

Volume 3 Annex

The Caduceus and the Tree of Life

The Caduceus is presented at the beginning of this study as one of the essential keys needed to broach the organisation of consciousness put forward by Greek mythology. This is why it is the main attribute of the god Hermes, a symbol of the overmind, which is also why the herald, whose name in Greek is the same as Caduceus, is known to spread the highest wisdom (Herald, κηρυξ-υκος, and Caduceus, κηρυκειον-ου).

While the Caduceus illustrates the circulatory process of the currents of energy-consciousness, the Tree of Sephiroth is more expressive of the nature of the relations between the different centres of consciousness. However, they are both representations of the same reality, one in a static form and the other in a dynamic form. These two symbols translate inner experiences shared by many initiates, who have articulated and formalised them in this manner. Very greatly simplified, the following analysis regarding these two symbols reflects only this author's understanding of the subject.

Knowledge of the intertwining of the circulation of energies illustrated by the Caduceus goes back to the earliest period of antiquity, appearing for instance on the *libation cup of Gudea, the prince of Lagash*, kept at the Louvre museum and estimated to date from the end of the third millennium BCE. On the other hand, texts which deal with the static form mostly belong to the esoteric Jewish tradition known as Kabbalah (also spelled Cabbalah or Qabalah), although some scholars claim that the Tree was already known in ancient Egypt. Our purpose here is not to debate the origin of its founding texts (principally the Sefer Yetzirah in regards to this analysis), for knowledge is also transmitted through channels outside of written sources. Their date of composition, and the date of these symbols' first appearance, is therefore of little importance.

The Tree of Sephiroth

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, the Tree of Sephiroth represents the complete structure of a United Consciousness from the level of the non-manifest to that of dense matter. It includes the created world and the creator world, as well as that which lies beyond the two. It therefore integrates the totality of the laws and forces which govern man as well as the universe as a whole, the microcosm and the macrocosm, and the interactions between the two. It can therefore be applied in an almost identical fashion to all domains of existence: the structure of matter, the universe, life, and the mind, the circulation of energy, the make-up of the human body and so forth.

Outside of the layout of the centres of energy-consciousness, it also includes a variety of indications and markers, such as 'pillars', 'worlds', 'planes', 'veils' interposed between man and absolute Knowledge, 'pathways' linking the centres, and so forth.

Our purpose here is to undertake neither a detailed study of this symbol nor of the complex foundations of its organisation, but rather to underline elements of analysis which are little developed in specialised works and seem indispensable for whomsoever is interested in the deciphering of mythology. Here we will only give a succinct overview.

The tree comprises ten main Sephiroth, Divine emanations or centres of energy-consciousness, spread out across four worlds over three vertical axes in seven horizontal planes and separated by so-called 'veils' (see the diagrams in the annexes). There is an eleventh occult Sephirah known as Daat on the boundary-line into the higher world, as well as 'negative' Sephiroth, or Qlipoth, which are rarely described in detail in text or depicted in illustrations, except perhaps by the indication of the two downward-pointing tails of the snakes on the Caduceus. The reason for this is probably that working on these centres can prove to be extremely dangerous, and can at the very least cause a fall for a seeker who is insufficiently purified.

The ten Sephiroth are linked by twenty-two pathways, which along with them make up the 'thirty-two pathways of wisdom'.

The three lower planes belong to the 'created' domain and can be associated, moving from the bottom to the top, to matter, the vital and the mind respectively. The upper planes are the planes of the highest of the creative world and of the divine trinity. The middle plane simultaneously forges the link between these planes in a paired arrangement, and integrates them all; it is the plane reserved to future Man when he will have become One with the Divine, other human beings and nature, taking part in the Supramental.

The pillars and the worlds

In the vertical plane, the centres are spread over three axes or pillars. The one in the middle symbolises equilibrium. The other two represent the two major movements at work in the universe: fission and fusion, moving away and moving towards, or separation and union.

The first pillar, situated on the right, characterises the movement of endless expansion, the axis of the outpouring of forces, the call to the transcending of limits, and the aspiration to a fusion with all that is. In Kabbalah, it is known as 'the pillar of mercy'. It is the axis of fusion in matter, of instinct in life, and intuition in the mental world. On this pillar, the progressive densification of Consciousness-Force is expressed as the origin of divine laws, the potentialities of new ideas and forms, the origin of space, harmony, compassion, intuition, and fusion. Within man, this is situated at the highest level of the right side of the brain, which is said to be synthesising, non linear, intuitive, spatial and atemporal. (It must be remembered that the Tree of Life represents a dorsal view of the figure of a man.)

