipheret through Daat to Keter on the Yetziratic tree corresponds to the path from Malkhut to Yesod on the Briatic tree. The Foolish Man is revealed once again as ... the Foolish Man, setting out to ascend the Tree of Life. At one level he has achieved everything, but at another level he has achieved nothing. This is characteristic of major changes of consciousness - all the insights and achievements one has struggled for are revealed as pointless or worthless or deluded or an artifact of blindness - "I once was blind but now can see" as the song goes.

This path is the higher-level analogue of the Magician path, but observe the differences. The Magician is a static male figure, his props are laid out on a table in front of him, and although he waves a wand, it appears to be more for show than anything else.

The World card is a dancing female figure.

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She dances within the realm of the four elements, denoted by the bull-lion-eagle-man figures at each corner.

Real knowledge cannot be laid out on a table. It is operational within the wholeness of the human psyche, and the dancing figure shows how completely the lessons of the paths have been absorbed and internalised to the point where the challenges of existence have become a flowing dance.

Symmetries

This method of presenting the Tarot on the Tree has a surprising narrative coherence, and it is a narrative that seems to accord well with personal experience. This is as much as one can expect from any narrative: that it tells a memorable story, possesses internal coherence and provides a measure of subjective usefulness.

The idea that this scheme “fits well” onto the Tree evokes some resistance in me, because I do not think any scheme is intrinsically better than any other, for reasons given above. However ... I *do* think this scheme fits well on the Tree, and I am not the first to have made this observation - Dr. Alan Bain, in *The Keys to Kabbalah*, speculates that the Colman-Smith/Waite pack may have been designed with this scheme in mind, and finds internal evidence in the design of the cards to support this idea

When the Tree is examined from Malkhut, the Foolish Man sees the Hierophant on the left, the High Priestess in front of him, and Justice to the right of him. Each of these figures is seated between two pillars and suggests that no approach is possible without passing through the pillars of the temple (a duality reflected in the Tree itself).

In the Magician card (Malkhut to Yesod) the tokens of the four elements are present on the table in front of the Magician. In the Wheel card (Yesod to Tipheret) they are now represented as figures surrounding the wheel, suggesting that the Foolish Man has now become aware of these forces in his environment, but is still subject to their uncertainties. In the World card (Tipheret - Daat - Keter) contains the four elements as in the Wheel, but the dancing figure suggests a harmonious and balanced relationship.

Bain also notes that the Lovers card (Hod - Netzach) shows the sun of Tipheret over the two figures, and the Star (Gevurah - Chesed)

likewise shows the star of Keter (variously, Daat, as several modern writers have identified Daat with the star Sirius).

Another significant oddity is that the placement of the cards reflects the original Tarot numbering when Justice was 8 and Strength was 11 - that is, the pre-Golden Dawn numbering. The Golden Dawn numbering looks completely odd in this scheme, as interchanging Strength with Justice does considerable damage to the picture.

The cards do not cover every path, and this must seem to be an objection, but observe which paths are not covered. This scheme operates up to the abyss, just where one would expect the narrative to end. When one crosses the abyss one begins again as the Foolish Man in a new world and on a new Tree. There is a natural correspondence between this scheme for Tarot, and the Extended Tree arrangement of the Four Worlds - they seem to be made for each other.

Conclusion

The use of Tarot in Kabbalah is a relatively modern innovation that can be traced to the 18th. century French occult revival. It is not present in the Jewish tradition. Given that one understands that one is not dealing with ancient knowledge, and that there are many variant schemes, the Tarot is a useful addition to Kabbalah, and many people find it so. Much of the reason for this lies in the vivid imagery of the cards - they are rich in symbols, and capable of generating many kinds of useful and memorable narrative.

The debate over the “correct” attribution is something of an artifact of a peculiar Victorian mentality, and should be ignored - we are all postmodern now, and revel in multiple interpretations.

The Four Worlds

The sephirothic Tree of Life presents a metaphor where creation takes place in ten steps and there is the suggestion that ten potencies (or emanations, or vessels, or garments, or crowns) are involved. There is an alternative picture where the creation takes place in four steps; this model is called “the Four Worlds”. The four worlds can be mapped onto the Kabbalistic Tree, and the two models have become complementary.

The four worlds are:

- Atzilut - the world of emanation or nearness
- Briah - the world of creation
- Yetzirah - the world of formation
- Assiah - the world of making

The names of three of the four worlds can be found in *Isaiah* 43.7 where the Lord (speaking through the mouth of the prophet) states:

“...for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

It is interesting to compare the Kabbalistic four worlds with the Neoplatonic scheme of Plotinus [31], where we find a similar four-fold division into the One, the Divine Mind, the All-Soul and the Sensible World. A comparison can also be made with the “celestial hierarchies” of the gnostic Pseudo-Dionysus, where we find a super-celestial world of the Nous, the Real; a celestial (and potentially hostile) world of the demiurge, guardians and Archons; and the sub-lunary world of the elements.

The Kabbalistic model of four worlds shares with both of these alternative and older views an attempt to bridge the gap between the perfection of a transcendent Godhead, and the finiteness and imperfection of the material world - it would seem inevitable for metaphysical speculation to attempt to bridge the gap between the two extremes. How can God be perfect when the world is so patently flawed? A

solution to the problem of irreconcilable extremes is to postulate a continuum, to make each extreme an end to the same piece of string. The four worlds represent an attempt to bridge the gap, but in doing so they represent something more complex than a simple continuum connecting two extremes.

Atzilut - Emanation

Atzilut is the world of pure emanation, the outflowing light of God which we see refracted through the glass of consciousness as the ten lights of the sephiroth. “To emanate” is to “flow out from”, and Atzilut is the world which flows directly out of the infinite and unknowable En Soph. The word *Atzilut* can be derived from the root *eziel*, meaning “near by”, emphasising the closeness of this world to the hidden, unmanifest En Soph. Another term used to describe the nature of the emanation is *hamshakhah*, “drawing out”, with the suggestion that the emanation is only a part of something greater, just as we draw water from a well.

The sephiroth, viewed as an expression of the Holy Names of God, are normally attributed to Atziluth and this is an indication that early Kabbalists viewed the pure energies of the sephiroth as being exceedingly remote, and inaccessible to normal consciousness. The world of Atzilut is remote from the world where it is possible to form representations of the sephiroth (Yetzirah), and this tells us that the pictures of the sephirothic Tree normally employed for communication and instruction are representations of something unimaginable and incommunicable: we must constantly remember that the map is not the territory.

Intellectually we know that sunlight is composed of a spectrum of colours, and even young children can draw a picture of a rainbow, but we do not see the colours in sunlight directly. We do not see the colours until the light is refracted in a shower of rain and it is worth bearing this in mind when considering the

importance (or otherwise) of the sephirothic correspondences.

Atzilut is the world of closeness or nearness to God, the world where one is bathed in the undifferentiated light. In the terminology of the Merkabah mystics, it is the world of the Throne. There is very little that one can usefully say about it.

Briah - Creation

Briah is the world of creation, creation in the sense of “something out of nothing”. The author of the Bahir makes the amusing observation that as light is an attribute of God, light did not have to be created, but was formed, “something out of something”; darkness, on the other hand, was not a part of God and had to be created. This ties in with the Kabbalistic notion of contraction, or tzimtzum, the idea that for the creation to proceed there had to be a space where God was not. If one also supposes that the ultimate nature of God is good, then one must also conclude that evil was created, that the goodness, light and peace of God were deliberately withheld in some measure to create the universe, and this reflects the separation of Keter into Chokhmah and Binah, the right and left sides of the manifest God.

This is a key kabbalistic idea: the negative qualities of existence, the rigour and severity of God as depicted by the lefthand Pillar of the Tree of Life, are not the result of a malevolent third party - a diabolical anti-God fouling-up the works, a spiteful Satan wandering around the creation looking for trouble. They are the very essence of the creative act.

The suggestion that the fundamental creative act was the creation of evil¹ is not (for obvious reasons) given much prominence in Kabbalistic literature, but hints to this effect can be found everywhere. The Bahir uses the metaphor of gold and silver to make the point that the essence of the creative act was “holding back”. That which was held back was so much greater than that which was given. The mercy of God in the creation is only a small part of God’s mercy, and so corresponds to silver, because the more valuable part was held back by the judgement or severity of God

The essence of the creative act was the with-

1. Gnostics explicitly demonise the creator god for this reason.

holding of God, and nowhere have I found a suggestion that an entity other than God was involved - there is no demiurge in Kabbalah. The essence of the creative act was separation. One becomes two, Keter becomes Chokhmah and Binah, and in this primary duality can be found the root of all dualities.

When I first began thinking about Briah, and I tried to make sense of the word “creation”, I assumed that something tangible was created, and I found I could not differentiate the end result from formation - a rose is a rose whether it is created out of nothing or grown in a garden. Does it matter whether I make a cake miraculously by conjuring it out of nowhere, or whether I make it synthetically by mixing ingredients and baking them in an oven? I presume both cakes will taste the same. Synthetic creation, the creation of “something out of something” is commonplace, but miraculous creation is not, and if Briah is not the world of synthetic creation (which belongs properly in Yetzirah), then what does it represent?

The creation which takes place in Briah is differentiation; that is, Briah predicates the *possibility* of synthetic creation. The creation which takes place in Briah is *not* the creation of anything tangible, but the creation of those necessary (but abstract and definitely intangible) conditions which make synthetic creation possible. It is difficult to find a good example without resorting to abstract forms of theoretical physics which also attempt to answer questions concerning “why is the universe the way it is?”, but the nature of Briah is elusive unless the attempt is made, and so I will make the attempt.

Pottery is a creative activity, the creation of new and completely original forms out of clay and it is clearly synthetic creation - clay is a prerequisite. A potter wants to make a jug to hold water. Note the use of the word “make”; jug making is an activity which takes place in Assiah, the world of making. The potter may incorporate some novelty of design into the jug he or she is about to make, and if this novelty is sufficiently unusual we might consider the design itself to be creative - this is an example of Yetziratic creativity. The design is intangible; it must be expressed in some way (using clay or whatever) but the thing we regard as creative isn’t the tangible jug, because anyone can make a rudimentary jug out of clay, but the design embodied in the jug.

The Four Worlds

Let us now go back through history to a remote time in the past when there were no jugs. Should the creation of the first jug be regarded as truly creative in the Briatic sense, rather than synthetically creative in the Yetziratic sense?

I would say that the creation of the first jug would have been an evolution from past experience; there must have been an experience of “containment” which was almost certainly derived from cupping hands to drink water, or from drinking water held in pools in rocks. The idea for the first pottery jug was almost certainly derived from a prior experience of using a variety of artifacts to contain water, and all of these artifacts would have in common the quality of “containment”. Containment would not be possible without the basic physical properties of the world we live in, such as the existence of individually identifiable objects extended in space with a specific shape. The abstract physical properties themselves would not be possible without...what?

What was it that determined the most abstract properties of the world and made it possible for us to conceive of containment as an abstract property? In the terminology of Kabbalah, this takes place in Briah. The world of creation creates the conditions for form by providing differentiation and identity. This is an abstract concept, and difficult to grasp. Wittgenstein put his finger on the problem when he observed that the solution of the riddle of life in time and space lies outside time and space.

Traditionally, Briah is the world of the archangels. The attributions of archangels to specific sephira vary greatly from one historical period to another, and from writer to writer. The author uses the attributions given in Chapter 3.

Yetzirah - Formation

Yetzirah is the world of formation where complex forms are built synthetically, “something out of something”, what I have previously called synthetic creation. We are not yet in the world of tangible things; to use an analogy I gave when describing the sephira Yesod, we are more in the world of bottle moulds than a world of glass bottles, and more accurately still, in the world where one designs bottle moulds for glass bottles.

Yetzirah is a curious world, because its contents are both intangible and real. Money is an

example of an abstraction that people will kill over. Criminal law is something clearly abstract and synthetic in nature, but not something to meddle with too often. Several times in these notes I have attempted to point out the “real but intangible” nature of mathematical objects, with computer programs being the most important examples. The development of virtual reality systems drives home the point that there is a world of objects which are not real in the sense of being physical, but they are real in another sense: they are real in the sense that they can be differentiated in some way, real in the sense of having specific properties and behaviour. The world of intangible but differentiated objects is the world that Kabbalists call Yetzirah, and it is a world that spans thought, from slippery abstractions like beauty and truth down to something as specific and detailed as an engineering blueprint.

It is difficult to write about Yetzirah because it contains so much, because it contains the whole of human culture; our myths, legends, music, poetry, law, cultural behaviour, literature, sciences, games, and so on. These all fall into the “intangible but real” category - things which have no substance but which constitute our inheritance and define our experience of being human. It is a kind of “mind-space” where all the forms ever conceived can be found, a space where it is possible to interact with form.

One of the most interesting developments in recent times is the realisation that it is becoming possible to bridge the gap between Yetzirah and Assiah using computer technology, and the term “cyberspace” is widely used to describe this idea. Computer programs have become the medium for turning form into something that can be shared. A program which defines a jug in all its respects allows us to share the form of the jug without any potter having to get her hands dirty. It isn't a real jug, and it won't hold real water, but it can hold the form of water, the Yetziratic representation of liquidity, and I could pour Yetziratic “water” out of my Yetziratic “jug”. The fact that we can share the form of an object without having to *make* it (and this is increasingly the way industrial designers work today) means that humans will have the ability to interact in Yetzirah, as magicians have always done, without any form of magical training.

Writing was the first breakthrough in record-

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ing the contents of Yetzirah and it gave the contents an independent (if static) existence. Cyberspace will be an even greater breakthrough in that it will not only record the contents, it will enable us to bring them to life in a limited way. Yetzirah is in the process of "becoming real".

The world of Yetzirah is traditionally the realm of the Angel Orders, but like the Archangels, the attributions to specific sephiroth vary greatly from writer to writer.

Assiah - Making

Assiah is the world of making, the world where forms "become real". The essential quality of the "world of making" that permits us to make things is stability, the fact that the material world has stable properties and behaves in a predictable way. Our sciences are an outcome of this predictability - there would be no science if there were no stable properties.

