

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL HERMETIC QABALISTIC PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

As Freemasons, we periodically encounter references to Kabbalah in the degree work and supplemental literature on the Craft's ritual and symbolism. Kabbalah (which, for the present context, we shall define as: a mystical, Judaic, exegetical method – the ontological elements of which, being of little present import), having its origins in medieval Europe, is explicitly referenced in certain degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and also in the Masonic invitational order, *Societas Rosicruciana*. Despite the occasional proximity of the subject, many Masons overlook the opportunity to develop the necessary proficiency to utilize this powerful interpretive perspective.

When we consider Kabbalah's association with Freemasonry, we are generally referring to the system's occult adaptation, commonly known in the Western Esoteric Tradition as Hermetic Qabalah. Hermetic Qabalah is differentiated from Judaic Kabbalah, and the Renaissance-era Christian Cabala of Pico della Mirandola et al., primarily in its syncretization with hermeticism, astrology, alchemy, tarot symbolism and various mythologically archetypal elements from pagandom, particularly that of the Egyptian & Greco-Roman cultures. This is the form which was utilized by Freemasons such as Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, William Wynn Westcott, Arthur Edward Waite (all members of the *Societas Rosicruciana* and its splinter group, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn), Paul Foster Case (of the post-Golden Dawn orders, *Alpha et Omega* and the Builders of the Adytum) and Manly Palmer Hall (author of *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, an encyclopedic compendium of the Western Esoteric Tradition).

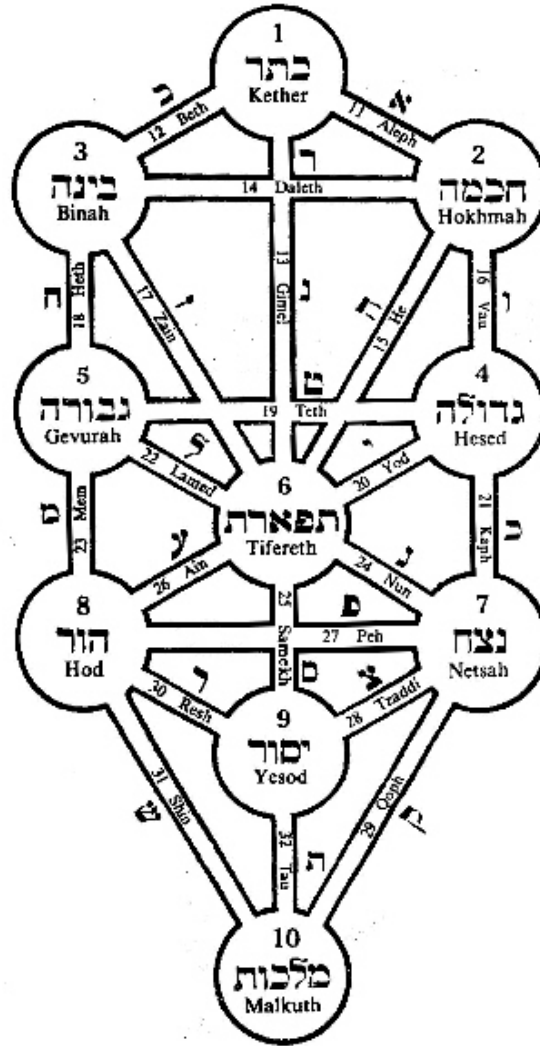
To the present day, many Freemasons find this interpretive methodology to be particularly suited not merely to the study of general esoterica and the occult, but also as an exegetical aid to a deeper understanding of the ritual and symbolism of the Craft. Unfortunately, far fewer Freemasons ever come to the realization that it is one matter to intellectually absorb the historical and theoretical details of the hermetic arts and sciences, but it is quite another to develop and maintain a philosophically viable and theurgically transformational practice based in Hermetic Qabalah.

It is the purpose of this piece to explain, in a general and cursory way, how the utilization of this system may help to synthesize data gleaned from scripture, dreams, divinatory practices and, of course, Masonic ritual and symbolism. Additionally, we will illustrate how any name, date, word or number may be Qabalistically rendered and thereby analyzed vis-à-vis the myriad correspondences afforded by other hermetic associations within the greater system. Lastly, we will show how this system can be a tremendous aid to personal ritual construction in a magical practice.

