

# Qabalah - The Tree of Life

By Barbara Barnett

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I love the Qabalah and I'm never happier than sitting at my computer tapping away exploring the nature of the Sephiroth and the Paths of the Tree as they connect with - what? There are a myriad of subjects they can connect with - I have worked with crystals, the gods of Roman Greek and Celtic mythology, flowers, trees, animals, mystical beings, the works of Shakespeare, the characters in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and even television comedy programmes. The list is endless and leads to hours of pleasure and fun as well as providing a very useful clear and structured system for exploring the Nature of Man and the Universe.

It is impossible to even scratch the surface of what the Qabalah contains in one short article but I'd like to share with you a little flavour of what it means to me. I shall start with a brief explanation of the meaning of the word Qabalah and its history, then I shall describe the structure of the Tree of Life and the position of the Sephiroth in relation to each other and the structure of the Tree as a whole and take you on a journey down the Tree on a path known as the Lightning Flash and finally trace the journey up the Tree through the Sephiroth connecting with the correspondences of the ancient gods with particular attention to Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasa and Samhain and consideration of how for me they fit onto the tree.

What is the Qabalah? The word Qabalah has two meanings. It means to receive and to reveal. It is a means of revelation of the secrets of the universe but with that revelation comes the reception of that wisdom within ourselves. By seeking to reveal the secrets of the universe one seeks to unite it and make it whole and by seeking to heal the universe one finds that healing taking place within oneself.

The Qabalah is summarized in a diagram called the Tree of Life and it has been described as a 'mighty all-embracing glyph of the Soul of man and of the Universe'. It can be thought of as a tree with the roots in the sky and with its branches and leaves reaching down to earth. The first Sephira on the tree, which is called *Kether*, contains within itself the concept of everything that is to follow just as a single acorn contains the 'blue print' for the mighty oak tree.

The mythical history of the Qabalah is that it was a form of secret wisdom originally taught by the Father/Mother god to the angels in heaven. After the fall of Adam and Eve out of Eden the angels decided to help humankind regain their link with paradise by teaching them the secret wisdom of the Qabalah. Unfortunately very few listened but there were a few who had ears to hear - Noah at the time of the flood, Abraham with whom the Father/Mother god made a new covenant and Moses whose attention was drawn to the existence of divine wisdom through the symbol of the Burning Bush. The Hebrew name *Mosheh* contains the three Hebrew letters *Shin*, *Mem* and *Heh* representing fire, water and breath.

The mundane history of the Qabalah is that it has its roots in two books the *Zohar* or *Book of Splendour* and the *Sephir Yetsirah* or *Book of Formation*. The *Sephir*

*Yetsirah* was written before the sixth century and possibly around AD 100. Both books emphasize the importance of a female counterpart to God. There was then further interest in the Qabalah in Spain in the thirteenth century when the *Sephir Bahir* or *Book of Brilliance* was written.

Perhaps both of these stories in their different ways have a part in the development of humanity and the evolutionary pattern of man. Whatever we choose to believe what is really important is the way the Qabalah can help us experience personal, interpersonal and spiritual development in our own lives today.

### ***The Structure of the Tree of Life***

As the human body has a skeletal structure the Tree of Life has a basic structure which consists of eleven circles or spheres or Sephiroth. The singular of Sephiroth is Sephira. The first three of those Sephiroth form an equilateral triangle with the apex at the top. These Sephiroth are called *Kether* at the top, *Chockmah* at the bottom on the right and *Binah* at the bottom on the left. These are numbered one, two and three.

The next Sephira is without a number and is situated on the centre column of the tree between the first triangle and the second and is called *Daath*.

The second triangle is the other way up with the base at the top and the apex at the bottom and the Sephiroth at the three corners are called *Chesed* at the top on the right, *Geburah* at the top on the left and *Tiphareth* at the bottom. These are numbered four, five and six.

The third triangle is below the first and second triangles and is also pointing downwards and the Sephiroth at the three corners are called *Netzach* on the right, *Hod* on the left and *Yesod* at the bottom. These are numbered seven, eight and nine.

Below the third triangle hangs the Sephira numbered ten. It is called *Malkuth* and is considered as a pendant to the tree. We will consider each Sephira separately shortly and its connection to the other Sephiroth and the Path of the Lightning Flash.

