

The Original Cabala, the Cabala of Eight Elements, the Sufi Cabala

One of the best known metaphysical systems that purports to give a comprehensive explanation of reality, including its origin and man's place in it, is the Cabala, which is a large body of teaching - more diverse than most of its contemporary students probably realize - that is almost without exception identified as of Jewish origin, although even within that assumption opinions differ as to whether it dates from the time of Moses, or from even before that, or, rather, from medieval Europe.

In *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Gershom Scholem describes the question of the Cabala's origin and the initial phases of its development as second only to the destruction of the Second Temple in the sense of being problematic within the context of the history of Judaism. By no means, he asserts, have the source materials received adequate attention, and he indicates that a reason for that is that they are all but bereft of material that can be thought of as historical in the sense of shedding any light on those origins or their circumstances.

The symbol with which the Cabala is most widely associated is the one sometimes called the Tree of Life, which consists of ten words, representing powers, essences, archetypes, or aspects of divinity called *sefiroth*, linked diagrammatically by straight lines. According to some interpretations, they are to be seen as simultaneous emanations of the infinite, and in others as successive and interdependent ones. Indeed, according to an old edition of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Ktav Publishing House, New York; no date; Preface dated 1901), the original Cabala did not even have ten *sefiroth*: it had eight, and came from a Muslim group known as 'The Faithful Brothers of Basra'.

The 'Faithful Brothers of Basra' were the *Ikhwan as Safa*, the 'Sincere Brethren', a group of Ismaili (a Shiaah subgroup) Muslims whose great tenth century AD work was their *Rasa'il (Letters)*, an encyclopedic undertaking that attempted to make available the knowledge of the time, including what we would call esoteric or metaphysical knowledge. They considered themselves heirs to the most ancient wisdom of Pythagoras and Hermes, which the Sufis also say is identical with their tradition.

The same *Jewish Encyclopedia* tells us further that 'Eleazar of Worms' statement that a Babylonian scholar, Aaron B. Samuel by name, brought the mystic doctrine from Babylonia to Italy about the middle of the ninth century, has been found to be actually true... The fact is that when Jewish mystic lore came in contact with Arabic-Jewish philosophy, it appropriated those elements that appealed to it; this being especially the case with Gabirol's philosophy on account of its mystical character...

'The following doctrines of Arab philosophy especially influenced and modified Jewish mysticism, on account of the close relationship between the two. The "Faithful Brothers of Basra", as well as the Neoplatonic Aristotelians of the ninth century, have left their marks on the Cabala. The brotherhood taught, similarly to early Gnosticism, that God, the highest Being, exalted above all differences and contrasts, also surpassed everything corporeal and spiritual; hence, the world could only be explained by means of emanations. 1. the creating spirit (nous); 2. the directing spirit, or the world-soul; 3. primal matter; 4. active nature, a power proceeding from the world-soul; 5. the abstract body, also called secondary matter; 6. the world of the spheres; 7. the elements of the sublunary world; and 8. the world of minerals, plants and animals composed of these elements. These eight form, together with God, the absolute One, who is in and with everything, the scale of the nine primal substances, corresponding to the nine primary numbers and the nine spheres. These nine numbers of the "Faithful Brethren"... have been changed by a Jewish philosopher in the middle of the eleventh century into ten, by counting the four elements not as a unit, but as two.'

Another source, a little studied historical occult one, discusses the three upper *sefiroth* as unequivocal disinformation. What that may mean in the context of the present study should become evident. It also maintains that the real Cabala originated in Babylonia, and is currently the property of some of the Sufis of Persia.

'The Cabala, however,' *The Jewish Encyclopedia* continues, 'is not a genuine product of the Provençal Jews; for just those circles in which it is found were averse to the study of philosophy. The essential portions of the Cabala must, on the contrary, have been carried to Provence from Babylon; being known only to a small circle until Aristotelianism began to prevail, when adherents of the speculative Cabala were forced to make their doctrine public.'

One of the meanings of the Arabic word *qabala* is 'to receive'. Some of the metaphorical language in which Cabalists over the centuries have struggled to describe their understanding of the working of the *sefiroth* involves references to them as 'vessels' into which, and from which, one to another, a sublime reality or power is 'poured'

from its celestial origin, and that each *sefirah* manifests in a different way in order to produce what we experience as the universe, including ourselves. In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem presents the familiar idea of the Tree of Life as one with many *sefirotic* branches but a single, unknowable root. The sap of the root, the concealed root of the root, and the transcendent reality beyond the *sefirot* and the tree itself is the *En-Sof* (or *Ain Sof* or *Ein Sof*), usually translated as the 'absolutely infinite'. The Tree of Life is the cosmic skeleton, and everything, even the most trivial, that exists only does so through the potentiality bestowed on it by, and active through it from, the *sefirot*.

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In most traditions of consciousness development, there is none without some form of watchfulness. Within historic Jewish mysticism - both, apparently, apart from the tradition of the Cabala and, at times and in some ways, confluent with it - are the teachings of the *merkabah* ('chariot') mystics. They were and are so called, Scholem says in *Major Trends*, because they took as their point of departure (as it were) the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, wherein the prophet has his vision of God's throne - which, in motion, becomes a chariot. It was, he says, nothing less than the earliest form of Jewish mysticism.

