

Colin Wilson – Cabalah
Introduction

If a chemist from the twentieth century could step into a time-machine and go back two-hundred years he or she would probably feel a deep kinship with the chemists of that time, even though there might be considerable differences in terminology, underlying theory, equipment and so on. Despite this kinship, chemists have not been trapped in the past, and the subject as it is studied today bears little resemblance to the chemistry of two hundred years ago.

Kabbalah has existed for nearly two thousand 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 continually "re-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 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 in 1992, so that people who are interested in Kabbalah and want to learn more about it are not limited purely 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 mystical or magical adventure. There is enough information not only to make that decision, but also to move from theory into practice. I should emphasise that this is only one variation of Kabbalah out of many, and I leave it to others to present their own variants – I make no apology if the material is biased towards a particular point of view.

The word "Kabbalah" means "tradition". There are many alternative spellings, the two most popular being Kabbalah and Qabalah, but Cabala, Qaballah, Qabala, Kaballa (and so on) are also seen. I made my choice

as a result of a poll of the books on my bookcase, not as a result of deep linguistic understanding.

If Kabbalah means "tradition", then 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. Because the Word was veiled, special techniques were developed to elucidate the true meaning....Kabbalistic theosophy has been deeply influenced by these attempts to find a deep meaning in the Bible.

The earliest documents (~100 – ~1000 A.D.) associated with Kabbalah describe the attempts of "Merkabah" mystics to penetrate the seven halls (Hekaloth) of creation and reach the Merkabah (throne-chariot) of God. These mystics used the familiar methods of shamanism (fasting, repetitious chanting, prayer, posture) to induce trance states in which

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they literally fought their way past terrible seals and guards to reach an ecstatic state in which they "saw God". An early and highly influential document (Sepher Yetzirah) appears to have originated during the earlier part of this period.

By the early middle ages further, more theosophical developments had taken place, chiefly a description of "processes" within God, and a highly esoteric view of creation as a process in which God manifests in a series of emanations. This doctrine of the "sephiroth" can be found in a rudimentary form in the "Yetzirah", but by the time of the publication of the book "Bahir" (12th. century) it had reached a form not too different from the form it takes today. One of most interesting characters from this period was Abraham Abulafia, who believed that God cannot be described or conceptualised using everyday symbols, and used the Hebrew alphabet 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" Scholem includes a

long extract of one such experiment made by one of Abulafia's students
it
has a deep ring of truth about it.

Probably the most influential Kabbalistic document, the "Sepher ha Zohar", was published by Moses de Leon, a Spanish Jew, in the latter half of the thirteenth century. The "Zohar" is a series of separate documents covering a wide range of subjects, from a verse-by-verse esoteric commentary on the Pentateuch, to highly theosophical descriptions of processes within God. The "Zohar" has been widely read and was highly influential within mainstream Judaism.

A later development in Kabbalah was the Safed school of mystics headed by Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. Luria was a highly charismatic leader who exercised almost total control over the life of the school, and has passed into history as something of 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 sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Judaism as a whole was heavily influenced by Kabbalah, but by the beginning of this century
a Jewish writer was able to dismiss it as an historical curiosity.
Jewish Kabbalah has vast literature which is almost entirely untranslated into English.

A development which took place almost synchronously with Jewish Kabbalah
was its adoption by many Christian mystics, magicians and philosophers. 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 Kabbalah.

It is not clear how Kabbalah was involved in the propagation of ritual magical techniques, or whether it *was* involved, or whether the ritual
techniques were preserved in parallel within Judaism, but it is an

undeniable fact that the most influential documents appear to have a Jewish origin. 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. 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, neo-platonism, pythagoreanism, rosicrucianism, christianity, tantra and so on. The most important "modern" influences are the French magician Eliphas Levi, and the English "Order of the Golden Dawn". At least two members of the

G.D. (S.L. Mathers and A.E. Waite) were knowledgeable Kabbalists, and three G. D. members have popularised Kabbalah – Aleister Crowley, Israel Regardie, and Dion Fortune. Dion Fortune's "Inner Light" has also produced a number of authors: Gareth Knight, William Butler, and William Gray.

An unfortunate side effect of the G.D is that while Kabbalah was an important part of its "Knowledge Lectures", surviving G.D. rituals are a syncretist hodge-podge of symbolism in which Kabbalah plays a minor or nominal role, and this has led to Kabbalah being seen by many modern occultists 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 drew heavily on medieval ritual and Kabbalah for inspiration, and it is not unusual to find witches teaching some form of Kabbalah, although it is generally even less well integrated into practical technique than in the case of the

G.D.

The Kabbalistic tradition described in the notes derives principally from Dion Fortune, but has been substantially developed over the past 30

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

Chapter 1.: 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. The three concepts are force, form and consciousness and 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 get to the centre of a garden maze. The hedges are a form which constrain that person's ability to
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walk as they please.

- a diesel engine provides the force which drives a boat forwards. A rudder constrains its course to 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 if the change is to be made legally.
 - 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 all 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 very different types of example here:

1. examples of natural physical processes (e.g. a falling stone) where the force is one of the natural forces known to physics (e.g. gravity) and the form is some combination of physical laws which constrain the force to act in a well defined way.

2. 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, polite behaviour etc.).

Despite the fact that the two different types of example are "only metaphorically similar", Kabbalists see no fundamental distinction between them. To the Kabbalist there are forces which cause change in the natural world, and there are

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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 component parts of the physical world seem to obey (natural laws) and there are completely arbitrary forms we create as part of the process of living (the rules of a game, the shape of a mug, the design of an engine, the syntax of a language) and 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 I have called consciousness for lack of a better word.

Consciousness is undefinable. We know that 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. We can define the manifestations of consciousness in terms of manifestations of consciousness, which 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 lots of words for the phenomena of consciousness

–thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires, emotions, motives and so on –but few words for the 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, and one of the purposes of these notes is to explain this vocabulary, not by definition, but mostly by metaphor and analogy. The only genuine method of 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. A fundamental premise of the Kabbalistic model of reality is that there is a pure, primal, and undefinable state of consciousness which manifests as an interaction between force and form. This is virtually the entire guts of the Kabbalistic view of things, and almost everything I have to say from now on is based on this trinity of consciousness, force, and form. Consciousness comes first, but hidden within it is an inherent duality; there is an energy associated 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).

First Principle
of
/ Consciousness \
/ \
/ \
Capacity Raw
to take _____ Energy
Form

Figure 1.

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What do we get out of raw energy and an inbuilt capacity for form and structure? Is there yet another hidden potential within this trinity waiting to manifest? There is. If modern physics is to be believed we get matter and the physical world. The cosmological Big Bang model of raw energy surging out from an infinitesimal point and condensing into basic forms of matter as it cools, then into stars and galaxies, then planets, and ultimately living creatures, has many points of similarity with the Kabbalistic model. In the Big Bang model a soup of energy condenses according

to some yet-to-be-formulated Grand-Universal-Theory into our physical world. What Kabbalah does suggest (and modern physics most certainly does not!) is that matter and consciousness are the same stuff, and differ only in the degree of structure imposed –matter is consciousness so heavily structured and constrained that its behaviour becomes describable using the regular and simple laws of physics. This is shown in Fig. 2. The primal, first principle of consciousness is synonymous with the idea of "God".

First Principle
of
/ Consciousness \
/ | \
|

Capacity | Raw
to take _____ Energy/Force

Form |

Matter
The World

Figure 2

The glyph in Fig. 2 is the basis for the Tree of Life. The first principle of consciousness is called Kether, which means Crown. The raw energy of consciousness is called Chockmah 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, called Malkuth or Kingdom. This quaternary is a Kabbalistic representation of God-the-Knowable, in the sense that it the most primitive representation of God we are capable of comprehending; paradoxically, Kabbalah also contains a notion of God-the-Unknowable which transcends this glyph, and is called En Soph. There is not much I can say about En Soph, and what I can say I will postpone for later.

God-the-Knowable has four aspects, two male and two female: Kether and Chokhmah are both represented as male, and Binah and

Malkuth are represented as female. One of the titles of Chokhmah is Abba, which means Father, and one of the titles of Binah is Aima, which means Mother, so you can think of Chokhmah as God-the-Father, and Binah as God-the-Mother. Malkuth is the daughter, the female spirit of God-as-Matter, and it would not be wildly wrong to think of her as Mother Earth. One of the more

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pleasant things about Kabbalah is that its symbolism gives equal place to both male and female.

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 Fig. 2 is a model of consciousness, but not of self-consciousness, and self-consciousness throws an interesting spanner in the works.

The Fall

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.

Consciousness
of
/ Consciousness \
/ | \
/ | \
Consciousness | Consciousness
of _____ of
Form | Energy/Force
\< | /
\< | /
\< | /
Consciousness

of the

World

Figure 3

Figure 3. is Figure 2. reflected through self-consciousness. The overall effect of self-consciousness is to add an additional layer to Figure 2. as follows:

First Principle

of

/ Consciousness \

/ | \

/ | \

Capacity | Raw

to take _____ Energy/Force

Form |

\ | /

\ | /

\ | /

Consciousness

of

/ Consciousness \

/ | \

/ | \

Consciousness | Consciousness

of _____ of

Form | Energy/Force

\ | /

\ | /

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\ | /

Consciousness
of the
World

|
|
|

Matter
The World

Figure 4

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 (Kether) and that Consciousness realised as matter and the physical world (Malkuth). This is called "the Fall", after the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From a 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. 5:

The Self
Self-Importance
Self-Sacrifice

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/ | \
/ | \
/ | \

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Language | Emotions
Abstraction_____Drives
Reason | Feelings

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\ | /
\ | /
\ | /

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\ Perception /
Imagination
Instinct
Reproduction

