The Sephiroth as Tree

Another configuration to which the Sephiroth lend themselves is the Tree of the Garden of Paradise, and specifically the Tree of Life. In this form the Sephiroth in the centre are thought of as the trunk, the Sephiroth on the left and right as its branches. In the Zohar it is said that the Torah is the Sephirothic Tree of Life and that all who occupy themselves with it are assured of life in the world to come.¹

In discussing this analogy between the Torah and the Tree of Life symbolised by the configuration of the Sephiroth, some Kabbalists claim that at the beginning of His creative act God engraved all that was to come onto the Sephirah Chesed. The Torah contained in Chesed was referred to as Torah Kelulah, the unfolded Torah. It was in this Sephirah, the right hand of God, that the written and the oral Torah were contained in the form of fire. There they remained until activated by the Sephiroth Chokmah and Binah. Then the written Torah became lodged in and expressed, through the Sephirah Tiphareth, the oral Torah residing in the treasury of the Sephirah Malkuth.

The Zohar also refers us to the idea that the Tree of Life, extending over a 500-year journey, resided in the centre of the garden, with a stream flowing from its base nourishing ‘the beasts of the field’ below. The Zohar explicitly states that the stream which led to the Tree of Good and Evil, so named because it acquired its sustenance from two opposing sides. This tree, which is not of the middle, is referred to as the six days of creation, and is accordingly composed of the Sephiroth Chesed to Yesod inclusive. It is the Microprosopus. The configuration of the Sephiroth therefore reveals a two-fold structure: the first three Sephiroth, the first triad, compose the Tree of Life, the second and third triads compose the Tree of Good and Evil. These two tree configurations symbolise the Garden of Eden, the last Sephirah, Malkuth, representing the world which stands outside them. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was made up of the composite values of the lower six Sephiroth. By eating this fruit borne by the Sephirothic tree, man acquires knowledge of good and evil, and is in that regard considered equal with God:

“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ (Genesis xxx, 5).

Another idea to be considered is that the Tree of Life, referred to as existing in the middle of the garden, is the central axis of the Sephiroth configuration, made up of Kether, Tiphareth, Yesod and Malkuth. The

¹ Levertovf, The Zohar, vol 2, p. 25
Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is made up of two opposite sides, the six Sephiroth encompassing it on either side. When man ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil he did not draw any sustenance from the middle tree, The Tree of Life, which mediates between the opposites.

It is for this reason that the opposites exist in the world in conflict. Without the knowledge contained in the Tree of Life there is no balance. One may therefore interpret the Tree of Life as containing a mediating factor. The Tree of Life symbolically represents the force necessary to unite the opposites, to marry the opposites with one another. It is the middle path, a place where the ‘sound of one hand clapping’ may be known. In light of the fact that the Tree of Life is often referred to by the Kabbalists as the Shekhinah, the soul, there is much to consider here. It is the soul alone which unites the opposites, which is the Tree of Eternal Life. Unless a man unites himself with this tree, with the values contained in the Sephiroth symbolising the Tree of Life, he cannot know a future life.

Many Kabbalists think that the Sephirothic tree also symbolises the body of man. In the light of recent consideration of Oriental techniques and systems of spiritual transformation, this idea yields much material seldom considered. It has already been pointed out above that the right and left sides of the Sephirothic configuration constitute the arms of Adam, and that the Sephiroth running down the middle compose his trunk. I think the line running from Kether through Tiphareth and Yesod to Malkuth should more correctly be thought of as the spine. In order to develop this suggestion I will have to take a detour and discuss briefly the Tantric discipline of Kundalini Yoga.

The major premise of Kundalini Yoga is that the residue of the feminine power, Sakti, which fashioned the creation, settled at the base of man’s spine in the form of a coiled and slumbering serpent, Kundalini. There she resides in a state of exile, separated from her Lord who anxiously awaits her return to his abode in the head of man. This cannot be accomplished unless man rouses the slumbering serpent and causes her to ascend in a straight line upwards through his spinal cord. Thus in this discipline the human body is so illustrated.