Even with such a rudimentary sketch of the Cabalistic *sefirot* as we have given, their essential similarities with the 'throne-world', in the sense that they are both ways of seeing the divine in the profane, or the divine behind the profane, are evident; and in fact, in discussing (in *Origins of the Kabbalah*) the seven lower *sefirot* in the context of one of the earliest known Cabalistic works, a book called *Bahir*, Scholem writes that a variety of symbolisms directly taken from the works of the *merkabah* mystics were, at that seminal stage, used to represent the seven lower *sefirot*, thus infusing the Cabalistic legacy for generations to come with those otherwise, strictly speaking, non-Cabalistic elements.

Jewish mystical authors at various times spoke of an 'ascent to the *merkabah*', in the sense that it is 'above' man's ordinary life, and also of a 'descent' to its vision, because it is also within his own being. It was a complex and hazardous journey of many stages, and preparation for it involved austerities, repetitions and physical postures, especially the head between the knees.

There is, thus, a connection between the Cabala and the ideas of control, of discipline, of temperance. Indeed, an idea that runs throughout Cabalistic literature is that the *sefirotic* Tree of Life is also a representation of man, and that man is the microcosm of the universe, which is the Body of God. By exercising watchfulness over himself - or at least, with that as a first step - man can attain the vision of the whole beyond himself. The similarity with Sufi teaching about the 'complete' or 'perfect' man is obvious.

Markabat is Arabic for a 'vehicle, carriage, beast for riding', from the verb *rakaba*, 'to ride, drive, sail, make use of any vehicle'. The verb *raqaba*, spelled and sounding almost exactly the same, means 'to observe attentively, to be on the watch for, watch, expect, guard'.

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On another level, the chariot itself has been, as we saw when discussing the Cabala, a metaphor for a metaphysical reality, regardless of whether it is accurate to see it and the usage just given as forming a continuum. The association of its status in that regard with what became the doctrine of the *sefirot* in Jewish teaching is controversial. But then, as we have also seen, the *sefirot* as they became and as they started out are different. The earliest Jewish sources using the term do so in the context of describing the ecstatic travels of the mystic through seven stages, formulated as temples or palaces, on his way to the throne of God. During the course of that journey, he becomes privy to all sorts of revelations that culminate in the vision of the Creator, including gnosis of the structure of His own person. As far as the dervishes are concerned, according to Brown in *The Darvishes, or Oriental Spiritualism*, *muraqaba* is the name they give to the contemplative and prayerful state, associated with wakefulness and the prevailing of the powers of the soul over the body while the two are yet united. They have a different name, *insila*, for the condition where the soul takes leave of the physical frame and wanders unfettered by space or time. It was when he was in such a state that the Prophet Mohammed went on his night time journey, carried by the angelic horse *Buraq*.

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We considered the possibility that it was originally intended as some sort of representation of or reference to the enneagram and, in considering the Cabala, with its components the *sefiroth*, we took note of the fact that authoritative sources aver that the form of the Cabala that we have inherited differs from the original in that the original version had eight, not ten, *sefiroth*.

The Tarot and the Cabala are seen to have come from the same sources and to have become publicly known in Europe around the same time. (Cards were popular enough in Germany in 1329 to be banned by the Church, and the Gringonneur cards of 1392 are clearly Tarot.) The enneagram is also seen to be from that source. It is thus not unreasonable to seek correlations among them that may prove illuminating. The Cabala had eight *sefiroth*, and one of the 'laws' the enneagram is supposed to express is the 'law of octaves'. The musical scale has seven notes, eight if you count both 'doh's - which involves or implies the notion of it as a dynamic and developing thing, just as the enneagram, a circle with nine points, is 'in motion' and part of its information concerns the relationship of any *living* thing, or 'cosmos', with the world outside of it, nothing alive existing in isolation. One may then speculate whether a diagrammatic, geometric representation of 'eightness' may be said to have some sort of instructive relationship with the diagram of the nine points, and whether, and if so how, one may somehow be the 'unfolding' of the other. Gurdjieff (as reported by Ouspensky) famously confirmed that the enneagram as he had divulged it was incomplete and, in particular, that it was not possible, using only the material he had given, to connect it with a comprehensive representation of the law of seven (or law of octaves), and that the means to do so were more complicated than he had shown.

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Taking into account the ten *sefiroth* in their traditional arrangement, *En Sof*, or *Ein Sof*, the 'absolutely infinite', is sometimes included, usually above *Kether*, 'crown', as its source and the source of all the *sefiroth*. Some authors have maintained that the *Ein Sof* and *Kether* are distinct, others that they are, at least in some sense, the same. Likewise, *Da'ath*, or 'knowledge', is sometimes added - with the word, enclosed by a circle or a broken circle to indicate its fluid and ubiquitous nature with respect to the *sefiroth*, in the upper middle among them, between *Kether* and *Tifereth*. Leo Schaya, in *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, maintains that the positioning thus of *Da'ath* alludes to God's omniscience and omnipresence, so that *Da'ath* is not itself a *sefirah*, but rather the knowing presence of the divine in each *sefirah*. Even so, the idea of God's omniscience itself came to be seen by Cabalists as corresponding to the blending of the upper *sefiroth* *Hokmah* and *Binah*, which would be the knowledge that the divine singularity has of the whole of creation, as distinct from its knowledge of itself (the latter of which would be the meaning of *Hokmah* alone).