Our technology is an outcome of our scientific knowledge, and our ability to make increasingly complex artifacts is an outcome of our technology. If I make a chair at lunchtime, then (left to itself) it will still be a chair at dinnertime, and it won't be a towel, a giraffe, or an igloo. An ounce of gold remains an ounce of gold. A pound of lead weighs the same on each successive day of the week. It is this stability and predictability which allows us to have a shared experience of the world. If you place the pound of lead on the chair I made at lunchtime, then I will find the same pound of lead on the same chair at dinnertime, and both of us can behave with some confidence that this will indeed be the case. An unstable world where you leave a pound of lead on a chair, and I find a hedgehog in a goldfish bowl, and this happens in a completely unpredictable way would not, in my opinion, be a world of shared experience - each person would have their own individual and private experience of the world, and we would have a world more resembling Yetzirah than Assiah.

The stability and predictability of Assiah forms the rock on which we have build our material culture of "things" - millions of different types of thing - screws, nails, tools, books, hairbrushes, trouser presses, shoes, pens, paper ... list goes on almost indefinitely. It is interesting to ask whether any life could be sustained in a world with less stability given that we know living organisms have a distressing tendency to

die when their environment changes. It is also interesting to speculate whether life could exist in a more predictable world, and we must consider the possibility that our world is unpredictable in ways we do not appreciate because we have no other experience to compare with.

Perhaps there are more predictable worlds which are too predictable and mechanical for life - I am reminded of the Zoharic myth of the kings of Edom, the kingdoms of "unbalanced force" which contained a preponderance of Din, judgement and were destroyed. If this is so, then it is probable the properties of the Assiah we know and love are necessary in a deep and fundamental way. I have a somewhat mystical perspective that the godhead, the root of existence, had an urge to become conscious of itself, and the cosmogenic descriptions in Kabbalah, of which the "four worlds" model forms a part, are an attempt the show the necessary steps for this to take place, with Assiah being a final and necessary step.

The problems of living in a finite world suffering the attendant ills of the flesh has lead to some prejudice against Assiah, but there is nothing "wrong" with Assiah. What we perceive to be its imperfections are necessary components of its perfection.

Everything is right with Assiah; if there is a flaw in the creation, it is that when "God wished to behold God" and ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge it did not become conscious of its own nature. It was seduced by the beauty of Assiah, overwhelmed by the miracle of its own making, and the Yetziratic consciousness, which should have united the worlds of Assiah and Bria, turned away from Bria and faced Assiah exclusively, creating the Abyss.

The Four Worlds & the Tree

The four worlds can be related to the sephirothic Tree, and there are many ways of doing this. There is general agreement that Atzilut corresponds to Keter, Bria to Chokmah and Binah, Yetzirah to the next six sephiroth, and Assiah to Malkhut. This is too simple however. The four worlds represent four distinct "realms" of consciousness, and there is more in this idea than a simple attribution to sephiroth. Out of the many ways of presenting the four worlds I will present two schemes which I consider to offer more in the way of real, useful substance than other schemes I am familiar

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with. There is no question of “rightness” or “wrongness” - any map, unless it is grossly or maliciously misleading, is bound to contain some useful information. It is a question of how useful the map is, and in my opinion the following attributions of the four worlds to the Tree are outstandingly useful and enrich the basic sephirothic Tree considerably. The first attribution relates the four worlds to a single Tree; the second makes use of four separate Trees and is called “The Extended Tree”.

The first attribution begins with a small amount of simple geometry, and if you have not done this before then it is well worth doing. Draw a vertical line on piece of paper. At the top of the line place the needle of a pair of compasses and draw a circle with a diameter approximately half that of the length of the line.

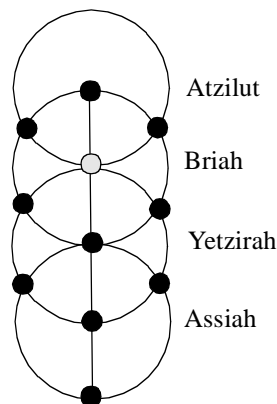


Figure 15: The Tree and the Four World

Without altering the compasses, draw a second circle where the first intersects the line. Repeat this for the second circle, and then for the third. You now have a line and four intersecting circles. Label the centre of the first circle “Keter”, the second “Daat”, the third “Tipheret”, and the fourth “Yesod”. It should be obvious where to place Malkhut, and the rest of the sephiroth can be placed at the intersection points of the four circles.

The four circles represent the four worlds. The first circle, Atzilut, is centred on Keter, reaches up into the Unmanifest, takes in Chokmah and Binah, and reaches down to Daat. It is entirely on the other side of the Abyss. The second circle, Bria, is centred in Daat, reaches up as far as

Keter and down as far as Tipheret, and takes in Chokmah, Binah, Chesed and Gevurah. The third circle, Yetzirah, is centred in Tipheret and reaches from Daat to Yesod, and includes Chesed, Gevurah, Netzach and Hod, the six sephiroth traditionally associated with Zoar Anpin, the Lesser Countenance or Microprosopus. The final circle is centred in Yesod and reaches from Tipheret to Malkhut, taking in the sephiroth Netzach and Hod. This is shown in Fig X.

Note that most sephira can be found in more than one world, and this is an important point: the worlds *overlap*. There is a subtle but real distinction between Hod in Assiah and Hod in Yetzirah. The sephira Tipheret can be experienced in three distinct ways, depending on whether one’s vantage point is that of Assiah, Yetzirah or Bria. These are not intellectual distinctions, and an example would be the ways in which one can experience Tipheret as the King of Assiah, as the Sacrificed God of Yetzirah, or as the Child of Bria (refer to the magical images for Tipheret).

The worlds overlap, but they are distinct, almost like social strata which co-mingle but are nevertheless clearly defined. The upper middle-class nineteenth century household, with its “upstairs” and “downstairs”, is a good example of two completely distinct but co-mingling strata.

There are ways of trying to articulate this, but they obscure as much as they reveal; I was taught that in going from one world to the next there is a “polarity switch”, so that one might regard Assiah as negative, Yetzirah as positive, Bria as negative once more, and Atzilut as positive. This idea can be related to the Tetragrammaton, where the Yod can correspond to Atzilut, He to Bria, Vau to Yetzirah, and He final to Assiah: this points a finger at the deep relationship between Bria and Assiah¹. Just what a “polarity switch” might be I leave to the reader to explore - there is no way I could attempt to describe this.

The second scheme for representing the four worlds is based on the tradition that each of the four worlds contains its own Tree, and these are sometimes shown strung out with the Keter of the world below intersecting the Malkhut of the world above. This is not a very illuminating

1. Yod normally corresponds to Chokmah, He to Binah, Vau to Tipheret and He to Malkhut - this gives another way to attribute the four worlds to the Tree..

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arrangement, and there is an alternative arrangement called “the Extended Tree” which requires some draughtmanship to appreciate.

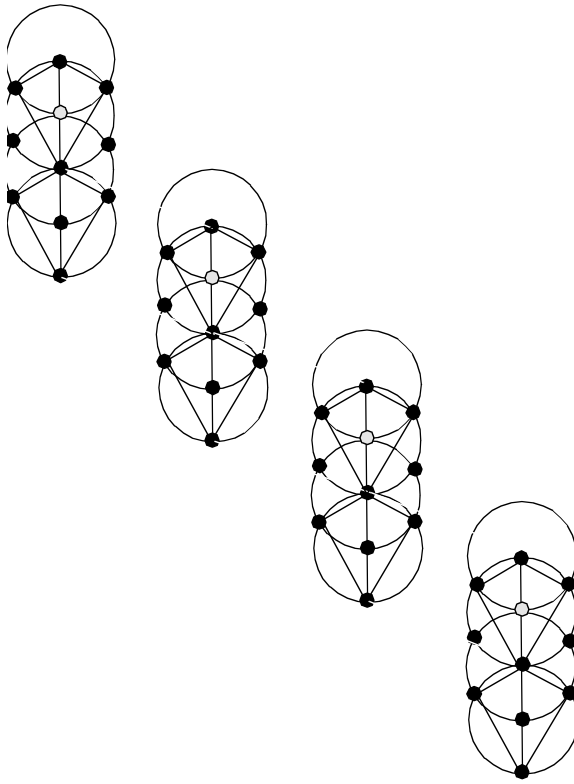


Figure 16: The Extended Tree

Use the “four circles” method for drawing a Tree described earlier, and draw four identical Trees on clear acetate film; an even better method is to draw the Tree once and photocopy it four times onto acetate - any copy bureau should be able to do this. Now observe that the Tree contains two diamond shapes which I will call (incorrectly, as it happens, but it is a useful convention) “the upper face” and “the lower face”. The upper face is bounded by the sephiroth Keter, Chokhmah, Binah and Tipheret; the lower by the sephiroth Tipheret, Netzach, Hod and Malkhut. Now take your four identical transparencies, label them from Atzilut to Assiah, and lay the lower face of Atzilut over the upper face of Briah, the lower face of Briah over the upper face of Yetzirah, and the lower face of Yetzirah over the upper face of Assiah. You should now have a single, large Tree, sometimes called “Jacob’s Ladder” for reasons which should be obvious when you look at it

The Extended Tree makes clear the dynamics of the four worlds, and is probably the most

useful Kabbalistic map you are likely to find. It provides a map of the four worlds, and a method for representing the sephirothic correspondences for each world, and it shows how the worlds overlap and interpenetrate. The representation of the four worlds on a single Tree (given previously) is consistent with the Extended Tree, but the Extended Tree is considerably more useful in that it provides the Kabbalist with a powerful new map - it is like going from a large-scale map of a whole country to a series of detailed, overlapping small-scale maps.

The worlds of overlap are Yetzirah and Briah, and in these worlds the sephira Hod overlaps the sephira Binah, the sephira Netzach overlaps the sephira Chokhmah, and the sephira Yesod overlaps Daat. When one makes the polarity switch from one world to the next, then one sephira becomes another; for example, Binah in Assiah, the “Intelligence” of the body, becomes the Hod of Yetzirah, the capacity for abstraction. The mystery of Daat can be fathomed by flipping to the world above, where it becomes its Yesod. The king who wears the crown (Keter) of Assiah becomes the Sacrificed God of Yetzirah in Tipheret, and is reborn in the Malkhut of Briah as the Child. It is essential to draw the diagram for yourself, study the overlaps, and think about the significance. There is too much material for a series of introductory notes such as these.

The four worlds should not be viewed as an arbitrary four-fold “graduation” of the Tree, with little additional content. There is a great deal of experiential worth in this scheme, and it reflects real and important changes in consciousness which can be observed in practice. This is one of several holistic views of the Tree that concentrates less on the sephiroth and paths, and more on its deep structure.

I must emphasise that the Extended Tree is not another piece of pretty Kabbalah for the armchair Kabbalist to indulge in, and I say this because there is tendency for many who study Kabbalah to become lost in the pretty patterns. The Vision of Splendour is the curse of those who like pretty patterns. To use the Extended Tree effectively it is necessary to have integrated the model of the sephiroth into one’s internal awareness, and be capable of observing (relatively) subtle changes in consciousness - it is pointless having an exceedingly detailed map of a region if one is too short-sighted to observe

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the countryside as it passes! For this reason I will say no more about the extended Tree.

The Souls

I have stated that the four worlds represented “realms of consciousness”, and in support of this view Kabbalah contains a view of the soul which integrates with the four worlds. My interpretation of the word soul is firstly, that it is a vehicle for a particular kind of consciousness, and secondly, it carries with it the connotation of individuality or uniqueness, so that I can imagine my souls as encapsulating, in different realms, what is unique to me.

In Kabbalah there are five parts to the soul - the sephira Binah is the Mother of souls, the letter associated with Binah is He, and the number associated with He is five. The five souls are:

- Yechidah - uniqueness
- Chiah - vitality
- Neshamah - breath, soul proper
- Ruach - wind-spirit, intellectual spirit
- Nephesh - soul, vital spirit, soul

The attribution to the four worlds is:

Briah - Neshamah
Ruach - Yetzirah
Nephesh - Assiah

The precise difference between Yechidah, Chiah and Neshamah is unclear; Kaplan [] gives the following attribution:

Yechidah - Keter
Chiah - Chokhmah
Binah - Neshamah

For practical purposes only the Nephesh, Ruach and Neshamah need be considered, and the bulk of the discussion will refer to this trio.

The Nephesh is the animal soul, the “soul of the body”. Animals possess this soul, and as human beings are animals, we share this inheritance. The Nephesh is concerned with the needs of the body - hunger, pleasure, rest, sexual satisfaction, social status and so on. In many cultures, if a person is asked where their soul resides, they will not point to their head: they will point to their heart. *The Secret of the Golden Flower* [22] provides a description of the animal

soul:

“This heart is dependent on the outside world. If a man does not eat for one day even, it feels extremely uncomfortable. If it hears something terrifying, it throbs; if it hears something enraging it stops; if it is faced with death it becomes sad; if it sees something beautiful it is dazzled.”

Note the close identification with the body and its feelings. Kabbalists believe the Nephesh comes into being when we are born, and it decays with the body when we die. According to widespread belief, women are more attuned to the body soul than men, and the Nephesh is sometimes depicted as being feminine; whether this is simply sexual stereotyping must remain an open question. The Nephesh is associated with Assiah, the world of making, and this emphasises its close link with the material world, and the body itself.

The Ruach is the rational soul, and is associated with air or wind (the word literally means air), and with the world of Yetzirah. Traditionally, the Ruach was not seen as something that one was given automatically; in the words of Scholem, it was a “post-natal increment”. It is the case that some people live almost exclusively according to physical needs, and others spend a great deal of time finding a rational basis for their behaviour, but I do not think there is any evidence for a discontinuity, and I think we must assume that the Ruach is everywhere present in some measure. What can be said is that a level of consciousness represented by Ruach exists in varying degrees from person to person - it is not present by default in equal measure.