The perpendicular channel believed to run through the centre of the spine, from the anus at the base to the crown at the head, is called Susamna, the void. The two intertwining channels to the left and right of this primary channel are called Ida and Pingala. The Ida channel commences on the left, the Pingala on the right. The former is identified with the moon, the latter with the sun. In other words, they represent the opposites, dark and light, good and evil. The five circles distributed over the length of the middle channel, the Susamna passing through their centres, are called chakras or subtle centres. These subtle centres symbolise different forms of consciousness, the grossest form symbolised by the bottom chakra, the purest at the top. In the average
man, the serpent awakens from time to time and ascends one or two channels intertwining in the middle channel. When this occurs the forces residing in each centre become activated.

The difficulty here is that the forces activated in this manner, by the passage of Kundalini through one of the two side channels, influence the individual adversely because he is unaware of their awakening. He is at the mercy of the emotions and desires released by each of these centres. At the same time the concentration of energies in only one of the side channels causes an imbalance to occur. The imbalance is experienced as a state of conflict, the conflict between the potential energies of the unused channel and the exaggerated or over emphasised energies of the channel Kundalini ascends. Neither of these two paths lead to the Lord living in the head. They empty out into the nostrils, and whatever energy contained within the channels is dissipated. Union is unknown.

The only way by which Kundalini might come into a state of union with her Lord is by traveling through the subtle centres up the spine. This force, Kundalini, which moves from the base of the body to the top of the skull, is always visualised as feminine. The skull or brain where the Lord awaits her is identified with the supreme cosmic principle. In addition to all of the above, the spine in common yogic parlance is spoken of as the yoga tree and is feminine by virtue of the fact that it is a path used solely by the feminine principle in her ascent.

The reader may recall that the Sephiroth running down the centre of the configuration, and thought of as a unit separate from the other Sephiroth, has been called by Kabbalists the Shekhinah, the feminine principle which unites the opposites as represented by the six Sephiroth distributed on either side of it. In addition, it is significant that the Kabbalists also refer to Chokmah as the sun and Binah as the moon. These two Sephiroth, along with those lined up directly beneath them, coincide with the Ida and Pingala channels outlined in our description of Kundalini Yoga.

In addition to this, Kether, located at the head, is thought of in Kabbalism as longing for union with his bride, the exiled feminine principle residing in Malkuth, the slumbering world of our passions. It is significant that the location of these two Sephiroth, when the configuration of the Sephiroth
in total is viewed as symbolic of the human body, is the same as the masculine and feminine principles of Kundalini.

It should also be obvious that the right and left portions of the Sephirothic configuration point to two distinctively different types of action, based on two different ways of approaching the world and life: through either love and mercy or judgment and power.

There are numerous correspondences between the chakras and the Sephiroth ranging down the centre of our diagram, too lengthy and technical to discuss here, but I might point out some of the more interesting and immediately recognisable correspondences. The Sephirah Yesod, symbolic of the general region and all that it means, corresponds in both location and meaning with the first chakra, the Muladhara, which in the Kundalini system is identified with the sexual passions and energies. Malkuth would correspond with the slumbering Kundalini herself.

I would suggest at this point that the Sephirothic and Kundalini configurations correspond in more ways than one. I would even suggest that the Tree of Life, the middle set of Sephiroth, are subtle centres in the same way that the chakras are. In short, the Sephirothic arrangement actually diagrams a yogic process for meditation and should be so used. The analogy which we are considering should become even more persuasive when one considers the fact that the great Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia not only laid down rules of body posture for the student to follow during his meditations on the Sephiroth, but a breathing discipline as well – a discipline found at the heart of every yogic system. Indeed the student should turn his meditation directly to the Sephiroth and their relationship to the Shekhinah. Perhaps something has been lost in the centuries. Perhaps a secret tradition existed in which the Sephiroth were viewed in much the same way that the chakras are in Kundalini yoga.

The goal of the student faced with the Sephiroth as tree should be to ascend it, following the central path after awakening the Shekhinah, and releasing her from exile. This is the yoga of the Kabbalah.

Before ending our discussion on the striking parallels to be found between the Sephiroth and the chakras of Tantric Buddhism, I refer the reader to one final diagram shown here.

