

Study Guide 2

Qabalah – Introductory Notes

The following tutorial follows an earlier introductory article titled 'Hermetics, K- C- Q- abbala[h], Golden Dawn + Craft / Wicca'. It provides the basic concepts for practical understanding of Qabalah. The abbreviation 'TOL' refers to the 'Tree of Life' map, linking the Sephiroth [10 spheres].

Qabalah is a meditation tool, aptly called the 'Yoga of the West', and characterized by an unusually free style, subject only to its glyph, the 'TOL', and thereafter restricted only by imagination. It has two purposes- the raising and perfecting of consciousness by alignment with divinity [evolution]; and the drawing down of divine consciousness into the self and our world [involution].

From a yogic or meditative standpoint, the efficacy of Qabalah is based on the discovery that its structural map or glyph, the 'TOL', is a compelling way to store the brain's mnemonics, or memory cues, for filing 'correspondences' or imaginatively explosive sense-data bytes.

Much of what is written about Kabbalah, Cabala and Qabalah is partisan and irrelevant. People have axes to grind, some committed to suffocating religious ideals, some to rigid formulae, still others to magic, astral travel or hallucination. You basically get what you want. It is a powerful system; and like anything powerful, dangerous: at least philosophically, sometimes psychiatrically (or worse).

In fact, Qabalah is just 'lucid dreaming' based on thousands of years of people's experience doing it basing their meditations on the 'Tree of Life' framework. There are other ways of lucid dreaming, including seven other 'craft paths'. Qabalah, however, is not only highly effective, but by offering an accessible literature to refer you to other people's experiences, is an empirical [scientific] approach.

Many Jewish people will tell you that Kabbalah (with a K-) is an ancient form of psychotherapy. I think that is true of Qabalah (with a Q-) as well, but it can also be the reverse, if played badly. It is possible to have really bad trips, or to become obsessed with it so that life becomes unbalanced. Some of the main authorities on Qabalah for these reasons recommend the importance of mental health and balance before embarking on Qabalistic pathworking. This involves plenty of healthy social contact, ordinary work, fresh air and exercise, artistic expression, and an orderly and happy approach to life.

Although Qabalah is 'empirical' [experiential], it is also 'mystical', i.e. esoteric and magical, i.e. a 'technology of idealism'. The most important factors in causal pathworking or lucid dreaming are 'will' and 'imagination'. Technologies to achieve them include 'manna', 'ritual' and 'correspondences'.

Manna. If you don't have a lot of 'manna', i.e. meditational experience, lucid dreaming practice, and confidence using whatever tools you have available to tap into the imaginative correspondences- then the 'trip' on the Tree of Life will not get you far unless- you do a lot of preparatory reading on the path you are going to tread so that you can create an effective virtual reality; and then you use a lot of 'correspondences', i.e. objects, aromas, colours, sights and sounds that suggest the path you are going to travel on 'in imagination'. These are substitutes for personal manna, or 'poser'.

Ritual. The 'hocus pocus' and 'mumbo jumbo' of each system's practices are actually quite effective and useful, even if a little strange at first. This is because they engage the two principal factors in occult meditation, which are 'will' and 'imagination'. Ritual enables the psycho-drama component.

Correspondences. These are items which suggest to the subconscious through association the characteristics which build the scene of the trip or journey. They are necessary in even greater degree if you don't have a lot of 'mantra'.

Will. All of this is still useless without 'willing'. Basically, the more you 'will' the world to be 'real-for-you', the more effective the virtual reality. You also have to will the 'suspension of disbelief'.

Imagination. Finally, there is 'art'. The better your 'imagination', the deeper your experience, and the more immersed you will be in your lucid dream and virtual reality.

Each Sephirah [the plural is 'Sephiroth'...] may be activated for lucid dreaming or pathworking by a sound or mantra, which is a 'word of power' repeated on the breath. This mantra is often referred to as a 'vibration', and is best thought of in that way. The word should vibrate through your being.

Correspondences in our mundane world are collected together to help you along the lucid dreaming path. They include cues to all the senses, including sight [each Sephirah is associated with a particular colour], number [each is numbered from 1 to 10], odour [particular incense or aroma, such as an aromatic oil, flower fragrance or perfume], and sound [mantra, usually a 'name of power'].