The Ruach is based on the ability to create abstract models of the world in consciousness and reflect on them, so that while a hungry Nephesh might grab a whole pizza and consume it without a moments thought, the Ruach might reflect on the activity of pizza-eating in the context of “Do unto others...” and conclude that sharing it might be a Good Thing. We see here the basis for morality, the ability to make a conscious choice between good and evil, and it is here that the Ruach is elevated above the Nephesh in the eyes of traditional Kabbalah. This ignores the possibility that the Ruach might well knock the Nephesh over the head (making an impeccable ethical case, well argued, that the Nephesh has forfeited the pizza because no-one had said Grace, and besides, no-

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one so greedy deserves a whole pizza) and not only grab the whole of the pizza, but attempt to corner the market in Mozzarella.

If we ignore the questionable value of being able to reflect on the morality of our decisions, we are still left with the ability to reflect; we have the ability to reflect on ourselves, perhaps even to reflect ourselves, and create a “self-image”. The Nephesh lacks this ability to reflect upon itself - I have never seen an adult cat study itself in a mirror. Some of the great apes *do* have this ability - they appear to be “self-aware”.

Because the Ruach can reflect upon itself, and create a self image, it can become an entity in its own right, perhaps even dissociating itself from the body and its needs, producing someone who feels guilt at indulging in the “sins of the flesh”. We find the “spiritual” person who cannot accept their physicality and who rejects the body and its “evil lusts” in favour of a purer, “more spiritual” existence.

We have millions of people reflecting upon themselves and concluding that they are “wrong” in some way - the wrong shape, the wrong size, the wrong colour, the wrong age. It is unlikely that someone who thinks they are the wrong size is going to ever feel good about themselves so long as they view the body as a means to an end, a vehicle, a carriage which conveys them through life, a fashion accessory. In our culture there are strong taboos connected with anything which points too directly towards our physical and animal nature, which can be seen in attitudes to clothing, to death, to sex, to self-mutilation.

My own view of the Ruach is profoundly negative. Our culture develops this single aspect of consciousness to such an absurd degree that the Ruach is incapable of forming a sensible notion concerning either the Nephesh or Neshamah, and turning its face away from both the lower and higher worlds, becomes obsessed with its own creations. The Ruach has a tendency to reduce the body to an object and often lives a life completely at odds with the needs of the Nephesh. Where there is a spiritual aspiration, the Ruach produces a monstrous and bloated reflection, “itself-made-perfect”, and aspires towards this illusory caricature of itself. The Ruach is a patchwork monster, a grotesque reflection of its creator, and it lurches about the world trying to make sense of what is happening, sometimes playing like a child, sometimes

leaving a trail of destruction. It is the king that needs to be slain, the god that must be sacrificed.

The Neshamah is the Breath of God. In the Bible it states “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”. The “breath of life” is the Neshamah, and unlike the Nephesh and the Ruach it is a gift from God, and the source of our ability to intuit the realm of the divine. It is difficult to write about the Neshamah. The Ruach tends to idealise the Neshamah, and in the absence of a genuine contact projects a distorted reflection of itself. An attempt to describe the Neshamah encourages the creation of such reflections, so I will desist.

A characteristic of the World of Briah, to which the Neshamah is attributed, is that it is beyond space and time, and from the point of view of those living in space and time the Neshamah has an eternal quality of being...just being. It is the hub around which the wheel of personality turns. As we live our lives, we change, but something at the centre of our being does not change. The magician Aleister Crowley wrote about “True Will”, and while this concept is no easier to grasp than the Neshamah, both refer to a part of us that exists outside of the ebb and flow of life in the mundane world. Writing about the three souls, Crowley comments [7]:

“The Neschamah is that aspiration which in most men is no more than a void and a voiceless longing. It becomes articulate only when it compels the Ruach to interpret it. The Nephesh, or animal soul, is not the body itself; the body is excremental, of the Klippot or shells. The Nephesh is that coherent brute which animates it, from the reflexes to the highest forms of conscious activity. These again are only cognizable when they translate themselves to the Ruach. The Ruach lastly is the machine of the mind converging on a central consciousness, which appears to be the ego. The true ego, is however, above Neschamah, whose occasional messages to the Ruach warn the human ego of the existence of his superior. Such communications may be welcomed or resented, encouraged or stifled.”

The relationship between the Neshamah and the Holy Guardian Angel is unclear. What can be said is that in many cases, people approach

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Neshamah through the medium of an entity which acts as an intermediary between the Ruach and the Neshamah. There is no doubt that in many cases the HGA is the Ruach's own idealised projection, but that does not invalidate the notion that it is capable of linking the two levels of consciousness. The HGA is associated with the sephira Tipheret, the point on the Pillar of Consciousness where Briah overlaps with Yetzirah. The method of invoking the HGA as a way of contacting the Neshamah is legitimate.

A discussion of souls carries with it, far more so than any of the Kabbalistic framework discussed so far, the temptation to indulge in metaphysical speculation. Traditional Kabbalah is filled with this, and there is much speculation on the origin of souls, the nature of souls, the fate of the soul, reincarnation, and so on. This traditional material is adequately presented elsewhere. I feel public speculation on such topics is counterproductive as it simply provides more material for the never-ceasing elaborations of the Ruach.

In Kabbalah there is a view that if there is a defect in the creation, it is a result of separating that which should have been united. I have made my views on the Ruach clear: here is a level of consciousness which has turned inwards and no longer carries out its task of mediating between higher and lower. A trace of this attitude can be found in the quotation from Crowley above, where one can detect a negative attitude towards both the body and the Nephesh. In the main, Kabbalah has a very positive attitude towards living in the world, for the world, far from being the "dead matter" of the Neoplatonists, is infused with the Shekhinah, the indwelling presence of God.

In some traditions one sees people turning away from the world and mundane life and seeking a "world of the spirit". In Kabbalah the world and God are two poles of the same thing, and the purpose of the Kabbalist is to bring God into the world, and take the world back to God. I say this to emphasise an important point: the Neshamah is not higher than the Nephesh, the body is not something divorced from spirit. These are ideas which create the separation the Kabbalist tries to overcome. The world, the souls, and god are links in a circular chain, the Ourouboros, and there is no higher or lower, there is no spiritual or mundane - they are all parts of the same thing.

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The Great Work

“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

The term “The Great Work” is not a term to be found in the literature of traditional Kabbalah, but it is a term which has come to be associated with traditional Kabbalistic ideas. Two key ideas underpinning the Great Work are:

- the universe we live in is not as it should be. In some way it is “damaged”, and only a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of the created will restore it to its intended state. Also, as a consequence...
- we live in ignorance of our true estate. We know not what we are. In the words of the poet W.B. Yeats, “Consume my heart away; sick with desire and fastened to a dying animal, It knows not what it is...”

The Great Work is the attempt to undo the damage, and it consists of two parts. The first part is the preservation of knowledge and techniques which enable individual human beings to awaken and recover the knowledge of their true nature. The second part is the deliberate efforts undertaken by these awakened individuals to restore the world to what it should have been.

There is nothing explicitly Kabbalistic about this idea of the Great Work - similar ideas have occurred at many times and places - but the idea that the creation is not what it should have been is one of the key elements of Kabbalistic speculation, and the belief that it is possible for individual human beings to help to repair the damage and restore the creation was and is one of the key motives underlying Kabbalistic practice.

The extent of Kabbalistic speculation has been so extensive that it is difficult to extract simple explanations for why human beings do not

understand their true nature, or why the creation is flawed. It is unreasonable to expect simple explanations for something which lies outside the domain of intellectual speculation, and perhaps it is unreasonable to expect an explanation of any kind, agreeing with Wittgenstein that “the sense of the world must lie outside the world”; those who go beyond the world cannot be expected to bring back answers which mean anything to those who are in it. Given this caveat, the following discussion on the Great Work is based on several traditional ideas, but the synthesis is mine. Those who wish to delve into centuries of speculation within a strictly Judaic tradition are referred to Scholem [39].

A great deal of Kabbalistic speculation begins with the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This story is not to be taken literally; it is usually taken as an allegory to be interpreted within the context of general Kabbalistic ideas concerning the Creation. The Garden represents the Creation as it should be, the Creation as it was before the Fall.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were conscious, but not self-conscious - they did not know that they were naked. The sin of Adam and Eve was to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and in doing so they became self-conscious; they understood what they had done, became afraid, and hid themselves from God. As a consequence God made coats of skin to clothe them and they were ejected from the Garden to become human beings - animals who join sexually to produce offspring, animals who die. The return to Eden and the Tree of Life was barred.

The Biblical story mentions two trees in the garden: the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. For some Kabbalists the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge were one tree until Adam and Eve picked the fruit, causing the two to separate, so that the Tree of Life became the right pillar of the sephirothic Tree, and the Tree of Knowledge became the

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left, and the Tree of Life as we now see it is not the original Tree as it was before the fruit was picked. The sin of Adam was the sin of separation, the sin of creating a division between knowledge and life.

The Biblical story can also be interpreted as a story of the growth of self-consciousness. There was a time when humans lived unselfconsciously among the animals, a time when humans *were* animals, and that state was shattered by the growth of self-consciousness. The self-conscious creature, terrified by the naked consciousness of the One, and in danger of slipping back into the One, hid itself away from God and the Cherubim who wielded fiery swords were servants of its own making. The self-conscious creature, in an attempt to strengthen its fragile identity, anchored itself to the left side of the Tree, the Tree of Knowledge, and set about building the structures and abstractions which have resulted in our complex and confused society.

There is a relative unanimity among Kabbalists that the left side of the Tree is the source of evil. To be fair, it is also the source of good, as it is impossible to have one without the other, but the problem of evil was the major preoccupation. Let us suppose a rich man walks past a beggar in the street. The rich man thinks:

“If I give to this person, then logically I ought to give to all equally poor people, for all are equally miserable and equally deserving. I do not have enough money to feed every poor person, and my poverty will not solve the problem of poverty, so really there is no point in giving.”

This kind of rational thinking belongs on the left side of the Tree. Suppose the wealthy man decides to give something. How much should he give? Everything he has? This unlikely. He will give a little and hold back the rest. This “holding back” is the quality of Din, Judgement, and Kabbalists have seen God as the wealthy man who gives a little and holds-back much. In the *Bahir* the left side of the Tree was associated with gold, and the right side with silver, to make the point that God gave silver, but held back something more valuable. The Creation could not stand the full force of God’s light, and so it was held back, and as a consequence each one of us has inherited the ability to hold back.

Let us continue with the story of the rich man

and the beggar. Why does the beggar have so little? The beggar has so little because there are laws of property. Laws belong on the left side (Hod). The beggar cannot take what is not his because there are authorities to uphold the law, and they also belong on the left side (Gevurah). There are well-defined procedures for transferring property; work is one of these. These well-defined procedures also belong on the left side (Gevurah, Hod). If the beggar does not “fit-in”, then he must take what comes by chance, or live outside the law.

In every case we see what we would regard as an inequitable situation as being created and sustained by qualities associated with the left side of the Tree. Fortunately there are also laws (left side) which provide some minimal provisions for the poor, which is evidence that good is not completely divorced from evil. How did these laws come about? I believe that in most people the left and right pillars are not completely divorced; they meet on the middle pillar to produce Rachamim, compassion.

In the previous example the evil of poverty was a side-effect of a structure of laws largely designed to protect property. When one puts a fly in a jar and seals the lid, then sooner or later the fly will suffocate. The effect of confining the fly is that the fly dies. There is no evil in the jar, and if evil is to be found anywhere it is in the hand that screws the lid tight, or in the mind that conceives of ways of killing. In the same way, the left side of the Tree provides the structure for evil, it is not in itself evil. Structure provides the means for people such as you and me to create evil, but there is no suggestion that some kind of metaphysical evil is involved.

Some Kabbalists have gone further and suggested just that. The suggestion that powers of evil exist is usually based on the belief that the Creation involved, or even required, an excess of the quality of Din or Judgment. In the Zohar the first attempts at creation were unbalanced, and the power of Din overflowed and shattered the worlds. The fragments fell into the Abyss to become the realm of the Klippot, powers which are the result of unbalanced Din, and hence evil in the sense that unbalanced Judgement and Severity are evil. Isaac Luria further dramatised these events with extraordinary elaborations: the first three sephiroth were able to contain the light of God, but the remaining seven were shattered in an event known as “the breaking of the

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vessels”, and in the catastrophe some of the light was carried into the Abyss and became trapped in the realm of the Klippot. The four worlds were dislocated, and Assiah slipped into the realm of the Klippot. In Luria’s view we are immersed in a world where evil has a primordial origin.

Other Kabbalists have stressed that, regardless of the catastrophic origin of evil, its continued existence is based on an unbalanced flow of energy down the left side of the Tree, and it is this steady drip of unbalanced force which nourishes the *Sitra Achara*, or Other Side. It is human evil which creates this unbalance. In a definition reminiscent of the classic definition of dirt, Gikatilla defined evil as an entity which was not in its rightful place - sand is fine on a beach, but not in engine oil - and there are powers which have a rightful place in the world but which are evil in the wrong context. Kabbalistic views of evil cover the entire spectrum, from the surprisingly sophisticated view of evil as a structural and necessary part of creation, to a low superstitious belief in a hierarchy of evil demons.

The exact nature of the Great Work is no simpler to explain than the problem of evil itself, and if one takes it to be the attempt to restore a defect in the creation, then its nature will depend on what one believes that defect to be. There is no simple view of the Great Work, but there are a number of clear threads to follow.

The first thread is to re-unite what has become separate, and the place to begin is in one’s own nature. When one re-unites the elements of one’s being, then one becomes capable of transmitting, of acting as an agent between the higher and the lower. This is an important Kabbalistic idea. The purpose of Kabbalah is not a personal quest for self-realisation; it is a conscious decision to play a part in uniting the higher and the lower, not only in oneself, but more importantly still, in the world. If it is part of the essential nature of God to give, then someone who only receives and does not give cannot be like God or understand the nature of God. To know God one must not only receive, but give out in direct measure. Likewise, if “God wished to know God” as some authors have maintained, then one must fulfil the purpose of creation by making this possible.