The figure at the top of this diagram, Parasamvit, represents the changeless Brahman aspect – the God in which the plan of the universe and all the opposites are contained. In every respect this answers the Kabbalistic description of Kether. The next two figures immediately following it, Shiva Tattva and Shaktitattva, are the supreme opposites, male and female, the mother and father from which issue the remaining portions of the diagram. These two principles correspond in every respect with Chokmah and Binah. The brackets alongside the diagram refer us to the evolution of the tattvas, the various forms of the Parasamvit’s manifestation through creation via his feminine counterpart. The tattvas become grosser and heavier in form the closer the creation comes to realisation.
The Thirty-two Paths of Wisdom

Our next consideration of the Sephiroth will be with their paths, the connecting links between the Sephiroth. The thirty-two paths are designated in the same diagram.

This illustration sets out the number of each path together with the letter of the Hebrew alphabet assigned to it, but by the two Sephiroth which it connects.

The best explanation of this diagram can be presented by citing the text of *The Thirty-two Paths of Wisdom* itself.

The assigning of astrological values to the paths is by no means a fixed matter. Kabbalists differ on this question. Rather than outlining the many different systems, I will give the astrological designations of an established and respected Kabbalist, Kurt Stenring, taken from his translation of the *Sefer Yetsirah, the Book of Formation*. On page 173 of this book the reader will find the further connection of the thirty-two paths to the Tarot. I do not include this set of correspondences, because they did not become associated with the Kabbalah until after the eighteenth century and at that time mainly on the insistence of the Christian Kabbalists.

The Text of the Thirty-two Paths

1. The title of the first path is ‘Admirable’ or Concealed Intelligence. It is the Light which communicates understanding at the Beginning which knows no beginning. It is the First Glory. No created being can attain to its essence.

2. The title of the second path is Illuminating Intelligence. It is the Crown of Creation and the splendour of Unity to which it is closest. Above every head it is exalted, and the Kabbalists call it the Second Glory.

3. The title of the third path is Sanctifying Intelligence, the foundation of Primordial Wisdom, otherwise called the Creation of Faith. Its roots are Amen. It is the mother of faith, its emanation.

4. The title of the fourth path is That Intelligence Which Receives and Contains. It is given this title because it contains the spiritual emanations of the Higher Intelligences which have been sent down to it. It is from here that the emanations of the Supreme Crown again, in subtler fashion, emanate.

5. The title of the fifth path is Radical Intelligence. It is called this because it is closest to equality with the Supreme Crown, emanating from the depths of Wisdom.

6. The title of the sixth path is the Intelligence of the Mediating Influence, because there it is that the influx of the emanations is multiplied. It sends forth the resulting influence to those blessed men who have united themselves with it.

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2 The following text of the Thirty-two Paths is a compilation of the translations of Westcott, Waite and Stenring. I have taken this liberty because of the confusing and ambiguous phrasing each of these three translators was sometimes habit to.
7. The title of the seventh path is Concealed Intelligence, because from it the Intellectual virtues which are seen by the eyes of the spiritual through the ecstasy of faith receive its brilliant outpouring.

8. The title of the eighth path is the Perfect or Absolute Intelligence. It is from here that the ability to prepare principles emanates. It attaches itself to the roots hidden in the depths of Chesed.

9. The title of the ninth path is Purifying Intelligence. It is called this because it purifies the numerations, qualifies and adjusts the manner in which they are represented, and unites them with itself so that they may not suffer division and destruction.

10. The title of the tenth path is the Resplendent Intelligence. It is called this because it is exalted above every head from where it sits on the throne of Binah. It illuminates the Numinosity of all lights and causes to emanate the Power of the archetype of countenances or forms.

11. The title of the eleventh path is the Scintillating Intelligence. It is called this because it is the garment held up before the formations and the order of the superior and inferior causes. To possess this path is to enjoy great dignity and to come face to face with the Cause of Causes.

12. The title of the twelfth path is the Intelligence of Numinosity because it images Magnificence. It is the source of visions in those who see apparitions.

13. The title of the thirteenth path is the Uniting Intelligence. It is the essence of Glory and it reveals Truth to all spirits.

14. The title of the fourteenth path is the Illuminating Intelligence. It is that which found concealed ideas, the basis of all holiness.

15. The title of the fifteenth path is the Constituting Intelligence. It is called this because it fashions the creation in the world’s darkness. It is the darkness mentioned in Job xxxviii, 9; ‘When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it.’