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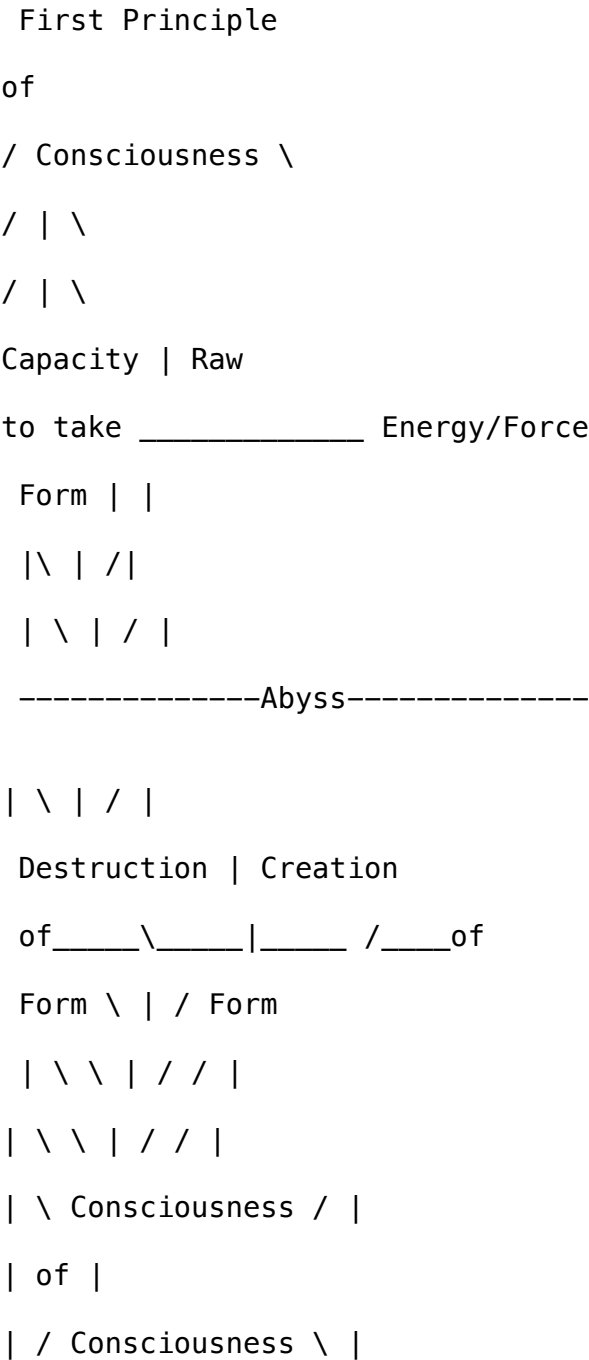
Figure 5

Figure 4. 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

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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 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 Chesed, which means Mercy, and the state

which represents the destruction of forms is called Gevurah, which means Strength. This is shown in Fig. 6. The objectification of forms which takes place in a self-conscious being, and the consequent 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 6.



| / | \ |

| / | \ |

Consciousness | Consciousness

of _____ of

\ Form | Energy/Force

\ \ | / /

\ \ | / /

\ \ | / /

\ Consciousness /

\ of /

\ the World /

\ /

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\ | /

\ | /

\ | /

Matter

The World

Figure 6

The diagram in Fig. 6 is called the Tree of Life. The "constructionist" approach I have used to justify its structure is a little unusual, but the essence of my presentation can be found in the "Zohar" under the guise of the Macroprosopus and Microprosopus, although in this form it is not readily accessible to the average reader. 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 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 consciousness and its interaction with the physical world.

The Tree is composed of 10 states or sephiroth (sephiroth plural, sephira singular) and 22 interconnecting paths. The age of this diagram is unknown: there is enough information in the 13th. century "Sepher ha Zohar" to construct this diagram, and the doctrine of the sephiroth has been attributed to Isaac the Blind in the 12th. century, but we have no certain knowledge of its origin. It probably originated sometime in the interval between the 6th. and 13th. centuries AD. The origin of the word "sephira" is unclear – it is almost certainly derived from the Hebrew word for "number" (SPhR), but it has also been attributed to the Greek word for "sphere" and even 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 focii 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 .

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. The Kabbalistic "explanation" runs as follows: when Malkuth "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 Daath, or Knowledge. Daath is *not* a sephira; it is a hole. This may sound like gobbledy-gook, and in the sense that it is only a metaphor, it is.

The completed Tree of Life with the Hebrew titles of the sephiroth is shown below in Fig. 7.

En Soph
/-----\
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/ \

(Kether)
/ (Crown) \

/ | \
/ | \
/ | \

Binah | Chokhmah
(Understanding) _____ (Wisdom)

(Intelligence) | |
| \ | / |
| \ Daath / |
| \ (Knowledge) / |
| \ | / |

Gevurah \ | / Chesed

(Strength) \ _____ | _____ / ____ (Mercy)
| \ | / (Love)
| \ \ | / / |
| \ \ | / / |
| \ Tipheret / |
| / (Beauty) \ |
/	\
/	\
/	\

Hod | Netzach
(Glory) _____ (Victory)
(Splendour) | (Firmness)

\ \ | / /
\ \ | / /
\ \ | / /

\ \ | / /
\ \ Yesod / /
\ (Foundation) /

\ /
\ | /
\ | /

\ | /

Malkuth
(Kingdom)

Figure 7

From an historical point of view the doctrine of emanations and the Tree of Life are only one small part of a huge body of Kabbalistic speculation about the nature of divinity and our part in creation, but it is the part which has survived. The Tree 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 Mystery Tradition is largely concerned with the understanding and practical application of the Tree of Life, and the following set of notes will list some of the characteristics of each sephira in more detail so that you will have a "snapshot" of what each sephira represents before going on to examine the sephiroth and the "deep structure" of the Tree in more detail.

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Chapter 2.: Sephirothic Correspondences

The correspondences are a set of symbols, associations 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 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 it 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 the sephira. In some cases it is not a planet at all (e.g. the fixed stars). The planets are ordered by decreasing apparent motion -this is one correspondence which appears to pre-date Copernicus!
3.
The Element is the physical element (earth, water, air, fire, aethyr) which has most in common with the nature of the Sephira. The Golden Dawn applied an excess of logic to these attributions and made a mess of them, to the confusion of many. 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 but I haven't found them to be useful in 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 the sephira clouds one's judgement; it is something which is *obviously* true. 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.

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9.
The Virtue and Vice are the energy of the sephiroth as it manifests in a positive and negative sense in the personality.
10. Qlippoth
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 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 the Manichean notion that matter was evil, a snare for the spirit, and consequently the Qliphoth or shells were "demonised" and actually turned into demons. The correspondence I have given here restores the original notion of a shell of form *without* the corresponding force to activate it; it is the lifeless, empty husk of a sephira devoid of force, and while it isn't a literal demon, it is hardly a bundle of laughs when you come across it.

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 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, Atziluth.

13. The Archangel mediates the energy of the sephira in the

world of creation, Briah.

14. The Angel Order administers the energy of the sephira in the world of formation, Yetzirah.

15. The Keywords are a collection of phrases which summarise key aspects of the sephira.

=====

Sephira: Malkuth Meaning: Kingdom

Planet: Cholem Yesodeth Element: earth

----- (the Breaker of -----

the Foundations, sphere of the elements, the Earth)

Briatic Colour: brown Number: 10

----- (citrine, russet-red, -----

olive green, black)

Magical Image: a young woman crowned and throned

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Briatic Correspondence: stability

Illusion: materialism Obligation: discipline

Virtue: discrimination Vice: avarice & inertia

Qlippoth: stasis Command: keep silent

Spiritual Experience: Vision of the Holy Guardian Angel

Titles: The Gate; Gate of Death; Gate of Tears; Gate of Justice;
-----The Inferior Mother; Malkah, the Queen; Kallah, the
Bride; the Virgin.

God Name: Adonai ha Aretz Archangel: Sandalphon

-----Adonai Malekh -----Angel

Order: Ishim

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.

=====
Sephira: Yesod Meaning: Foundation

Planet: Levanah (the Moon) Element: Aethyr

Briatic Colour: purple Number: 9

Magical Image: a beautiful man, very strong (e.g. Atlas)

Briatic Correspondence: receptivity, perception

Illusion: security Obligation: trust

Virtue: independence Vice: idleness

Qlippoth: zombieism, robotism Command: go!

Spiritual Experience: Vision of the Machinery of the Universe

Titles: The Treasure House of Images

God Name: Shaddai el Chai Archangel: Gabriel

Angel Order: Cherubim

Keywords: perception, interface, imagination, image, appearance,

glamour, the Moon, the unconscious, instinct, tides,
illusion, hidden infrastructure, dreams, divination,
anything as it seems to be and not as it is, mirrors
and crystals, the "Astral Plane", Aethyr, glue,
tunnels, sex & reproduction, the genitals, cosmetics,

instinctive magic (psychism), secret doors, shamanic

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tunnel.

=====
Sephira: Hod Meaning: Glory, Splendour

-----Planet:
Kokab (Mercury) Element: air

Briatic Colour: orange Number: 8

Magical Image: an hermaphrodite
Briatic Correspondence: abstraction
Illusion: order Obligation: learn
Virtue: honesty, truthfulness Vice: dishonesty
Qlippoth: rigidity Command: will
Spiritual Experience: Vision of Splendour
Titles: -
God Name: Elohim Tzabaoth Archangel: Raphael
Angel Order: Beni Elohim
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.

=====
Sephira: Netzach Meaning: Victory, Firmness
Planet: Nogah (Venus) Element: water
Briatic Colour: green Number: 7
Magical Image: a beautiful naked woman
Briatic Correspondence: nurture
Illusion: projection Obligation: responsibility
Virtue: unselfishness Vice: selfishness
Qlippoth: habit, routine Command: know
Spiritual Experience: Vision of Beauty Triumphant
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Titles: -----

God

Name: Jehovah Tzabaoth Archangel: Haniel

-----Angel

Order: Elohim

Keywords: passion, pleasure, luxury, sensual beauty, feelings,
drives, emotions – love, hate, anger, joy, depression,
misery, excitement, desire, lust; nurture, libido,
empathy, sympathy, ecstatic magic.