In order to travel to each Sephirah, it is necessary to imagine a 'path'. These are known by the Hebrew name 'Cinneroth'. In Qabalah, uniquely [and unlike either Kabbalah or Cabala], each of these pathways is associated with a set of symbols [or 'correspondences'] provided by the Tarot. These symbols are objects of meditation to aid the pathworker reaching a particular Sephirah. Before a meditation, the symbols of the path are studied and made into a story, which is entirely subjective and will vary from person to person and from time to time.

Not all virtual realities are healthy. I would suggest that you stay well clear of the 'Abyss' and 'Da'ath'. Many Kabbalists, Cabalists and Qabalists include 'Da'ath' as a 'Sephirah' and suggest you go there. They even provide maps showing 'paths' leading to and from this psychic vacuum cleaner. If it is truly the Da'ath which was removed from the Tree of Life because of its associations with the fallen angels, then even as an imaginary exercise it will be at the very least nightmarish. In both Jewish Kabbalah and occult Qabalah, the Abyss is occupied by half-formed Qlippoth, and by Shedim, basically the damned and demons. Avoid!

All the other ten Sephiroth stand for Jewish 'heavens', except that the 'supernal Sephiroth' [numbering three, in a triad] form the single and highest heaven, known as 'Araboth', which Cabalists of Arthurian romance called the 'Land of Sarras'. Here you may sit in the 'siege perilous', roughly described as a miraculous scrying seat of hearing and seeing. In order to do this, you will need to practice, probably for years, on the preliminary paths to the preceding six heavens, each of these heavens occupying a single Sephirah [imaginal or virtual sphere].

Each of the 10 Sephiroth represent collections of virtues or skills, bundled under collective names such as 'Foundation', 'Glory', 'Victory', 'Beauty', 'Justice', 'Magnanimity', 'Understanding', 'Knowledge' and 'Supreme Bliss'.

It is important to proceed in a logical and orderly sequence. This may take a long time, or it may be shorter for those with more intuitive skill. You cannot proceed to one Sephirah without having mastered that which precedes it on the ascent of the Tree. For example, [9] 'Yesodh' or 'Foundation' has to be mastered before proceeding to [8] 'Hod' or 'Splendour'. You will also need to find the appropriate 'launch' conditions in [10] 'Malkuth' which is our 'space-time', and to have worked out a story-line for proceeding along the 'path' or 'Cinnerah' from Malkuth to Yesodh. Many Qabalists will use 'The World' [Tarot Card XXI] for a set of mental images to construct such a story for their lucid dream. Other paths between Sephiroth are similarly associated with specific symbols.

Example: use a 'Circle of Art' as the launchpad; a night of 'full moon' would be effective; a 'fire' is lit, or candles burning on an altar may suffice; mantras [passwords] for the Guardian of the Path might be 'AUM' then 'TAU' [ascending]; 'TAU', 'TECHINAH' and 'AUM' or 'MAH' [descending]. For entry to Yesodh use 'YAH' then 'SHADDAI EL CHAI' for the temple at the centre of this world. [You cannot go further until you have mastered this 'Foundation' Sephirah, i.e. the 'astral realm' and 'astral travel'].

In a Rosicrucian approach, in respect of each Sephirah, every one of the Seven Virtues [fortitude, prudence, justice, temperance; faith, hope, love] must be applied to its mastery, and temptations to every one of the Seven Vices [pride, anger, envy, sloth, avarice, gluttony, lust] must also be mastered. However the nature of each Sephirah is also determined by particular Virtues. Ectypes of the Virtues and Vices are subjective, so the stories structured around them will differ from person to person. Many visits may be required to achieve integrity with the Sephirah in each case.

Lightning Path. This is the path of exact sequence following the most direct route from each Sephirah to its numerical neighbour. It is sometimes called the 'Path of Creation'. When you are a Novice, you must follow this path exactly. So you can go from [10] to [9], then to [8], then to [7], and on to [6] etc., but you must not go directly between non-sequential Sephiroth, e.g. from [10] to [8], or from [9] to [7]. With experience, this becomes permissible, at first only for descending [2nd° manna], later for ascending as well [3rd° manna]. This is partly due to the centuries' old discovery that it is impossible to master, for example, [7] 'Victory' [of the senses] after merely mastering [9] 'Foundation' [in the astral plane] without in between mastering [8] 'Splendour' [of Speech, Communication and Reason]. To do otherwise could strand the Qabalist in virtual space, or inflict a psychic wound [or both].