THE ETZ CHAIM, THE SEPHIROTH AND THE 22 PATHS

To begin, a working knowledge of the *Etz Chaim* ("Tree of Life"), which consists of the *Sephiroth* ("Emanations", plural; *Sephirah*, singular) and the twenty-two (which is, not coincidentally, the number of letters in

the Hebrew alphabet) Paths between them, must be cultivated and internalized as deeply as possible. In time, this structure will serve as a conceptual filing cabinet, into which all manner of concepts may be catalogued and categorized. This data may then be synthesized by associating it with corresponding material from an adjacent hermetic discipline. One may then begin to develop a more coherent and integrated understanding of the given concept or subject within the wider context of the Western Esoteric Tradition.



An efficient way to absorb the architecture (and to begin to cultivate the corresponding mental schema) of the *Etz Chaim* is to begin with the hermetic discipline with which one is most familiar. For instance, if one is conversant with mythological personae and archetypes, a sure footed starting point would be to memorize which *Sephirah* is commonly associated with which persona: *Kether* with Pluto, *Chokmah* with Poseidon, *Binah* with Cronus, etc. Perhaps, if one is sufficiently well-acquainted with tarot symbolism, finding each tarot key's position on the paths between the *Sephiroth* may be the most advantageous point of entry. Once an existing point of reference is established, it may then be used as a sort of Rosetta Stone by which one may translate and collate corresponding material from other groups of concepts, such as alchemical, planetary or elemental groups. In turn, these extended associations may be used as fodder for further interpretation and the subsequent construction of pathworking narratives.

HERMETIC CORRESPONDENCES

Immersion into Qabalistic analysis, as opposed to rote memorization of the symbol sets and their physical positioning on the *Etz Chaim* (which will come in time, and with little conscious effort, through working in the medium), is certainly the most immediately fruitful approach. It is in this pragmatic manner that one begins, at once, to forge archetypal associations and conceptually synergetic relationships, even if only by intuiting the data, *prima facie*, and developing a theoretically supportive basis over time

ABRIDGED TABLE OF CORRESPONDENCES

TAROT KEY	HEBREW	ENGLISH	GEMATRIA	PATH	PLANET/ASTROLOGY	GREEK MYTH	ELEMENT/ALCHEMY
O. FOOL	ALEPH	OX	1	11	URANUS	OURANOS	AIR
I. MAGICIAN	BETH	HOUSE	2	12	MERCURY	HERMES	MERCURY
II. HIGH PRIESTESS	GIMEL	CAMEL	3	13	MOON	SELENE	SILVER
III. EMPRESS	DALETH	DOOR	4	14	VENUS	APHRODITE	COPPER
IV. EMPEROR	HEH	WINDOW	5	15	ARIES	ARES	FIRE
V. HIEROPHANT	VAU	NAIL	6	16	TAURUS	APHRODITE	EARTH
VI. LOVERS	ZAYIN	SWORD	7	17	GEMINI	HERMES	AIR
VII. CHARIOT	CHETH	FENCE OR FIELD	8	18	CANCER	HECATE	WATER
VIII. STRENGTH	TETH	SERPENT	9	19	LEO	APOLLO	FIRE
IX. HERMIT	YOD	HAND	10	20	VIRGO	ARTEMIS	EARTH
X. WHEEL	KAPH	PALM	20	21	JUPITER	ZEUS	TIN
XI. JUSTICE	LAMED	OX GOAD	30	22	LIBRA	APHRODITE	AIR
XII. HANGED MAN	MEM	WATER	40	23	NEPTUNE	POSIEDON	WATER
XIII. DEATH	NUN	FISH	50	24	SCORPIO	HADES	WATER
XIV. TEMPERANCE	SAMECH	PROP	60	25	SAGITTARIUS	ZEUS	FIRE
XV. DEVIL	AYIN	EYE	70	26	CAPRICORN	CRONUS	EARTH
XVI. TOWER	PEH	MOUTH	80	27	MARS	ARES	IRON
XVII. STAR	TZADDI	FISH HOOK	90	28	AQUARIUS	OURANOS	AIR
XVIII. MOON	QOPH	BACK OF HEAD	100	29	PISCES	POSIEDON	WATER
XIX. SUN	RESH	HEAD	200	30	SUN	APOLLO	GOLD
XX. JUDGEMENT	SHIN	TOOTH	300	31	PLUTO	HADES	FIRE
XXI. WORLD	TAU	CROSS	400	32	SATURN	CRONUS	LEAD

GENERATING QABALISTIC DATA FROM A WORD OR NAME

Any word or name can be Qabalistically analyzed but the word must first be rendered in Hebrew. There are several online translation programs for this purpose (Google Translate is very handy and does the job sufficiently well). Once the Hebrew letters for the word or name in question have been obtained (remember that Hebrew is written left-to-right), these may be used to gather the associations and correspondences from the table above (and, of course, from other sources as one's Hermetic Qabalistic knowledge base expands). When all the correspondences (*Gematriac*, Astrological/Planetary, Mythological, Alchemical/Elemental, etc.) have been generated, catalog them in a dedicated notebook for further meditation, narrative pathworking and ritual construction (see sections on PATHWORKING and RITUAL CONSTRUCTION below).