There is a tradition that Keter and Malkhut play a complementary role in sustaining the

Tree of Life. So long as Malkhut only takes from Keter, and does not give back, it is not like God. Once Malkhut begins to give back to Keter, a continuous loop of impulse and reflection is created, Malkhut will become like God, and “God will know God”. It is our role, as creatures of matter, to create this bridge and make the creation self-conscious. In Jewish Kabbalah this process is called “tikkun” or reintegration, and is best known from complex speculations of Isaac Luria.

Scholem states [39]:

“The object of this human activity, which is designed to complete the world of tikkun, is the restoration of the world of Asiyyah to its spiritual place, its complete separation from the world of the kelippot, and the achievement of a permanent, blissful state of communion between every creature and God which the kelippot will be unable to disrupt or prevent.”

This all sounds very grand. It is an enterprise which appeals to those with an idealistic and crusading temperament. Unfortunately, one cannot repair the design faults in machine by giving it a fresh coat of paint. The Tree of Knowledge is not going to be reunited with the Tree of Life unless it is re-united in ourselves, and when one looks at conditions in the world today one sees an ever-accelerating dive into the knowledge of Assiah and a disregard for the condition of the human soul.

This section on the Great Work may seem more than a little metaphysical, lacking in concrete ideas, and this is intentional. If conventional religion has a fault, it is that it tends to produce relatively homogeneous and often politically active groups of people who are convinced they know what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong. Great tyrannies can and do arise from this. People want to know what life is about, and latch onto anything which gives their life a greater meaning, and it is dangerous to be prescriptive about the Great Work because this feeds the messianic urge in most of us to make the world “a better place”.

For one person to supply to another person a reason for living is the antithesis of the Great Work, which is to understand it for oneself. If each of us is a little piece of God, and “God wishes to know God”, then the whole is to be found in the sum of the parts, and each part has

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its own role to play. No-one has the authority to define the Great Work for another.

The Klippot

The word “qlippah” or “klippah” (plural “Klippot”) means “shell” or “husk”.

The idea of a covering or a garment or a vessel is common in Kabbalah, where it used, at various times and with various degrees of subtlety, to express the manner in which the light of the En Soph is “encapsulated”. For example, the sephiroth, in their capacity of recipients of light, are sometimes referred to as kelim, “vessels”. The duality between the container and the contained is one of the most important in Kabbalistic explanations of the creative moment.

The word “klippah” is an extension of this metaphor. A klippah is also a covering or a container, and as each sephira acts as a shell or covering to the sephira preceding it in the order of emanation, in a technical sense we can say the Klippot are innate to the Tree of Life. Cut a slice through a tree and one can see the growth rings, with the bark on the outside. The Tree of Life has 10 concentric rings, and sometimes the klippah is equated to the bark. The word is commonly used to refer to a covering which contains no light: that is, an empty shell, a dead husk.

It is also the case that the Klippot appear in Kabbalah as demonic powers of evil, and in trying to disentangle the various uses of the word it becomes clear that there is an almost continuous spectrum of opinion, varying from the technical use where the word hardly differs from the word “form”, to the most anthropomorphic sense, where the Klippot are evil demonesses in a demonic hierarchy responsible for all the evil in the world.

One reason why the word “klippah” has no simple meaning is that it is part of the Kabbalistic explanation of evil, and it is difficult to explain evil in a monotheistic, non-dualistic religion without incurring a certain complexity....

If God is good, why is there evil?

No short essay can do justice to the complex-

ity of this topic. I will indicate some of the principle themes.

The *Zohar* attributes the primary cause of evil to the act of separation. The act of separation is referred to as the “cutting of the shoots”. What was united becomes divided, and the boundary between one thing and another can be regarded as a shell. The primary separation was the division between the Tree of Life (Pillar of Mercy) from the Tree of Knowledge (Pillar of Severity).

In normal perception the world is clearly characterised by divisions between one thing and another, and in this technical sense one could say that we are immersed in a world of shells. The shells, taken by themselves as an abstraction divorced from the original, undivided light (making another separation!) are the dead residue of manifestation, and can be identified with dead skin, hair, bark, sea shells, or shit. They have been referred to as the dregs remaining in a glass of wine, or as the residue left after refining gold. According to Scholem [39], the *Zohar* interprets evil as “the residue or refuse of the hidden life’s organic process”; evil is something which is dead, but comes to life because a spark of God falls on it; by itself it is simply the dead residue of life.

The skeleton is the archetypal shell. By itself it is a dead thing, but infuse it with a spark of life and it becomes a numinous and instantly recognisable manifestation of metaphysical evil. The shell is one of the most common horror themes; take a mask, or a doll, or any dead representation of a living thing, shine a light out of its eyes, and becomes a thing of evil intent. The powers of evil appear in the shape of the animate dead - skulls, bones, zombies, vampires, phantasms.

The following list of correspondences follows the interpretation that the Klippot are empty shells, form without force, the covering of a sephira:

Keter	Futility
Chokhmah	Arbitrariness

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Binah	Fatalism
Chesed	Ideology
Gevurah	Bureaucracy
Tipheret	Hollowness
Netzach	Routine, repetition, habit
Hod	Rigid order
Yesod	Zombieism, robotism
Malkhut	Stasis

A second, common interpretation of the Klippot is that they represent the negative or averse aspect of a sephira, as if each sephira had a Mr. Hyde to complement Dr. Jekyll.

There are many variations of this idea. One of the most common is the idea that evil is caused by an excess of the powers of Din (judgement) in the creation. The origin of this imbalance may be innate, a residue of the moment of creation, when each sephira went through a period of imbalance and instability (the kingdoms of unbalanced force), but another version attributes this imbalance to humankind's propensity for the Tree of Knowledge in preference to the Tree of Life (a telling and precognitively inspired metaphor if ever there was one...).

The imbalance of the powers of Din "leaks" out of the Tree and provides the basis for the *sitra achra*, the "other side", or the "left side" (referring to pillar of severity), a quasi or even fully independent kingdom of evil. This may be represented by a full Tree in its own right, sometimes by a great dragon, sometimes by seven hells. The most lurid versions combine Kabbalah with medieval demonology to produce detailed lists of demons, with Samael and Lilith riding at their head as king and queen.

A version of this survives in the Golden Dawn tradition on the Klippot. The Klippot are given as 10 evil powers corresponding to the 10 sephiroth. I referred to G.D knowledge lectures and also to Crowley's "777" [8] and found several inconsistencies in transliteration and translation. Where possible I have reconstructed the original Hebrew, and I have given a corrected list.

Keter	Thaumiel: Twins of God (TAVM, tom - a twin)
Chokmah	Ogiel: Hinderers (? OVG - to draw a circle)
Binah	Satariel: Concealers (STR, satar- to hide, conceal)
Chesed	Gash'khalah: Breakers in Pieces

(GASH Ga'ash - shake, quake KLH, khalah - complete destruction, annihilation)

Gevurah Golachab: Flaming Ones (unclear)
Tipheret Tagiriron: Litigation (probably from GVR, goor - quarrel)

Netzach Orev Zarak: Raven of Dispersion (ARV, orev - raven ZRQ, zaraq - scatter)

Hod Samael: False Accuser (SMM, samam - poison)

Yesod Gamaliel: Obscene Ass (GML, gamal - camel? alt. ripen?)

Malkhut Lilith: Woman of the Night (Leilah - Night)

Most of these attributions are obvious, others are not. The Twins of God replace a unity with a warring duality. The Hinderers block the free expression of the God's will. The Concealers prevent the mother from giving birth to the child - the child is stillborn in the womb. The Breakers in Pieces are the powers of authority gone berserk - Zeus letting fly with thunderbolts in all directions. The Flaming Ones refer to the fiery and destructive aspect of Gevurah. Lilith is the dark side of the Malkah or queen of Malkhut.

Why Samael is placed in Hod is unclear, unless he has been christianised and turned into the father of lies. In Kabbalah he is almost always attributed to Gevurah, sometimes as its archangel. Yesod is associated with the genitals and the sexual act, but why Gamaliel is unclear to me. I could easily concoct fanciful and perhaps even believable explanations for the attributions to Tipheret and Netzach, but I prefer not to.

In "777" Crowley also gives Klippot for many of the 22 paths. If the transliterations and translations are as accurate as those for the sephiroth, I would be tempted to reach for my lexicon.

The G.D. teachings on the Klippot are minimal in the material in my possession, but a great deal can be deduced from those fascinating repositories of Kabbalistic myth, the twin pictures of the Garden of Eden before and after the Fall. There are so many mythic themes in these pictures that it is difficult to disentangle them, but they seem strongly influenced by the ideas of Isaac Luria, and it is now time to describe the third major interpretation of the Klippot.

Luria's ideas have probably received more elaboration than any others in Kabbalah. The man left little in a written form, and his disci-

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ples did not concur in the presentation of what was clearly a very complex theosophical system - this is a subject where no amount of care will ensure consistency with anyone else.

Luria made the first step in the creation a process called "*tzim tzum*" or contraction. This contraction took place in the En Soph, the limitless, unknown, and unknowable God of Kabbalah. God "contracted" in a process of self-limitation to make a "space" (in a metaphorical sense, of course) for the creation. In the next step the light entered this space in a jet to fill the empty vessels of the sephiroth, but all but the first three were shattered by the light. This breaking of the vessels is called *shevirah*. The shards of the broken vessels fell into the abyss created by contraction, and formed the Klippot. Most of the light returned to the En Soph, but some of it remained in the vessels (like a smear of oil in an empty bottle) and fell with the Klippot.

Scholem [39] describes the *shevirah* and the expulsion of the Klippot as cathartic; not a blunder, an architectural miscalculation like an inadequately buttressed Gothic cathedral, but as a catharsis. Perhaps the universe, like a new baby, came attached to a placenta which had to be expelled, severed, and thrown out into the night.

One way of looking at the *shevirah* is this: the self contraction of *tzim tzum* was an act of Din, or Judgement, and so at the root of the creative act was the quality which Kabbalists identify with the source of evil, and it was present in such quantity that a balanced creation became possible only by excreting the imbalance. The *shevirah* can be viewed as a corrective action in which the unbalanced powers of Din, the broken vessels, were ejected into the abyss.

Whether cathartic or a blunder, the *shevirah* was catastrophic. Nothing was as it should have been in an ideal world. The four worlds of Kabbalah slipped, and the lowest world of Assiah descended into the world of the shells. This can be seen in the G.D. picture of the Eden after the Fall. Much of Lurianic Kabbalah is concerned with corrective actions designed to bring about the repair or restoration (*tikkun*) of the creation, so that the sparks of light trapped in the realm of the shells can be freed.

The final word on the shells must go to T.S. Eliot, who had clearly bumped into them in one of his many successful raids on the inarticulate:

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;"
Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us - if at all - not as lost,
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

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Practical Kabbalah

“But just as I was going to put my feet into the water I looked down and saw that they were all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly just as they had been before. Oh, that’s all right said I, it only means I had another smaller suit on underneath the first one, and I’ll have to get out of it too. So I scratched and tore again and this underskin peeled off beautifully and out I stepped and left it lying beside the other one and went down to the well for my bathe. “

“Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, oh dear, how ever many skins have I got to take off? For I was longing to bathe my leg. So I scratched away for the third time and got off a third skin, just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water I knew it had been no good. “Then the lion said - but I don’t know if it spoke - “You will have to let me undress you.” I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back and let him do it.”

“The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off.”

C.S. Lewis

From an historical and traditional perspective the practical techniques of Kabbalah include techniques of mysticism and (to a lesser extent) magic to be found the world over, and include complex concentration and visualisation exercises, meditation, breath control, prayer, ritual, physical posture, chanting and singing, abstinence, fasting, mortification and good works.

Many different combinations of practice have been used at different times and places over a period of nearly two thousand years, and it is

clear from the variety of approaches that practice grew as much out of the temperament of the individual Kabbalist as it did from a long historical tradition. From time to time an outstanding teacher would appear, and a school would form, but these schools tended to be short-lived, and one is struck more by the diversity and individuality of the different approaches, than by (what is often presumed) a chain of masters handing down the core of a secret tradition through the centuries.

A problem with trying to find an authentic tradition of Kabbalistic practice is not only is it difficult to identify just what such a tradition might be (given the diversity of approaches over the centuries), but more importantly, the keys to many of the practical techniques have been lost. In her book on Kabbalah [10], Perle Epstein makes a number of wry comments about the state of Kabbalah in Judaism today, and regrets the loss of a practical mystical tradition.

Outside of Judaism the situation is little better. Kabbalah has become an element in the syllabus of many traditions, but its practical application is often limited to exercises such as pathworking. It is instructive to examine the Golden Dawn initiation rituals [35] as an example of what happens when Kabbalah is boiled up with a mixture of ingredients drawn from Greek, Egyptian, Rosicrucian and Enochian sources - there is a pervasive smell of Kabbalah throughout, but it rarely amounts to a meal.

The following description of Kabbalistic practice makes no attempt to be comprehensive; on the contrary, I have chosen only those practices with which I am personally familiar. This will be unsatisfactory to those readers with an academic or historical interest, but these notes were intended to have a practical value, and I see no value in trying to describe techniques I have not used. For the reader who wishes to take a broader view, Perle Epstein provides a useful introduction to the breadth of Kabbalistic prac-

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tice, and the personalities that have shaped Kabbalistic thought.

I am fully aware there will be those who would not wish to associate the name “Kabbalah” with the practices I am about to describe - although I am not Jewish, I respect the beliefs of those who are - but at the same time there is a great deal of variety in nearly two thousand years of Kabbalah, and one living tradition is worth at least as much as several dead traditions. There is no right or canonical tradition of Kabbalistic practice, and never has been¹.

The practice of Kabbalah as I will describe it is underpinned by the theosophical structure I have outlined previously in these notes. First and foremost comes the belief that there is a God. The ultimate nature of God is neither known nor manifest to us, but just as light can be passed through a prism to produce a rainbow of colours, so God manifests in the creation as ten divine lights or emanations, usually referred to as sephiroth.