To return to the image of the human skeleton it is interesting to consider that as the bones of the human skeleton are connected and linked together by muscle and tissue, so the Sephiroth of the tree of life are connected by twenty two paths or channels. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that as well as twenty two paths on the tree of life there are twenty two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and twenty two cards in the Major Arcana of the tarot so that one of each of these can be attributed to each path to help us in our meditation on and understanding of it. I also find it fascinating that in Gematria - the science and art of number and letter manipulation - the numerical correspondence to the word *wife* is twenty two. Could this mean that the mother goddess has been hidden within the Qabalah and information about her nature can be revealed and understood through the study of the twenty two paths?

If we can now visualise the structure of the Tree we have created in our minds we can begin our journey down the Tree lighting up the Sephira with light and energy as we travel.

## ***Journeying down the Tree***

For this purpose I'd like us to imagine a source of infinite light pouring down from a space above the top Sefhira and filling it with light until it glows with a brilliant white light. The top Sefhira is called *Kether* and is also known as the Crown. In the human body it represents the self consciousness and is situated at the crown of the head. The Sefhira forms a vessel to hold the light like a cup or a chalice and the light pours in until eventually it overflows. We are now going to trace the journey of the light as it overflows from *Kether* down the first stage of the Lightning Flash along the 11th path of the tree to the first Sefhira on the right hand column. The 11th path is connected with the Hebrew letter *Aleph* and the tarot card of the *Fool* which is otherwise known as ' *the Spirit of the Aethyr* .' At the end of that path the light reaches and flows into the second sephira *Chockmah* . This Sefhira is also known as Wisdom. In the human body it represents Spiritual Will or Purpose and corresponds with the left side of the head or left brain. Left? We had said *Chockmah* was on the right! It is as we look down at a diagram of the tree but when the tree is placed on the human form it is in mirror image and *Chockmah* is on the left. *Chockmah* fills with light and its grey colour is glowing brightly.

Once *Chockmah* is full to overflowing the light pours out from *Chockmah* and we trace its journey along the second stage of the Lightning Flash from *Chockmah* on the right hand side of the tree to *Binah* on the left hand side of the tree. The path along which the light travels is the 14th path of the tree and is connected with the Hebrew letter *Daleth* and with the tarot card of the *Empress* which is also known as the ' *Daughter of the Mighty Ones* ' .

*Binah* is also known as understanding and compliments and balances *Chockmah* , for wisdom is not complete without understanding. In the human system *Binah* represents spiritual love and awareness and relates to the right hand side of the head and the right brain. The Sefhira of *Binah* is black but when it is fertilised from *Chockmah* and the light of understanding dawns, light shines in the darkness. When we have struggled in the dark for a long time failing to grasp a crucial piece of information suddenly all comes clear and with Archimedes we cry *Eureka!* It is interesting that Archimedes' principle related to fluid displacement and another name for *Binah* is ' *the Great Sea* ' .

The first triangle is known as the Triangle of Spirit. Let us hold the image of that triangle in our minds, the white sephira of *Kether* , the grey of *Chockmah* and the black of *Binah* , for now things are going to change.

As the light overflows in *Binah* we wonder where it is going to go next for there is a gap or chasm called the Abyss and in the Abyss is the unnumbered Sefhira *Daath* which is also known as Knowledge. In the human system *Daath* is described as the Next Step and is represented by the throat. Knowledge reminds us of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden and of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The price that Adam and Eve were said to have paid for eating the fruit of that tree was expulsion from Eden. The door was closed behind them so that they could not return that way. The Hebrew letter of the 14th path *Daleth* means door.

As the light travels through the Abyss it lights up the lilac colour of *Daath* and travels on to Sephira numbered four on the right hand side of the tree called *Chesed* . But where on the diagram of the tree is the path shown that represents this part of the journey on the Lightning Flash? There is no path shown this is a hidden path and this represents the third and fourth parts of the journey of the Lightning Flash.

The light reaches and enters the Sephira *Chesed* which is also known as Mercy. In the human system it is known as love and awareness and corresponds with the left shoulder and left adrenal gland. The colour of the Sephira is blue. We are now starting to form the second triangle which is inverted and reflects the first triangle. The second triangle is known as the Soul Triangle.

When the Sephira *Chesed* is filled with light the light overflows and travels from right to left along the fifth stage of the Lightning Flash to the Sephira *Geburah* on the left hand side of the tree. Remember this triangle is inverted so this path is below and parallel with the 14th path.