=====

Sephira: Tipheret Meaning: Beauty

Planet: Shemesh (the Sun) Element: fire

Briatic Colour: yellow Number: 6

Magical Image: a king, a child, a sacrificed god

Briatic Correspondence: centrality, wholeness

Illusion: identification Obligation: integrity

Virtue: devotion to the Great Work Vice: pride, self-importance

Qlippoth: hollowness Command: dare

Spiritual Experience: Vision of Harmony

Titles: Melekh, the King; Zoar Anpin, the lesser countenance, the
-----Microprosopus; the Son; Rachamin, charity.

God Name: Aloah va Daath Archangel: Michael

Angel Order: Malachim

Keywords: harmony, integrity, balance, wholeness, the Self,
selfimportance,
self-sacrifice, the Son of God, centrality,
the Philosopher's Stone, identity, the solar plexus,
a King, the Great Work.

=====

Sephira: Gevurah Meaning: Strength

Planet: Madim (Mars)

Briatic Colour: red Number: 5
Magical Image: a mighty warrior
Briatic Correspondence: power
Illusion: invincibility Obligation: courage & loyalty
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Virtue: courage & energy Vice: cruelty

Qlippoth: bureaucracy

Spiritual Experience: Vision of Power

Titles: Pachad, fear; Din, justice.

God Name: Elohim Gevor Archangel: Kamael

Angel Order: Seraphim

Keywords: power, justice, retribution (eaten cold), the Law (in execution), cruelty, oppression, domination & the Power
Myth, severity, necessary destruction, catabolism, martial arts.

=====

Sephira: Chesed Meaning: Mercy

Planet: Tzadekh (Jupiter)

Briatic Colour: blue Number: 4

Magical Image: a mighty king

Briatic Correspondence: authority
Illusion: being right Obligation: humility
----- (self-righteousness) -----

Virtue: humility & obedience Vice: tyranny, hypocrisy,
----- bigotry, gluttony
Qlippoth: ideology

Spiritual Experience: Vision of Love

Titles: Gedulah, magnificence, love, majesty

God Name: El Archangel: Tzadkiel

Angel Order: Chasmalim

Keywords: authority, creativity, inspiration, vision, leadership, excess, waste, secular and spiritual power, submission and the Annihilation Myth, the atom bomb, obliteration, birth, service.

=====
Non-Sephira: Daath Meaning: Knowledge
Daath has no manifest qualities and cannot be invoked directly.
Keywords: hole, tunnel, gateway, doorway, black hole, vortex.
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=====
Sephira: Binah Meaning: Understanding,

Planet: Shabbathai (Saturn)

Briatic Colour: black Number: 3

Magical Image: an old woman on a throne

Briatic Correspondence: comprehension

Illusion: death

Virtue: silence Vice: inertia

Qlippoth: fatalism

Spiritual Experience: Vision of Sorrow

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.

God Name: Elohim Archangel: Cassiel

Angel Order: Aralim

Keywords: limitation, form, constraint, heaviness, slowness, oldage, infertility, incarnation, karma, fate, time,

space, natural law, the womb and gestation, darkness,
boundedness, enclosure, containment, fertility, mother,
weaving and spinning, death (annihilation).

=====
Sephira: Chokmah Meaning: Wisdom

Planet: Mazlot (the Zodiac, the fixed stars)
Briatic Colour: silver/white Number: 2
-----grey -----

Magical Image: a bearded man

Briatic Correspondence: revolution

Illusion: independence

Virtue: good Vice: evil

Qlippoth: arbitrariness

Spiritual Experience: Vision of God face-to-face
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Titles: Abba, the Father. The Supernal Father.
God Name: Jah Archangel: Ratziel
Angel Order: Auphanim
Keywords: pure creative energy, life force, the wellspring.
Angel Order: Auphanim
Keywords: pure creative energy, life force, the wellspring.

=====
Sephira: Kether Meaning: Crown

Planet: Rashith ha Gilgalim (first swirlings, the Big Bang)

Briatic Colour: pure white Number: 1

Magical Image: a bearded man seen in profile

Briatic Correspondence: unity

Illusion: attainment

Virtue: attainment Vice: ---

Qlippoth: futility

Spiritual Experience: Union with God

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.

God Name: Eheieh Archangel: Metatron

Angel Order: Chaioth ha Qadesh

Keywords: unity, union, all, pure consciousness, God, the Godhead, manifestation, beginning, source, emanation.

Chapter 3: The Pillars & the Lightning Flash

=====

In Chapter 1. the Tree of Life was derived from three concepts, or rather one primary concept and two derivative concepts which are "contained" 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 the idea by introducing the three Pillars of the Tree, and uses the Pillars to clarify a process called the Lightning Flash.

The Three Pillars are shown in Figure 8. below.

Pillar Pillar Pillar
of of of
Form Consciousness Force
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(Severity) (Mildness) (Mercy)

Kether
/ (Crown) \

/ | \
/ | \
/ | \

Binah | Chokhmah
(Understanding)_____ (Wisdom)

(Intelligence) | |
| \ | / |
| \ Daath / |
| \ (Knowledge) / |
| \ | / |

Gevurah \ | / Chesed

(Strength)_____|_____/__ (Mercy)
| \ | / (Love)
| \ \ | / / |
| \ \ | / / |
| \ Tipheret / |
| / (Beauty) \ |
/	\
/	\
/	\

Hod | Netzach
(Glory) _____(Victory)
(Splendour) | (Firmness)

\ \ | / /
\ \ | / /
\ \ | / /

\ \ | / /
\ \ Yesod / /
\ (Foundation) /

\ /
\ | /
\ | /
\ | /

Malkuth
(Kingdom)

Figure 8

Not surprisingly the three pillars are referred to as the pillars of consciousness, force and form. The pillar of consciousness contains the sephiroth Kether, Tiphereth, Yesod and Malkuth; the pillar of force contains the sephiroth Chokhmah, Chesed and Netzach; the pillar of form contains the sephiroth Binah, Gevurah and Hod. 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 as an emanation of God is a delicate *balance* (methaqela) 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

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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, and even in medieval times the terms had distinctly technical meanings as the following quotation shows [1]:

"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 precisely this sense – it is that which defines *what* a thing is, the structure whereby a given thing is distinct from every other thing.

As for "consciousness", 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* according to the *forms* it takes, in which case we are defining the forms, *not* the consciousness. The same qualification applies to the word "force". My inability to define

two of the three concepts which underpin the structure of the Tree is a nuisance which is tackled traditionally by the use of extravagant metaphors, and by elimination ("not this, not that").

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 form from the top of a pillar to the bottom. Tipheret, Yesod and Malkuth all share with Kether the quality of "consciousness in balance" or "synthesis of opposing qualities", or 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, and Binah, Gevurah and Hod share the quality of form, definition and limitation. From Kether down to Malkuth, force and form are combined; 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, and with that metaphor we are now ready to describe the Lightning Flash, the process whereby God takes on flesh, the process which created and sustains the creation.

In the beginning...was Something. Or Nothing. It doesn't really matter which term we use, 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, and understand by this a hidden, unmanifest God-in-Itself.

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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 all too easy to make fun of the effort which has gone into elaborating the indescribable, so I won't, but in return do not expect me to 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 (Isaac Luria's theory 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 these notes it is enough that a point crystallised. This point was the crown of creation, the sephira Kether, and within Kether was contained all

the unrealised potential of the creation.

An aspect of Kether 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 force to sustain it the creation would crumple like a balloon. The force-like aspect within Kether 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 whole of creation is maintained by this ravaging, primeval desire to *be*, to become, to exist, to change, to evolve. The experiential distinction between Kether, the point of emanation, and Chokhmah, the creative outpouring, is elusive, but some of the difference is captured in the phrases "I am" and "I become".

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) 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. 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 used for the marriage of the Microprosopus and his bride, the Queen and Inferior Mother, the sephira Malkuth).

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 the visionary leaders who drive the human race

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onwards into every new kind of endeavour. It can be for good or evil; a leader who can tap the petty malice and vindictiveness in any person and channel it into a vision of a new order and genocide is just as much a visionary as any other, but the positive side of Chesed is the humanitarian leader who brings about genuine improvements to our common life.

No change comes easy; as Cordova points out "everything wishes to remain what it is". The creation of form is balanced in the sephira Gevurah by the preservation and destruction of form. Any impulse of change is channelled through Gevurah, and if it is not resisted 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 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 Tiphereth. It is an instinctive morality, and it isn't present by default in the human species. It isn't based on cultural norms; 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 defense of that sense of justice. Tiphereth 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 Tiphereth 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 Tiphereth, 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
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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 our last cargo 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 wants in terms of reasons and explanations. Hod is the sephira of abstraction, reason, logic, language and communication, and a reflection of the Mother of Form in the human mind. We have a 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 the comparison with computer peripheral interfaces is an excellent one. Yesod is sometimes called "the Receptacle of the Emanations", and it interfaces the emanations of all three pillars to the sephira Malkuth, 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 Malkuth 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 final step in the process is the sephira Malkuth, 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 keep it for later.

The process I have described is called the Lightning Flash. The Lightning Flash runs as follows: Kether, Chokmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiphereth, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, Malkuth, and 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: Kether is 1, Chokmah is 2, and so on. The "Sepher Yetzirah" [2] 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

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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 in the material world. It can be used to describe *any* change - lighting a match, picking your nose, walking the dog - and novices are usually 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 material world of the senses changes and evolves, it is a key to practical magical work, and 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 *all* the routine and unexciting little things in life. Everything is equally "spiritual", equally "divine", and there is more to be learned from picking one's nose than there is in a spiritual discipline which puts you "here" and God "over there". The Lightning Flash ends in Malkuth, and it can be followed like a thread through the hidden pathways of creation until one arrives back at the source. The next chapter will retrace the Lightning Flash by examining the qualities of each sephira in more detail.

[1]

Scholem, Gershom G. "Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism",
Schoken Books 1974

[2] Westcott, W. Wynn, ed. "Sepher Yetzirah". Many reprintings.

Chapter 4: The Sephiroth

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

Malkuth

Malkuth 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, and for

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sheer inscrutability it rivals Kether –indeed, there is a Kabbalistic aphorism that "Kether is Malkuth, and Malkuth is in Kether, but after another manner".