Each of one of us is a part of God, a microcosm, a complete and functioning simulacrum of the whole, and so God similarly manifests within us as ten divine lights. Because we can look in the mirror of our own being and see the reflection of the macrocosm, it follows that self-knowledge shades imperceptibly into knowledge of God; and also, as the whole of creation is an emanation of God, so self-knowledge moves the centre of consciousness away from a subjective awareness of reality towards an objective and non-dualistic union with everything that is.

The second key idea is that the emanations or sephiroth are aspects of the *creative* power of God. On a macrocosmic scale, the creation is seen as the continuing outcome of a dynamic process in which creative energy manifests progressively through the sephiroth; at a microcosmic and personal level the same process is at work, and this is the Kabbalistic interpretation of the notion that we are “made in God’s image”. By understanding the elements which

comprise our own natures, by going far enough inside ourselves to understand the energy and dynamics operating within our own consciousness, so we touch the same energies operating in the universe. When we have touched these energies we can call on them and influence the flow of creative energy. A name for this process is “magic”. I prefer “theurgy”, as there is no power that comes from anywhere but God.

Traditionally these energies are called upon by name, and are characterised in concrete ways - because we are human beings there is a natural tendency to anthropomorphise these energies and call upon them in the form of ‘angels’ or other supernatural beings. The list of correspondences given in Chapter 4 of these notes provides some ideas as to how these energies are likely to be observed at a level where we are most likely to observe them.

The Kabbalistic Tree of Life is an abstract representation or map describing the creative energy of God and the process of manifestation. The Kabbalist learns to use this map to understand the dynamics of creative energy; from this point of view it is a key to applied magical work.

And that is it, in essence. How literally you take these assumptions is up to you. My attitude resembles that of the engineer Oliver Heaviside, who didn’t care whether his self-invented mathematical methods made sense to mathematicians (they didn’t), as long as his calculations produced the right answers (they did). I will talk about angels and archangels and names of God, powers and sephiroth and invocations, and leave it to you to make your own sense of it.

But to return to the discussion of practical Kabbalah ... one can identify two major kinds of practical work arising out of the assumptions above.

From the idea that we are made in the image of God we can conclude that by knowing ourselves we can (in some degree) know God; this leads to practical work designed to increase self-knowledge to the greatest degree possible, a process I will refer to as *initiation*. The emphasis of initiation is primarily mystical.

From the idea that we can call upon aspects of the creative energy of God to change reality we arrive at practices intended to increase *personal power*, practices which many people continue to refer to as magic.

Kabbalah has divided along these two paths,

1. The popularisation of Kabbalah within Judaism is often carried out today by ultra-orthodox Chassidim. I appreciate and respect their perspective, but their presentation and emphasis is not always historic or representative. Many are not familiar with the long history of Hermeticism.

and I believe it is accurate to say that traditional Jewish Kabbalah is predominantly mystical, with the emphasis on union with God, while non-Jewish Kabbalah is predominantly magical.

It is easy to sit in judgement of these two approaches, and many authors have done so. To seek for union with God is to seek to do God's will. The world-wide mystical agenda is composed largely of the subjugation of ego and the replacement of personal wilfulness with divine union. Magic is seen to be predominantly wilful, and so shares the original Satanic impulse of pride and rebellion against the divine will. It is easy to conclude that mystical union (*devekut*, or "cleaving to God") is the true goal, and magic an "egocentric" and wilful aberration of consciousness.

It is difficult to provide a *rational* counter to this argument: to be rational is to fail to appreciate the ineffability of mystical insight, and to argue is to demonstrate Satanic wilfulness - one is condemned out of one's own mouth.

Nevertheless, there is a middle way between the two extremes, and in what follows the mystical process of initiation is combined with the use of magical techniques in a blend which I believe captures the best of both approaches. The approach is primarily *theurgic*. Although the trappings of ceremonial magic are used, the ultimate power behind all invocation is God. The manifestations of God's creative power may be imagined as sephiroth, angels, or spirits, but this is a conscious decision not to fight the all too human need for concrete symbols. There is only God.

I have chosen to describe the process of initiation first because I have a romantic notion that an ethical sense grows out of self-knowledge. I follow that with a discussion of some general magical techniques.

Initiation

One of the meanings of the word "initiation" is "the process of beginning something". What is one beginning? One is committing oneself to find answers to certain questions. What questions? The questions vary, but they are usually fundamental questions about the nature of life and personal existence: "why is the world the way it is?", "why am I alive, and what is the purpose of being alive?", "what lies behind the phenomenal world?", "why should I continue living?", "what is good and what is evil?", "how

should I live?", "is there a God?", and "how can I become rich, famous and sexually attractive without expending any effort?".

It happens (for no obvious reason) that there are many people who cannot escape the nagging conviction that some or all of these questions can be answered, and the same people are determined to wring the answers out of somebody or something. The situation resembles a cat in a new house. The poor creature will not rest until it has explored every nook and cranny from the attic to the crawlspace. So it is with certain people; they look out on the world with cat's eyes, and metaphysical and philosophical questions are like dark openings into the attics and crawlspaces which lie behind the phenomenal world of the senses.

It happens that every question, when followed with enough determination, leads back to the questioner. What is the precondition for knowing anything? Our own souls are the attics and crawlspaces of existence, and so in the end we are forced to look within, and know ourselves. This is the first aspect of initiation, the belief that we can find answers to difficult existential questions by increasing our self-knowledge.

There is another aspect to initiation. The first aspect is the desire to *know oneself*. The other aspect is the desire to *be something else*. Initiation is also the beginning of a process of self-transformation, a process of becoming something else. Become what? Answers vary, but in the main, people have a vision of "myself made perfect", and if they believe in saints, they want to be saintly; if they believe in God, they want to be united with God. Some want to be more powerful, and some want to be rich, famous, and sexually attractive. Two easily observable characteristics of people looking for mystical or magical training are a lust for knowledge and a desire to be something other than what they currently are. A bizarre situation indeed; not only do people seek to know what they are and why they are, but even before they know the answers, they want to be something else!

Kabbalistic initiation is a process of increasing self-knowledge, and an accompanying process of change, and it is based on a practical experience of the sephiroth. If each of us is potentially a simulacrum of God, and if the creative energy of God can be described in terms of the dynamics of the ten sephiroth, then by understanding the dynamics of the sephiroth within us we can

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begin to understand the nature of the God within, and by extrapolation, the nature of God in the absolute. The learning process (like most learning) mirrors the alchemical operation of “solve et coagula” - that is, before we can reach the new stage in knowledge and understanding (“coagula”) it is necessary to break down what already exists into its component parts (“solve”).

The “solve” and “coagula” can be observed whenever we attempt to learn a new skill. We begin the process in a state of unconscious competence where we can do many tasks without difficulty, but when we try a new skill we find that our old habits are a positive obstacle. We become unconsciously incompetent - we approach a new task in an old way and make a mess of it. When we have made enough messes either we give up, or we realise the necessity of change, drop the old habits as a prerequisite for acquiring new habits (solve), and become consciously incompetent. Finally, with enough practice (coagula), we develop our new skills to the point where they become routine and return once more to a state of unconscious competence, ready to begin the cycle one more time.

The process of kabbalistic initiation leading to increased self-knowledge begins with the sephiroth, and each sephira contains within it a world of “solve et coagula”, a world where one may already function with limited unconscious competence. To reach a new level of understanding and competence one must go through the fire and experience the energy of the sephira deliberately and consciously.

What advantage is there in understanding the nature of a sephira? What “things” are there to be learned?

In answer, there are no “things” to be learned. A sephira is not a particular manifestation of consciousness (e.g. pleasure), or a particular behaviour (e.g. being honest, being kind). The sephiroth underpin manifestations of consciousness, they are the earth in which behaviours (and their opposites) are rooted, and by understanding a sephira one burrows underneath the *phenomena* of consciousness and grasps an abstract state of *becoming* (or emanation) which gives rise to phenomena.

This is a magical procedure; when one ceases to identify with the shopping list of qualities, beliefs and behaviours which can be mistaken for personal identity (a necessarily fixed and

limited abstraction) then one touches the raw substance of becoming, and it is on the power to manipulate the “becoming” of reality that magic is based. The closer one tries to get to the energy of a sephira, the more one must abandon the artificial restrictions of personality. The mystical quest for self-knowledge and the magical quest for personal power unite in the same place.

There are many ways to investigate the nature of the sephiroth, but one of the simplest and most direct is to ask God, through the powers of the sephiroth, for help. In principle all one has to do is call upon the powers of a sephira, and ask to be instructed.

There are three potential problems with this procedure. The first is that it is like asking to be dropped in a wilderness; you may learn to survive, or you may not. The second possible problem is that people tend to have a natural affinity for some sephiroth and not others, and left to themselves tend to develop their knowledge in a lop-sided manner. Lastly, many people do not know how to call upon the powers - you can't ask Gabriel to help you if you don't know Gabriel, and you don't know how to contact Gabriel. But, if you knew someone who knew Gabriel....

The time-honoured method of initiation into the nature of a particular sephira is to ask someone who has had that experience to invoke to powers of the sephira on your behalf. The person chosen as initiator would use the techniques of ritual magic to invoke the powers of a sephira with the intention that you should receive instruction and insight into the nature of that sphere.

It works. Metaphysical theories may be impossible to prove or disprove, supposed magical powers evaporate in the physics laboratory, but people who undergo this kind of initiation can change visibly and even claim to have learned something. One can argue about the objective reality of the Archangel Gabriel and the Powers of the sephira Yesod, but it is difficult to dispute the validity of initiation when someone changes his or her outlook on reality and actually does things differently as a consequence.

I would like to clarify some possible misunderstandings. This kind of initiation is not a ceremony with a fixed and lengthy script, like the masonic-type rituals which have become so closely associated with magical initiations. The

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initiation ritual I am describing is a challenge. It is a one-to-one encounter between an initiatee, and an initiator who acts as agent for the invoked powers. If there is a script it is minimal; the purpose of the ritual is not to impart secrets, or impose a view of the world, but to challenge the initiatee to demonstrate a personal and individual understanding relevant to the initiation.

The success of the initiation depends on the initiator's ability to invoke and channel the powers, and on the initiatee's willingness to be challenged at a deeply personal level in an atmosphere of trust. The challenge aspect of initiation is a vital part of its success; it creates a catalytic stress which can act to bring about sudden and sometimes dramatic changes in perspective. The initiation is also a challenge for the initiator; each initiatee is different and approaches the same place from a different direction.

This kind of initiation is not a lightweight procedure. It is easy to abuse it. The purpose of initiation is not to select initiatees for conformity to the beliefs of the initiator (quite the opposite), but it must be said that it is easy for an initiator to use an initiation to enhance his or her personal power at the expense of the person being initiated. This is an unfortunate problem in esoteric systems which use an apprenticeship system and is not unique to this particular form of initiation.

Self-initiation is possible and may be the only option for many people. It suffers from a number of disadvantages:

- people are naturally self-important and endow their opinions, attitudes and prejudices with far more importance than another person would. Working with another person produces beneficial friction.
- it is easy to make excuses to yourself which you wouldn't make to another person. Their presence is a challenge to make an effort, or do things differently.
- magical work can produce dramatic changes in behaviour. An observer can provide useful feedback.
- most of Kabbalah isn't "facts"; it is "ways of being", and an excellent method of learning is to let someone else demonstrate. It is easy to reinvent the wheel when working by oneself.

None of these difficulties are insurmountable. The essence of initiation is challenge, and there

are many ordinary real-life situations which are extremely challenging to one's beliefs, lifestyle, self-importance, fears, and so on. Joining an amateur dramatic group as a conscious and deliberate magical exercise is an example which might provide some of the raw input needed, and provide lots of stress, friction, and challenges to one's personal world view. It is easy to think up other examples. What is important is not to treat practical Kabbalah as something separate from normal life, but to use normal life as the stimulus to put Kabbalah into practice - this is a traditional Kabbalistic idea. If you can't do it in ordinary life, you can't do it.

It is easy to mystify initiation and pretend it leads somewhere different from the "school of hard knocks". It doesn't. Ordinary life is a perfectly adequate initiator, and people do change in many ways (sometimes dramatically) as they grow older. At most initiation may go further. It can and should accelerate the process of acquiring self-knowledge and (in theory at least) lead to someone who has explored their personal microcosm in a broader, deeper and more systematic way than someone who has had to suffer "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" in the patchy and random sequence that is our common lot.

The Kabbalist should be able to go further in exploring and analysing the extremes of consciousness, boundless steppes in the shadowland of "not-me", where daemons of "otherness" threaten the fragile ghost of personal identity.

Much of what an initiator does is to ask questions. If you want to carry out a self-initiation you will have to ask your own questions. I will use the sephiroth of Hod and Netzach as examples to show how the sephirothic correspondences can be used to ask questions.

Suppose you want to identify those behaviours and attitudes in your personality which are underpinned by Hod and Netzach. Read the correspondences in Chapter 5 for Hod and Netzach and try to decide. Are you impulsive? Do you do what you want to do and ignore people who warn you of the consequences? Do you have strong passions for things, people, places. If asked why you are doing something, how do you explain yourself - do you give elaborate rationalisations, or do you say things like "I haven't any choice", or "you made me do it", or

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“I just want to”, or “I can’t explain why”. Do other people tell you to stop being irrational? Do you find it hard to suppress your emotions, do you think you are transparent to others? Are you furious one minute, miserably sad the next, do your moods and feelings change on the fly?

On the other hand, you might be someone who is concerned with the protocol of relationships and situations (you worry whether it is right to kiss on the first date!). You like to talk about things and have definite ideas about the right and wrong way to conduct a discussion - you might refer to this as “being rational”. You analyse your conduct in some detail according to a constantly developing set of rules, and you dream up hypothetical situations to test your ability to apply these rules - you don’t want to make mistake. You are skilled at handling problems with many rules, and may be adept at cheating the rules. You have a clear grasp of high-level abstractions and might work in law, medicine, finance, science, or engineering, where you can use your ability to apply rule-based knowledge. You might feel uncomfortable with a display of emotion in another person, particularly when it cuts across your sense of protocol, and you keep a tight rein on your own emotions. Other people may find you sharp but clinical, able to communicate verbally but poor at responding to real-life situations involving emotional conflict, poor at any problem where there is insufficient information, where variables cannot be quantified, or where there is no abstract model.

