

Study Guide _3

Qabalah made simple: some more notes ...

[Modern and Hermetic] Qabalah is an extension of the pre-existing Cabala [Renaissance and Christian] and Kabbalah [ancient and medieval Jewish] systems of mystico-magical ritual and meditation. It is aptly called the 'Yoga of the West'. In fact modern Qabalah often uses preliminary meditation techniques borrowed from Indian Yoga.

In case you did not understand my first two series of notes, K- C- Q- abbala[h] is simply a system of meditation based on 'pathworking' between spheres of consciousness. The spheres are organised in a system known as the 'Tree of Life', and there is more than one system of organisation that has been put forward. In the end, pathworking meditation is a very fluid system, a lot of the dogmatic statements of those who go in for it are overly rigid and exclusive. What works for you is what is true.

If you go 'up' the Tree, ascending to more spiritual levels of consciousness, the process is basically what might be called 'mysticism'. In Dion Fortune's books, she calls this type of pathworking 'evolution'. If you go 'down' the Tree, absorbing, invoking or evoking higher levels of entity into the mind-body or world of space-time, the process is basically what might be called 'magic', or the 'technology of idealism', although this term is sometimes also used to refer to ascending the Tree where elaborate rituals and correspondences are used. Fortune calls the descending type of pathworking 'involution'. Theistic [mostly Judaeo-Christian] Qabalists believe that 'involution' includes processes of 'Creation' – but beware! these terms are more complex than in common usage ...

'Theurgy' is the involution of the consciousness of divine entities from higher planes of the Tree. It is the deliberate attempt to manifest such consciousness, or to facilitate such consciousness in our own world of 'space-time'. In terms of 'Gaian' beliefs, this is any process, ritual or meditation which draws down 'Goddess' consciousness. In post-Darwinian evolutionary terms, it is any ritual which aims to permit the Goddess, or Nature if you prefer, to become Self-conscious and active on our planet and in the universe [macrocosm]. This conscious body of Nature resplendent is the 'Shekinah'.

Some forms of involution may also invoke spiritual entities other than the Divine. These include: angelic intelligences; in the plane of Yetzirah, all manner of devas and other world beings; or from 'pitfalls' into the Shadow Tree, unpleasant entities, including half-formed Qlippoth and malicious Shedim. For these reasons, caution must be exercised, and the latter should obviously be avoided.

A 'plane' is a 'world'. There are four 'planes of reality' recognised in K- C- Q- abbala[h], these being 'Atziluth' which is the 'Pleroma' or realm of the Absolute or First Force; 'Briah', or the 'Briatic world', which is the realm of the Spirits entrusted with putting the 'Music of the Spheres' of Atziluth into Being, and then propelling it towards manifestation; 'Yetzirah' or the 'astral realm', a trans-temporal, etheric world immediately pre-figuring the manifest world, including all manner of spirits and entities, not all wholesome; and finally 'Assiah', centred on the single sphere of 'Malkuth', the world of 'space-time', including our Earth.

There is some disagreement about the boundaries of 'planes' or 'worlds'. And there is also added complexity, because the Tree is said to magically reappear at the centre of each world... (!)

All agree that 'Assiah' belongs to a single sphere, the sephirah of 'Malkuth' [kingdom of the macrocosm], which includes 'space-time'. Some believe that our world also includes phenomena that go beyond 'space-time', such as the 'Shekinah' or 'Divine Anima', who is so much of Goddess consciousness as has already established Herself here. Other entities not of our space-time but which may appear in our world include, according to some authorities, things like 'Hell's Gate', or the gateway to the 'Shadow tree' of the evil 'Qlippoth' [demons] and 'Shedim' [damned souls]. Also relatively neutral 'elementals' and 'guardians' that co-exist astride both Assiah and the astral plane of Yetzirah.

All would also agree that 'Yetzirah', the 'astral plane', is spread in a triad between the three next inferior [downward pointing] spheres, namely 'Yesodh' [Hebrew for 'foundation', a sort of alchemical laboratory for attaching substance to form], associated with the Moon and all manner of material, mythical and spirit entities; 'Hod' [Hebrew for 'glory'] associated with Mercury-Hermes, the 'City of God' [and of Man] and with 'thought', 'analysis' and 'synthesis' from symbols, including hermeticism and its symbols; and beyond these 'Netzach' [Hebrew for 'victory'] associated with Venus, 'feelings', 'triumph of Nature', 'sweet desire', 'ecstasy' or 'delight', 'love' and 'fecundity', and 'water'. However, in practice you can use whatever correspondences 'work' for your virtual reality.