The word Malkuth 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 Malkuth. Malkuth is the sphere of matter, substance, the real, physical world. In the least compromising versions of materialist philosophy (e.g. Hobbes) there is nothing beyond physical matter, and from that viewpoint the Tree of Life beyond Malkuth does not exist: our feelings of identity and self-consciousness are nothing more than a 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** a materialist model of reality, but when we examine Malkuth by itself we find ourselves immersed in matter, and it is natural to think in terms of physics, 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 foolishness of the first order to imagine that Kabbalah can provide better explanations of the nature of matter on the basis of a study of the text of the Old Testament. Not that I under-rate the intuition which has gone into the making of Kabbalah over the centuries, but for practical purposes the average university science graduate knows (much) more about the material stuff of the world than medieval Kabbalists, and a grounding in modern physics is as good a way to approach Malkuth as any other.

For those who are not comfortable with physics there are alternative, more traditional ways of approaching Malkuth. The magical image of Malkuth 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 mother Binah. She is the Queen who inhabits the Kingdom, and the Bride of the Microprosopus. She is Gaia, Mother Earth, but of course she is not only the substance of this world; she is the body of the entire physical universe.

Some care is required when assigning Mother/Earth goddesses to Malkuth, because some of them correspond more closely to the superior mother Binah. There is a close and deep connection between Malkuth and Binah which results in the two sephiroth sharing similar correspondences, and one of the oldest Kabbalistic texts [1] has this to say about Malkuth:

"The title of the tenth path [Malkuth] 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 Malkuth sits. We will return to this later. Binah contains the potential of form in the abstract, while Malkuth is is the fullest realisation of form, and both sephiroth share the

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correspondences of heaviness, limitation, finiteness, inertia, avarice, silence, and death.

The female quality of Malkuth 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 [7] 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 further on; more information can be found in [3] & [7].

Malkuth 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 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 rarified and arcane that most people (self included) are pushed to say what it is; the fifth element is aethyr (or ether) and is sometimes called spirit.

The amount of material written about the elements 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 "The Magus" [2]. The hierarchy of elemental powers can be found in "777" [4] and in Golden Dawn material [5]

-I have summarised a few useful items below:
Element Fire Air Water Earth

God Name Elohim Jehovah Eheieh Agla

Archangel Michael Raphael Gabriel Uriel

King Djin Paralda Nichsa Ghob

Elemental Salamanders Sylphs Undines Gnomes

It amused me to notice that the section on the elemental kingdoms in Farrar's "What Witches Do" [6] had been taken by Alex Saunders lock, stock and barrel from traditional Kabbalistic and CM sources.

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The elements in Malkuth are arranged as follows:

South
Fire

East Zenith Aethyr+ West
Air Nadir Aethyr-Water

North
Earth

I have rotated the cardinal points 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:

Tiphereth
Fire

Hod Yesod Netzach
Air Aethyr Water

Malkuth
Earth

It is important to distinguish between the elements in Malkuth, where we are talking about real substance (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, fertile

Air: vocal, communicative, intellectual

Fire: energetic, daring, impetuous

Positive Aethyr: glue, binding, plastic

Negative Aethyr: unbinding, dissolution, disintegration

Aethyr or Spirit is enigmatic, and I tend to think of it in terms of the forces which bind matter together. It is almost certainly a coincidence (but nevertheless interesting) that there are four fundamental forces – gravitational, electromagnetic, weak nuclear

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& strong nuclear – known to date, and current belief is that they can be unified into one fundamental force. On a slightly more arcane tack, Barret [2] has this to say about Aethyr:

"Now seeing that the soul is the essential form,

intelligible and uncorruptible, 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" [8] and the material world. Aethyr is often thought to come in two flavours – positive Aethyr, which binds, and negative Aethyr, which unbinds. Negative Aethyr is a bit like the Universal Solvent, and requires as much care in handling ;-}

Working with the physical elements in Malkuth 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 experience in a very direct way through recreations such as caving, diving, parachuting or firewalking; they bite back in a suitably humbling way, and they provide CMs

with an opportunity to join the neo-pagans in the great outdoors. Our bodies themselves are made from physical stuff, and there are many Raja Yoga-like exercises which can be carried out using the elements as a basis for work on the body. If you can stand his manic intensity (Exercise 1: boil an egg by force of will) then Bardon [9] is full of good ideas.

Malkuth is often associated with various kinds of intrinsic evil, and 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 strange gyrations in an attempt to avoid what was for many an unacceptable conclusion. It was difficult to accept that famine, war, disease, prejudice, hate, death could be a part of a perfect being, and there had to be some way to account for evil which did not contaminate divine perfection. One approach was to sweep evil under the carpet, and in this case the carpet was Malkuth. Malkuth became the habitation for evil spirits.

If one examines the structure of the Tree without prejudice

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then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that evil is quite adequately accounted for, and there is no need to shuffle evil to the periphery of the Tree like a cleaner without a dustpan. The emanation of any sephirah from Chokhmah 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 has to balance the other -you cannot have the mercy without the severity. On the other hand, the severity of God is persistently 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 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:

"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 "Sepher Bahir") were influenced by the Cathars, a late form of Manicheanism. Whether the source was Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Manicheanism 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 Malkuth ends up as a kind of cosmic outer darkness, a bin for all the dirt, detritus, broken sephira and dirty hankies of the creation. Form is evil, the Mother of Form is female, women are definitely and indubitably evil, and Malkuth is the most female of the sephira, therefore Malkuth is most definitely evil...quod erat demonstrandum. By the time we reach the time of S.L. Mathers and the Golden Dawn there is a complete Tree of evil demonic Qlipboth *underneath* Malkuth as a relection of the "good" Tree above it. I believe this may have something to do with the fact that meditations on Malkuth 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 "discover" an averse Tree "underneath" Malkuth. This view of the Qlipboth, or Shells, as active, demonic evil has become pervasive, and the more energy people put into the demonic Tree, the less there is for the original. Abolish the Qlipboth as demonic forces, and the Tree of Life comes alive with its full power of good *and* evil. The following quotation from Bischoff

[10] (speaking of the Sephiroth) provides a more rational view of the Qlipboth:

"Since their energy [of the sephiroth] shows three degrees of strength (highest, middle and lowest degree), their

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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 preceeding, 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) Qlipboth."

This is my own view; the shell 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 alive. With this interpretation the Qlippoth 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 get a Qlippah. For this reason one of the vices of Malkuth 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. The Qlippah of Malkuth is what you would get if the Sun went out: Stasis, life frozen into immobility.

The other vice of Malkuth 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, there is no excitement or "natural energy" to keep one fired up, and one has to keep on pushing right to the finish. For this reason the obligation of Malkuth is (has to be) self-discipline.

The virtue of Malkuth is Discrimination, the ability to perceive differences. The ability to perceive differences is a necessity for any living organism, whether a bacteria able to sense the gradient of a nutrient or a kid working out how much money to wheedle out of his parents. As Malkuth 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 so fundamental to survival that it works overtime and finds boundaries and distinctions everywhere – "you" and "me", "yours" and "mine", distinctions of "property" and "value" and "territory" which are intellectual abstractions on one level (i.e. not real) and fiercely defended realities on another (i.e. very real indeed). 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 to lead us out again. Some people think skin colour is a real measure of intelligence; some don't. Some people think gender is a real measure of ability; some don't. Some people judge on appearances; some don't. There is clearly a difference between a bottle of beer and a bottle of piss, but is the colour of the *bottle* important? What *is* important? What differences are real, what matters? How much energy do we devote to things which are "not real". Am I able to perceive how much I

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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 rest centuries ago? One of the primary exercises of an initiate into Malkuth is a thorough examination of the question "What is real?".

The Spiritual Experience of Malkuth is variously the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel (HGA), or the Vision of the HGA (depending on who you believe). I vote for the Vision of the HGA in Malkuth, and the Knowledge and Conversation in Tiphereth. 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 identical to what I was taught by the person who taught me Kabbalah, so some part of Gnosticism lives on. The current tradition concerning the HGA almost certainly entered the Western Esoteric Tradition as a consequence of S.L. Mather's translation

[11] 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 and it is often attempted and occasionally completed.

The powers of Malkuth 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 Malkuth and his head in Kether, which gives him an opportunity to chat to Metatron, the Angel of the Presence. The angel order is the Ashim, or Ishim, sometimes translated as the "souls of fire", supposedly the souls of righteous men and women.

In concluding this section on Malkuth, 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 Malkuth as Mother Earth provides a link between Kabbalah and a numinous archetype with a deep significance for some. The image of Malkuth 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 Malkuth 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 Malkuth can reveal a great deal about Kether – the bottom of the Tree and the top have much in common.

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Yesod

Yesod means "foundation", and that is what Yesod is: it is the hidden infrastructure whereby the emanations from the remainder of the Tree are transmitted to the sephira Malkuth. 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, a telephone exchange etc, so does the Creation, and the external, visible world of phenomenal reality rests (metaphorically speaking) upon a hidden foundation of occult machinery. Meditations on the nature of Yesod tend to be full of 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 this 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". The 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 rarified, and this "fifth element" is often called aethyr. I

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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" [1,2] and so on. I don't take this stuff too seriously, but I do like to work with the kind of natural intuitions which occur spontaneously and independently in a large number of people – there is power in these intuitions – and 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 Malkuth. The interface is bi-directional; there are impulses coming down from Kether, and echoes bouncing back from Malkuth. The idea of interface is illustrated in the design of a computer system: a computer with a multitude of worlds hidden within it is 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 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, and so Yesod is also the sphere of instinctive psychism, of clairvoyance, precognition, divination and prophecy. It is also clear from accounts of lucid dreaming (and personal experience) that we possess the ability to perceive an inner world as vividly as the outer, and so to Yesod belongs the inner world of dreams, daydreams and vivid imagination, and 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, mediumship, lycanthropy and the like. 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 just as the sea supports all the life which lives in it and sails upon 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 Malkuth it is the most magical, but compared with Malkuth 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

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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 sophisticated examples of this are to be found in modern marketing, advertising and image consultancies. I do not jest. My tongue is not even slightly in my cheek. The following quote was taken from this morning's paper [3]:

Although the changes look cosmetic, those responsible for creating corporate image argue that a redesign of a company's uniform or name is just the visible sign of a much larger transformation.

