

Observations on the Qabalah

Overview

This document is a summary of views, personal thoughts, and ideas about the Qabalah and the Tree of Life, formed since originally encountering the philosophy twenty years ago. They are not necessarily those of the mainstream.

References made to the Qabalah in this text are to that version of the original Hebrew Kabbalah associated with and adapted for the Western Esoteric Tradition. Hebrew scholars in 12th century CE Moorish Spain wrote down the original Hebrew Kabbalah reputedly taught for centuries by word of mouth. The Qabalah discussed here is a development of that orthodox Tree of Life system.

Qabalah, sometimes referred to as the Christian Qabalah, gave rise in the Renaissance and increased in popularity around the time of Levi, in the latter part of the 19th century. The philosophy, further enlarged by SL Macgregor Mathers, W. Westcott, AE Waite, Dion Fortune, and numerous others, formed a pillar of the Golden Dawn Society.

While the core philosophies are common with Hebrew and Christian varieties, it is a tendency for the Qabalah to use English titles for divine names and phraseology, in place of Hebrew names and script, and to replace certain correspondences with figures and artefacts from western lore and mythology. However there is always a degree of overlap.

The Hebrew words and names of power had little meaning personally (ie. incomprehensible), and the inconsistent spelling of those words was confusing.

Tree of Life Philosophy and The Divine

The Kabbalah Cabala or Qabalah denotes a philosophy of life or a philosophy for living life, and achieving oneness with the Divine creator. It is just one of many spiritual disciplines in existence, and deals not only with our life in the now, but also with the cycle of lives to come. The Qabalah provides a way to aid in reuniting us, as spiritual entities, with the Divine, of seeking Divine Unity, and achieving a Divine state.

So what does achieving that divine state mean – why should we want it, what are the alternatives? From a Christian point of view there are two states of existence following death, the very white, and the very black – heaven and the promise of eternal life in the company of God and his angels, or Hell with the Devil.

The concept of living one life, and then consignment to either white heaven or black hell, is far too simplistic to be a true Divine plan. Conceivably there is a more comprehensive testing of us, and the goal of achieving Divine unity, of being in the Divine presence through successfully following a cycle of lives of diligent striving, makes more sense.

If we could simply choose our afterlife most would prefer heaven, although some would prefer Hell. Others don't care – refusing to face the issue, letting fate decide. While the concept of heaven may seem stifling, hell is a place of blackest evil, realm of the Qliphoth. We avoid it at all costs.

However the Divine, being divine, is more subtle, providing Qabalah as an alternative, being a way neither black, nor white but one attained by our own actions. Our divine gift is to make our own choices, and if we desire, to make our lives morally purposeful and help others to do the same. The divine way, the Qabalah is the only and ultimate goal.

Should we ever achieve the divine state, being in the Divine presence means not only an end to the countless reincarnations and the pleasure and pain of those – but also the opportunity to control our own destiny, and the way we will spend eternity. It is the only and ultimate goal.

Qabalistic Teachings

Qabalistic teachings are apparently simple but in fact complex, and take time to learn – they are elusive, and need diligent study. The coloured picture of the Tree of Life often depicted in literature is only the first page in the Qabalistic book, but having said that, it is also the last page with much in between. It seems best to absorb the Qabalah in stages, looking at that first page in detail before setting out from there.

So, firstly there is the coloured image of the Tree with its sephira and paths – what does it mean? My own way, and not necessarily anyone else's but no doubt influenced by literature, is to think of it as a picture of creation, formed far back in history with the birth of our current phase of humanity, either in a fall from grace or merely at the Divine word or whim.

This Divine Word resulted in a galactic, explosive emanation, from beyond the top of the Tree – then crashed like a lightening flash, zigzagging down, forming the ten sephira, and exploding at the sephira called Malkuth, at the base of the tree, where humanity began to unfold. Eventually, in the emerging eons later those who were, and are worthy, can regain their original place if they choose, by careful and controlled ascent through purposeful and well lived lives

Those who choose to attempt to return have to prove themselves worthy by undergoing many long, hard and difficult tests, by climbing back up the Tree. In that case assistance is always available to those who follow the path.

In turning the pages of the book the next aspect which needs consideration is that a single Tree of ten sephira is too simplistic a representation of what are in fact four levels or worlds – four interconnected trees.

The Four Worlds concept

The idea that there are four worlds of emanation, or stages of conscious associated with the Tree, applies generally to all systems of the Kabbalah, and had its origins at least with the Zohar in thirteenth century Spain, and possibly earlier. This idea embraces the principle that ten sephira can be considered as representing a tree for each of the four worlds, of separate but interpenetrating, hierarchical states.