This path is the 19th path of the Tree and corresponds with the Hebrew letter *Teth* and the tarot card of *Lust* or *Strength* which is also known as ' *Children of the Dragon Flame*' *Teth* corresponds with Serpent which again connects with the story of the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The light enters *Geburah* and lights up the red Sephira.

*Geburah* is also known as Strength. In the human system it corresponds to will and power and corresponds with the upper chest and the lymph and spleen. Like the 14th path, the 19th path is a balancing path on the tree and the mercy or *Chesed* is balanced by the strength and will in *Geburah*. In the human being the balance of love and will is constantly having to be adjusted to cope with the experiences around us. Someone exhibiting too much will to the exclusion of love could appear too harsh and inconsiderate whereas someone operating only from *Chesed* could become weak willed, indecisive and dependent on the approval of others

The balance here is held in the third point of the Soul Triangle which is the Sephira numbered six - *Tiphareth* and it is there that the light travels as it overflows in *Geburah* .

To travel from *Geburah* to *Tiphareth* the light flows along the sixth stage of the Lightning Flash which is the 22nd path of the Tree and which corresponds with the Hebrew letter *Lamed* and the tarot card of *Justice* or *Adjustment*. This card is also known as the '*Spirit of Inner Truth* .'

When the light reaches *Tiphareth* it lights up that Sephira, which is yellow in colour, with a bright golden light. This Sephira is also known as beauty and harmony. In the human system it represents the personal self the centre the 'I' and relates to the breast bone heart and thymus. In terms of the Universe it represents the Sun.

So now we have completed two triangles - the Spirit Triangle and the Soul Triangle. Let us hold the image of the Spirit Triangle with *Kether* at the top glowing with bright white light, *Chockmah* on the right glowing with grey light and *Binah* on the left with a glowing black light. Then the lilac sphere of *Daath* . Then the inverted soul triangle

with *Chesed* on the right glowing with blue light *Geburah* on the left glowing with red light and at the apex of the triangle the glowing golden light of the 'sun' *Tiphareth* shining downwards towards the creation of the third triangle.

The third triangle is known as the Personality Triangle. Spirit in the triangle of the supernals has separated itself into individual sparks of Soul on the Soul triangle and these individual sparks of Soul now have a job to do - a life purpose to perform - and in order to do this they have to clothe themselves with thoughts and feelings and finally to take on a human body and be born into manifestation on earth in *Malkuth* .

From *Tiphareth* the light flows along the seventh stage of the Lightning Flash down the 24th path towards the right hand side of the tree. This path corresponds with the tarot card of *Death* which is also known as the ' *Lord of Great Transformations*' and this is appropriate for the Soul is experiencing a spiritual death or transformation as it passes into manifestation and likewise when the physical body dies at the end of a lifetime it passes through death of the body and the Soul is released once more into spiritual life.

The Hebrew letter for this path is *nun* which means fish but it can also mean the primordial waters and we can visualise the spark of soul as a fish swimming through the Primordial Waters. This image also brings to mind the male sperm swimming towards the female egg to meet in fertilisation.

The image of the Primordial Waters also brings to mind the river Lethe of Roman Mythology - the River of Forgetfulness and the ferryman Charon rowing the Shades of the Dead across the river.

But for now the light is on its way down into manifestation and it reaches the Sephira numbered seven *Netzach* on the right hand side of the tree. This Sephira is also known as Victory. In the human system it is known as feeling and relates to the left arm and hand and the left kidney. This is the Sephira of nature and the light shines in the bright green Sephira.

As the light fills the Sephira of *Netzach* it flows back along the tree from right to left along the eighth stage of the Lightning Flash the 27th path. This path corresponds to the Hebrew letter *peh* which means mouth and to the tarot card of ' *the Tower*' which is also known as the ' *Priest of the Divine Fire* .' This path is the third balancing path on the tree and in the human body it represents the balance between thoughts and feelings and the balance of the two is worked out in *Yesod* the subconscious.

As the light reaches the end of the 27th path it reaches the orange Sephira of *Hod* . This Sephira is also known as Splendour and it lights up with a brilliant glowing light. In the human system *Hod* connects with thinking and with the right arm and hand and the right kidney.

