

Newsgroups: alt.magick
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Subject: BASIC Kabbalah: A Beginner's Intro
Date: Wed, 7 Sep 1994 06:59:07 GMT

Kabbalah: A Real Basic Introduction

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A Beginning

Many people when they start getting into magick, try to read someone like Crowley, Dion Fortune, W.E. Butler, etc., and become frustrated by all the reference to the Kabbalah (or Qabalah), of which they often know nothing. And, the "usual sources" often are as confusing and complex as the original references. Everyone has their theory, and no one seems willing to simply get people started.

Following is a basic tree diagram, with planetary correspondences, and a quick discussion of pillars, a few theories, et al. It is intended to provide the novice student some basic building blocks, not be the "be all and end all" of the Kabbalah, or its correct application in magickal practice. I have conspicuously chosen to avoid any discussion of paths and their numbers, considering that an advanced and often unnecessary topic for those who have not delved too deep.

In the interest of making my life easy, I have turned the usual circles for the Sephiroth into squares. Ascii art is easier that way.

In the Tree-of-Life, there are ten Sephiroth. These can be seen as corresponding to the known planets and the Sun. In various magickal systems, a common goal is the attainment of understanding such as results from successful traveling the tree from Malkuth, or Earth, to Kether, the attainment. In this presentation, I will associate Kether with Pluto, Chokmah with Uranus, and Neptune with Da'ath, the "invisible Sephiroth." I realize this is at odds with many systems and presentations, which often give no planetary correspondences whatsoever for these Sephiroth. However, it seems logical that these "recently discovered" planets should be assigned, and when this is done, these are the usual choices. These attributions can be especially meaningful and helpful to a new "magickal" student with a background in and understanding of astrology and/or planetary attributions.