We need to keep in mind these two facts: that there is, in Cabalistic lore, in addition to the ten *sefiroth*, an element above and outside them that represents 'the infinite', and another one within them that has been translated as 'knowledge', but an Arabic homonym of which, *dhat*, means 'essence', which is significant in Sufi teaching. Regarding the *Ein Sof*, the 'absolutely infinite', such a formulation is easily comparable in its meaning with the being-beyond-being from which all originates in the Sufi metaphysical scheme we have already looked at; it also sounds rather like something approximating 'eye of purity' in Arabic, and one may speculate whether, as we have seen happened so often, a meaning on one level - in this case, that of perception through the part of oneself that can be relatively free from conditioned influences - has been lost and its terminology applied to another.

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We should consider further the correspondences between the *Da'ath* of the *sefirothic* tree, the *dhat* of the dervishes, and the inner triangle of the enneagram.

In *Al Khair al Kathir*, Shah Waliullah says that each level of creation is passive in relation to the level that precedes it and from which it is produced, so that the latter is active in relation to the lower and subsequent level. Further, the

'substance' and 'secret' of 'a thing' (a thing that is 'passive' in this sense), he says, is to be found in the dimension of it that is present in the precedent, active level that has caused it to come into being. In other words, the reality or essence of a thing is to be understood in those terms and in that context, and not, presumably, in terms of its existence in the context of all the other ('passive' in this sense) existents that also have their own respective active causes on another, higher, level of reality.

The idea that the essence of a thing is what makes it that thing, without which it would cease to be what it is - in the case of something living, presumably, this would correspond to, at least where physical existence is concerned, death - is potentially instructive when you consider that, in the enneagram, it is the function of the inner triangle (points 3, 6 and 9) to supply the 'shocks' or conscious filling-in-the-gaps at what correspond to the intervals that occur, as in the musical scale, in the course of the circulation of movement around and within the diagram. It is the filling of these intervals with new energy and impetus that prevents the natural tendency for the process in question (even where the process is a thing) to tend toward its own opposite: entropy, and also enables the octave, whatever it is in the given case, to maintain or regain a connection with its origin.

With the doing-away of the idea of the octave, with its intervals and their significance, the role of the *Da'ath* in the *sefirotic* tree is also susceptible to becoming a basis for arbitrary theorizing.

Is there anything else in Cabalistic lore as we have received it that suggests the survival of the idea of a process, in time, in some sense cyclical, involving eight elements and a hierarchical ontology?

The late Gershom Scholem, undoubtedly the best known scholar of Cabala and Jewish mysticism of our time, wrote in his book *Origins of the Kabbalah* about the first group identifiable as a Cabalistic one to appear in Spain (Gerona, a small town between Barcelona and the Pyrenees mountains) in the thirteenth century. Their location, he points out, situated them well for absorbing other esoteric traditions being studied by their respective representatives in the same general area at the time, and that they would have incorporated them into their Cabalism.

Teachings pertaining to cosmic cycles from sources in India and among the Arabs are known to have found homes in the thinking of medieval Jewish philosophers, but one doctrine in particular attained special importance in the Gerona school and, thus, for the development of the Cabala. The doctrine in question is that about the *shemittoth*, or 'world cycles', and it was expressed in an anonymous work entitled *Temunah*. The *shemittoth* teaching held that God's power of creation is not confined to the *sefirot*, and also encompasses their manifestation in creations that occur in sequence and succession. It is only possible for all that is hidden within the *sefirot* to be completely exteriorized by its doing so through individual cosmic singularities each of which exists and functions in a way appropriate to the particular *sefirah* being expressed. It is at this point that the distinction between the upper three and the lower seven *sefirot* becomes of practical significance. The upper three, *Kether*, *Hokmah* and *Binah*, are, as it were, in the *shemittoth* doctrine, inherent and concealed powers constituting three aspects of the fundamental informing capacity of the godhead and, unlike the lower seven, are not visibly (or at least obviously) active in the world, in the sense of being recognizable as stages in cosmic building processes. The other seven *sefirot*, on the other hand, were held to directly correlate to the days of creation of the Genesis story; and each, in fact, constitutes a creation that is separate and self contained.

Scholem goes on to describe how, in the Gerona school, each of these latter was believed to last 7000 years, or one of God's weeks, with a period of fallowness between them, taking their cue from the Book of Deuteronomy.

It thus seems at least possible that the eight *sefirot* of the original Cabala of the *Ikhwan as Safa* and the Sufis consisted of the seven lower *sefirot* of the Cabala we know, plus the three upper *sefirot* combined into one; if so, it would resonate with the occult source's assertion that the division of the top *sefirah* into three was something like a deliberate deception. Moreover, the description of the first three *sefirot* as hidden powers not active in the apparent world as are the other seven obviously closely parallels the relationship, and difference, between the 'law of three' and the 'law of seven' as Gurdjieff taught them.

On the other hand, this scheme still does not, on the face of it, correspond with the 'nine numbers of the "Faithful Brothers"', the *Ikhwan as Safa* - eight plus God, as it were - spoken of by the author of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* article.