The second pillar, situated on the left, represents the opposite movement, the one of limitation and separation. It is known as the 'pillar of rigour'. It is the axis of fission within matter, of the quest for freedom and independence in the vital, and reason in the mental plane. On this pillar, the progressive densification of the Energy of Execution manifests itself successively as a power of limitation which leads towards individuation and separative and organising mental logic. Within man, it appears on the highest plane of the left side of the brain in its analytical, rational, logical, temporal,

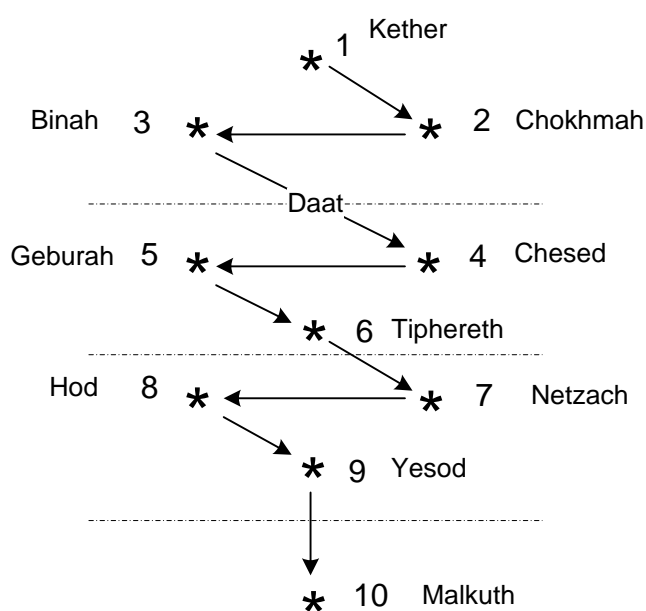
and sequential aspects, and on the right side of the body due to its role in the execution of action.

Creation being an eternal and infinite game of love between Consciousness-Force and its Energy of Execution, Joy deploys itself each time they reach an equilibrium on the middle pillar. In its highest aspects, this Joy is Beatitude, an inexpressible divine intoxication, and the resplendent Joy of Love, Knowledge, and Truth in action, and in the lower planes the enjoyment of the senses.

The pillar on the right side receives its energy from the Sephirah Chokmah on which stands divine Consciousness concentrated upon itself, while the pillar on the left receives it from the Sephirah Binah, the seat of the Divine Shakti or the Energy of execution of the Supreme.

The centres

From above and according to the route known as the 'dazzling lightning', the centres represent stages of progressive densification or incarnation, stages which must be followed in an inverted direction for an ascent towards Unity.



The centres are spread out across four worlds, respectively known from top to bottom as the world of dense matter and action (Assiah), the world of formation (Yetzirah), the world of creation (Beriah), and the world of emanation or the divine world (Atziluth). They are described as the worlds of substance, existence, essence and the being. (However, there exist other different systems for attributing these centres to the four worlds.)

In the world of creation, duality is only a potential. It only becomes effective within the world of formation, at the mental level.

Beyond Atziluth are situated the non-manifest worlds of negative existence, known as Ayin (nothingness), Ein Sof (infinite space), and Ohr Ein Sof (infinite light).

Trees within trees

The Tree can also be understood as a system akin to that of Russian dolls, within which a tree would be contained within each Sephira, within each world or possibly even within each plane.

Taking into account this unfolding or proliferation of trees, it is necessary to first determine which point of reference has been chosen (to which world, which plane or which Sephira belongs the tree which is being studied), for the meaning of each energy centre and of the symbols which it is associated with change depending on which of the trees are being considered.

The trees of the four worlds can be linked to one another through complex systems. Either the Malkuth of one is the Kether of the other, or the Tiphereth of one is the Kether of the previous tree and the Malkuth of the next.

It seems that an organisation of this kind was retained by Greek mythology, with five centres for the vital world and seven centres for the human mental as indicated on the diagram on 'the planes of consciousness' (see corresponding annex). It can be surmised that if the vital world is limited to five spheres, it is because the sixth Sephira, that of Mars-Ares, corresponds to the renewal of forms. Nevertheless, within the mental world, it seems impossible to progress beyond the barrier of the occult Sephira

Daat, situated beyond the seventh Sephira known as Geburah, for it is at that point that the mental fades away and the wings that envelop created space are spread out.

With each passage from the pillar on the left to the pillar on the right, there is a transition from a state of separation to a state of union, and vice versa. Thus, in the tree of the mental planes of consciousness, the progression is carried out from the logical mental in 8 to the higher mental in 7, which brings in an important aspect of intuition. Then from that point, following the illumined mind in 6 which represents a perfect equilibrium between the two poles, we broach intuitive discernment in 5 to finally come to the overmind in 4, where Knowledge pours out in a continuous flow. Beyond this, the wings of Unknowing spread out within a realm which can no longer be accessed by the mind as we know it within the two polarities of logic and intuition. For it is then a question of direct knowledge of matter to matter or spirit to matter.