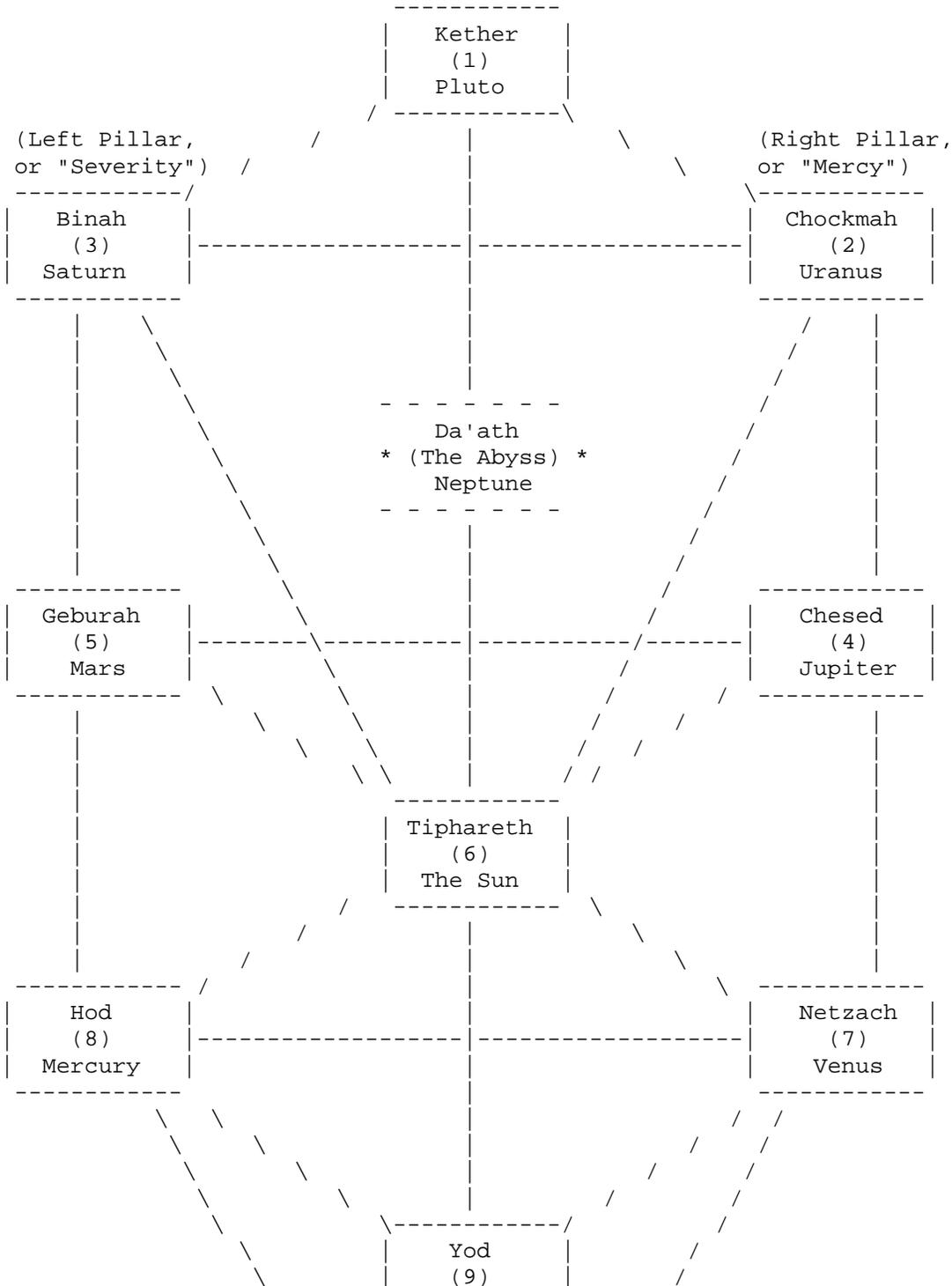
The Tree

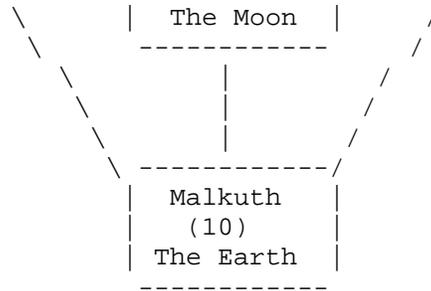
The three "veils"
of negative existence
(unmanifestation).

****Ain****
Ain Soph
Ain Soph Aur

Negativity
The Limitless
The Limitless Light

(Middle Pillar,
"Mildness" or "Equilibrium")





Okay, so you get the picture. Lots of interesting Hebrew names of the Sephiroth, with their various meanings and attributions according to which author you are reading, and according to the classic Jewish scholars on the Kabbalah. Their "most common" planetary attributions, which with a good book on astrology or a good book on magickal attributions of planets are one means of shedding light on the "nature" of these Sephiroth. They also get numbers.

There are 22 "paths," or means of connecting the Sephiroth, which will not be discussed here. I have drawn them in for clarity, but I have not appropriately numbered them.

There are also three "veils of negative existence" beyond Kether. I will not discuss them. Someone else will.

Some Ways of Viewing the Information

According to certain means of addressing the Tree, the Sephiroth can be further subdivided into groups. One manner of doing this is to label each "column," as shown here, the left-hand "Pillar of Severity," the right-hand "Pillar of Mercy" and the Middle Pillar, also known as the "Pillar of Mildness" or the "Pillar of Equilibrium." In perusing my library of works by magickal authors, the most common opinion about these pillars seems to be that one should proceed up the tree focused on the Middle Pillar. I would not recommend the beginning student concern themselves much with these or other labels, merely understand that they are there and so labeled. Various authors will present their own opinions as to what these labels mean and the importance thereof.

Another manner of subdividing the Sephiroth is to group them into triangles. Da'ath and Malkuth are basically "left out" of these groupings. One grouping is Kether, Chokmah and Binah, sometimes called the "supernal" triangle. A second is Chesed, Geburah and Tiphareth, with labels too numerous to mention. The final triangle consists of Netzach, Hod and Yesod.