"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, focussed 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. 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 be 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 an appalling customer relations problem, so it is changing the colour of its door handles! This is Yesodic magic on a gigantic scale.

The 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. Nowadays 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.

While on the subject of changing perception to assemble new
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realities, the following quote by "Don Juan" [4] 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 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, focussed 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. 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, the image of and precursor to reality, mirrors are an important tool for Yesod magic. Quartz crystals are also used, probably because of the 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 jewelry (lunar association), perfumes, dreamy music, and all the glitz, glamour and glitter of a daemoniac magpie's nest, is like a temple to Yesod. Mirrors and crystals are used passively as focii 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 Malkuth [5].

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 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
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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 man and wife to an internal process within the body of God: e.g [6].

"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 Tiphereth, the Bride is the sephira Malkuth, and the point of union between them is obviously Yesod.

The 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 get close to what is happening in sexual reproduction it is worth asking the question "What is a computer program?". Well, a computer program indisputably begins as an idea; it is not a material thing. 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; it could be written in several different high level languages – Pascal, C, Prolog, LISP, ADA, ML etc. Are they all the same program? Computer scientists wrestle with this problem: can we show that two different programs written in two different languages are in some sense functionally identical? It isn't trivial to do this because it asks fundamental questions about language (any language) and 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 the program is, it seems to exist independently of any particular language, so what is the program and where is it? Let us ignore that chestnut and go on to the next level. Suppose we write the 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

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back. We can transform it into radically different forms (that is what compilers and assemblers do). It obviously isn't tied to any physical representation either. What about the computer it runs on? Well, it could be a conventional one made with CMOS chips etc.....but aren't there a lot of different kinds and makes of computer, and they can all run the same program. 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 Turing machine, and that isn't hard. So not only is the 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; 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?

Now apply the same kind of scrutiny to living organisms, and the mechanism of reproduction. Take a good look at nucleic acids, enzymes, proteins etc., and ask the same kind of questions. I am not implying that life is a sort of program, but 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 atoms which could just as well be ball-bearings or fluids or....The thing 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, and if I was asked which was more real, the transient collection of chemicals used, or the abstract form itself, I would answer "the form". But then, I am a programmer, and I would say that.

I 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 [7]:

"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."

"Ah Ha!" cry the materialists, "At least the 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 Malkuth) is not arcane, theosophical mumbo-jumbo; it is an issue which is alive and kicking, and the closer we get to "real things" (and that certainly includes living organisms), the better the Kabbalistic model (that form precedes

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manifestation, that there is a well-defined process of form-ation with the "real world" as an outcome) looks.

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), and conversely there are feelings of despair, depression, loss of identity, and existential terror when a crack forms in the illusion, and reality shows through – Castaneda calls it "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, it will enthusiastically embrace any ally which will help to shore up its defenses –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 [8], 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; I have noticed 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. The other method, the abrasive, is to wear 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 all the correct 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 anymore), 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. The woman who taught me Kabbalah used both the cataclysmic and the abrasive methods on her students with

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malicious glee –I will discuss this in more detail in the section on Tiphereth.

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 Malkuth. A stone is inert because it lacks the capacity to change, but in most circumstances people 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 Qlippothic aspect of Yesod occurs when foundations are rotten and disintegrating and only the superficial appearance remains unchanged – Dorian Gray springs to mind, or cases where the brain is damaged and the body remains and carries out basic instinctive functions, but the person is dead as far as other people are concerned. Organisations are just as prone to this as people.

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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."

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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 another 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 Malkuth.
Neither quality manifests in a pure state, as 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 Tiphereth is Melekh, or king. This king is the child of Chokhmah (Abba, the father) and Binah (Aima, the Mother) and hence a son of God who wears the crown of Kether. The kingdom is the sephira Malkuth, 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 (Tzaba), 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 if there is no rightful king ruling over the kingdom of the soul (a common state of affairs), then the 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 – more on this later.

The 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

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possess an absolutely basic ability to create internal representations out of the information we are capable of perceiving 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 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, but 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 an appropriate light meter. The colours are synthesised by my retinas; different elements in my eye respond to different frequencies in the light and give rise to an internal experience we label "red", "blue", "green". The circles simply 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)

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that I am able to distinguish patterns standing for abstract
numbers in patterns of circles e.g.

oo

o o

o

o

o

o

o

ooooo

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 and yet 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, the abstraction "chair", the abstraction "cup", and confirm the relationship of "on-ness". Why are the cup and table abstractions? Because the word "cup" does not uniquely specify any particular cup in the world, and when I use the word I am

assuming that the listener already possesses an internal representation of an abstract object "cup", and can use that abstract specification 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 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 gets a lot more complicated when dealing with complex internal abstractions: 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 (e.g. "good", "sin") there is no universally accepted definition. Life is further complicated by a widespread lack of awareness that these internal abstractions *are* internal, and 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

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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. Much of the content of electronic bulletin boards consists of endless arguments and discussions on the definition of complex internal abstractions (what is ritual, what is magic, what is karma, what is ki, what is...).

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. A second characteristic of reason is that it operates on the "garbage-in, garbage-out" principle: if the base of given facts 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 taken from Aristotle.

If 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) then the sephira Netzach on the Pillar of Force represents affective states of consciousness which influence how we act and react: 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, and 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 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 Kaballah is learned at first hand from someone.

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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", and 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 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 Kaballah 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 clumsy metaphor.

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 (i.e. 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,
brownier...).
- 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 these days, but these "wants" can all occur concurrently in the same person, and while some may have been simmering away on a back burner for years, there can be an astonishing variety of

pots and pans waiting for an immediate turn on the stove. The

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average person's consciousness zips around the kitchen like 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 wars with 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. One activity is quickly replaced by another as the person attempts to reconcile all his wants and drives, but unfortunately there is no requirement that wants should be internally consistent or complementary; like a multi-process operating system, a single 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 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, one who loves pizzas and one who wants to be thin, and each makes plans independently of the other, and only the magic dust of unbroken memory sustains the illusion that I am a single person. 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. 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! Every day new wants are kicked off in response to advertising or peer pressure, old wants compete with each other in a zero-sum game. Having said this, I should point out that it is not desire or wants or drives which create the insanity – Kaballah does not place the value judgement on desire that Buddhism does (that desire is the cause of suffering, and by inference, something to
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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 Tiphereth, as the misidentification of Self is a key element in the discussion on Tiphereth.

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 perhaps free-floating happiness is too (I can't speak from experience there ;-). 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 features of being able to create abstract representations of reality and communicate 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 they

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attempt to fit it into their representation.

The illusion of order (that everything in the world can be neatly classified) relates closely to the klippoth 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 it is generally recognised, particularly in the sciences, that a deeply ingrained sense of "how things are" is the greatest obstacle to progress. 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 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 gone very cold and very stiff.

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 spent combining letters according to complex rules generated highly abstract symbolic meanings and insights which led 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, 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 don't, and nothing I do is without some consequence; my 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; my needs must 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

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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 with a flute and a blissful expression of cosmic love. 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, 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 papal authority, but those who complain are (clearly) anal-retentive nit-pickers and don't count. For a total immersion in the aesthetic vision read Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Grey".

The Illusion of Netzach is projection. We all tend to identify feelings and characteristics in other people which we

find in ourselves and when we get it right it is called "empathy" or "intuition"; when we get it wrong it is called "projection", because we are incorrectly projecting our feelings, needs, motives, or desires onto another person and interpreting their behaviour accordingly. Some level of projection is unavoidable, and at best it can be balanced with a critical awareness that it can occur, but projection is insidious, and the strength of feeling associated with a projection can easily overwhelm any intellectual awareness. Projection usually "feels right".

One of the most overwhelming forms of projection accompanies

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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 internal and 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 [1] 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.

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 can have a powerful hold on particular men. Male sexual fantasy material is amazingly predictable, cliched, unimaginative and crude, 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 amazingly predictable, cliched, unimaginative and crude, and contains a limited number of stereotype 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 impulses. In most men the Anima is repressed and in most women the Animus is repressed, and

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so both form a component of the Shadow. The major part of the Shadow however 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 when 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 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 Tiphereth.

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 creature and it is possible to attain an ideal state of being in which the same person is kind, loving, wise, forgiving, compassionate, in harmony with the Absolute, or whatever. This projection will either fasten on a living or dead person, who then becomes a hero, heroine, guru, or master with grossly inflated abilities, or it fastens 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 will probably insist that the ideal has existed in certain rare individuals (usually long dead saints and gurus, or someone who lives a long way off whom they haven't met), and that is the sort of person they want 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 Tiphereth.

The klippoth or shell of Netzach is habit and routine. When behaviour, with all its potential for new experiences, new ways of doing things, new relationships, becomes locked into patterns which repeat over and over again, then the life energy, the force aspect of Netzach is withdrawn and all that remains is the dead, empty shell of behaviour. Just as the klippoth of Hod is rigid order, the petrification of one's internal representation of reality, so the klippoth 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 feminine (metaphorically speaking) tendency in that aspect of God. The elucidation of God Names can become phenomenally complex and obscure, with long excursions into gematria and textual analysis of the Pentateuch and it is a quagmire I intend to avoid.

The Archangels are Raphael and Haniel. The Archangel of Hod

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is sometimes given as Michael, but I prefer Raphael (Medicine of God) for no other reason than the association of Mercury with

medicine and healing; besides, Michael has perfectly good reasons for residing in Tiphereth. 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 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 are the Beni Elohim and the Elohim.

The triad of sephiroth Yesod, Hod and Netzach comprise the triad of "normal consciousness" as we normally experience it in ourselves and most people most of the time. This 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 Tiphereth represents a state of being which unlocks the energy of "normal consciousness" and is the subject of the next section.

[1]

Jung, C.G, "Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self", Routledge & Kegan Paul 1974
Tiphereth

"Nothing is left to you at this moment but to burst out into a loud laugh"
From "The Spirit of Zen"

The sephira Tiphereth lies at the heart of the Tree of Life, and like Rome all paths lead to it. Well, not all, but Tiphereth has a path linking it to every sephira with the exception of Malkuth. If the Tree of Life is a map then the sephira titled Tiphereth, 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 Tiphereth? 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 [1]:

"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."