The veils

To get a notion of what they represent for consciousness, one must think of these veils as a transition between spaces of differing densities.

The Tree of the Sephiroth represents a progressive densification of consciousness spanning from the highest vibrations to the lowest frequencies; the more man ascends in his consciousness and the more he must be able to withstand heightened vibratory levels.

Without these veils, man would be unable to withstand what is Real. Thus, if the seeker bursts into a level for which he is insufficiently purified, this can bring about a loss of sanity or even death.

These veils can also be seen as the accumulation of memories which cut man away from his origins. Being superimposed upon the mental cycles, they explain the disappearance of any perception of the subtle worlds.

The passage through these veils requires a reversal of consciousness.

The lowest veil represents the discontinuity of life due to the process of birth and death, as well as the separation of the material, vital and mental worlds.

The second veil is that of rebirth or 'second birth', traversed by the man reborn in the spirit, and who unites temporarily or definitively with his immortal being, his soul.

The last veil is known as the 'veil of abysses'. It is here that the cosmic breath is born, the vast movement of the alternating predominance of the forces of fusion and separation. It is therefore at this point that are situated the heads of the two snakes of the Caduceus, which are the origins of the cosmic currents.

The Sephirah Tiphereth holds a special place, for it is situated at the juncture of the created worlds and the creator worlds. It is the site of Man, that which is allocated to him as the agent of equilibrium of creation, and which he will have to occupy in a future time as for the moment, man's existence is still held within the third world.

This domain is the solar space of the heart and the creating Verb. It is the Supramental world of the Consciousness of Truth as identified by Sri Aurobindo, in which everything is an act in freedom carried out at the right time and place. It is the site of human perfection rendered divine, not in some other-worldly heaven but here on earth, within matter and the bodily form.

'Visions', 'revelations' and 'inspirations' are but lightning flashes originating from this world, and penetrating through a mental that is sufficiently purified to receive them.

Associated symbols

It is possible to superimpose other symbolic systems onto the image of the tree. These consist not only of numbers and their principal meanings as principles, but also include planets and the signs of the zodiac, the secrets of the Tarot of Marseille, the deities of mythology, and so forth.

On this foundation, it is also possible to study the human body, the structure of which can be seen as a succession of reflections and refractions between the veils.

The twenty-two pathways can also be made to correspond with the characters of the Hebrew alphabet, which includes three mother characters, seven double characters and twelve simple characters (this foundation is the one upon which we have carried

out a first discussion on the archetypes contained within the characters of the Greek alphabet).

The Caduceus, or the circulation of energies

The Caduceus was well known in the Egyptian and Greek civilisations. It was also widely utilised in the writing of Genesis and the Apocalypse.

Many variations of its representation exist. The one which will be used here, in agreement with the Tree of the Sephiroth, is composed of two snakes coiled thrice around a staff. Some representations of the Caduceus depict one of the snakes with its head pointing downwards and the other with its head pointing upwards. On other representations there appear a varying number of coils around the staff, most often two, but sometimes as many as six as on the *Libation Cup of Gudea*.

The heads of the snakes joined at the top imply an opposite circulation of energies, sometimes translated by the colour of the snakes, one white and the other black. Above the two heads, a pair of wings are spread out on either side and at the top of the staff can be found either a knob or a pine cone, a symbol of occult knowledge. Below, the tails of the snakes are rooted in what can be construed to be the world of the Qliphoth ('negative' Sephiroth). The two snakes symbolise both the circulation of energies and the principles of involution and evolution.

Man and woman

In no instance should the pillars of the Tree be associated with the human masculine and feminine principles, for these are built drawing alternatively from each of the two pillars according to the pattern traced by the Caduceus. This explains why one finds a depiction of a young woman in Netzach and a young man in Hod, only opposed in appearance to the nature of the principles situated at the top of the two pillars.

On the other hand, the currents within the snakes circulate in opposite directions in man and woman.

It is the intersection of these currents and their opposite flows which explains the often opposed and complementary natures of men and women. For instance, while 'roundness' is characteristic of woman at the physical level, it is characteristic of man at the psychological level. Inversely, the angularity and strength which characterise man in his physical aspect are characteristic of female psychology in its firmness, psychic force and so forth. For this reason, it seems urgently necessary for woman to take her true place in the world if we are to avoid great catastrophes and perhaps even the extinction of mankind.