[In some traditions, initiation requires that ALL Cinneroth [paths] below a certain level be mastered, and that Sephiroth [spheres] be visited in each of their '4 manifestations', i.e. in each of the four worlds].

The major writers on Qabalah have very different strengths and weaknesses. They are grouped under four main schools, each offering a major advantage over the others, yet also each having its own particular limitations. Let's briefly introduce these four perspectives.

[1] The 'theatrical magic' or 'dramaturgical' model of Mathers was the earliest; which later gave rise to the 'Alpha and Omega' Temple [AO]. An obvious criticism was that Qabalah is not only about magic, which is rather the supposed means to establishing the dream reality, not the end in itself. The principal goal of Qabalah is rather an upwards and integrating sweep of human consciousness [or brain activity if you prefer], using the 'Yoga of the West' as a tool for healing, integrating and perfecting imagination, and for acquiring the qualities of each Sephirah on Jacob's Ladder.

Mathers and his wife Moina were magical romantics, authors of brilliant psycho-drama. They considered that awe-inspiring ritual alone could transport along the paths. To a very great extent they were right, but numinous theatre is not the only way to achieve it, nor the best method for all temperaments. Classical [formal], ecstatic [tantric] and mystical approaches also work.

[2] The 'classical' or 'formalist' model of Regardie, originally of the Stella Matutina, later of the 'American' Golden Dawn, was a reaction against mere theatrical romanticism. Regardie was a formidable scholar who gathered all the Qabalistic traditions together and distilled a system of highly complex and precise formulae which he insisted were necessary to travel on the Tree of Life.

They undoubtedly work, but they are also unnecessarily rigid, narrow and obscure. Any serious and dedicated attempt will in fact succeed, given right conditions for imagination and will, self-consistent understanding of the paths, and appropriate imaginative correspondences. The rituals of Regardie will unlock the paths; but so will other rituals if they are sufficiently intricate, appropriate, numinous and stimulating. They are nevertheless beautifully constructed rituals of flawless intricacy.

[3] The third model is the 'ecstatic' or 'tantric' model of Aleister Crowley of the Argentum Astrum [AA] and Ordo Templo Orientalis [OTO]. In some versions, this turns out to be a 'sex model', although in theory it includes any system of ecstatic magico-meditation. Crowley advanced both with lively and empirical intellect, and with a great sense of humour. Unfortunately he was also a drug addict, and during the inter-war years took his 'Thelema' model to extremes of confusion and depravity.

It certainly appears to be true that erotic tension in Tantric yoga, or in Pentacostal ecstasy for that matter, is a successful means of quickly travelling on the paths and entering the virtual reality of the Tree; however Crowley overplayed this and erred in thinking it was the only 'true path'. He was also mistaken in thinking that 'power' obtained from the voyages was the way to climb the mountain of consciousness to achieve the promised bliss. In fact 'power' is surprisingly irrelevant, and may often be a distraction, or even a corrupting factor. Crowley himself became fascinated by 'Da'ath', the 'Abyss' and the monster 'Choronzon' who is said to reside there. Some of his rituals remain useful and extraordinarily efficient methods for Qabalistic pathworking (just not the only ones); whilst others are dangerous lures into the Shadow Tree. Distinguishing them is difficult and dangerous work.

Perhaps Crowley's main gift to Qabalah was the perfecting of the Tarot correspondences. Although these had been observed, they were not properly understood or catalogued until his great discoveries of their imaginative potential. His monumental book of the proposed imaginative correspondences for practical pathworking use, known as 'Liber 777', is still the most widely used. Despite errors, speculations and moral lapses, it is still arguably one of the most comprehensive.

[When you hear the term 'Illuminati' in modern use as a term of abuse or paranoia, it often refers to the 'ascended masters' of Crowley's system, a cabal of thelemites networking the globe].