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The sephira Tiphereth 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 Tiphereth 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 Tiphereth, 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 in every aspect 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 the 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: pious, preaching, judgemental, a humble servant of the highest powers with a blind spot of intolerance. Those who inhabit the vicinity of such moral incandescence may have reason to recall that the Vice of Tiphereth is self-importance and pride.

A student can 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 Tiphereth is an excellent set on which to

act out a personal drama. If the devotion to the Work is genuine, and if Tiphereth and the HGA are invoked with passion and determination, then sooner or later the hand of fate lends a hand and the student has the shit knocked out in a big way. An attempt to penetrate the nature of Tiphereth does seem to bring about that state which the Greeks called "hubris", an overweening arrogance, self-importance and pride, until 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 and sent reeling, and in that moment there is a chance for real change and the dawning of the golden sun of Tiphereth.

This is how I interpret the word "initiation": there is a state of being represented by the sephirah Tiphereth which is absolutely distinct from what most people experience as normal consciousness. Once attained the change is irreversible and permanent; 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

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(referenced below) is as guarded and explicit on the subject as any worthwhile book is likely to be.

The symbolism of Tiphereth is three-fold: a king, a sacrificed god, and a child. This three-fold symbolism corresponds to Tiphereth's place on the extended Tree (to be explained in a later chapter), where it appears as Kether of Assiah, Tiphereth of Yetzirah, and Malkuth 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 explicitly 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 Tiphereth in the earliest Kabbalistic documents

(e.g. the Zohar), and the introduction of divine kingship and the sacrificed god into modern Kabbalah owes a lot more to the publication of "The Golden Bough" [2] 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 [3], 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 mysteries. The Golden Dawn Tiphereth 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 [3] 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 Tiphereth symbol, being the metal of Shemesh, the Sun, which also corresponds to Tiphereth. Gold is incorruptible and symbolises a state of being which is not "base" or "corrupt"; again, 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 an awful lot of it. It is possible to write at great length and succeed in doing nothing 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.
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I wanted to provide an idea of how a large amount of exotic symbolism has accreted around Tiphereth, but that is all. The state indicated by Tiphereth is real enough, and 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 Tiphereth corresponds to something called Zoar Anpin, the Microprosopus, or Lesser Countenance. As might be expected, there is also something called Arik Anpin, the Macroprosopus, or Greater Countenance, and this is often used as a synonym for the sephira Kether. The symbology connected with the Greater and Lesser Countenances is extremely complex: the "Greater Holy Assembly" [4], 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. 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 symbology 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 insight into the thirteen parts of the beard of the Macroprosopus.

Another rich set of symbols associated with Tiphereth comes from the divine name of four letters YHWH, usually written 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 Tiphereth. The final He is associated with the daughter (and bride of the son), the sephira Malkuth. Tiphereth 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, Tiphereth, 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 Creation.

The illusion of Tiphereth 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 chessecake", "I hate dogs". It is extremely common for people to identify what they are with the totality of

their beliefs and behaviours, and they will defend the sanctity of these beliefs and behaviours, often to the death – a person might have behaviours which make their life a misery and still cling to them with a grip like a python. This inability to stand

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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-getting) 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 to make sense of other people. If I am unaware that I regularly slip little put-downs into my conversation, and Joe takes umbrage at my sense of humour, then rather than change my behaviour (which is unconscious) I interpret the result as "Joe doesn't have a sense of humour; he needs to learn to laugh a little". There are many behaviours which may seem innocuous to the person concerned but which are irritating or offensive to others, and when the injured party reacts appropriately it is impossible for me to make sense of this reaction if my behaviour is unconscious and tightly bound to my sense of identity. Our sense of identity thus 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 [5] comments:

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 [5] 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 Tiphereth 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 to 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 hollowness. The intellect attempts to solve the koan of koans 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 Qlippoth or shell of Tiphereth, Tiphereth as the Empty Room with Nothing In It. Jung [6] provides a memorable and moving description of how his father, a country parson, was progressively consumed by this feeling of hollowness. 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 Tiphereth is Jehovah Aloah va Daath, or simply Aloah va Daath. It is often translated as "God made manifest in the sphere of the mind". The Archangel is sometimes

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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 Kether and Tiphereth. The angel order is the Malachim, or Kings.

To cover all of the traditional material related to Tiphereth is to cover most of Kabbalah. Tiphereth is at the centre of a complex of six sephiroth which represent a human being. This isn't 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 the Bible and Kabbalah, a human being is in some sense a reflection of God, and to the extent that Kabbalah is an outcome of genuine mystical experience it is a description of the dynamics of that relationship, 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. Tiphereth is a reflection of Kether and represents the "image of God", the "God within", whatever you take that to mean; it 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.

[1] Watts, Alan W., "The Spirit of Zen", John Murray 1936

[2]

Frazer, J.G., "The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion", Macmillan 1976

[3]

Regardie, I., "The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic", Falcon 1984

[4] Mathers, S.L., "The Kabbalah Unveiled", RKP 1981

[5]

Jung, C.G., "Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self", RKP 1974

[6] Jung, C.G., "Memories, Dreams, Reflections", RKP 1963
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."

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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 any other 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 Malkuth, 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", but when I see the same thing being wantonly destroyed, I would probably think this is "bad", and this type of thinking pervades early Kabbalistic writing. In his commentary on "The Bahir", Aryeh Kaplan writes [1]:

"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 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 the manifest Creation in Kabbalah is very definitely pictured as a living, organic system (i.e. a 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

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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 – and Chesed and Gevurah represent respectively the kingly obligation to seek what is good for the many (enlightened leadership of course!), 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 [2]:

"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 a 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 it happens. And how many people would dream of a socialist utopia where traditional communities are forcibly bulldozed and replaced by dilapidated concrete slums, and have the power to bring this

about? 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 unfortunately also the case that the result can become a new definition of evil. Good and evil 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 skulls, but what did he know about asset stripping?

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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. It 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 to those who didn't already know it 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 might loot an entire country. A petty and irrational bigot with enough power might 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 –

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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 the 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 without conviction, when 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 qliphoth 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. If 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 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 this is 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 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 (wrongly) attribute the emotion of anger to Gevurah. It is worth recalling from Chapter 3. the traditional Kabbalistic view [3]:

"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

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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 Malkuth sits upon the throne of Binah, and at no point will we find the raw gloop of Malkuth. 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 made not 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 gloop mentioned anywhere. These texts do not explain the world, but they predict it, often with astonishing accuracy, and something one does not find is a prediction that the world is founded on a formless gloop. As a programmer I have built realities out of pure mathematical forms - sets, functions, containers - and nowhere did I need any grey gloop; my worlds were the way they were because the objects within them behaved the way they did, and that behaviour was simply the structure or form I created. The view of reality in Wittgenstein's "Tractatus" [4] 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

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form of an object." (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". Programmers work with form; they shape programs out of forms with the same inquisitive delight as a glassblower 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 even 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, mayem 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 qlippoth 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 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," the woman behind the counter said.

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"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 deliberate 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 sephirah 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

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. Invoke on the Pillar of Form, and cause and effect will follow without the slightest regard for your feelings. All good programmers who have sweated throughout the night with a programming error of their own making know 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, archtypal 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,

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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 –it goes well with the Jupiter correspondence.

The God name associated with Gevurah is Elohim Gevor. All the sephiroth on the Pillar of Form use Elohim in their God names, and in this case it is qualified by "gevor", 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 is sometimes given as Kamiel, and sometimes as Samael. Samael, the "Poison of God" is an angel with a *long* history – see [5], 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 (which I have been told means "sword of God" – I cannot confirm this), but there is marginally more scope for interpretation! 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 Tiphereth, 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, and somewhere in a garden a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil still grows, and still bears fruit.

[1] Kaplan, Aryeh, "The Bahir", Samuel Weiser 1979

[2]

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[4]

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[5]

Graves, R., and Patai, R., "Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis", Arena, 1989
Daath 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 Kether, Chokmah, and Binah, and the seven lower sephiroth. When one looks at 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, thus reinforcing this idea of a "gap" or "gulf" which has to be crossed. This notion of an Abyss is extremely old and has found its way into Kabbalah in several different forms, and in the course of time they have all 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.

One of the earliest sources for 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 this view that there was a time before the creation characterised by Tohu and Bohu, namely Chaos and Emptiness [1]. Another idea mentioned several times in the Zohar

[2] 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, and the

resulting detritus of these failed attempts, the broken shells of previous sephiroth, accumulated in the Abyss. Because the shells (Qlippoth) were the result of unbalanced rigour 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, or the rebellious Titans in Greek mythology who were buried as far beneath the Earth as the Earth is beneath the sky.

Another theme which contributed to the notion of the Abyss was the legend of the Fall. According to the 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 of 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. This theme of

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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 exiled in matter. This idea of separation or exile from divinity mirrors very closely the use of the Abyss on the modern Tree to divide the sephiroth representing a human being from the sephiroth representing God.

Isaac Luria (1534 –1572) introduced a new element into the notion of the Abyss with his idea of "tzimtzum" or contraction. Luria wondered how it was possible for the hidden God (En Soph) 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 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 limitation was inherent in creation from the very beginning. Limitation, finiteness, the separation of one thing from another, what early Kabbalists referred to as the severity or "strict judgement" of God (what modern Kabbalists call "form") was a puzzling quality to introduce into the Creation given that it is the source of suffering and evil in the impersonal sense, what Dion Fortune

calls "negative evil" [3]. Luria's notion of tsimtsum suggested that there was no possibility of creation without it, and provided a rather abstract explanation to one of the most persistent questions of all time, namely: "if God made the world and God is good, how come he made mosquitoes?".

Pull together the various ideas of the Great Abyss and one ends up with a sort of 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 Kether. The lights of the sephiroth blaze out and illuminate the centre of this vast arena; this is Olam Ha-Nekudoth, "The World of Point Lights". 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 [4]:

"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

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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's experience has far more in common with the rending of the Veil of

Paroketh separating Yesod and Tiphereth, and further comments by Crowley add weight to this:

"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."