The first set of behaviours is appropriate to Netzach, while the second set is appropriate to Hod. Few people are purely one thing or another, and behaviours change according to circumstance - drinking alcohol tends to shift people from Hod-type behaviours to Netzach-type behaviours. A person might sustain a Hod persona at work, then go to a bar in the evening and become the complete opposite. A Hod/Netzach joke concerns the (real) couple who were asked which of the two sephiroth they had the greatest affinity to. The man responded “Well, I feel I’m Hod”, and the woman replied “I think I’m definitely Netzach”.

The analysis can be taken further. Suppose you have identified a large number of Hod-type behaviours in yourself. The virtue of Hod is honesty or truthfulness, and its vice is dishonesty - the power of language to represent and

communicate information about the world automatically brings with it the power to *misrepresent* what is going on. How often are you dishonest? With yourself? With others? In what situations do you sanction dishonesty? What value do you perceive in dishonesty? Are you capable of giving a purely factual account of a failed, close relationship without rationalising your own behaviour? Try it, and ask a good friend to score the attempt.

I must emphasise that there is no moral intent in this dissection of personal honesty - it is an exercise designed to expose the way in which we represent events so as to make ourselves feel comfortable. The sephira Hod underpins the ability to create structure and abstract representations; an initiation into Hod is the understanding of how *your* sense of identity has been created out of arbitrary structures and abstractions.

The illusion of Hod is Order, and the klippah or shell of Hod is Rigid Order. It is easy to observe during discussions and arguments how people try to defend and preserve the structure (or form) of their beliefs. Do you know anyone with an unshakeable view of the world? Does it annoy you that no matter how ingenious you are in finding counter-examples to his or her view, this person will always succeed in “fitting” your example into their world view? What about yourself? Do you collect evidence which reinforces your beliefs like someone collecting stamps? Are you conscious of trying to “fit” and “interpret” the evidence to support your beliefs? Why are your beliefs important? What is their actual *value* to you. What would happen to you if you gave them up?

You can do the same thing with the sephira Netzach. The illusion of Netzach is projection, the averse face of empathy, the tendency to incorrectly attribute to others the same feelings and motives as I have. Suppose I am sexually attracted to someone; I look at this person and they smile in return. What does that smile mean to me at that instant? How many different mistakes might I have made? Suppose I say to someone “I know how you feel”, and they retort angrily “No you bloody well don’t!”. One of the fastest ways of alienating someone is to consistently misinterpret how they feel. Are you constantly puzzled why people don’t share your taste in clothes, music, literature, films, art, or decor? Do you feel that if only their eyes were

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opened, they might? Do you ever try to convert people to your taste? How do you react when they aren't impressed? Do you make secret judgments which affect the way you treat them? Have you ever discounted someone because their taste offended yours? What *value* does your personal aesthetic have to you? What would happen if you gave it up?

As you can see, this is not a procedure where anyone (barring yourself) is going to provide answers. Questions, yes; lots of questions, but no answers. Asking the right questions isn't easy. We tend to have a peculiar blindness about our own behaviour, beliefs, and attitudes, and that translates into an unconsciousness of what we are. One of the oldest jokes that children play is to stick a notice on someone's back saying "Kick Me". The poor unfortunate walks around and wonders why his acquaintances are behaving oddly - tittering, sneaking up behind, and so on. From his point of view, other people are behaving oddly. He can't see what other people can see clearly, and he hasn't the power to understand (and possibly influence) their behaviour until he does see.

Suppose an "initiator" walks up and says: "Have you looked at your back recently?" "Ahhhh....!" says the victim in a sudden flash of insight.

According to folk wisdom, asking questions is a dangerous business. Asking yourself questions certainly is. It hurts. It has no obvious benefit. You may find yourself hating yourself as you penetrate layers of self-deception and dishonesty only to discover a fear (or terror) of changing, and pious resolutions and commitments fall apart in the face of that fear. You take off the first skin, and then you take off the next skin, and then you take off the skin under that. Then you get stuck. You can't go any further by yourself - you haven't the courage to do it - and at the same time you can't go back to what you were. A blind and deaf man can stand happily in the middle of a busy road, but give him sight and hearing for only a second and that happiness is gone. It is at this point where it helps to have a faith in a power greater than yourself - your Holy Guardian Angel, God, Aslan the Lion, whatever. Pray for help. There is a place within us which hears prayers of this kind.

In summary, the process of kabbalistic initiation described above is based in detail on the map of consciousness provided by the Tree of

Life and the correspondences. The sephiroth are explored by using ritual magic to invoke the powers of the sephiroth for the purposes of initiation. Incidents in ordinary life are interpreted as challenges or learning experiences supplied by the powers. Major steps in the process of initiation are marked by observable changes in the initiatee, and confirmed by an initiator whose role is primarily that of a catalyst.

This technique of initiation has been used for at least one hundred years, but its execution has tended to be marred by a good deal of superfluous dross - elaborate ceremonials and scripts, pompous and often meaningless grades and titles, and magical systems so vastly elaborate that the would-be initiate spends more time looking at the finger than at the moon.

Ritual

The Kabbalistic ritual technique I am about to describe is based on an assumption which may or may not be valid, but which gives the technique a characteristic style. The assumption is "form precedes manifestation"; that is, anything which manifests in the real, physical world is preceded by a process of "formation", a process described in its general outline by the doctrine of sephirothic emanation and the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

This premise is not so odd or metaphysical as it might seem. Every object in the room I am sitting in is a product of human manufacture. The mug I am drinking my tea out of was once clay, and its form existed in someone's mind before it was turned into a shape in fired clay. The house I live in was once an architect's design, and before that, an abstract object in a land developer's scheme for making money. Every object of human manufacture originally existed as an idea or form in someone's mind, and each idea went through a process of development, from inspiration to manufacture - I have described much of this elsewhere in these notes. It is not a large step to conceive of the whole universe as the product of mind, so that every form of substance - the physical elements, each species of plant and animal - are the result of a process of formation occurring in mind.

Where are these abstract minds? They compose a whole which the Kabbalist conveniently labels "God", and the parts (if we want to refer to them separately as subordinate components) we call "archangels", and "angels" and "spir-

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its”, and “elementals” and “devils”. Each of these minds or intelligences holds a portion of the archetypal form of the world in place, and each mind is a form in its own right. Each of these archetypal intelligences can be comprehended as a part of Binah, the Intelligence of God and Mother of all form.

When I drop a stone, it falls to the ground. It does this because the spirit of matter inhabiting the stone uses messenger spirits (or angels) called gravitons to communicate with the spirit of matter inhabiting the Earth. It turns out that the curvature of space-time (its form) is determined by the Lords of Matter in an intricate but completely exact way according to the distribution of mass-energy - the details can be summarised in an equation first written down by Albert Einstein.

It may seem absurd and retrograde (and William of Occam would certainly turn in his grave) to suggest that what we call the laws of physics are forms maintained in the minds of archetypal intelligences, but as Einstein himself stated, “The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible”; that is, it can be described using language. There are abstract forms which describe change in the physical world, and they *can* be comprehended by mind, and although it is a large step to propose that mind takes primacy over matter, it is a view attractive to the practising magician. It is a view completely consistent with Kabbalah. When I call upon a spirit to modify the law of gravity at a specific time and place, I am not violating a physical law ... I am *changing* it at its source.

If “form precedes manifestation”, then practical magic is about understanding how the future is formed out of the present. The seeds of many futures are planted in the present, and accessible to the magician as the forms of the future. The forms of the future are being progressed by many minds, and where they overlap, there is conflict and inconsistency, a situation resembling a bus where each passenger has a steering wheel providing an unknown and variable input to the eventual direction of the vehicle. In one interpretation (“primacy of will”) the magician is the person with the most powerful steering wheel; in another interpretation (Taoist nudging) the magician is a person who understands the dynamics of steering sufficiently well to use opportune moments to move

the bus in a desired direction. Perhaps both interpretations are valid. In either case, if one accepts the simile, then it should be clear that magic is rarely about certain outcomes. In both cases the magician must have a clear notion of direction, what is usually called *intention*. The bus isn’t going to go anywhere you want it to if you don’t know what you want in the first place.

Formation is a process of increasing limitation or constraint. Once something is manifest it is constrained or limited by what it is at that instant. Suppose I want to make a film. It could be a film about *anything*. Once I have a script I am more limited, but have a lot of scope in directing the film - choice of actors, sets, locations etc. Once I have the rushes my choices are even more constrained, but I still have some freedom in the editing. Finally, once the film is released, I have no more freedom to change it, unless, like some directors, I choose to re-edit and re-issue it.

Intention is a limitation: it is a limitation of will. I chose to make a film, but I could have chosen to write a book, or chosen to take a holiday. In choosing to make a film I limited my free-will. I could of course abandon the film project, but a life of incomplete, abandoned projects is not very satisfactory to most people, so my will to complete (i.e. to bring into manifestation) sustains my intention and I have to learn to live with this fairly considerable limitation on my theoretical free-will. The limitation of will and the formation of the film go hand-in-hand. I can’t just intend to make a film. I have to intend to get a script, find some money, borrow the equipment, recruit some actors and a crew.

The formation of the film is driven by a fragmentation of my original intention into many components and sub-components as the task proceeds, and activity and intention feed off each other until, knee-deep in the details of film making, I might find myself thinking “I’d give anything if we could get this scene in the can and knock off for a beer.”

We have gone from a person with theoretically unlimited free-will to someone who cannot take the time out to go for a beer. Most people who go to work and attempt to bring up a family are in this situation of being so limited by previous choices and past history that they have very little actual free-will or uncommitted energy, a situation which has to be understood

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in some detail before attempting serious magical work.

To summarise: if magic is about making things *happen*, then the magician might want to understand the process of formation which precedes manifestation, and understand not only the forms which other people are *intending*, forms which may be competitive, but also the detailed relationship between *formation* and *intention*.

You don't have to understand these things; many people like magic to be truly "magical" (i.e. without causality or mechanism), but I think it is a mistake to confuse a lack of consciousness of mechanism with a lack of mechanism, just as someone might look at a clock and assume that it goes round "by magic". Kabbalah does provide a theoretical model for magical work (the lightning flash on the Tree) which many have found to be useful, so I'd like to say something more about the concept of limitation, a concept essential to understanding the ritual framework I am going to describe.

We are limited beings. Our lives are limited to some tens of years, our bodies are limited in their physical abilities, and compared to the different kinds of life on this planet we are clearly very specialised compared with the potential of what we could be if we had the free choice of being anything we wanted. Even as human beings we are limited, in that we are all quite distinct from each other. We limit ourselves to a small number of behaviours, attitudes and beliefs and guard that individuality and uniqueness as an inalienable right. We limit ourselves to a few skills because of the effort and talent required, and only in exceptional cases do we find people who are expert in a large number of different skills - most people are happy if they are acknowledged as being an expert in one thing. It is a fact that as the sum total of knowledge increases, so people (particularly those with technical skills) are forced to become more and more specialised.

This idea of limitation and specialisation has found its way into magical ritual because of a magical (or mystical) perception that, although all consciousness in the universe is One, and that Oneness can be perceived directly, it has become limited. There is a process of limitation (formation) in which the One (God, if you like) becomes progressively structured and constrained until it reaches the level of thee and me.

Magicians and mystics the world over are relatively unanimous in insisting that the normal everyday consciousness of most human beings is a severe limitation on the potential of consciousness, and it is possible, through various disciplines, to extend consciousness into new regions. From a magical point of view the personality, the ego, the continuing sense of individual "me-ness", is a magical creation, an artificial elemental or thoughtform which consumes our magical power in exchange for the kind of limitation necessary to survive, and in order to work magic it is necessary to divert energy away from this obsession with personal identity and self-importance.

Now, consider the following problem: you have been imprisoned inside a large inflated plastic bag. You have been given a sledghammer and a scalpel. Which tool will get you out faster? The answer I am obviously looking for is the scalpel. The key to getting out of large, inflated, plastic bags is to apply as much force as possible to as sharp a point as possible. Magicians agree on this principle - the key to successful ritual is a "single-pointed will". A mystic may try to expand consciousness in all directions simultaneously, to encompass more and more of the One, to embrace the One, perhaps even to transcend the One, but this is hard, and most people aren't up to it in practise.

Rather than expand in all directions simultaneously, it is much easier to limit an excursion of consciousness in one direction only, and the more precise and well-defined that limitation to a specific direction, the easier it is to get out of the plastic bag. Limitation of consciousness is the trick we use to cope with the complexities of life in modern society, and as long as we are forced to live under this yoke we might as well make a virtue out of a necessity, and use our carefully cultivated ability to concentrate attention on minutiae to burst out of the bag.

We find the concept of limitation appearing in the process of formation which leads to manifestation; in the limitation of will which leads to intention; now I suggest that a focused limitation of consciousness is one method to release magical energy. Limitation is the key to understanding the structure of magical ritual as described in these notes, and the key to successful practice.

Essential Ritual Steps

I decided against giving the details of any rituals. All the rituals I have taken a part in were written by one or more of the people present. Even though these were effective rituals at the time, I do not think any would be worth preserving for their literary or poetic content. On the other hand, the majority of the rituals I have taken a part in have conformed to a basic structure which has rarely varied; this structure we called "the essential steps".

There is never going to be agreement about what is essential in a ritual and what is not, any more than there will ever be agreement about what makes a good novel. That does not mean there is nothing worth learning. The steps I have enumerated below are suggestions which were handed down to me, and considerable insight (not mine) has gone into them. They conform to a Western magical tradition which has not changed in its essentials for thousands of years, and I hand them on to you in the same spirit as I received them.