16. The title of the sixteenth path is the Triumphant and Eternal Intelligence. It is called this because it is the delight of Glory. It is also called the Paradise prepared for the just.

17. The title of the seventeenth path is the Disposable Intelligence. It provides perseverance to the righteous in preparation for their reception of the Holy Spirit.

18. The title of the eighteenth path is the Intelligence of the House of Wisdom, which it is. From within this are retrieved the arcana and hidden meanings hiding in its shadows.

19. The title of the nineteenth path is the Intelligence of Spiritual activities.

20. The title of the twentieth path is Intelligence of Will. It is called this because it individual; personalities are prepared for the reception of the Primordial Glory’s existence.

21. The title of the twenty-first path is the Intelligence of Mediation. It is called this because it receives the divine benediction from above and dispenses it below, thus influencing all in existence.

The thirty-two paths and their celestial correspondences.
22. The title of the twenty-second path is the Intelligence of the Faithful, or Faithful Intelligence. It is called this because deposited in it are spiritual virtues, which are increased until they flow unto those beneath its shadow.
23. The title of the twenty-third path is the Intelligence of Stability. It is called this because it is the source of that which is consistent in all of the numerations.
24. The title of the twenty-fourth path is Imaginative Intelligence. It is called this because it is that which is the model for the likeness of beings who are created in a manner which agrees with its aspects.
25. The title of the twenty-fifth path is the Intelligence of Temptation or Trial. It is called this because it represents the first temptation God tries His creatures by.
26. The title of the twenty-sixth path is the Intelligence of Renovation. It is called this because it is by this Intelligence that God renews all that is capable of Renovation in his creation.
27. The title of the twenty-seventh path is the Natural Intelligence. It is called this because by it everything in the orb of the sun is completed to perfection.
28. The title of the twenty-eighth path is called the Intelligence of the Active, or Active Intelligence. It is called this because it is here that the spirit of every being of the supreme orb is created. It is here too that the energy or activity which they display is created.
29. The title of the twenty-ninth path is Corporeal Intelligence. It is called this because it is that which forms the corporeal portion of all bodies existing beneath the orbs and also is the force behind their growth.
30. The title of the thirtieth path is the Intelligence of the Collective or Collective Intelligence. It is called this because it is here that astrologers arrive at their speculations through judging the movements of the stars and heavenly signs. It is here where the perfection of that science is to be known.
31. The title of the thirty-first path is Perpetual Intelligence. It is called this because it governs the movements of the Sun and Moon, insuring that they follow the paths proper to them.
32. The title of the thirty-second path is the Administrating Intelligence. It is called this because it directs the movements of the seven planets.

Little commentary has been written on the practical usage of these paths. True, the suggestion that the paths might be likened to the stages of yoga has been made a number of times in recent years. How they were originally employed is another question. We can only assume that the paths outlined here are to be applied as vehicles for our own travels. A cursory examination of paths eleven to thirty-two in our illustration will reveal certain difficulties. How does one get from path twenty-nine to thirty, for instance?

Putting aside the topological difficulties, it will be noted that each path is a form of intelligence, a further differentiation of the original intelligence displayed in Kether. I would suggest that the term Intelligence used in the text might be better understood as a form of consciousness, and what the text of The Thirty-Two of Wisdom is putting forward is the observation that there are thirty-two specific forms of consciousness. William James to Timothy Leary, not to mention the scholars of the East, have all made the observation that there is more than one form of consciousness. The paths outlined are spiritual stations for the individual pilgrim. How each path is to be traversed is a secret each pilgrim must work out for himself or herself.

My suggestion is that the student considers the configuration of the paths in the way many other cultures have considered the elaborate designs of labyrinths. Labyrinths were originally constructed to safeguard the tombs of kings from the eyes of the uninitiated. Deep within these labyrinths rituals of spiritual renewal were performed which in time came to be associated with the design of the labyrinth alone, a talisman for regeneration. This configuration of the paths may be employed in the same way. All paths lead to the sanctuary of the king, Kether.

Another consideration to be discussed briefly appears in ‘The Greater Assembly’ section of the Zohar where we are told of the existence of two Edens. The first Eden, ‘Which shineth in Eden,’ is called the superior Eden by virtue of the fact that it is hidden and totally self-contained. About this Eden it is said that no man has ever known it or shall ever know it. It is known only as Macroprosopus. In other words, it is the home of Macroprosopus, Kether.