GENERATING QABALISTIC DATA FROM A NUMBER OR DATE

Numerical data is especially useful in its *Gematriac* application. Any number may be rendered in Hebrew letters, since every Hebrew letter has an assigned numerical value (see also: *Isopsephy*, a counterpart to Hebrew *Gematria*, useful for the numerical rendering of Greek, as this language also appears frequently in scripture and

elsewhere in Classical Literature). There are online databases that calculate which words have the *Gematriac* value of the number entered (www.biblewheel.com is very useful). Generally, these databases also perform the inverse operation of generating the *Gematriac* value for inputted words. Again, these associations and correspondences should be catalogued for use in mediation, narrative pathworking and ritual construction (see sections on PATHWORKING and RITUAL CONSTRUCTION below).

DREAM ANALYSIS

If one is mindful and observant of the objects, settings and narratives in one's dreams, there should be no problem finding useful information subject to Qabalistic analysis. Using roughly the same methodology as above, the information is processed against all manner of hermetic correspondences and the data yielded is collected for further Work (see sections on PATHWORKING and RITUAL CONSTRUCTION below).

PATHWORKING AND MEDITATION

Once a sufficient amount of hermetic correspondences (*Gematriac*, Astrological/Planetary, Mythological, Alchemical/Elemental, etc.) have been generated and catalogued by the aforementioned methods, these may be used as building blocks in a process known as Pathworking. This practice, which was developed by the members of Golden Dawn splinter groups, *Alpha et Omega* and *Stella Matutina*, essentially consisted of a guided meditation along the Paths of the *Etz Chaim*. The meditation was typically conducted by the Hierophant of the order but, for our purposes, we may avail ourselves to our inner Hierophant.

One should begin by creating an atmosphere of solemnity and quietude, using the methods of one's chosen initiatory tradition or lineage, in a place where one is unlikely to be interrupted or otherwise disturbed. The goal here is to generate a sort of twilight state – somewhere between a waking and sleeping consciousness. Then, meditating on the data collected in the above methods, begin a free-form process of creative visualization. Imagine these elements coalescing into a narrative – try to picture this narrative vis-à-vis the *Etz Chaim*, as if one were pinning Polaroid pictures to a storyboard. Eventually, this narrative will take sufficient form to render it subject to interpretation.

It may, at first, be difficult to allow oneself to actively engage in this highly creative and imaginative process but, as with any other practice of value, the rewards are commensurate with one's efforts. One should proceed steadily in the confidence that incremental progress will be made and that the experiences will deepen in insight and significance. Note also that the above procedure may be extrapolated upon, *ad infinitum*, and applied to nearly any personally significant input. It has been the author's experience that sometimes even the mundane experiences of everyday life are, in a sense, allegorical and are thereby worthy of our deepest contemplation and interpretation. These sort of personal mythological narratives are perfect fodder for Hermetic Qabalistic analysis.

RITUAL CONSTRUCTION

The data and subsequent hermetic correspondences collected by the methods mentioned above may also be used in a ritual and/or ceremonial magick context. Simply use these elements in the construction and consecration of magical implements and in the composition of incantational passages, aesthetic design and choreography of ceremonial ritualism. Obviously, further independent research is required in order to capture a nuanced and magically significant constellation of concepts that will sufficiently represent the ritualistic operation at hand.

CONCLUSION

This is by no means an exhaustive exposition of the topic, nor is this cursory overview meant to be representative of anything like a dogmatic methodology universally employed in Hermetic Qabalistic theory and practice. This has merely been a general distillation of some of the author's best developed techniques in his personal

practice. One would do well to modify these methods to suit one's preferred modes of learning, synthesis and integration, and also to one's philosophical and theological inclinations – particularly since the depositing of the individual's subjective consciousness (i.e. the Self as the psycho-alchemical *prima materia*) into the Work is integral to the process. And this process, if regularly performed, may lead to conditions that have variously been referred to as gnosis, individuation, self-realization, psychic integration and Further Light.

For further elucidation in the development of a personal Hermetic Qabalistic practice, the author recommends the following books:

777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley, Crowley, Weiser Books, 1986

Mystical Qabalah, Fortune, Weiser Books, 2000

The Book of Tokens: Tarot Card Meditations, Case, Builders of the Adytum LTD, 1989

The Holy Qabalah, Waite, Dover, 2003