Still yet another way of viewing the tree is the "path of the serpent" and the "path of the sword," which visually appears like many magickal symbols, as well as resembling a caduceus somewhat. In this construction, the "path of the serpent" follows the numbers given in order, with the "head" of the serpent in Kether and the "tail" of the serpent in Malkuth. This manner of addressing the three noticeably "touches" all the Sephiroth. To visualize the sword, overlay it on the Middle Pillar, with the hilt in Kether and the point in Malkuth.

Some people will tell you you need to "back into" the tree. Some people will talk about "Qlippoth," or "negative shadows" of the Sephiroth. Some people will tell you that Kether is in Malkuth (i.e., they connect back together). These can all be very interesting or very boring ways to look at things, depending on the author and your interests.

The Importance of Tiphareth and That Annoying Invisible Sephira

Tiphareth, or "the Sun" is associated in many magickal systems, including Aleister Crowley's with what he called "knowledge and conversation of your Holy Guardian Angel" or understanding of one's True Will. He even wrote a ritual specifically geared to attain this state, or what could be seen as "progress" to this point in the Tree. I can attest from personal experience that this is a rather heady experience, to be fully "in the glory of Tiphareth." In a Middle Pillar approach, the obvious "next step" is crossing the "abyss", or passing through (or around, or over, etc., etc.) Da'ath. Phrases such as "dweller on the threshold," names such as "Choronzon" or the "demon of the Abyss" are tossed about. Doesn't sound like fun? It's not supposed to.

A psychological approach might say that this is the part of yourself you deny: the things you don't like about yourself. In a departure from my "info only" approach I will offer this "way of looking at it" that I think gets passed over and/or shrouded in mystery by those who martially enter the Abyss to "defeat" the demon.

In an old Star Trek episode (oh no, she's using television shows!), Captain Kirk is split by the transporter into two beings, one "evil" and strong, and the other "good" and weak. Now, I don't believe in evil and good, per se, but the analogy is useful. The "weak" side had all the intellect, control and compassion we associate with "nice" behavior, while the "strong" side had all the power, passion and forcefulness we associate with "emotional" and "not so nice" behavior. Problem was, the "weak" Kirk couldn't even make a decision by himself, he couldn't commit to a choice, and the "strong" Kirk couldn't control his behavior or understand the needs of another human being. He was divided against himself. In the resolution, they are sent through the transporter again, and the "weak" Kirk reassures and embraces the "strong" Kirk so they can be together again, and he can be whole again and "able to command."

Why does this seem so important to me? It often seems we are "divided against ourselves" in this society, calling parts of ourselves "bad" and others "good," judging ourselves and others very harshly, perhaps disabling ourselves by denying ourselves all our abilities. I don't think we all divide like Captain Kirk, but I suggest that the "demon of the abyss" is this "shadow self" we have judged and thrown away, rather than choosing to embrace and also control. However we visualize the process, I would like to offer that a useful way might be to see ourselves embracing the demon and unifying it with the angel, to become more whole. I have found it very useful for me, at any rate, and offer it to others as an idea I think has merit and may be helpful for the beginning student in magick, once he or she progresses a little further on the path.

In Conclusion

Many writers will toss the Kabbalah, several perspectives on Astrology, the Tarot, 6 or 7 systems of magick, Yoga, numerology, etc. at you. Some of it will stick. I hope this little treatise provides some "glue" for the Kabbalah information. In my estimation, they all relate back to each other, and the importance of them all is understanding of self. In other words, take a step back once in a while, don't get too mesmerized by all the details. The "goal" is to become more aware of the "real world," and more effective in your chosen path in the universe, and hopefully a more wonderful human being, in touch with your starry nature and the starry nature of the other beings on the planet. Magick should help in this task. The ways of viewing the tree, the symbols you might associate with a particular thing, tools you choose and the rituals you perform should be focused on what they teach you, and how they help you become what you want to be, or your "best true self," they are not an end in and of themselves.

Every man and every woman is a star.

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- 4) Inner Traditions of Magic, by William G. Gray.
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@}->-- Love is the Law, Love under Will

....You can do what you want....

...You will get what you create....