These are the essential steps:

1. Open the Circle
2. Open the Gates
3. Invocation to the Powers
4. Statement of Intention and Sacrifice
5. Main Ritual
6. Dismissal of Powers
7. Close the Gates
8. Close the Circle

Step 1: Open the Circle

The Circle is the place where magical work is carried out. It might literally be circle on the ground, or it could be a church, or a stone ring, or a temple, or it might be an imagined circle inscribed in the aethyr, or it could be any spot hallowed by tradition.

In some cases the Circle is created specifically for one piece of work and then closed, while in other cases (e.g. a church) the building is consecrated and all the space within the building is treated as if it was an open circle for a long period of time.

I do not want to deal too much in generalities, and so I will deal with the common case where a circle is created specifically for one piece of work, for a period of time typically less than one day. The place where the circle is created could

be anywhere: indoors, outdoors, top of a hill, a cellar. It could be an imaginary place, the ritual carried out in a lucid dream for example.

Most often a ritual will take place in a room in a house, and the first magical ability the magician develops is the ability to turn any place into a temple. I like to prepare a room with some kind of cleaning, and clear enough floor space for a real or visualised circle. I secure the room against access as far as possible, take the phone off the hook, tell anyone else in the house that I am unavailable, and so on.

The Circle is the first important magical limit: it creates a small area within which magical work takes place. The magician tries to control everything which takes place within the Circle (limitation), and so a circle half-a-mile across is impractical. The Circle marks the boundary between the rest of the world (going on its way as normal), and a magical space where things are most definitely not going on as normal (otherwise there wouldn't be any point in carrying out a ritual in the first place).

There is a dislocation: the region inside the circle is separated from the rest of space and is free to go its own way. There are some types of magical work where it may not be sensible to have a circle (e.g. working with the natural elements in the world at large) but unless you are working with a power already present in the environment in its normal state, it is best to work within a circle.

The Circle may be a mark on the ground, or something more intangible still; my own preference is an imagined line of blue fire drawn in the air. It is in the nature of consciousness that anything taken as real and treated as real will eventually be accepted as Real - the idea of "money" is a good example of this.

From a ritual point of view the Circle is a real boundary, and if its usefulness is to be maintained it should be treated with the same respect as an electrified fence. Pets, children and casual onlookers should be kept out of it. Whatever procedures take place within the Circle should only take place within the Circle and in no other place, and conversely, your normal life should not intrude on the Circle unless it is part of your intention that it should.

From a symbolic point of view, the Circle marks a new "circle of normality", a circle different from your usual "circle of normality", making it possible to keep the two "regions of

consciousness” distinct and separate. The magician leaves everyday life behind when the Circle is opened, and returns to it when the Circle is closed, and for the duration adopts a discipline of thought and deed which is specific to the type of magical work being undertaken; this procedure is not so different from that in many kinds of laboratory where scientists work with hazardous materials.

Opening a Circle usually involves drawing a circle in the air or on the ground, accompanied by an invocation to guardian spirits, or the elemental powers of the four quarters, or the four watchtowers, or the archangels, or whatever. The well known Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram [35] can be used as a basis for a Kabbalistic circle-opening. The precise method is less important than practising it until you can do it in your sleep.

There is a question of attitude: what attitude should you adopt while opening a Circle? I suggest that Circle-opening should be carried out with the same attitude as a soldier on formal guard duty outside a public building. The kind of ritual I am describing is formal. Much of its effectiveness derives from its formality and precision. For example, I never at any time turn or move in an anti-clockwise direction within the circle. When I work in a group one of the most important officers is the sword-bearing sentinel, responsible for procedure and discipline within the circle. When you create a circle you are establishing a perimeter under the watchful “eyes” of whatever guardians you have requested to keep an eye on things, and a martial attitude and sense of discipline and precision creates the correct psychological mood.

When working in a group it is helpful if the person opening the circle announces “the circle is now open” because there should be no doubt among those present about whether the opening has been completed to the satisfaction of the person carrying it out, and the sacred space has been established.

Step 2: Open the Gates

The Gates in question are the boundary between normal and magical consciousness. Just as opening the Circle limits the ritual in space, so opening the Gates limits the ritual in time. Not everyone opens the Gates as a separate activity as opening a Circle can be considered a de-facto opening of Gates, but there are

reasons for keeping the two activities separate.

Firstly, it is convenient to be able to open a Circle without going into magical consciousness. Despite what I said about not bringing normal consciousness into the Circle, rules are made to be broken, and there are times when something unpleasant and unwanted intrudes on normal consciousness, and a Circle can be used to keep it out - this is like pulling blankets over your head at night.

Secondly, opening the Gates as a separate activity means they can be tailored to the specific type of magical consciousness you are trying to enter.

Thirdly, just as bank vaults and ICBMs have two keys, so it is prudent to make the entry into magical consciousness something you are not likely to do on a whim, and the more distinct steps there are, the more conscious effort is required.

Lastly - and it is an important point - opening the Circle is best done with a martial attitude, and it is useful to have a breathing space to switch out of that mood and into the mood needed for the invocation. Opening the Gates provides an opportunity to make that switch.

There are many ways to open the Gates, and many Gates you could open. I imagine the gates in front of me, and I physically open them, reaching out with both arms. I visualise different gates for different sephiroth, and sometimes different gates for the same sephira.

Step 3: Invocation to the Powers

The invocation to the Powers is normally an excuse for some of the most leaden, pompous, grandiose and turgid prose ever written or recited. Tutorial books on magic are full of this stuff. If you are invoking Saturn during a waxing moon you might be justified in going on like Brezhnev addressing the Praesidium of the Soviet Communist Party, but as in every other aspect of magic, the trick isn't what you do, but how you do it, and interminable invocations are not the answer. At a practical level, reading a lengthy invocation from a sheet of paper in dim candlelight will require so much conscious effort that it is hard to “let go”; it is better to keep things simple and to the point, so that you can do an invocation without having to think about it too much, and that will leave room for the more important “consciousness changing” aspect of the invocation.

When I do sephirothic work I use the sephirothic God name, Archangel, Angel Order and sephira names as part of my invocation, and put my effort into the intonation of the names, rather than memorising lengthy invocations.

You have probably had the same experience as I have, of buying a ticket in a train station, then wandering around innumerable platforms wondering where your train is. An invocation is like a ticket for a train: if you can't find the train there isn't much point in having the ticket.

Invocations learned from books or written by others may work for you or they may not. Opening the Gates gets you to the doorstep of magical consciousness, but it is the invocation which gets you onto the train and propels you to the right place, and that isn't something which "just happens" unless you have a natural aptitude for the aspect of consciousness you are invoking.

It does happen that way however; people tend to begin their magical work with those areas of consciousness where they feel most at home, so they may well have some initial success. Violent, evil people do violent and evil conjurations. Loving people invoke love. Most people begin their magical work with "a free ticket", but in general, invoking takes practice, and the power of the invocation comes from practice, not from deathless prose.

I can't give a prescription for entering magical consciousness. Well devised rituals, practised often, have a way of shifting consciousness which is surprising and unexpected. I don't know why this happens; it just does. I suspect the peculiar character of ritual, the way it involves every sense, occupies mind and body at the same time, its numinous and exotic symbolism, the intensity of preparation and execution, the formality of procedure, involve dormant parts of the mind, or at least engage the normal parts in an unusual way¹.

Using ritual to cause marked shifts in consciousness is not difficult; obtaining the results you want, and avoiding unexpected and undesired side-effects is harder. Ritual is not a rational procedure. The symbolism of magic is

intuitive and bubbles out of a very deep well. The whole process of ritual effectively bypasses the rational mind, so expecting the outcome of a ritual to obey the dictates of reason is completely irrational! The image of a horse is appropriate: anyone can get on the back of a wild mustang, but getting to the point where horse and rider go in the same direction at the same time takes practice. The process of limitation described in these notes can't influence the natural waywardness of the animal, but at least it is a method of ensuring the horse gets a clear message.

Step 4: Statement of Intention and Sacrifice

If magical ritual is not to be regarded as a form of bizarre entertainment carried out for its own sake, then there is usually a reason for doing it - healing, divination, personal development, initiation, and the like. If it is healing, then it is usually healing for one specific person, and then again, it is not just healing in general, but healing for some specific complaint, within some period of time.

The statement of intention is the culmination of a process of limitation which begins when the Circle is opened, and to return to the analogy of the plastic bag, the statement of intention is like the blade on the scalpel - the more precise the intention, the more the energy of the ritual is applied to a single point.

The observation that rituals work better if their energy is focused by intention is in accord with our experience in everyday life. Any change, no matter how small or insignificant, tends to meet with opposition. If you want to change the brand of coffee in the coffee machine, or if you want to rearrange the furniture in the office, someone will object. If you want to drive a new road through the countryside, local people will object. If you want to raise taxes, everyone objects. The more people you involve in a change, the more opposition you will encounter.

The same principle holds in magic, because from a magical point of view the whole fabric of the universe is held in place by an act of collective intention involving everything from God downwards. When you perform a ritual you are setting yourself up against that collective will to keep most things the way they are, and your ritual will succeed only if certain things are true:

1. There is now good evidence that our olfactory system is deeply wired into the memory part of the brain - using the correct incense really does propel you to a special place.

9. You are a being of awesome will (you have the biggest steering wheel on the bus).
10. You have allies (lots of people on the bus want to get to the same place as you).
11. You limit your intention to minimise opposition (Taoist nudging); another analogy is the diamond cutter who exploits natural lines of cleavage to split a diamond.

Regardless of which is the case, I will suggest that precision and clarity of intention will generally produce better results. Here is a non-magical example which occurs almost every day. An extreme political organisation wants to make a point, and plants a bomb in a car. The explosion kills two young children. Is this likely to increase the level of public sympathy for their cause? Many magicians assume that the world will change because they want it to. It doesn't, because in the main, they are outvoted.

And so to sacrifice. This presents many magicians with a problem. The problem arises from the perception that in magic you don't get something for nothing, and if you want to bring about change through magic you have to pay for it in some way. So far so good. The question is: what can you give in return?

You can't legitimately sacrifice anything which is not yours to give, and so the answer to the question "what can I sacrifice" lies in the answer to the question "what am I, and what do I have to give?". If you don't make the mistake of identifying yourself with your possessions you will see that the only sacrifice you can make is yourself, because that is all you have to give. Every ritual intention requires that you sacrifice some part of yourself, and if you don't make the sacrifice willingly then either the ritual will fail, or the price will be exacted without your consent.

You don't have to donate pints of blood or your kidneys. Each person has a certain amount of what I will call "life energy" at their disposal - Casteneda calls it "personal power" - and you can sacrifice some of that energy to power the ritual. What that means in ordinary down-to-earth terms is that you promise to do something in return for your intention, and you link the sacrifice to the intention in such a way that the sacrifice focuses energy along the direction of your intention. To give a straightforward example, my cat was ill and hadn't eaten for three

weeks, so, as a last resort, fearing she would die of starvation, I carried out a ritual to restore her appetite, and as a sacrifice I ate nothing for 24 hours. I used my (very real) hunger to drive the intention, and she began eating the following day.

The idea of "self-sacrifice" may seem somewhat quaint in this day and age, as it is not a fashionable component of most magical work or textbooks, and there are bound to be those who will object that "I don't sacrifice in my magical work, and I still get results". This may be so, but look at it like this: any sacrifice which hurts enough engages a deep impulse inside us to make the hurt go away, and the magician can use that impulse to bring about magical change by linking the removal of the pain to the accomplishment of the intention.

Most of us are creatures of habit who find comfort and security by living our lives in a particular way, and any change to that habit and routine will cause some discomfort and an opposing desire to return to the original state; that desire can be used. Just as a ritual intends to change the world in some way, so a sacrifice forces us to change ourselves in some way, and that liberates magical energy.

If you want to heal someone, don't just do a ritual and leave it at that; become involved in caring for them in some way, and that active caring will act as a channel for the healing power you have invoked. If you want to use magic to help someone out of a mess, provide them with active, material help as well. Conversely, if you can't be bothered to provide material help, your ritual will be infected with that same inertia and apathy. "True will, will out", and in many cases our true will is to do nothing at all.

From a magical perspective each one of us is a magical being with a vast potential of power, but that is denied to us by an innate, fanatical, and unbelievably deep-rooted desire to keep the world in a regular orbit serving our own needs. Self-sacrifice disturbs this equilibrium and lets out some of that energy, and this may be why the egoless devotion and self-sacrifice of saints has a reputation for working miracles.

Step 5: The Main Ritual

After invoking the Powers and having stated the intention and sacrifice, there would seem to be nothing more to do, but most people like to

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prolong the contact with the Powers to carry out some kind of symbolic ritual for a period of time varying from minutes to days. Ritual as I have described it so far may seem like a fairly cut-and-dried exercise, but it isn't; it is more of an art than a science, and once the Circle and Gates are opened, and the Powers are in attendance, whatever science there is gives way to the art.

Magicians operate in a world where ordinary things have deep symbolic meanings or correspondences, and they use a selection of consecrated implements or "power objects" in their work. The magician can use this palette of symbols in a ritual to paint of picture which signifies an intention in a non-verbal, non-rational way, and it is this ability to communicate an intention through every sense of the body, through every level of the mind, which gives ritual its power. Here are a few suggestions:

- each sephira has a corresponding number which can be used as the basis for knocks, gestures, chimes, stamps etc.
- each sephira has a corresponding colour which can be used throughout the working area: altar cloth, candle(s), banners, flowers, cords etc.
- many occult suppliers make sephirothic incenses. The quality is so variable that it is best to try a few suppliers and apply common sense.
- each sephira has corresponding behaviours which can be used during the central part of the ritual.
- if you are working with several people then they can take their roles from the sephira, and wear corresponding colours etc. For example, a sentinel would use Gevuric correspondences, a scribe would use Hod correspondences.
- each sephira has ritual weapons or "power objects" which can be used in a symbolic way.
- each sephira has a wide range of individual correspondences which can be used on specific occasions e.g. a ritual of romantic love in Netzach might use a rose incense, roses, a copper love cup, wine, a poem or song dedicated to Venus, whatever gets you going...

Step 6: Dismissal of Powers

Once the ritual is complete the Powers are thanked and dismissed. This begins the with-

drawal of consciousness back to its pre-ritual state.