As the light fills and overflows from *Hod* we trace it along the ninth stage of the path of the Lightning Flash down the thirtieth path to *Yesod* on the central column of the tree. This path is the thirtieth path and corresponds with the Hebrew letter *resh* and the tarot card of the *Sun* which is also known as the ' *Spirit of the Primal Fire* .' .

When the light reaches *Yesod* it fills and lights up the purple Sefhira which is also known as the Foundation and the Sefhira of the Moon. In the human system *Yesod* represents the subconscious and sexuality and relates to the sexual organs. With the lighting of the purple Sefhira of *Yesod* the third triangle of the Personality is complete.

As mentioned *Yesod* is attributable to the moon and the moon has four phases. These are waxing, full, waning and absent. The waxing and full moon is more attributable to the *Priestess* path between *Kether* and *Tiphareth* but the waning and dark moons are attributable to *Yesod*. The waning and dark moons receive and absorb light and it is here that our energies can stagnate unless we consciously work on ourselves and release this energy.

And so as the light fills *Yesod* to overflowing it is ready for the final stage of its journey along the path of the Lightning Flash from *Yesod* to *Malkuth* and into manifestation.

This journey is along the last of the twenty two paths of the tree which is the 32nd path and represented by the tarot card of the *Universe* which is also known as '*Great One of the Night of Time* .' It is also represented by the Hebrew letter *Tau* which means cross. The spark of Soul has clothed itself in matter and taken up the cross of manifestation.

The tenth sephira of *Malkuth* is often depicted as blue in colour perhaps to represent the blue of the oceans as they in their turn reflect the blue of the sky above or it can be depicted divided into four colours citrine, olive, russet and green.

With arrival at *Malkuth* this completes the journey down the path of the Lightning Flash sometimes called the Flaming Sword. It gives a little information on the Sephiroth and on those paths which form part of the Lightning Flash. It is only a brief introduction and has made little if any reference to those paths which do not form part of the path of the Lightning Flash.

It is interesting to meditate on the passage in Genesis describing the expulsion from Eden which says "*And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life.*"

### ***The Tree and the Gods***

At the beginning of the article I mentioned the relationship of the gods of mythology to the tree and in particular as they relate to the quarter dates of Imbolc, Beltaine, Lughnasa and Samhain and I will now use this as a means to travel back up the tree from *Malkuth* at the bottom to *Kether* at the top.

In *Malkuth* we have the goddesses of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The myth says that Persephone was captured by her uncle Hades who took her to the Underworld and married her. Demeter, mourning for the loss of her daughter, neglected the earth so that the crops no longer grew and the earth was barren. She appealed to Zeus (who corresponds with the sephira of mercy, *Chesed*) and a compromise was reached whereby Persephone spent half of the year on earth with

her mother, during which time the crops flourished and grew as the days of light and sunshine were long, and the other half of the year in the Underworld with her husband, during which time the days on earth were short and the periods of darkness longer and most of the growth that took place was under the soil.

Moving up to *Yesod* we have the Moon goddesses. The first who comes to mind is Diana or Artemis who ruled over all the mysteries of women from menstruation to childbirth. The figure of the triple goddess is also relevant here describing the stages of womanhood - the virgin, the mother and the crone. Selene could represent the Virgin, Aphrodite the lover and the mother and Hecate sometimes seen as barren and destructive as the crone.

In Celtic mythology Brigit, the daughter of Dagda, is also seen as the triple goddess. Brigit is also connected with Imbolc, the Celtic feast celebrated on the first and second days of February. As the tender young spring shoots first begin to appear out of the darkness of the soil and be warmed by the Spring sun, so the creative sparks emerge from the darkness of the subconscious in *Yesod*.

Moving to the right hand side of the tree and the Nature Sephira of *Netzach* we find the nature goddess Venus or Aphrodite. Aphrodite has her light and dark sides. The light side is one of love and beauty but 'nature is red in tooth and claw' and Aphrodite too had her dark side and could be the cause of much suffering.