This is a very recognisable description of someone who has been released from the demon of the false self and the imprisoning triad of Hod, Netzach and Yesod, and moved through the Paroketh towards Tiphereth. Crowley's experience is valid as it stands, but what it might mean to "cross the Abyss", and the absurdity of Crowley's belief that he had achieved this, will be examined in the following section on Binah and Chokmah.

A twentieth-century Kabbalist who did succeed in adding something useful to the ever-expanding notion of the Abyss was Dion Fortune, in her theosophical work "The Cosmic Doctrine" [3]. The form of this work appears to have been inspired by Blavatsky's "The Secret Doctrine", and certainly lives up to Fortune's claim that it was "designed to 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 as 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 remarkable, given that she was writing in the 30's. Many programming languages allow new programming structures to be created dynamically, thus allowing the creation of more and more

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complex structures. 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 (i.e. remove all references). 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."

"Cosmic Doctrine" is a valiant attempt to say something quite profound; at an intellectual level it fails "abysmally", and I cannot read it without squirming, but it still has more raw Kabbalistic and magical insight at an intuitive level than just about anything else I have read. The idea of a cosmic reference-counting garbage collection process and an abyss of unbeing which is not so much a state as a process of unbecoming is something not easily forgotten once touched.

A final example of an abyss is one which differs from the 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

[6] 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 by now that the Abyss is a metaphor for a number of intuitions or experiences. I do not know how many different kinds of abyss there are, but there are some distinctions which can be made:

- the Abyss of nothingness
 - the Abyss of separation
 - the Abyss of knowledge
 - the Abyss of un-being (or un-becoming)
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The perception that being and nothingness go hand-in-hand is something Sartre studied in great depth [7], 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 machinery of perception; strip away the trick, Yesod becomes Daath, and a yawning abyss opens up where one is conscious less of what one knows than of what one does not; 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 Daath 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 unbeing 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.

Daath means "Knowledge". In early Kabbalah Daath 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;

e.g. 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 an 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" [8] and "Zohar" [e.g. 2] Daath represents the symbolic union of wisdom and understanding, and is their offspring or child. As the Microprosopus, often symbolised by Tiphereth, is also the symbolic child of Chokhmah and Binah,

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there is some room for confusion. According to the Zohar however, Daath 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 as to why knowledge is the natural outcome of wisdom and understanding. It was only recently 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 the house using petrol and hydrogen peroxide. He 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. 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 the wisdom of God 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. Knowledge of God was the union between the higher and lower, and perhaps this is why Daath was never a sephiroth, something which manifests positively; since the Fall that knowledge has been lost. One of the unattributable pieces of Kabbalah I was taught was that Daath is the hole left behind when Malkuth fell out of the Garden of Eden. If you examine my derivation of the Tree of Life in Chapter 1. closely you will see that I have based some of it on this very astute observation.

The notion of Daath as a "hole" appears to have originated this century. Gareth Knight, for example [9], provides a complete set of correspondences for Daath, many of which happen to be negative Tiphereth correspondences or misplaced correspondences borrowed from other sephiroth, but one at least is appropriate: he gives the magical image of Daath as Janus, god of doorways. Kenneth Grant [10], with his usual florid imagination, sees Daath as a gateway through to "outer spaces beyond, or behind, the Tree itself" dominated by Qliphothic forces.

There is a deep correspondence between sephiroth in the lower face of the Tree and sephiroth in the upper face: look at the symmetry of the Tree and you should see why Malkuth, Tiphereth and Kether are linked, why Hod and Binah are linked, why Chokhmah and Netzach are linked, and most importantly for the purposes of this discussion, that there is a correspondence between Yesod and Daath. 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. Daath and Yesod, at different levels, are like two sides of the same coin. Jam the machinery of perception I said above, and Yesod can become Daath. The following quotation is taken from an bona-fide anthropological article [11] attempting to explain some

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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" [5]. 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 astonished and recognised it instantly, prisms and all; when I showed it to my wife her reaction was the same. The tunnel vortex appears to be one of the constants of magical/mystical experience, and it appears in a very precise context. In Kabbalah the shamanic tunnel would be attributed to the 32nd. path connecting Malkuth to Yesod; this path connects the real world to the underworld of the imagination and the unconscious, and is commonly symbolised by a tunnel [eg.9]. However, using the symmetry of the Tree, this path also corresponds to the path at another level connecting Tiphereth across the Abyss, through Daath, to Kether. 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 Daath 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 used to be called gnosis.

To conclude this section on Daath and the Abyss, it is worth asking what the relationship between the two ideas is. 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: 2, II, .., two etc. The number two can be represented in an infinite number of ways, and it is only when you share some

understanding of my language that you can *begin* to guess that a particular mark in the world represents the number two. 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

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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 is irreconcilable; between the physical world and the world of the mind is an abyss, and I am not 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.

To take a slightly different approach, 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 discover; 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 will be encoded optimally to look like random garbage. There is an abyss here; there is knowledge which can never be attained. 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, and it is this abyss I have been discussing for most of this section. There are further abysses, and this should be clearer when I discuss the Four Worlds and the Extended Tree. The Abyss and Daath 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 Daath 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? Only when Daath flips over to become the Yesod of another world can you *know* anything, but unfortunately the fiery speech of angels is like leprecaun's

gold: by the time you've taken it home to show to your friends,
you've nothing but a purse of dried leaves.

[1]

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Binah, Chokmah, Kether

Only man can fall from God
Only man.

No animal, no beast nor creeping thing
no cobra nor hyaena nor scorpion nor hideous white ant
can slip entirely through the fingers of the hands of god
into the abyss of self-knowledge,
knowledge of the self-apart-from-god.

For the knowledge of the self-apart-from-God
is an abyss down which the soul can slip
writhing and twisting in all the revolutions
of the unfinished plunge
of self-awareness, now apart from God, falling
fathomless, fathomless, self-consciousness wriggling
writhing deeper and deeper in all the minutiae of self

knowledge, downwards, exhaustive,
yet never, never coming to the bottom, for there is no

bottom;
zigzagging down like the fizzler from a finished rocket
the frizzling, falling fire that cannot go out, dropping

wearily,
neither can it reach the depth
for the depth is bottomless,
so it wriggles its way even further down, further down
at last in sheer horror of not being able to leave off
knowing itself, knowing itself apart from God, falling.

"Only Man", D. H. Lawrence

The triad of Binah, Chokmah and Kether 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 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". My 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 your God, is as valid as mine, and as there are no formal

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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 then 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 simply 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. For a start, 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 bum end one is standing.

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 "devekuth", 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 Chokmah translates as "wisdom", and that of Kether 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 Kether. An enormous amount of effort has gone into "explaining" this process: one book on Kabbalah [1] in my possession devotes eight pages to the En Soph, twelve pages to the supernal trio of Kether, Chokmah 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 Kether. In most versions (and this idea can be found as far back as the "Bahir" [2]) the En Soph "contracted" (tsimtsum) to "make room" for the creation, and the crystallised point of Kether manifested within this "space". Kether is the seed planted in nothingness from which the creation springs –an interesting metaphor turns the Tree of Life "upside down" and shows Kether 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 Kether connected to the En Soph by a "thread of light", a metaphor I used somewhat whimsically in the section on "Daath and the Abyss", where I portrayed the Tree of Life as a lit-up Christmas tree with a

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power cord snaking out of the darkness of the En Soph and through the abyss to Kether. Like the Moon, Kether 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 (the right side, as it happens) is visible to us, but the other side is turned forever towards the En Soph.

Kether 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 Kether is the first, the oldest, the root of existence, remote, and its most accurate symbol is that of a point. Kether precedes all forms of existence, all differentiation and distinction, all polarity. Kether contains everything in potential, like a seed that sprouts and grows into a Tree, not once, but continuously. Kether 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 Kether is all the love in the world, and wrapped around the love is all the hate. Kether is an outpouring of purest, radiant light, but 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" [3] is packed with references to Kether, and it is difficult to be selective, but the following quote from the "Lesser Holy Assembly", is clear, simple, and subtle:

"He (Kether) 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 Kether in the form of Chokmah 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. Chokmah 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":

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"Come and behold. When the Most Holy Ancient One, the Concealed with all Concealments (Kether), 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 (Chokmah) 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: Chokmah is the Father and Binah is the Mother, and therein are Chokmah, 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 – Chokmah, 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 (Chokmah & 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 Chokmah, to emphasise the continuous nature of creation. The primary metaphor is that of a phallus – Chokmah 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 etc, belong to Chokmah, and womb symbols – a cauldron, a gourd, a chalice, an oven etc, belong to Binah. In an abstract sense, Chokmah 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 Chokmah is the roaring blast of

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flame which keeps it in the air. The metaphor is not completely accurate: Binah is not form, but 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"), the planet Saturn. The symbolism of Binah is twofold: on one 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" [4] 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 Malkuth, 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 etc.

Malkuth 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, vegetation etc.

Yesod in its lunar aspect is the Moon, a hidden reality with the ebb and flow of secret tides, illusion, glamour, sexual reproduction etc, and is sometimes invoked in the form of lunar goddesses – 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 definite Binah-type correspondences.

Netzach has the planet Venus as a correspondence, and its aspect of sensual pleasure, luxury, sexual love and desire is sometime 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 an anchor in life. For every reason to live I can find you, 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 while 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, but Tolstoy records [5] 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 Qlippoth 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 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.

The Spiritual Experience of Chokmah is the Vision of God Face-to-Face. The tradition I received has it that one cannot have this vision while incarnate i.e. one dies in the process. One Hasidic Rabbi liked 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" [3], three Rabbis

pass away in ecstasy, and in the "Lesser Holy Assembly" [3] 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 that, I would not like to underplay the naked rawness of Chokmah; unconstrained, unconfined, free of form, it is the creative power which sustains the universe, and talk of death is not

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melodramatic.

The Illusion of Chokmah 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 Chokmah we draw our water from the same well.