The sequence of emanations, again, as he and others have transmitted them is as follows: 1. The creating spirit. 2. The directing spirit, or world soul. 3. Primal matter. 4. Active nature. 5. The abstract body, or secondary matter. 6. The world of the spheres. 7. The elements of the sublunary world. 8. The world of minerals, plants and animals. The ten *sefirot* of the Cabalistic 'tree' are traditionally given, with minor variations in transliteration, as follows: 1. *Kether*, 'Crown'. 2. *Hokmah*, 'Wisdom'. 3. *Binah*, 'Intelligence'. 4. *Hesed*, 'Grace' or 'Love'. 5. *Din*, 'Severe Judgement', or, sometimes, *Gevurah*, 'Power'. 6. *Rahamim*, 'Compassion', or, sometimes, *Tifereth*, 'Beauty'. 7. *Netsah*, 'Victory'. 8. *Hod*, 'Majesty' or 'Glory'. 9. *Yesod*, 'Foundation'. 10. *Malkuth*, 'Kingdom'.

Some of these terms correspond directly with Arabic words that occur frequently in Sufi metaphysical writing.

Hikmat means 'wisdom', especially 'divine wisdom'; *din* ('deen') means 'judgement, victory', and also 'religion, faith';

rahim, of course, means 'mercy' or 'compassion'; *jabarut* means 'power', especially 'spiritual power'; and *malakut* means 'kingdom', from *malik*, 'king'. Others, by their sound, correspond directly with Arabic words the meaning of which is not, however, the meaning assigned to them in Hebrew in the *sefirothic* 'tree': but is, on the other hand, the meaning - and sometimes the meaning in an unexpected way - of some other term in the same scheme.

Assuming that the sequence and terms given as those of the *Ikhwan* are correct, the first one, the 'creating spirit', corresponds with the Primal Intelligence, the Reality of Mohammed, the Exalted Pen. In Arabic one of its names is '*aql al kull*, the 'intelligence of the universe' or 'world intelligence'. The name of the first *sefirah* is *Kether*, which means 'crown'. Arabic for 'crown' is *iklil* ('ikleel') - which sounds very much like '*aql al kull*, or, as it would be in Persian, '*aql i kull* ('aql ee kull').

Drawn from the Pen as was Eve from Adam is the Book, or Slate, the 'world soul', '*alam al arwah*, the *nafs* of the universe, the repository, in a sense, of the divine ideas or forms or archetypes that are the 'basis' of everything existing in our world. In Arabic, *bani* or *baniyan* is 'foundation', as in 'foundation of a building': and, of course, that closely resembles *Binah* in sound, and *Yesod* in meaning.

The Arabic term - or one of them - for 'primal matter', *haba*, means 'fine dust suspended in air'. A similar-sounding word, *hubb*, means 'love', the same as the *sefirah Hesed*.

Ibn al 'Arabi says that 'active nature' by the '*alam al arwah*, is the third thing produced in sequence from the Primal Intelligence. Arabic for 'nature' is *tabiyat*; the particular sense of 'nature' here, though, is 'active', 'setting in motion'. *Nashat* (the *sefirah Netsah*) means, literally, 'drive from place to place', 'lively, brisk', 'invigorate'.

The 'abstract body,' *jism*, or 'secondary matter', *hayula*, is 'physical' matter, and the nature of its relationship with 'primal matter' is a subject that can be discussed at some length, and has been by historical authors. Another Arabic word that sounds much like *haba* ('primal matter') is *haybah*: 'fear' or 'terror'. It would appear that the dichotomy of the gentle and severe aspects of divinity - *jamal*, 'beauty', and *jalal*, 'majesty', for instance - have here been applied, or misapplied, with each being assigned to one of the two kinds of 'matter'. The gradations of being in this scheme of the *Ikhwan*, however, do not represent aspects of divinity, but stages of manifestation. Nor do they, as given, have intricate and specific interconnections as seen in the *sefirothic* 'tree'. The intermittent inclusion in the midst of the latter of *dhat*, 'essence', however, and the interconnections of the points of the circumference of the enneagram, the inner triangle of which is supposed to represent the vital status of the thing or being represented, does suggest that the formulators of the *sefirothic* Cabala were trying to produce something of their own by combining elements of the teaching of the *Ikhwan* and the enneagram of the Sarmoun, and other Sufi doctrines as well. In the case of 'secondary matter', it has been taken, as it were by default, to be the 'glorious' or 'majestic' aspect of divine reality that has been further confused with the 'fear' or 'terror' that it (or something else) might arouse in an individual, which is what *haybah* means.

Similarly, the range of meanings associated with 'majesty' probably produced the 'severity' of the 'severe judgement' that is the meaning of the *sefirah Din*.

'Sphere', as in 'world of the spheres', the next emanation after 'secondary matter', in Arabic is *falak*. *Falqahat* means 'grace' (the meaning of the *sefirah Hesed*, or perhaps that of *Tifereth*) in the sense of 'polite manners, social graces'. Undoubtedly another kind or level of 'grace' altogether was intended by *Hesed*, but the term carried over. Another name for this level of being is 'throne', '*arsh*.