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3 Mathers, Kabbalah Unveiled, p. 124
The inferior Eden, on the other hand, is not self-contained. It is distributed into the thirty-two paths, even then only known by Microprosopus. All of which amounts to saying that the thirty-two paths of the Sephirothic configuration are contained in man.

The inferior Eden is the Eden of the Bible. The superior Eden is the divine model after which the inferior Eden was patterned. The one exists in a perfect state of unity, untainted by the fall; the other, in need of redemption and regeneration. The two may not be united until the latter returns to its original state, a state which can only be achieved by the work of man.

No man, while alive, knows the superior Eden.

**The Alchemy of the Sephiroth**

In the early part of the eighteenth century there appeared the text entitled, *Aesch Mezareph*. In this work the Sephiroth are referred to as alchemical qualities. This text almost certainly does not grow out of any alchemical tradition peculiar to Jewish mysticism. Alchemy was not a concern of the Kabbalists. Wherever we find mention of alchemy in Kabbalism today we may expect to find the roots of such speculation in eighteenth century Europe. We may also expect to find the parents of such speculation to be the small band of Christian Kabbalists whose theories became prominent at that time. A cursory examination will reveal that the operations outlined in the *Aesch Mezareph* were never, and could never be performed in a laboratory. At the most, we have in this text a precursor of what was to become spiritual alchemy – that branch of alchemy which no longer concerned itself which chemical, but solely with mental operations.

We have given so much space to the Sephiroth because without even a rudimentary understanding of them, the theories of Kabbalism are lifeless. I am tempted to say that the Sephiroth represent varying gradations of psychic energy. But this would be a half-truth. It would be better to think of them as models of energy, configurations which not only penetrate Being and give orderly sense to its operations, but which also permeate the whole of nature. The operations of the Sephiroth extend themselves throughout the entire spectrum of the phenomenal world and man’s psyche and soul make up only one of the many places where they manifest themselves.

In the Sephiroth one may find laws for both the material and psychic world. For this reason they may never be totally comprehended any more than may the Ain-Soph. One may come to appreciate the application of their values fully, but never learn the essence of their operation, for that essence is the same Ain-Soph which flows through them and animates them.

One can pray for understanding.

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4 See Part 1, chapter 3
Chapter 2. Numbers, Names, Letters & Computations of God

Kabbalists believed that the written word of God was the result of God’s inspiration and that Scripture contained within itself an essence of His being. By the same token they believed that because God is hidden, so too, beneath the divine words of Scripture, there was a hidden meaning, an essence to be ferreted out. To discover the hidden meaning they employed three methods of interpretation – Gematria, Notarikon and Temura. The first made use of the fact that every Hebrew letter has a numerical value assigned to it, and the second two employed intricate forms of abbreviation and substitution or permutation.

All three forms have been used from time to time by Kabbalists and Talmudic scholars, but this second group was divided on the legitimacy of such methods. As popular as these methods were with the majority of Kabbalists, only one Kabbalast shaped a unified system of mystical thought and application around these methods: Abraham Abulafia, of whom we have spoken earlier. The system he devised has come to be known as Prophetic Kabbalism. His attempts to elucidate the meaning of these interpretative methods shed more light on their philosophical legitimacy than anything a commentator may have to say.

In the first part of this chapter I will outline the three methods of interpretation; in the second, I will give a brief account of what the Kabbalists called ‘the names of God’, and the most famous example of these names, the Tetragrammaton. The last two sections will be reserved for a discussion of Abulafia’s Prophetic Kabbalism and the language of mysticism.

Gematria

*Gematria* is the science by which the letters of a word are converted into their numerical equivalent. Once one knows the numerical value of the word, one may then find a correspondence between the original word and another with the same numerical value. In this way one number can become representative of several ideas, all of which are thought of as being interpretive of each other. An example may be found by turning to Genesis xlix, 10:

‘The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.’