Step 7: Close Gates/Close Circle

The final steps are closing the Gates (thus sealing off the altered state of consciousness) and closing the Circle (thus returning to the everyday world). The Circle should not be closed if there is a suspicion that the withdrawal from the altered state has not been completed. It is sensible to carry out a sanity check between closing the Gates and closing the Circle.

It sometimes happens that although the magician goes through the steps of closing down, the attention is not engaged, and the magician remains in the altered state. This is not a good idea. The energy of that state will continue to manifest in every intention of everyday life, and all sorts of unplanned (and often unusual) things will start to happen.

A related problem (and it is not rare) is that every magician will find sooner or later an altered state which compensates for some of his or her perceived inadequacies (in the way that some people like to get drunk at parties). They will not want to let go of this state because it makes them feel good, so they come out of the ritual in an altered state without realising they have failed to close down correctly. This is sometimes called obsession, and it is a difficulty of magical work.

Closing down correctly is important if you don't want to end up like a badly cracked pot. If you don't feel happy that the Powers have been completely dismissed and the Gates closed correctly, go back and repeat the steps again.

Using the Sephiroth in Ritual

The sephiroth can be invoked during a ritual singly or in combination. This provides a vast palette of correspondences and symbols to work with, and one of the most difficult aspects of planning this kind of ritual is deciding which sephiroth are the key to the problem. It is an axiom of Kabbalistic magic that every sephira is involved somewhere in every problem, and it is sometimes difficult to avoid the conclusion that all ten sephiroth should be invoked. There is nothing wrong with doing this, but if one goes the whole hog with colours, candles etc., then the temple begins to look like an explosion in a paint factory, and this tends to dilute the focus of rituals if done regularly.

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A ritual would involve typically one to three sephiroth. An important consideration is balance: when invoking sephiroth on either of the side pillars of the Tree one is creating or correcting in imbalance, and it is worthwhile to consider the balancing sephira. For example, when using Gevurah destructively, what fills the vacuum left behind? When using Chesed creatively, what gives way for the new? The same principle applies to the pairs of Hod/Netzach and Binah/Chokhmah. The Tree is naturally arranged in many triads, or groups of three sephiroth, and after one has gained an understanding of individual sephira it is natural to go on to investigate the triads. From the point of view of balance there is a great deal to be said for initiation into triads of sephiroth rather than individual sephira.

The sephiroth are interconnected by paths, and again, the paths can be investigated by invoking pairs of sephiroth. This further extends the palette of correspondences and relationships, and over time the Tree becomes a living tool which can be used to analyse situations in great depth and detail. Unless one works closely with a group of people over a period of time the Tree must remain largely a personal symbol and vocabulary, but if one *does* work closely with other people it becomes a shared vocabulary of great expressive and executive power - ideas which would otherwise be inexpressible can be translated directly and fairly precisely into shared action via ritual magic.

Clues as to when to invoke a given sephira can be found in the correspondences, but for the sake of example I have given an indication in a list below:

Malkhut

The sephira Malkhut is useful for the following magical work:

- where you want to increase the stability of a situation. Particularly useful when everything is in a turmoil and you want to slow things down.
- when you want to earth unwanted or unwelcome energy. Also useful for shielding and warding (think of a castle).
- when working with the four elements in the physical world.
- when you want an intention to materialise in the physical world; when it is essential that an intention "really happens". e.g. it is

one thing to write a book, it is another thing to get it printed, published, and read.

- when invoking Gaia, Mother Earth.

Yesod

The sephira Yesod is useful for the following magical work:

- for divination and scrying; to increase psychism - telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition.
- when changing the appearance of something, for works of transformation, for shape changing (e.g. marketing and advertising!)
- when trying to manipulate the foundation of something, the form behind the appearance.
- for works concerning the sexual urge, the sexual organs, fornication, instinctive behaviours, atavism.
- for intentions involving images of reality - painting, photographs, cinema, television etc.
- for lucid dreaming, astral projection.

Hod

The sephira Hod is useful for the following magical work:

- for healing and medicine (Raphael is the healer of God).
- when dealing with spoken or written communication.
- the media, particularly newspapers and radio.
- propaganda, lying, misinformation.
- teaching and learning.
- philosophy, metaphysics, the sciences as intellectual systems divorced from experiment.
- computers and information technology.
- the nervous system.
- protocol, ceremony and ritual.
- the written law, accounting.

Netzach

The sephira Netzach is useful for the following magical work:

- when working with the emotions.
- the endocrine system.
- when nurturing or caring for someone or something. Charity and unselfishness,

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empathy.

- for works involving pleasure, luxury, romantic love, friendships etc. (e.g. parties).
- anything to do with aesthetics and taste: decor, art, cinema, dress, fashion, literature, drama, poetry, gardens, song, dance etc.
- for expression.

Tipheret

The sephira Tipheret is useful for the following magical work:

- work involving integrity, wholeness and balance.
- work involving the Self (the Jungian archetype), self-importance, self-sacrifice, devotion, compassion.
- overall health and well-being.
- communion with your Holy Guardian Angel.
- the union of the microcosm and the macrocosm.

Gevurah

The sephira Gevurah is useful for the following magical work:

- active defense.
- destruction.
- severance.
- justice and lawful retribution.

Chesed

The sephira Chesed is useful for the following magical work:

- growth and expansion.
- vision, leadership and authority (e.g. in business management, in politics).
- inspiration and creativity.

The sephiroth Gevurah and Chesed are best considered as a pair, since any work concerning one usually requires consideration of the other. For example, if you want something to grow and expand (Chesed), will it grow at the expense of something else (Gevurah)?

The supernal sephiroth of Binah, Chokmah and Keter can be invoked, but I would not recommend doing so until you have considerable experience of invoking the other sephiroth - either nothing will happen, or the scope of the results may go well beyond your intention.

Suggestions for a Malkhut Ritual

As stated earlier in this chapter, I decided not to be prescriptive about rituals, but I appreciate that many people feel apprehensive about their first ritual and usually question many points of detail. I have provided some suggestions to demonstrate that ritual is very much a matter of common sense. The suggestions relate to Malkhut, because that is where novice Kabbalists normally begin their work.

The Temple & Equipment

“Home is where the heart is”, and a Kabbalist’s temple is where he or she makes it. On occasions I have had the “luxury” of working in a place dedicated and reserved specifically for ritual work, but I would not rate this a high priority. Any place can become a temple; when one starts working with ritual this realisation strikes home with great force. *It is the power invoked that makes the temple.*

It is enough to clear a space for working. You will need an altar; a small table will do. An up-ended cardboard box will do if you can find nothing else! You will also need the following items:

- a brown altar cloth. It is worth making a set of altar cloths for the sephiroth you will be working - brown for Malkhut, purple for Yesod, orange for Hod etc. A white cloth can be used for any sephira, as can a white candle if there is nothing else available.
- a brown candle. A candle holder.
- Malkhut incense, self-igniting charcoal blocks and something to burn incense in. A censor is good if you have one; if not, it is not difficult to devise something. A brass bowl with three brass chains attached is quite functional.
- Matches, or a gas lighter.
- Your magical record and a pen.

The candlestick and candle go in the centre of the altar, the censor, incense and matches on the south side.

Your choice of clothing depends on personal circumstances. When working out of doors I usually wear normal clothes. When working indoors I either work naked or in a white robe. The white robe is traditional and should be made by yourself, emphasising that the Great Work is personal and cannot be done by anyone other than yourself.

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Procedure

1. Lock the door, take the phone off the hook, etc.
2. Sit down and write out your intention and sacrifice in your magical record. Think about them carefully, and memorise.
3. Practise the ritual until you have every step memorised. You can speak the Names while rehearsing, but do not vibrate them.
4. Approach the altar, kneel, and pray to God.
5. Open the Circle.
6. Open the Gates. Light the candle to show that the Temple is now open.
7. Invoke in the names *Adonai Melekh*, *Adonai ha Aretz*, call upon the mighty archangel *Sandalphon*, the hosts of the *Ishim*, and all the powers of the sephira *Malkhut*. The names are quietly intoned or vibrated with great intensity.
8. State your intention and sacrifice. Ask whether either is unacceptable.
9. Perform the main part of the ritual.
10. Thank and dismiss the powers of *Malkhut*, the hosts of the *Ishim*, the archangel *Sandalphon*, in the names *Adonai Melekh*, *Adonai ha Aretz*. Repeat vibration as per step 7. Note that sephirothic powers are *never* banished; they are thanked and dismissed.
11. Close the Gates.
12. Patrol each quarter of the Circle. If you feel unhappy with the dismissal and gate-closing, repeat until satisfied.
13. Clap your hands loudly, blow out the candle, and declare firmly "The Temple is closed!".
14. Record anything of note in your magical record.

The ritual as described may seem very simple, very basic. It isn't complexity as such that makes for a successful ritual; it is concentration, practise, discipline, and above all, the profound intensity which comes from the belief that you really are invoking the powers at the root of the creation, the power of a Living God.

Attitude

While it is permissible even for a Kabbalist to have intellectual reservations about the literal existence of archangels and angels, it is best to keep these reservations out of your rituals. When I open a Circle, I enter a world where the

Powers of *Malkhut* are real.

This raises the question of *approach*. The Powers of *Malkhut* are a legitimate and intrinsic aspect of Creation. Like the sea, they are neither good nor evil, and like the sea, they need to be treated with respect. No-one would think of threatening the sea, or banishing the sea. If you want to deal with the sea, you have to deal with it on its own terms, and no sailor, no matter how experienced, would ever believe that he or she had mastered the sea.

Each sephira has its own approach. *Malkhut* is the sephira where form is manifest, and it is characterised by limitation, boundedness, finiteness, stability, inertia. The magical image is that of a great queen on the throne of her Kingdom, a kingdom where change comes slowly within the context of the existing order. Imagine yourself trying to approach a great queen in a kingdom where tradition and stability are paramount.

Another, different approach to *Malkhut* is to approach her as a mother, a staunchly protective and conservative mother. Binah is the great Superior Mother on the Tree of Life, but she can be approached in the form of the Inferior Mother, the sephira *Malkhut*.

Do not expect a *Malkhut* ritual to feel the same as a *Netzach* ritual or a *Tipheret* ritual. A *Malkhut* ritual might have a "heavy" or formal feel to it. If you feel jangled and out of balance before such a ritual, you should come out of it feeling stable and balanced. You shouldn't come out of it feeling like you want to change the world - that isn't *Malkhut*.

Do not expect your rituals to produce "strange happenings". There is a tendency for people to expect something very gross and tangible to happen, and if *Sandalphon* doesn't put in a personal appearance then something must have gone wrong.

Learning to use ritual is like learning to taste wine; at first it is difficult to tell the difference between one red wine and another, but gradually one learns to make a multitude of subtle but real distinctions. Treat your own awareness or consciousness as a wine, and learn to observe the subtle changes and distinctions.

Other Practical Work

The sephirothic ritual technique described can be used to design an enormous variety of rituals quickly and easily, as the basic format

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can remain the same. A ritual involving Yesod should have an utterly different feel and effect from a ritual involving Tipheret, and yet the basic construction of the two rituals can be identical. The props will change, the intention will differ, and the attitude will differ, but the basic steps remain the same.

Because a ritual can be quickly carried out (not necessarily easily, but certainly quickly), sephirothic ritual can be used to add clout to other magical and mystical techniques, such as meditation, divination, scrying, oath-making, prayer, concentration and visualisation, mediumship and so on.

Sephirothic ritual is a tool which functions within a well-developed and very broad framework; the beginner has very little to learn initially, but that little is sufficient to accomplish a great deal.

In Conclusion

I wanted to provide in these notes approximately the same information as I was given when I began to study Kabbalah. The person who gave me this information said “You don’t need to read lots of books, just go off and do it.” This was sound advice. When you want to learn how to build a bridge, you should read books about building bridges, but if you want to learn about yourself, the largest library in the world isn’t going to help a great deal.

“Doing It” consists of invoking the sephiroth and asking to be instructed. It consists of jumping in with both feet when something new comes along. It involves trusting your intuition and conscience. It requires you to question everything. It also requires countless meditations, concentration and visualisation exercises, self-examination, rituals, dream-recording, prayer, whatever you want.

There is no prescription for this, and each person tends to find their own balance. As a chronic reader I found the advice about not reading books on magic and Kabbalah hard to take, but I took it, and for something like ten years I lost the habit completely. I’m glad I did, because I developed the self-confidence to trust my own intuition and found for myself the techniques best suited to my temperament and disposition. What works splendidly for one person may be totally inappropriate for another.

There is almost enough information in these notes to go off and “just do it”. The information I have withheld I have done so deliberately, as it consists of little things which any person with a small amount of common sense, initiative and trust in themselves can work out. For example, you don’t need to learn other peoples’ rituals: trust your own imagination and creativity, however insufficient they might seem, and write your own.

You need to trust yourself, and that is why I haven’t provided a detailed prescription. If you think Kabbalah should be more complicated, then make it more complicated. If you think it is

essential to learn about the Four Worlds, or the four parts of the soul, or the beard of Arik Anpin or whatever, then learn about them, but I don’t think it is essential to know these things to begin with, and there are better and quicker ways of learning Kabbalah than running off and buying the *Zohar*.

If you trust in yourself, you will learn what you need to know at the rate at which you can learn it. Kabbalah is only a map (but for the record I believe it is an accurate and useful map), and the entrance to the territory lies within *you*. In my experience the sephirothic magical rituals are the key to everything else. If you want to continue to study Kabbalah, by all means go out and buy other books, but do not imagine that the quality of the information you will receive will be higher than what you will learn if you simply invoke God through the Powers of Malkhut and ask them for instruction.

If you are afraid of ritual that is fine ... lots of people are. If you make mistakes in your rituals, that is not an unusual problem, because everybody does. If you are afraid of ritual but you invoke the Powers with the attitude and respect that is their due, and you are not afraid to give freely for what you get, then you will get a great deal, and almost certainly a great deal more than you would have expected.

Notes on Kabbalah

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