The elements of the sublunary world: it is these that are said to have been divided into two by the Cabalists. There are four: heat, cold, moisture and dryness; or, fire, air, water and earth. Again, the sense of 'heat' and 'cold' has been overlooked, so that *hada(t)*, 'heat' in the sense of an individual's temperament of being inclined to activity or violence, has given us the *sefirah Hod. Fatur*, 'cold' in the sense of 'lukewarm, indifferent', may well have been compounded with *furutat*, 'sweet' (if, extending the tree analogy, the essence, *dhat*, of the fruit of the tree may be said to be sweet), to produce the name *Tifereth*.

'*Arsh* means 'throne', but a closely similar word, *arsh*, in Arabic means 'creatures', in the sense of 'all creatures'. In its meaning it corresponds with the *sefirah Malkuth*, 'kingdom', even though in the *Ikhwan*'s formulation it was meant to comprise 'minerals, plants, and animals', but not humans.

Bain or *baun* (another possible source for *Binah*) means 'interval' or 'interstice', which is of interest if the enneagram was referred to, because of the intervals in the 'law of octaves'.

Gevurah, or *Geburah*, could also come from *kabir*, as in *al insan al kabir*, 'the big man' (the macrocosm). *Netsah*, the *sefirah*, may mean 'victory', but it also, in addition to *nashat*, sounds a good deal like *nats*, 'intelligent, clever' (the meaning of the *sefirah Binah*), and also *nasut*, 'humanity', which, like *jabarut*, is the name of one of the five broad hierarchical divisions: *al hahut* (God's essential nature), *al lahut* (divine creative nature), *al jabarut* (world beyond form, divine power), *al malakut* (angelic kingdom) and *an nasut* (human nature and body).

In an essay ('The Sufic Chequer-Board') included in one of his last published books (*Difficult Questions, Easy Answers*), Robert Graves opined that Sufism began in China, and pointed to the historical hegemony of China over

Khorasan for corroboration. Strength is further given to the notion that the esoteric influences on the Spanish Gerona school of Cabalists may have included Chinese Taoist material by the obvious similarity of the Tree of Life diagram to the various forms of the 'Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate' (*T'ai Chi T'u*). The Chinese figure has as the source, shown at the top, 'the Ultimateless, yet Supreme Ultimate' and, at the bottom, 'the production and evolution of all things'. A tenth century example may be found in Da Liu's popular book, *T'ai Chi Chu'an and Meditation*, and others are in scholarly works on Chinese philosophy.

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In discussing the concept of the commanding self, we speculated whether much of modern Western culture -- with, for instance, its pervasive narcissism -- in some sense represents its triumph.

In recent years Joe Public, if he has come across the enneagram at all, is likely to have done so as part of the incredibly popular 'enneagram of personality types' movement. There are believed to be nine principal types, and the manner of their interaction, and the paths for 'development', if it can be called that, from one type to another, follow the lines connecting the points on the circumference of the enneagram; which, as in what would appear to be the authentic enneagram teaching, are thought to be in motion. The proliferation of books, seminars, journals, workshops, websites and whatever about these 'enneagram personality types' is nothing short of awe-inspiring. Although virtually every book on the 'personalities enneagram' announces that the symbol is thought to have 'originated with the Sufis' and was first made known in the West by Gurdjieff, they generally neglect to mention that there is no convincing evidence that the use to which they are trying to put it is a correct one, or, indeed, that their approach has anything at all to do with anyone born before Fatty Arbuckle tried *The Prison Diet*.

The fact that there are so many different versions of the scheme would, one hopes, give it away. Everybody has his or her own idea about what the 'types' are and what the right arrangement of them is. It cannot be a case of multiple levels of interpretation, either, because without consistency such a system is meaningless.

How - not to put too fine a point on it - is it possible to take seriously a book that, when you look at the examples it gives to make a certain 'type' understandable, says, 'Burt Reynolds'? Would that be the Burt Reynolds of *Evening Shade*, or the Burt Reynolds of *Boogie Nights*? Or *Duckman*? Personally, I preferred *Malone*...

Did they have Burt Reynoldses in Sargon's Babylon? How about medieval Bokhara? If it is universally valid, and by definition it must be, there must be Inuit, Thai and Australian Aboriginal Burt Reynoldses?

The acclaimed French film director Francois Truffaut evidently considered *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) one of the greatest films ever made. What isn't clear is whether he meant the version that was released, that had the happy ending insisted on by Hollywood, or the original, which concluded with the doctor stumbling about the busy highway and shouting hysterically and futilely.

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One scholar of these matters describes the Tablets (or Tablet) of Destiny, or, to use the Sumerian word for them, the *me* ('meh' or 'muh'), as a sort of divine template. Another calls them an idea of central importance in Sumerian religion, where they were believed to be the property of Enki (the Sumerian name for the Babylonian Ea, the god who warned Utnapishtim, the Sumerian Noah, of the impending flood). They were, he says, the orders of heaven and the basis for all aspects of society and religion. Yet another presents the *me* as a collection of items fundamental to civilization, thought of (he maintains) by the Sumerians themselves as, in some sense (perhaps symbolically), physical objects, but which we would conceive of as abstract ideas, and encompassing everything from truth and lies to prostitution, priesthood, peace and instruments of music.