[4] The fourth model is the 'mystic model' based on 'theurgy', a system for manifesting or invoking the Divine used by Pagan and Christian Qabalists, who mainly looked to Freemasonry for their inspiration.

*** This 'mystical model' of Qabalah has arisen from three strikingly different perspectives, which have subsequently tended to converge.

The first was that of the early Dion Fortune, originally of the Hermes Lodge of Stella Matutina, then of the Fellowship of the Inner Light. Descendants of this group, still using her basic model, include 'SOL' and 'SIL'. Some Christian occultists such as Gareth Knight briefly passed through this modality, which represented practical mysticism. Basically, Dion Fortune believed that mystic occult ritual per se when combined with theosophy, psycho-drama [theatre], feminist theurgy and credible mythopoeia was necessary to negotiating the paths. Although she assumed a Christian framework, arguing for some Christian orthodoxies, she also initially accepted Blavatsky's dogmas about 'root races', 'Atlantis', 'past lives', 'spiritualism' and 'religious syncretism' as necessary to pathworking progress. Some of these early theosophical beliefs, internally inconsistent or distracting, became quickly outdated.

A second approach was an austere and specifically 'Christian' mystic model. It was formulated by Arthur Waite, a leading authority on the Tarot; and by two important Christian theologians, novelist Evelyn Underhill, and poet and Dante scholar Charles Williams. They regarded the proper pathworking function of Qabalah to be dependent upon a mix of Rosicrucian rituals, strict rules of purification, and formulae borrowed from arcane Hermetic sources known only to a select few scholars. Although this is a narrow approach, it certainly works. It does not claim to be the only methodology, merely safe. However, because of its rigour, it is less accessible than other versions of mystical Qabalah.

The third and most widely used mystic approach evolved (surprisingly) from the perspective of the 'Occult Revival' movement, now better known from its Findhorn and New Age rehabilitations.

In the early 20th C a group of Rosicrucians opened a Theatre on the outskirts of the New Forest near Southampton, calling themselves the 'Order Crotona'. They produced plays based on Rosicrucian rituals, mixed with pagan and Greek 'Orphic' rites, such as 'Drawing Down the Moon', and the 'Initiatory Rites of Eleusis'. They formed a working 'magical group' who met as a 'coven', believing that their rites were in some sense magical as well as being 'cathartic' psycho-drama.

A young man named Gerald Gardner got to hear about them, and was 'initiated' into their rites, later using what he remembered, together with some ideas furnished by his new friend Aleister Crowley, to formulate a new witch religion that he called 'Wicca'. Judaeo-Christian and Qabalistic references from the original Rosicrucian Order Crotona were at first quashed, the former with unfortunate vehemence.

At the same time, Dion Fortune began to promote the idea of 'Christian Paganism', describing a 'theurgy' based on a universal Goddess whom she identified with the Holy Spirit¹ of Christian theology. As her own rituals became more liquid, leaning towards a 'New Age' theme, her groups also became attracted to 'feminist Craft magic' as a means of attaining the level and type of mystical engagement required for this brand of Qabalistic pathworking. It also (posthumously) drew on ideas from Gaian ecology and teleological theories of Teilhard de Chardin. New Age spiritual ecology was born.

The union of these movements has since 1970 given rise to a more evolved version of mystical Qabalah, that of 'New Age' magico-mystical syncretism. A sympathetic critique will be found in the writings of occultist Gareth Knight. Adherents argue that it is a productive and uplifting approach, and the most appealing for naturalistic reasons. Again, it is certainly not the only path, but it is highly effective. It also allows another seven occult paths into virtual space besides Qabalah itself.

I hope this helps smooth out some complexities. Above all, the 'Tree of Life' is a flexible and fluid system; using it as a framework for lucid dreaming and virtual reality construction is a most personal and private choice. Liberating or suffocating, it will ultimately lead you where and how you choose.

Kindest regards, Alexander C-W

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NOTE (1) – 'Holy Spirit' or 'Anima mundi' in DF's theology is the Feminine node of Divinity, identified with the Judaic 'Immanence'. By this account theurgy is the deliberate drawing down of the Divine Feminine or Shekinah into space-time; when it becomes fully conscious and embodied a New Age based on a recalibration towards spiritual and temporal harmony will dawn.