This probably also explains the naming of the Trojan river Scamander, 'the man on the left', which is echoed in the experience of total union which the Mother perceives as being 'on the left' when experimenting with the end of reflective consciousness. This seems to indicate an inversion of the poles at the supramental level (see *Mother's Agenda* Volume 3, 14th July 1962).

This pattern of circulation was well known in Indian tradition, which identifies fourteen *nadis*, or energy currents, running through the human body, each of which is composed of five energetic fibres. Amongst these, the most well-known are Ida and Pingala, situated around the spine like the two snakes of the Caduceus, meeting at the level of the genitals, the heart, and the throat, and irrigating the principal centres of power of the human body known as 'chakras'. According to the experience of the author of this text, which it has not been possible to cross-reference further, this current descends following the trajectory of the first snake in four stages lasting about a second each. It seems to make a loop at the level of the lowest chakra and then ascends upwards again following the trajectory of the second snake, again in four stages. When it reaches the level of the head it appears to be lost within the heights for a time, and then reappears again at the level of the eyes following the undulation of the first snake.

The current circulating in the central axis, which is known as Sushumna, can become powerfully active when the spiritual energy-consciousness which has gathered above the head begins to descend downwards to purify, or else when that which sleeps within the depths of the being is awoken. (The ancient forms of Yoga aimed at the awakening of the Shakti or Divine Force from below - in which case it is known as Kunkalini - but

Sri Aurobindo's Yoga instead recommends its progressive descent from the heights of the Spirit.)

The principles of alternation

The principle of alternation is at the origin of creation and manifests itself alternately through the absorption of Energy in conscious-Existence-in-Self, the stage of the return of creation to its creator as well as a time of rest, and through the action of the Energy of execution in the Joy of becoming. It is therefore at the summit of the world of creation that the vast movement of the alternating predominance of the forces of separation and fusion finds its source.

This principle is repeated across all the worlds and in all the planes, from the most rapid vibratory phenomena bordering on complete immobility to the slowest rhythms, such as the breath of the universe within its cycles of expansion and contraction.

That which emerges from the 'veil of abysses' is closer to a succession of pulsations than it is to a set rhythm. It is only at the most elevated level of the world of formation, at the highest summits of the mental plane, that space-time and therefore rhythm appear.

The most obvious symbolic manifestation of this process is the alternation of night and day; the day is the joy of becoming, while night allows a return to Unity throughout all the planes of consciousness.

This primordial alternation also manifests itself through a very great number of biological rhythms, the origin of which remains unknown, including the heart rate, the respiratory rate, the rhythms of expansion and contraction of the brain, and so forth.

Within the symbol of the Caduceus, this alternation is translated by the predominance of the currents circulating through the snakes.

According to this author's research, it also appears to be active in the mental plane, following cycles of a very great duration which, on the plane of formation, bring to light either intuition or the logical separative mind.

Within the very vast cycles, in the order of twenty-six thousand years each, there appear to exist smaller cycles which mark the rhythm of the evolution of civilisations moving between humanistic periods (with man as the center of the world) and so-called medieval periods (with the Divine or the Sacred as the center). This is the topic of a yet-unpublished study by this author, *The Cycles of the Mind in the History of Civilisations*. It must also be noted that the cycles take place within twelve phases, each of a specific energetic nature that leaves its mark upon the evolutionary process. (Consider for example the age of the Ram extending approximately over the two first millennia BCE, followed by that of the Fish over the next two millennia, and that of Aquarius now beginning.)

Taking into account the inverted circulation of currents in man and woman, it follows that man would receive more energy on the side of the logical brain during the separative phase of the cycle, while inversely woman would receive more energy on the intuitive side during the period of fusion. This is manifested in the alternating domination of man and woman, of the Eastern and Western worlds, and science and religion.

Within this movement of alternation, the energies of fusion and separation follow one another without either one ever disappearing entirely from consciousness, as depicted by the Chinese Yin/Yang symbol.

Humankind evolves from an unconscious state to one of divine consciousness. Throughout millennia, it developed first within the vital plane, and then in the mental plane, which it is only just beginning to master, to integrate its place in the solar site of Tiphereth in a distant future. In its ascent through the mental, humankind oscillates from one pillar to the other following the rhythm of the cycles, submitting to the alternation of the energies of fusion and separation, the intensity of which becomes increasingly stronger as it draws nearer to the supramental (the crossing of the second veil).

In the most extreme periods of distancing, the pressure for individuation becomes extreme, while the seeds of the following period of a return to unity begin to appear. Humankind is now within such a period.

Thus the current of the right brain, the venusian sphere of intuition (Netzah) which had lain in shadow during the past millennia, will now be illuminated, while the mercurial sphere of the separative logical mental (Hod) will pass into shadow.