The Egyptian goddess Hathor is also represented here. She was the goddess of love, dancing and music but the fact that she was also worshipped as a mortuary goddess is evidence of her dual nature. The energies of the goat-footed god Pan also belong here and connect with Beltane. I was interested to read Rowan's comments in the Beltane issue of *White dragon* 'Beltane is the season when the goat foot god emerges from his winter hibernation and prepares to take possession of his kingdom of secluded woodland glades' It is true that this springtime was tinged with much sadness and it did seem with the slaughter of so much new life the natural order of things was indeed being overturned. I did draw a little comfort from the profusion of spring flowers, snowdrops, crocus and daffodils I saw everywhere and the information that because human beings were being kept away from some nature areas species not seen there recently were re-establishing themselves. I was also heartened when a friend told me that elephants in Sri Lanka previously hunted for their tusks had developed a species without tusks. But with any feelings of comfort comes a very strong warning. This is nature having to act to counteract the deeds of man. It is essential that man should learn to act once more in alignment and in co-operation with nature or nature may have to increasingly employ its dark side to balance and control.

Travelling to the left hand side of the tree we come to the Sephira of *Hod*. Mercury or Hermes the messenger of the gods belongs here and this is the Sephira of the mind and communication. Other gods attributed to this Sephira are the Egyptian god Thoth, Odin, god of battles and wisdom, Loki, 'the trickster' and Hanuman, the cunning monkey of Hindu mythology. As well as representing *Hod*, Mercury also appears on the 12th path of the tree between *Kether* and *Binah* and the tarot card of the Magician or Magus corresponds to that path. In Celtic mythology the energies of Mercury are represented by Lugh, the shining one, who gave his name to Lughnasa.

At Imbolc Brigit, the creative muse, provides the energy necessary for growth and at Lughnasa Lugh shapes that energy into the physical form of the crops.

Moving back to the centre of the tree on the central column we enter the Sephira of *Tiphareth*. The gods of *Tiphareth* are the Egyptian sun god Ra, and the sun god Apollo. The slain and risen gods would also be relevant here. As well as Christ Osiris, Adonis and Dionysus. We are warned here that the sun may burn as well as warm and the rapidly decreasing ozone layer makes this point only too clear.

Moving up to the left hand side of the tree and the Sephira of *Geburah* we find the Roman god of war Mars reputed to be the father of Romulus and Remus. There is also the Greek god Ares, the father of Deimos (terror) and Phobos (hate), after whom the moons of the planet Mars are named.

On the right hand side of the tree is the balancing Sephira of *Chesed* (mercy) and here the Roman god Jupiter brings his jovial and expansive nature to balance the destructive and limiting aspects of *Geburah*. Isis and Hathor can also relate to this Sephira. Hathor as goddess of the Nile and source of life for Egypt.

Moving into the unnumbered Sephira of *Daath* in the Abyss we find Horus 'the babe in the egg of blue'. This reminds me of Moses concealed in the bullrushes. Maat, the Egyptian goddess of truth and justice, is also relevant here as a reminder to speak our truth, as is Janus, the Roman god who faces both ways looking up to the heavens and down to earth as the doorkeeper, in this Sephira which straddles the Abyss.

The image of *Binah*, the third Sephira, is that of a mature woman - all goddesses and particularly those associated with motherhood are relevant here. Isis could represent the lighter side of *Binah* and her sister Nephthys the dark side.

In *Chockmah* on the right hand side of the tree is Amun in his aspect as fertility god. Any fertility gods would belong here including Pan in his higher aspect. In Celtic mythology Dagda, the good father, may be relevant here, and Sophia, goddess of wisdom, also belongs here, as does Athene.

And so we have reached the top of the tree and the Sephira of *Kether*. All the creator gods belong here- the Egyptian god Ptah; Zeus, the king of the gods of Olympus, and the Hindu god Brahma.

### **Conclusion**

On a final note I see that whilst my journey up the tree gave me immediate connections to Imbolc, Beltane and Lughnasa the connection to Samhain has not as yet emerged. This could be *Yesod*, the same as Imbolc, Samhain representing going down into the depths in the Autumn and Imbolc the fresh shoots emerging in the Spring. It is in the shadowy world of Samhain where the veils between the worlds are at their thinnest and it is the best time to communicate with spirit guides and friends and family members who have passed on and this connects well with the energies of *Yesod*. However I also notice that two trees relating to Samhain are the Elder and the Yew. The yew relates to the 24th path of Death and Transformation which we

have already discussed as one of the paths on the Lightning Flash and it is very relevant to Samhain. The elder relates to the 28th path and the Hebrew letter for this path is *tzaddi* , the fish hook, which can represent the bringing together of male and female energies or fishing in the subconscious by meditation hoping to catch a piece of divine knowledge. It is my hope that the reading of this article may inspire someone else to fish in those waters and acquire a precious piece of knowledge.