Let us consider this startlingly un-primitive conception in light of the ideas that we discussed earlier about levels of reality emanating from a sublime source. Looking down, as it were, from God's point of view - and as blasphemous as that might sound, it is only an exercise to try to follow what the great teachers have said about how it really is - the First Intelligence

was created, the Universal Soul was produced out of that, and the Intelligence then transmitted to the Soul - the Pen wrote on the Tablet - everything that was to be; and the World Soul made it, and continues to make it, happen. At some point, as Ibn al 'Arabi said in so many words, this means everything we know.

As we have seen, in Sufi teaching as formulated classically within the Islamic context, God has attributes, which manifest as his names (*asma*), and these have some relationship with 'fixed entities' (*a'yan ath thabita*), which are 'fixed' in the sense that they are so in knowledge. There is, in fact, the '*alam al jabarut*, the 'world of (divine) power', beyond form; and there is the '*alam al mithal* or '*alam al khiyal*, the 'world of similitudes (or forms)' or 'world of imagination'. They are 'similitudes' because they are not the 'real thing': they are the version of the real thing that we experience. In a sense, of course, the real thing isn't a thing; which is to say, it is more 'real' than 'thing'.

Jung had his idea of archetypes, but they are not quite the same. His conception was characterized by his preoccupations as a psychiatrist, studying the individual and 'collective unconscious', where potent images and patterns seemed to manifest inexorably in the lives and dreams of troubled people. He has been criticized for overstepping the bounds of his discipline and entering the realm of religion, but what most people would mean by 'religion' in this context itself exemplifies an ignorance of the comprehensiveness of the knowledge of which we are seeking echoes.

So we have the 'divine ideas', or archetypes, or Tablet of Destiny. What else can we find out about them - or are they things only talked about in archaic formulations?

The archaism of archaic formulation is an obstacle only to the extent that we are unwilling to trouble ourselves both to overcome our own hidden assumptions of superiority and forego the sense of drama that accompanies what we feel must be the tragedy of being modern and ignorant, and embrace the tedium of finding the lock, finding the key to the lock, and putting the key in the lock and turning it.

Is there a clue in the story of Noah's Ark?

Meanings of the word *nuh* ('nooh') in Arabic, as 'Noah' is rendered, include 'bemoan the dead' (as he must have done) and 'turn to, set oneself to (do something)' (as he also did). From *nah* we get 'urge to haste, goad on' (and *nahih*, 'repeat a tone in the chest', reminiscent of the Sufi *dhikr*). *Niha* means 'end, limit, extent', which the Flood certainly was. *Naih* is 'derive quiet from': in the original Mesopotamian version, the gods decided to destroy mankind because people were, simply, making too much noise. ('Noise' here undoubtedly represents the dissonant emanations produced *en masse* by a less-than-top-quality species, the toxic energetic waste of a creature whose evolution had gone so badly astray as to impinge upon the very harmony of the spheres; and the 'sweet savour' of the smoke rising up to, and pleasing, God from the sacrificed animals that Noah offers after the waters have subsided and they are back on dry land, the restoration of those emanations to purity and excellence.) *Nauh*, with a different *h*, means 'be firm, courageous', and 'fill without satiating' (as God did to the earth, with rain). 'Flood' is *tufan*, in the sense of 'deluge', 'continuous rain', and also 'general mortality', 'far-reaching storm or calamity' and 'great quantity'. *Tafanin* means 'lies, idle talk; holding back; remaining behind' (as most people did). *Tafnin*, differently spelled, is 'mixture' (recall Shah Waliullah and (in *Al Khair al Kathir*) the notion that our world constitutes the mixing-together of aspects of the Divine Names in such a way that there is rarely harmony between things in their ideal status, and that what we think of as evil is, in some cases, what happens when Divine Names of conflicting meaning encounter each other). The word from which *markab*, 'boat', is derived is *rakaba*, 'travel on the sea'. As we have seen, *raqaba* means 'watch, observe attentively'; and *baraka*, of course, is not only the word for what is traditionally thought of as the 'blessing' associated with Sufis that, among other things, protects and preserves, but also means 'rain continuously'. ... The signs of the zodiac, more often than not, are, or include, animals. A word for 'heaven' or 'firmament' (also 'sign') is *sama'*; *ism*, on the other hand, with the same consonants, is 'name' or 'noun', as in 'Names of God'. (One might also proceed from 'noun' to 'thing' and the 'realities'.) Waliullah elaborates on these as names or attributes of God, and says that they are in permanent rotation, and describes understanding their cyclic movement and its meanings in terms of being something highly desirable.

'Animals' can thus be taken as representing the 'realities', the 'divine ideas' or, if you like, archetypes. The word in Arabic, *haiwan*, means not only 'animal', but 'anything living', and even 'life'. It is thus not difficult to see what is meant by one of each (gender) being on the boat, or Ark.

The world covered in water is, in effect, formless and uncreated: the 'blessed realities' are above it. It is the world above and 'before' our own.

