

The Sēfirōthal Tree

THE FIRST AND FOREMOST “emanation” from ’ēin sōf, the Boundless, is the first of the sēfirōth, called Sēfirāh (see diagram p. 10). It is the primordial point from which emanate nine lower sēfirōth in serial order and in descending quality of brightness. This first sēfirāh is commonly called *Kether* (diadem, crown), and is known by various other names, such as White Head, Ancient of Days, Macroprosopus or Great Face — called Great Face because it contains potentially all the other “small” faces or lower sēfirōth. The term *face* is used to signify the ancient idea of the mask or *māyā*, and Great Face signifies the cosmic illusion of manifestation, called in Sanskrit *mahā-māyā*.

Kether is Number One, Indivisible, the monad of Pythagoras, the *Monas monadum* of Leibniz. From one standpoint it is the first unmanifest Logos. Its divine name is *’ehyeh* (“I am”). In one system of correspondences, Kether is made equivalent to the *Primum Mobile*, the first cosmic spatial manifestation of divinity; in another to the central invisible sun. When correlated to ’Ādām Qadmōn (archetypal man or universe), Kether is the head or “crown” of the head.

From Kether (crown), the indivisible point, issue forth

two rays of active and passive — or masculine and feminine — potency.* The right and masculine energy is focused in *Ḥokhmāh* (wisdom), the second *sēfirāh*, termed the Duad, *'āb* (father), likewise called by its divine name, *yāb*. It corresponds in certain respects to the second Logos, and represents the right shoulder of 'Ādām Qadmōn. The third *sēfirāh*, *Bīnāh* (intelligence, insight, understanding), is the feminine passive stream of energy flowing from Kether through *Ḥokhmāh*, and forms the left shoulder of 'Ādām Qadmōn. Its divine name is *heb*. It is also called *'ēm* or *'immī* (the Mother), coequal with the Father. *Bīnāh* is the Supernal Mother as contrasted with the tenth *sēfirāh*, *Mal-khūth*, the inferior Mother, Bride, or Queen. *Bīnāh* is the third Logos from one viewpoint.

These three *sēfirōth* form the invisible triad of archetypal man. As Qabbalistic thought expresses it: “neither the Head nor the shoulders of Adam-Kadmon can be seen” (cf. *SD* 1:239). The position of *Ḥokhmāh* and *Bīnāh* as the second and third — respectively the masculine or Father, and the feminine or Mother — is by certain Qabbalists reversed, Isaac Myer among these (*Qabbalah*, pp. 259-60). There is much to be said in favor of the reverse position, with *Bīnāh* as the feminine aspect representing the Mother issuing first from Kether, the two giving birth to or emanating *Ḥokhmāh* as the Son. This placing would immediately identify these first three *sēfirōth*, or the first “face” of the Tree of Life, with the Hindu Trimūrti of Brahmā,

*Each *sēfirāh* is feminine or receptive to the one above, and masculine or transmitting to the one below it; cf. Mathers, pp. 27, 335nn.

Vishnu, and Śiva, and with the Christian Trinity as originally understood as Father, Holy Spirit, and Son. However, as many students of Qabbālāh leave this refinement of position alone and take the more general view of Ḥokhmāh and Bīnāh as being the second and third aspects respectively, we shall place them likewise. It is of small moment which one of them is placed second or third, the essential point being that the supernal triad of Kether, Ḥokhmāh, and Bīnāh represents the unmanifest triad of divine forces and powers, which in time and space emanate from themselves the remaining sēfirōthal powers in orderly progression.

As a direct emanation from this triad, the second “face” or triad is born, consisting of Ḥesed, Gēbūrāh, and Tif’ereth: Compassion, Strength, and Beauty. *Ḥesed* (ardor, love, goodness, compassion, or mercy) is the fourth sēfirāh — a masculine active power, corresponding to the right arm of ’Ādām Qadmōn, and whose divine name is *’el* (the mighty one).

Gēbūrāh (strength, power, might), the fifth sēfirāh, a feminine potency issuing from and complementing Ḥesed, its masculine counterpart, corresponds to the left arm of ’Ādām Qadmōn. Its divine name is *’elōah* (goddess).

Tif’ereth (beauty, magnificence, glory), the sixth sēfirāh, is the fruit of Ḥesed and Gēbūrāh. It represents the heart of ’Ādām Qadmōn, and is said to be the seat of the sun, from which flows into the surrounding and lower sēfirōth all goodness and inspiration. This sēfirāh is often termed the Small Countenance or Microprosopus in contradistinction to Kether or Macroprosopus. The divine name of Tif’ereth is *’elohīm* (divine or mighty ones, gods-goddesses).