The Virtue of Chokmah is good, and the Vice is evil. Regardless of your definition of good or evil, Chokmah encompasses every possibility of action, circumstance and creation, and modern Kabbalists no longer try to believe God is 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 Qlippoth of Chokmah 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. [6]] 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 – creation and destruction, order and chaos, who cares? The Kabbalistic view is that this is not so: Chokmah contains form (as Binah) *in potential*, and it is not correct to view Chokmah 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 Kether is Union with God. My comments on the Spiritual Experience of Chokmah apply also to Kether. The Illusion of Kether is attainment. We can live, we can change, but there is nothing to attain. Even Union with God is no attainment; we were always one with God, and *knowing* that we

are changes nothing of any consequence – as long as we live, there is no goal in life other than living itself. As the Kabbalist Rebbe Nachman of Breslov said [7]:

"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 Qlipboth of Kether is Futility. Perhaps the creation was a bad idea. Maybe the En Soph should never have emanated the point-crown of Kether. 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 Malkuth back into Kether, collapse the whole, crazy house of cards, and admit the 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 Chokmah is Yah (YH), a shortened form of YHVH. The God-name of Kether is Eheieh, a name sometimes translated as "I am", and more

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often as "I will be".

The archangel of Binah is Tzaphqiel; 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 Chokmah 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 [8]. The archangel of Kether 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, Chokmah and Kether can be derived directly from the vision of Ezekiel. In the Biblical text, Ezekiel describes successively the Holy Living Creatures, 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 Chokmah is the Auphanim or Wheels, and the angel order of Kether 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 Chokmah and Binah from symbols alone, just as it is difficult to grasp interstellar distances, the energy output of a star, the number of stars in a galaxy, and the number of galaxies visible to us. The scale of the observable physical universe relative to our planet (and the planet is a big place for most of us) is staggering; there are something like a hundred stars in *our galaxy alone* for every person on this planet. When I think of Chokmah and Binah I attempt to think of them on this scale; the physical universe where we have our home, considered as Malkuth, 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 me 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 Malkuth 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.

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Model C: the Tree of Life exists in the four worlds of the

creation, namely Atziluth, Briah, Yetzirah, and Assiah.

When talking of "the Tree", we are talking about "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; 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? 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 Tiphereth (or Daath), but it is 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 Chokmah 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 *as a complete Tree*. There is some evidence in the "Zohar" that the author thought about the Macroprosopus and Microprosopus in precisely this way, with references to "the greater Chokmah" and "the lesser Chokmah". Model C is substantially similar to Model B, but cast in a slightly different model. With this interpretation it is certainly possible to consider "the lesser Chokmah" as an accessible state of consciousness, but "the Greater Chokmah" 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 initiation into Malkuth, far less Kether.

Lastly, it is worth asking "what *is* God?". What does the

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Kabbalistic trinity of Kether, Chokmah 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 Chokmah 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 quoted D.H. Lawrence's poem "Only Man" because of his deeply intuitive view of the Fall from God and the abyss of separation.

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 so much 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 could 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 of flyshit in a universe so vast you cannot even begin to comprehend its scale; your occult pretensions amount to nothing and are carefully designed to protect you from any experience of reality; all human experience and knowledge is parochial, insignificant and largely irrelevant on a universal scale, and your personal contribution even more so; 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 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.

believe that many religious, esoteric and occult traditions currently extant are unconsciously designed to protect

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human beings from 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. 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 statement without resorting to an onion-skin model of the psyche; 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 this 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, 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 the layers of fear – fear of solitude, fear of rejection, fear of disease and decay and disintegration, fear of madness, fear of meaninglessness, arbitrariness and futility, fear of death and personal annihilation. Like an audience in a cinema, we can live in a fantasy for a time and forget that it is dark, cold and raining outside, but sooner or later we have to leave our seats. And underneath all the fears is the fear of opening the door which conceals the awful truth: that we have wilfully, and with great energy and persistence, chosen *not to know*.

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of Genesis", Arena 1989

Chapter 5: Practical Kabbalah

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"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

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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: 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 were used at different times and places, and it is clear that practice grew more out of the temperament of the individual than 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 [1], 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 [2] 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
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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. Epstein [1] provides a useful introduction to the breadth of Kabbalistic practice, and the personalities which have shaped Kabbalistic thought. I am aware that 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.

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 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; one name for this process is "magic". Traditionally these energies are called upon by name, and are characterised in concrete ways – the list of correspondences given in Chapter 2 of these notes provides many 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.

And that is it, in essence. How literally you take these assumptions is up to you; my attitude resembles that of the engineer Oliver Heavyside, 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

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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**. 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**. Kabbalah has divided along these two paths, 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; 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 (devekuth, or "cleaving to God") is the true goal, and magic an "egocentric" 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 process of initiation is combined with the use of magical techniques in a blend which I believe captures the best of both approaches. I have chosen to describe the process of initiation first because I have the 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?", "what lies behind the phenomenal world?", "why should I continue living?", "what is good and what is evil?", "how should I live?", and "how can I become rich, famous and sexually attractive without expending any effort?". It happens (for no obvious reason) that there are 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 attic and crawlspace of existence. And it

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happens that every question, when followed with enough determination, leads back to the questioner. What is the precondition for knowing anything? We are the attics and crawlspaces of existence, and so in the end we are forced to look within, and know ourselves.

There is another aspect to initiation: on one hand we have the desire to *know*, and on the other hand we have the desire to *be something else*. Initiation is also the beginning of a process of self-transformation, a process of becoming something else. Becoming 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 they 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. 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 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 next stage in knowledge and understanding ("coagula") it is necessary to break down what already exists into its component parts ("solve"). This can be observed whenever we attempt to learn a new skill; we begin 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, and 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 we either give up, or we realise the necessity of change, drop old habits as a prerequisite for acquiring new habits (solve), and become consciously incompetent. Finally, with enough practice (coagula), we 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 function with limited unconscious competence, but 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 possible advantage could there be 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

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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* (emanation, or sephira) 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 the powers of the sephiroth for help. In principal 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 the 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 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

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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 for conformity (quite the opposite), but it must be said that it is easy for an initiator to use an initiation to enhance personal power. This is a 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. Joining an

amateur dramatic group as a conscious and deliberate magical exercise should 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 (sometime 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
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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 2 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 "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 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 a 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 may sustain a Hod persona at work, then go to a bar in the evening and become the complete opposite. My favourite 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 probably 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?

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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. 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 illusion of Hod is Order, and the qlippa 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 opened, they might? Do you ever try to convert people to your taste? How do react when they aren't impressed? Do you make secret judgements 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. 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

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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, the Lion, whatever.

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 the moon.

Ritual

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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 this, 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 taking 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 lots of 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

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call "archangels", and "angels" and "spirits", 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; 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 bus. 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**.

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 also a limitation: it is a limitation of will. I chose to make a film, but I could have chosen to write a book instead, or chosen to take a holiday. In

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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 knock off 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 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 Kabbalah does provide a theoretical model for magical work (the lightning flash on the Tree) which many have found to be useful. 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", and 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

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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 focussed 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 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. I do not think any of the rituals 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

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agreement about what makes a good novel. That doesn't mean there is nothing worth learning. The steps I enumerate below are suggestions which were handed down to me, and a lot of 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: Opening 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 long periods of time. I don't want to deal too much in generalities, 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 etc.

The Circle is the first important magical limit: it creates a small area within which the 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

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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 – and if you want to start an argument, state that money doesn't exist and isn't Real. 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 [2] can be used as the basis for a Kabbalistic circle-opening. The precise method isn't so important as practicing it until you can do it in your sleep, and it 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 a clinical precision. For example, I never at anytime 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 right 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: Opening 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; opening a Circle can be considered a de-facto opening of Gates, but there

are good 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 – think of 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 aren't the answer. On 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", so try 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, Archangel, Angel Order and sephira names as part of my invocation, and put all my effort into the intonation of the name rather than memorising lengthy invocations.

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. 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

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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, involve dormant parts of the mind, or at least engage the normal parts in an unusual way. Using ritual to cause marked shifts in consciousness is not difficult; getting 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 has to be 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 focussed 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, and in magic the same principle holds, 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:

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1. you are a being of awesome will (you have the biggest steering wheel on the bus).
 2. you have allies (lots of people on the bus want to get to the same place as you).
 3. 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.

And so to sacrifice. 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 have I got 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. For 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.

Any sacrifice which hurts enough engages a very 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. And I don't mean magical masochism. We 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, and 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

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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 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 nonverbal, 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.
- every 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

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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 withdrawal 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 their perceived inadequacies (in the way that some people like to get drunk at parties), and they will not want to let go of it 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.

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,

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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/Chokmah.

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 found in the correspondences, but for the sake of example I have given an indication in a list below:

The sephira Malkuth 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.

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.

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-

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.

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.

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, 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.

The sephira Tiphereth is useful for the following magical work:

-
work involving integrity, wholeness and balance.

-
work involving the Self (the Jungian archetype), selfimportance, self-sacrifice, devotion, compassion.

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-overall health and well-being.

-
communion with your Holy Guardian Angel.

-
the union of the microcosm and the macrocosm.

The sephira Gevurah is useful for the following magical work:

-
active defense.

-
destruction.

-
severance.

-
justice and lawful retribution.

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 Kether 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 beyond your intention.

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 can remain the same. A ritual involving Yesod should have an utterly different feel and effect from a ritual involving Tiphereth, and yet the basic construction of the two rituals can be identical. 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.

In Conclusion

I wanted to provide in these notes approximately the same information as I was given when I began to study Kabbalah. The

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person who gave me this information said "You don't need to read lots of books, just go off and do it." It was sound advice. If you want to learn how to build bridges, read books about building bridges, but if you want to learn about yourself, just go off and do it. "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, but there is no prescription for this, and each person tends to find their own happy medium. 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 very glad I did.

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. 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 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 begin with, and there are better and quicker ways of learning 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 are afraid of ritual that is fine; lots of people are. 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.

Colin Low 1992

[1] Epstein, Perle, "Kabbalah", Shambhala, 1978

[2] Regardie, Israel, "The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic", Falcon Press, 1984

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