The nature of the connection between that world and ours, or at least something of the nature of the connection we may, in our current situation, be able to make with it, is suggested by what Noah does with the raven and the dove. The raven is robust and coarse compared with the delicate dove, somewhat like the relationship between left and right brain mentation, logic and intuition. Nothing can be learned about this realm by referring to the raven: the fact that it doesn't come back is no sure indication either that land has appeared, or that it hasn't, because it can just keep flying. The dove, representing a refinement of thinking, returns with an olive branch: Arabic for both 'olive' and 'olive oil' is *zait*: 'oil', of course, is the same as 'essence', and even sounds very much like *dhat*. The refinement to

vanishing point, as it were, of the dove may represent a stage of mystical certainty; from our earthly point of view, perhaps, it can be

seen as indicating a successful 'reception' of some sort. (Researchers on intuition, incidentally, have discovered that the way to determine whether an intuitive impulse is genuine is to see whether it repeats.)

On the other hand, within the terms of the larger allegory, it may be that the detection of the presence of the olive tree - the source of the branch the dove brings back - represents something akin to the Cabalistic *En Sof* that is both the origin of the *sefiroth* and the 'sap' that vivifies them: it indicates - or creates? - the 'dry land' where the 'animals', the archetypes, can then manifest themselves.

In the text, the rainbow is supposed to be the sign of God's solemn 'promise' (*wa'd*, 'make a promise') that he will 'never' again destroy all living creatures; later, it specifically says, 'with a flood'. Associated meanings for *wa'd* include 'arrange' or 'appoint a time for', 'threaten, menace', and even 'deadline'. Similar-sounding words mean 'kill, destroy', 'multiple, numerous', and 'return' and 'recurrence'. (Remember also the '*Ad*' people of the *Koran*.)

'The waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh', reads Chapter 9, Verse 15 of Genesis. 'Water', *ma'*, sounds almost exactly like *ma*, 'not', indicating negation, of course; and the plural of 'water', *miyah*, is like *mauh*, 'to mix' (Shah Waliullah and the 'divine predicates' again?), and also, 'thin, dilute, adulterate; falsify, misrepresent'; and also like *maih*, 'to strut, swagger, walk with affected dignity'. The double negative, if it can be so construed, is potentially troubling (there won't not be another flood), and there are evocations of deceit and the sort of behaviour characteristic of the commanding self, which can hardly be said to have become a thing of the past.

While the *Contemporary English Version* has God speaking of the rainbow as being 'in the sky', the consensus of most other translations is that it should be as it appears in the *King James*: 'the bow shall be seen in the cloud', and 'the bow shall be in the cloud'. 'Bow' is *qus*; *ghash* means 'corruption, debasement, fraud, deceit', and *kais*, 'intelligence, subtlety, gracefulness, elegance'. *Qiyas* is 'measurement, reference, scale, example, analogy, comparison'.

The primary word for 'clouds' in Arabic is *ghamam*, from *gham*, meaning 'cover, veil, conceal', 'be obscure, incomprehensible', and also 'to fill with sadness, pain or grief'.

The notion of 'covering' overlaps with another range of words associated with *washy*, which means 'embellish, ornament with many colours, embroider (a fabric); slander, defame'; and 'fault, flaw, defect; mark, sign'. 'The rainbow will be the sign of that solemn promise', reads Chapter 9, Verse 17.

On one level, the message would appear to be that painful experiences contain something potentially valuable for those intelligent and subtle enough to be able to see through superficialities and appearances, perhaps by some kind of analogical approach.

Considered from yet another angle, and taking into account the possibility that the object portrayed in [an artefact in the British Museum, thought to be from northern Syria] is indeed a rainbow, it may be that we are meant to consider the rainbow and the animals, or their meaning, in a closer relationship than is conveyed in the Noah's Ark story as we have it. The rainbow and the animals may simply be a symbolic representation of that cyclic manifestation of Divine Names already mentioned. Ishtar, in that case, would represent the World Soul from which they all depart and to which they all return.

...

There have always been at least two schools of thought regarding the origin of the Cabala, even where it has been assumed to be an undistorted and, as it were, pure product. Modern scholarship, as far as it has gone, has tended in favour of a medieval formulation; but there have always been those with a strong commitment to its extreme antiquity, who have said it antedates all recorded religious manifestations. If the demonstration of its derivation from a wisdom tradition that does, in fact, fit that description isn't enough for them, perhaps further evidence of the presence of that knowledge, which is also - as we have seen - as modern as we can imagine in that most ubiquitous of holy sources, the Old Testament, will be.

There is even a further irony inasmuch as it is one place where we may be able to find hints of how items as seemingly disparate as the 'law of seven' and the dichotomous nature of human consciousness, as well as other things, may be harmonized.

The second Book of Samuel contains a number of stories, among them, in the second chapter, stories of the strife between Abner, who had been the general of the now deceased (king) Saul, and who made Saul's son Ishbosheth king of Israel in Mahanaim, on one side of the Jordan River, and David, king of the tribe of Judah in Hebron, on the other side.

The narrative relates how Abner and Ishbosheth's soldiers one day just happened to run into Joab with David's soldiers 'at the pool in Gibeon'. They sat down on opposite sides of the pool, and Abner suggested that they have their best soldiers engage in combat. Twelve of Ishbosheth's best Benjaminites and twelve of David's prime crew, it says (*Contemporary English Version*), 'grabbed each other by the hair and stabbed each other in the side with their daggers. They all died right there!... Then everyone started fighting. Both sides fought very hard, but David's soldiers defeated Abner and the soldiers of Israel.'