This passage was taken by the Kabbalists to be a prophecy of the Messiah. By *gematria*, the phrase *IBA ShILH* (‘until Shiloh come’ totals 358:

\[(10) \text{ plus } (2) \text{ plus } (1) \text{ equals } 13\]
\[(300) \text{ plus } (10) \text{ plus } (30) \text{ plus } (5) \text{ equals } 345\]
\[345 \text{ plus } 13 \text{ equals } 358\]

The word for Messiah, spelled *MShICh* also totals 358:

\[(40) \text{ plus } (300) \text{ plus } (10) \text{ plus } (8) \text{ equals } 358\]

All of which leads to a rather curious ‘gematriacal’ statement in Numbers xxi, 9: ‘And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.’

The Serpent of Moses, *Nachash* (*NChSh*), also yields the number of the Messiah:

\[(50) \text{ plus } (8) \text{ plus } (300) \text{ equals } 358\]

The last example offered encouraged many Christian Kabbalists to state that the image of the brazen serpent was a prefiguration of the Christ on the cross. There are many instances from Medieval Christian iconography where the Christ is represented by a serpent draped across the crossbar of a crucifix.

It should be apparent to the reader that there is no obvious limit to what can be yielded by employing such a method as *gematria*. Twentieth century Kabbalists think of it as
the central core of Kabbalism, which is probably what prompts so many of them to say that if you do not read Hebrew you cannot know the Kabbalah.

**Notarikon**

Notarikon is employed in two ways, both aimed at abbreviation. The first way involves the forming of one word by taking the initial and final letters of another word or words. The second way involves taking the letters of one name as being the initial or final letters of each word in a sentence.

Employing the first form and taking the question Moses asks in Deuteronomy xxx 12, ‘Who shall go up for us to heaven?’, MI IO LHV LNV HShMiLH, we find that the initial letters of the question yield, mylah, the Hebrew word for circumcision. Then taking the final letters of the question, we receive IHVH, the name of God, Tetragrammaton. The answer, by means of notarikon, is contained in the question, and is that the circumcised shall reach God.

The well-known prayer ending, Amen also comes to us through notarikon from the phrase ‘The Lord and faithful king’.

The Christians were quick to use this method of permutation in identifying, or rather in finding further justification for the fish as symbolic of Christ. The Greek word for fish is ichthus. Employing notarikon they then arrived at the sentence lesous CHristos THeou Uios Soter (‘Jesus Christ, the son of God, the Saviour’).

**Temura**

The third type of permutation is called temura and is a much more complicated procedure involving the interchanging of upwards of twenty-five letters according to certain rules. Even the simpler rules yield interesting possibilities.

Writing one half of the Hebrew alphabet in a reverse order and placing it on top of the remaining half, we arrive at the following figure:

```
  k I th ch z v h d g b a
  l m n s o p th q r sh t
```

Turning now to Jeremiah xxv 26, we find the statement: ‘...and the king of Sheshak shall drink after them.’ Turning to chapter 51, verse 41, we discover that Sheshak is none other than Babel. How did the writer of this Biblical passage arrive at Sheshak as another name for Babel? Through the method of temura. Taking the word ShShk and substituting each letter for one either above or below it on the above arrangement of the alphabet, we receive:

```
  Sh  Sh  k  Sh  (e)  sh  (a)  k
  b  b  l  b  (a)  b  (e)  l
```

All of which would seem to indicate that at least one of the writers of the Bible employed the methods outlined above, if not several.

Those readers desiring a full description of the other forms of permutation belonging to this system should refer to C.D. Ginsburg’s The Kabbalah.5

As we shall see in the next section some of the names of God were arrived at by temura.

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Tetragrammaton and God’s Other Names

Any four letter word is a Tetragrammaton, but the Kabbalists only apply this term to the unspeakable name of God, IHVH, the name translated by biblical translators as Jehovah. When Tetragrammaton is vocalised it is given the pronunciation of adonai, the Lord. In early times, when the correct pronunciation of a name was known, it was pronounced only once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Tradition tells us that once every seven years the sages were allowed to verbally pass on the secret pronunciation to their disciples.

The Tetragrammaton appears to have its origin in the phrase found in Exodus iii, 14, ‘I am that I am.’ Before this it was known as the Shem ha-meforash, the seventy-two syllabled name of God, made up of 216 letters. The source of the Shem ha-meforash, according to tradition, is verses 19 – 21 of Exodus xiv, each of the three verses containing seventy-two Hebrew letters. The letters of verse 19 were written down in separated form and in correct order; the letters of verse 20, also in separated form, were written down in correct order. Reading from above down, one obtains seventy-two three-letter names, all of which combine to make one. To these three-lettered names were then added either AL or IH to form the names of the seventy-two angels of Jacob’s ladder.