When we come to 'Briah', there is a great deal of disagreement. Some believe that 'Creation of a viable template for manifestation' is what is meant by the Briatic world, so that it consists of archangels who assemble this template according to principles such as 'multiplicity' vs. 'reduction', 'wisdom' vs. 'understanding', 'profusion' vs. 'limitation' etc., until finally a viable template for perfect Creation is created, known as the sphere of 'Tiphareth' [Hebrew for 'beauty']. Briah is the world of 'alchemy'.

However, others adhere strictly to the 'Triad' system of organisation. According to this, 'Briah' is a triad underpinned by two opposed but complimentary forces, 'Chesed' [or 'generosity'] associated with 'Juppiter' and 'air', and 'Geburah' [or 'limitation'] associated with 'Mars' and 'fire'. Chesed is regarded as masculine and positive, Geburah as feminine and negative. Chesed is also associated with 'Gedullah' or 'glory', 'Geburah' with 'power'. Without both principles, there would be chaos. The harmonisation of the principles results in 'Tiphareth', the finished template of perfected, ideal creation, or Beauty. It is an ectype of the upper spiritual manifestation of the Creator divinity, or Elohim, a plural Hebrew word meaning 'God-and-Goddess'.

[This organization follows C- Cabala, where the 'Choirs of Angels' follow the 'triad' format for all three superior planes].

'Atziluth' is the highest world. All agree that it is the 'Pleroma' or 'Divine Presence'. Whilst some restrict this to 'Kether' [the 'Absolute'] which contains the One, most Qabalists follow C- Cabala by including the spheres of 'Chokmah' which is the world of 'Abba' the Father; and of 'Binah' which is the world of 'Aima' the Mother. Those who like the 'Triad' organisation term this the 'supernal triad' or 'land of the supernals'. In Cabala, this is the 'Land of Sarras', or realm of the 'archangels' who serve the 'Elohim' [the divine Abba-Aima monad]. In this conception, 'Atziluth' is the realm of the 'Triune-in-One', in Jewish mythopoeia the Heaven of 'Araboth'. It is also the world of the 'Archetypes'.

In Qabalah, the correspondences used for meditation have been greatly increased to include many 'Hermetic' and 'Alchemic' symbols, the 'numbers' represented by Hebrew letters for Paths [cinneroth] joining the Spheres [sephiroth], and in modern times by 'Tarot' symbols. These are great aids to fantasy and imagination, and serve to connect and flush out the content of pathworking.

The four authors whose works I have mentioned are influential in the history of Qabalah, but it is important to keep an open mind and not get too hung up on dogma. For example Crowley was a genius in development of the hermetic and Tarot symbols for use in pathworking, but it cannot be emphasised enough that his moral character left much to be desired, and his tantric rituals often had more to do with the Shadow Tree than with the Tree of Life, despite flashes of fine scholarship.

Dion Fortune was excellent on feminist theurgy, and understood the way in which the Tree system of pathworking could be used intuitively. She was also interested in the psychology of consciousness, and in invocation [involution]. However, she was susceptible to occult dogma, and at one stage became obsessed with western tantric yoga. Erotic mythopoeia is useful but unnecessary.

Regardie was even more dogmatic, in an altogether different direction. His intricate rituals work, and are beautifully constructed. Moreover he was an excellent metaphysician, though intolerant and doubtful of people whose use of the Tree was less formal his own. Yet some who adopted more intuitive pathworking techniques and correspondences reaped equally profound effects.

Finally, Charles Williams, a student of Arthur Waite, tried to steer his Qabalah back to restorative pathworking based on Rosicrucian ritual and a system which he termed 'co-inherence'. This was an alchemic and therapeutic focus, based on Christian understanding of the spheres inspired by the relations of Dante's heavens. Though ambivalent to other approaches, he anticipated feminist theurgy which would take shape later in the 20th century, as discussed in Gareth Knight's work.

In practice, the important thing is to use what is good for you, and discard what is not useful. It is your journey, a virtual reality constructed by you. The dangers are real, but the rewards are vast.

Basically, Qabalah is a type of portable virtual reality generator, using the glyph of the Tree of Life as the starting point for human imagination. It offers a dangerous but spectacular and wondrous adventure, in mystical [upward] or magical [downward] directions. To succeed, my advice is to use teachers sparingly and cultivate a personal technique.

You may expand consciousness, draw down the Goddess or any of Her Nine Octaves, uncover or draw down heavens or other world entities, or be sucked into the Abyss or Shadow Tree via various 'pitfalls', as seems to have befallen Crowley, despite talent, humour and perspicacity. His many insights were sadly misused, but some of the connotative correspondences of '777' remain brilliantly useful, whilst others are gateways into perdition. On the whole, CW and DF are the safest mentors.

Wishing you the best of luck,

Alexander C-W

28 May 2018, revised 26 July 2019