These worlds are called; **Atziluth**, the highest world, of archetypes, the realm where God presides, and represents the overall concept – *'the idea'*; next is **Briah**, the creative world, representing the *'detailed plan'*, and the realm of Archangels; then **Yetzirah**, the formative world, representing the *'working out'* of the plan, and the realm of the choirs of angels; and finally **Assiah**, the mundane world of Malkuth, the practical, material world, where the concept becomes a working form, *'the result'*.

The manner of portraying these worlds is in various ways. One uses a sole Tree, and assigns the four worlds to different sephira. Atziluth is assigned to Kether and Chockmah, Briah to Binah, the remaining sephira, with the exception of Malkuth to Yetzirah, and then Malkuth to Assiah.

The way preferred here, is to consider four interconnected Trees, each extending upward from the other, such that the Kether of Assiah becomes the Malkuth of Yetzirah, the Kether of Yetzirah becoming the Malkuth of Binah, and then on to Atziluth in a similar manner.

The latter way gives the feel of the extended challenge of undertaking a prolonged journey and facing many tasks, and this undertaking enlarges further if a tree within each sephira is considered. In this way one begins to understand the how it is possible to spend many lifetimes in pursuing a goal of the ultimate prize.

Thus, considering four worlds of ten sephira, and a further tree within each sephira, this gives the sum of four-hundred trees, an idea that can be expanded to infinite numbers of trees to be traversed.

There are also negative Trees, extending below Malkuth, the realm of the Qliphoth the demons of magic.

How the aspect of four levels applies

The four levels concept is fundamental and important to the Qabalah. However, the explanations given elsewhere are sometimes difficult to understand, and as with much else associated with the Tree of Life general consensus appears lacking.

Frequently writings about the Kabbalah carefully detail the imagery of the single Tree, its associated Hebrew names of power and path attributions, but pay scant attention to the four worlds. However, the four worlds are a vital and indispensable component of Qabalistic philosophy, in this view the key, and effort spent considering their principle reaps dividends.

The four trees reveal the detailed and prolonged progression from the mundane Malkuth of Assiah, where this text considers we all begin, to the Divine Kether of Atziluth, where certain among the seekers know they will walk with God, and as such rank as a task worthy of the truest Magus, a truly divine quest.

The Sephira on the Tree

As mentioned there are ten sephira on the tree, each of with names and many associated attributions, as well as lessons and challenges. Books on Kabbalah / Qabalah frequently describe the sephira in detail, indeed making them their major focus to the exclusion of other aspects. They are of course important and such publications warrant consultation for more detailed information, but understand they are only part of the picture

The Paths on the Tree

Linking the sephira on each tree are twenty two paths, the concept of which again comes from the earliest Kabbalistic writings. The paths are the essential connections between sephira that allow movement from one to another, and constitute the aspect of journeying on the Tree, pathworking as it is sometimes called. The early Rabbi vested these paths with certain attributions, and subsequent Qabalists made further additions in the form of correspondences.

Correspondences and the Tree

The correspondences have particular significance for Qabalists as they are representatives of various astrological influences associated with that path, and evoke appropriate energies to make the lessons of the path more meaningful and easier to achieve.

Correspondences are an integral part of Western Esoteric Tradition, and thus the Qabalah. They consist of a certain varied range of items, originally formulated in pre Christian times, which were considered to be harmonious, resonant and thereby attractive to planetary and elemental energies. A particular deity, plant, animal, stone, colour, perfume etc, etc. was believed to attract the energy of its associated planet or element, enhancing and magnifying its influence – essentially making all kinds of magical operations more effective. Lists of correspondences appear in print, amended or changed from antiquity to suit the times, and have a role of association to the paths and the sephira of the Qabalah, serving as enhancers and concentrators of energy. Correspondences may be employed as a meditative focus, or to be physically present, when pathworking. However, it is not the intention to cover this subject in any further detail here, and the above comments were merely to introduce the concept. Like everything else about the occult world the student must find things out for themselves.

Tarot Cards and the Tree

At some point, possibly again with Levi, or earlier, the Tarot Cards became associated with the tree, the major arcana with the twenty two paths, and the minor arcana with the sephira. Other literature covers this matter in detail but there does seem to be a convenient, credible although unfounded relationship. This association is solely Qabalistic, and the Kabbalah does not subscribe to this relationship, although many authors who write about the Kabbalah seemed confused about this, mention the Tarot but offer no further explanation.

In accepting the significance of the Tarot, it must be noted that each card has a traditional explanation attributed to it, an explanation possibly devolved from the experience of past Tarot readers and diviners – however each associated card, rather than just being nominal, imparts certain energy to its assigned path. A study of the Tarot is necessary to understand the possible effect of the attributed energy. These assigned Tarot cards are common to each of the four worlds.

Summary

Qabalist doctrine while seemingly simply represented as a Tree, is complex as befits a spiritual path worthy of the name. The basic Tree is only the doorway into the philosophy; it is in the

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four worlds of emanation where its awe inspiring intricacy and its involvement with the entire spectrum of the occult arts begin to become apparent.

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