Tif'ereth is sometimes called the King (*Melekh*) in connection with Malkhūth as Queen, the tenth sēfirāh.

From this second triad or face of the sēfirōthal tree, a third triad emanates of still greater heaviness of texture, formed of Netsaḥ, Hōd, and Yēsōd: Triumph or Firmness, Majesty, and Foundation. *Netsaḥ* (glory, splendor, occasionally time), the seventh sēfirāh, is variously translated as Triumph, Firmness, or Subtlety. It is the masculine potency representing in archetypal man the right thigh and its divine name is *yēhovāh tsēbā'ōth* (lord of hosts or armies).

Hōd (splendor, majesty), the eighth sēfirāh, is the feminine potency accompanying the masculine power of Netsaḥ. It represents the left thigh of 'Ādām Qadmōn and its divine name is *'elohīm tsēbā'ōth*. The *Zohar* states (3:296a) that through Netsaḥ and Hōd “we comprehend extension, multiplication, and force.”

Yēsōd (foundation), the ninth sēfirāh, is the fruit or son of Netsaḥ and Hōd. It represents the generative or productive power of 'Ādām Qadmōn. Qabbālāh considered that all energy and life from whatever plane found its portal through Yēsōd into the manifested world: “All marrow, seed and energy are gathered in this place. Hence all the potentialities which exist go out through this” (Myer, p. 271). Its divine name is *'el ḥai* (the mighty living being, lord of life). This name is reminiscent of the Sanskrit term *prajāpati*, “lord of lives,” the progenitor of all living beings on earth.

These six sēfirōth, from Ḥesed to Yēsōd, are termed the sēfirōth of construction, partaking of the qualities of manifestation in contradistinction to the supernal triad or unmanifest face of Kether, Ḥokhmāh, and Bīnāh.

The final and tenth sēfirāh is named *Malkhūth* (kingdom, dominion), carrier or vehicle of all ten sēfirōthal powers. As Kether is said to contain all the sēfirōth in seed, so Malkhūth, its nether pole, is said to express by transmission, as the vehicle, all the superior sēfirōth. Representing the feet of archetypal man, it is called also the Bride, Inferior Mother, or Queen, whose symbol is the moon or the earth. Malkhūth represents the close of the spiritual “Construction or Building of the Universe,” with which the six sēfirōth immediately preceding it were concerned. Its divine name is *ʾadonāi*, literally meaning not “lord,” but “my lords.”

Thus have the sēfirōth unrolled forth from the Boundless through a series of triads, each of which is progressively more material. Myer sums up the Qabbalistic thought:

The idea of the Sephiroth is like that of a builder who desires to build a great Palace. 1. He grasps in his mind the plan of the whole building. This is Kether, 'Hokhmah, Binah. 2. Then he considers the way according to which the work shall be done, that it shall correspond to the plan. This is 'Hesed, Tiph'e-reth and Ge'boor-ah. 3. He considers the means of carrying it out, this is Ne-tza'h, Ye'sod and Hod. The entire building is the Divine government of the whole world represented by Malkhuth. — *Qabbalah*, p. 380

Each sēfirāh or emanation, proceeding from the top or crown, emanates the one from the other: from the highest comes forth the next highest, from those two, the third, until an invisible triad is formed. Finally all seven manifest sēfirōth are formed, no one coming to birth except as the fruit and product of all the preceding ones.

As we have seen, each of the ten *sēfirōth* of 'Ādām Qadmōn — the ideal, cosmic, or archetypal man, the synthesis of the ten emanations — corresponds to a particular part of the body. This in no wise should be considered as physicalizing spiritual power, but rather as affirming mankind's intimate relation with divine things, and that even the tenth emanation carries the mark of celestial and moral potency. While the correlations of the ten *sēfirōth* with the human body differ slightly among various writers, the principle remains the same throughout (cf. Ginsburg, p. 93).

The analogy between the *sēfirōth* and the human body reflects a cardinal doctrine of the Qabbalists: that everything that exists in the physical world has its higher and supernal counterpart in the celestial spheres. So convinced were they that the body contained planetary and celestial imprints that they taught it was spirit alone which “produces all the physiognomies known to the sages.”* Hence the early Hebrew initiates venerated the physical body not because of its material quality, but precisely because it represented to them the tabernacle or receptacle of divine powers. The *Zohar* states:

as we see in the all-covering firmament stars and planets which form different figures that contain hidden things and profound mysteries, so there are on the skin that covers our body certain figures and lines which are the planets and stars of our body. All these signs have a hidden meaning and attract the attention of the wise who can read the face of man.

— 2:76a, Franck, p. 191

**Zohar* 2:73b, Franck, pp. 181-3.