The status of the combatants as 'the best' is a clue that it is something as relatively elusive as qualities that are being discussed. The 'law of three' has it that where there is no third, reconciling or neutralizing force, the first two forces, the positive and negative, though they may meet, can produce nothing: just as the twelve warriors on each side exactly match, and then perfectly annihilate, each other. (A pool is a stagnant body of accumulated water: Arabic words for it emphasize that aspect, of coming together, collection, combination.) The rest then join the fray, and the victors, David's surviving men, may be said to represent the produced-with-difficulty third force.

David is not actually present; his forces are, as mentioned, led by Joab, who is 'the son of Zeruah'. 'Zeruah's three sons were there,' it continues, 'Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Asahel could run as fast as a deer in an open field, and he ran straight after Abner, without looking to the right or to the left.' These characteristics of Asahel reveal him as representing the activity of the left hemisphere of the brain, the analytic function, which knows only its target, its goal to be achieved, and is impatient with anything not devoted to the same purpose. In the context, as it will be seen, although it says all three sons 'were there', Abishai remains behind: he is thus the passive force. Joab represents the reconciling force, and in understanding the interplay of these things is to be seen the knowledge the story contains.

It is said in the lore about the law of seven and the enneagram that where an 'interval' in the 'octave' occurs, if the process the octave represents is to proceed with undiminished force or without misdirection, the gap of the interval must be filled by energy from the source of the process itself or, hypothetically, from some other, coincidental, source. (From a certain point of view, of course, all processes and all energies ultimately have the same source anyway.) To that extent, then, the resulting third force - that enables the process to get past its stage of self bafflement, the state of mutual thwarting of the opposed 'positive' and 'negative' forces - and the undifferentiated origin are one and the same. Perception of difference is in the domain of the left brain. We have also touched on the role of the right brain, which is concerned with simultaneity, spatiality, and wholeness, in what has traditionally been called 'mystical' experience, which is generally taken to mean man's (and woman's) experience of wholes, of comprehensive realities, from which humanity is customarily separated, or at least feels itself to be because of the imbalance that has existed throughout recorded human history as a result of the over-emphasis of left brain-type thinking.

There is thus no contradiction in saying that Asahel represents 'both' the activity of the left brain and the active force in the law of three, bearing in mind that in any real context the definitions of these things are relative.

So he goes (slipping into the present tense, if we may) running after Abner. If we are taking it that the point of the allegory is to tell us something useful in the context of improving our understanding of these matters, it does not seem too much of a stretch to say that Abner probably represents the knowledge itself that we are seeking: which is just like the Hermit in the Tarot cards - knowledge seeking the seeker, whatever it may look like he is doing.

Abner turns and sees Asahel, and says, "'Is that you, Asahel?'"

Are you separate, Asahel? Do you know 'who you are', that you are not me, not anyone else - that you are you, only you?

"'Yes it is.'"

Abner then says to him: "'There are soldiers all around. Stop chasing me and fight one of them! Kill him and take his clothes and weapons for yourself.'"

What you are looking for, what you need, is to be found all around you. You are not really separate. It's the very thing you are doing to get what you want that stops you getting what you want.

'But Asahel refused to stop.'

Abner then threatens to kill him if he doesn't 'turn back', adding, "'Then I could never face your brother Joab again.'"

Which is very interesting, because Joab and Abner are on opposite sides, their armies trying to kill each other. Why should he even want to 'face him' again? How can that which has one face face itself?

'But Asahel would not turn back, so Abner struck him in the stomach with the back end of his spear. The spear went all the way through and came out of his back. Asahel fell down and died.'

The front end of a spear is the sharp, fine end. The back end is the blunt, clumsy end. Asahel has run smack into his own nature, and his nature is to be limited: to have an end.

'Everyone who saw Asahel lying dead just stopped and stood still.'

The first interval.

Joab and Abishai, who up to this point have not moved (which makes little sense if taken literally) then continue the chase: the third force energy, from 'the source', fills the gap. The removal of Asahel also means the changing of Abishai's significance as representing the passive force. His accompanying Joab may be taken to indicate an unused potential, perhaps, the potential of everything the left brain keeps in check.

'Finally, about sunset, they came to the hill of Ammah, not far from Giah on the road to Gibeon Desert.' Abner gathers his men, of the tribe of Benjamin, on a hill. He shouts to Joab, "'Aren't we ever going to stop killing each other? Don't you know that the longer we keep on doing this, the worse it's going to be when it's all over? When are you going to order your men to stop chasing your own relatives?'"

'Joab shouted back, "I swear by the living God, if you hadn't spoken, my men would have chased their relatives all night!" Joab took his trumpet and blew the signal for his soldiers to stop chasing the soldiers of Israel. Right away, the fighting stopped.

'Abner and his troops marched through the Jordan River valley all that night. Then they crossed the river and marched all morning until they arrived back at Mahanaim.'

The second interval ('right away, the fighting stopped') is filled by the understanding of which Asahel was incapable, the realization of the shared reality ('your own relatives') that, ultimately, is at least as much a matter of resting and allowing to be given as it is of going after and taking.

The foregoing is excerpted and adapted from a longer work comprising 59,000 words and 68 illustrations.

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