Because the Hebrew language does not employ vowels in its written form, the correct pronunciation of this ineffable name of God was lost and not rediscovered until about 300 AD by the Kabbalists who gave it the title Tetragrammaton, ‘the word of four letters,’ and ‘the square name,’ or more simply, ‘the square’. At that time the Shem ha-meforash became represented by the simpler form YHVH.

The correspondence between the Shem ha-meforash and the Tetragrammaton (IHVH) is revealed when we apply another rule of gematria to the four-letter word.

The number equivalents of the letters of the Tetragrammaton are as follows: (10) (5) (6) (5) totaling 26. Then, adding the values of the letters in the following manner: equals 10; equals 15; equals 21.

\[10 + 15 + 21 + 26 = 72, \text{Shem ha-meforash.}\]

Therefore, the correct pronunciation of the four-letter name of God is thought of as being just as effective as the correct pronunciation of the Shem ha-meforash because gematria shows that the latter is contained within it. The inherent power of the name is revealed in the traditional belief that it was with its aid that Moses caused the Red Sea to part.

But so far we have only dealt with the Tetragrammaton as a vocable, which if properly pronounced, brings to the fore the power of God. In such a manner was the four-letter word used in later European magic. It is difficult to find a magical text of that period which does not invoke the power of God through the use of Tetragrammaton. As a vocable it appears to be the property of magicians and others who worry themselves over its pronunciation, some audacious enough to report that they knew the correct pronunciation but were honour-bound to keep it secret. (S.L. MacGregor Mathers, the translator of the Kabbala Denudata, is one example). From this avenue of mystery we may expect to gain nothing. When we consider the Tetragrammaton in its written form, however, a much deeper significance can be found, and it is with that aspect of the Tetragrammaton that all true Kabbalists primarily concern themselves.
The Zohar tells us that before God created the world His name was contained within Him. He and His name were not considered a unity. The reasoning here was that a unity refers us to the merging of two or more distinct parts. In order that His name could be known to Him, the Zohar tells us, the world He created was a part distinct from him. As we already know, this creation is brought about by the manifestation of the Sephiroth, the development of which in this instance not only corresponds with the emergence of the universe, but with the birth of the Tetragrammaton which we shall see unites the Sephiroth.

When the Sephirah Chokmah became manifested, so too was the letter י (Yod). The manifestation of the Sephirah Binah brought along the letter ה (He) usually referred to as the first or upper ה. The third letter, ו (Vau), is symbolic of the heavens and was made manifest along with the Sephiroth Chesed through Yesod inclusive. The second, or lower ה symbolically represents the earth and came into existence along with the Sephirah Malkuth.

The Tetragrammaton therefore contains the whole of the Sephirothic configuration: the point of the יod is the Sephirah Kether, the Crown; the יod itself is Chokmah, Wisdom; the first ה is the Sephirah Binah; the ו the next six Sephiroth and the second ה, Malkuth.

The seventy-two names of God inscribed on the petals of the symbolic sunflower. Above the circle they are written according to the Hebrew Kabbalah, below are two trees bearing the symbols of the planets (left), the zodiac signs with the names of the tribes of Israel (right). From Athanasius Kircher, Oedipus Aegyptiacus, Rome 1652.

This outline of the Tetragrammaton, as pointed out earlier, symbolises the body of man. Yet it suggests also the existence of a process of creation within man which becomes ‘mythologised’ in terms of a family. The יod, in that it is identified with the Sephirah Chokmah, is thought of as masculine and is the father; the first ה, in that it is identified with Binah, is thought of as feminine and is the mother; the ו, in that its numerical value is six, and is composed of the six Sephiroth which constitute the body of the Microprosopus, is the son born of their union. The final ה is Malkuth, the Microprosopus’ bride or Nakha. The bride which emerges from him is his Eve, the so-called Inferior Mother.

Technically speaking, the Sephirah Tiphareth, Beauty, standing at the centre of the Sephiroth composing the body of the Microprosopus, is called the Son.