

Psychosynthesis and the Kabbalah

WHAT I DID IN THE HOLIDAYS

MIKE STILLWELL

Within this essay I would like to compare and contrast some of the theories, maps and models of Psychosynthesis with those of the Kabbalah, and in so doing to produce a psychospiritual tool which may shed some light on the relationships between archetypes of the Self.

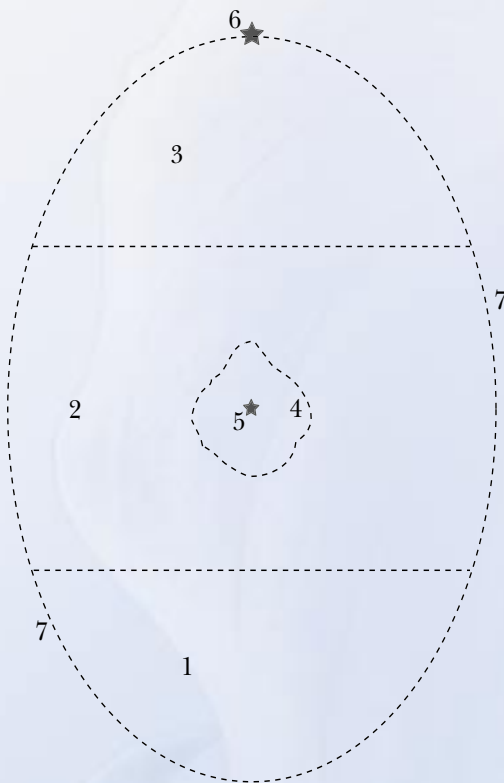


Mike Stillwell

1: PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

'Roberto Assagioli is one of the giants in the realm of psychology and consciousness expansion. His most famous contribution to human understanding was psychosynthesis, a comprehensive approach to self-realisation which combines a convincing theory of human psychology with a practical therapy to achieve one's full potential (which) evolved out of 50 years' psychospiritual reflections which comprise a huge body of work.' (Assagioli, 'Transpersonal Development' 1988, back cover.) From that body of work I would like to highlight a number of key concepts and techniques.

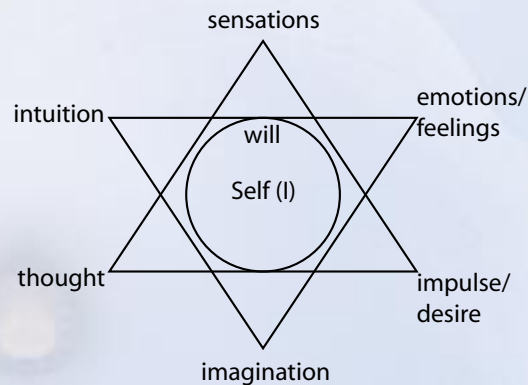
THE 'EGG DIAGRAM'



According to Ferrucci ('What We May Be' 1982, p. 411) 'Assagioli's so called 'egg diagram' represents our total psyche. The three horizontal divisions of the oval stand for our past, present and future. ... The 'lower unconscious' mainly represents our personal psychological past... The middle unconscious is where skills and states of mind reside which can be brought at will into our field of consciousness... the superconscious is

the region from which we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations... It is the source of the higher feelings ... of genius and of the states of contemplation, illumination, and ecstasy.' He continues, 'Who experiences those levels?... the personal self, or 'I' ... The personal self is a reflection or outpost of the Transpersonal Self... Personal and Transpersonal Self are in fact the same reality experienced at different levels: our true essence beyond all masks and conditionings.' (ibid. pages 44-451.) The egg diagram, with key, is included below.

THE STAR DIAGRAM



Ferrucci goes on to present 'Assagioli's 'Star diagram' (which) represents our psychological functions. It clarifies other aspects of our inner world, particularly the relationship of our several psychological functions to the self and the will. In the process of psychosynthesis, a person passes from being a disordered collection of clashing tendencies to being a meaningfully harmonized whole around a centre: the self. Through the action of the will, the self can then regulate each function of the psychophysical organism.' (pages 45-46)

SUBPERSONALITIES

Again referring to Ferrucci's book, he says, 'We can easily perceive our actual multiplicity by realising how often we modify our general outlook, changing our model of the universe with the same facility with which we change

dress. And for each of (these models) we develop a corresponding self-image and a set of body postures and gestures, feelings, behaviors, words, habits and beliefs .. (which) constitutes in itself a kind of miniature personality, or ... subpersonality. (page 47) He continues, 'Subpersonalities become harmful only when they control us. One of the aims of this work, therefore, is to prevent us from becoming dominated - and consequently limited - by them, and to aid us in identifying with and dis-identifying from them at will'. (page 52) On the following page he writes, 'Subpersonalities ... are degradations or distortions of timeless qualities existing in the higher levels of the psyche.'

This view of subpersonalities as 'degraded archetypes' (page 54) is pursued by Gretchen Sliker ('Multiple Mind' 1992). She reiterates the stages of subpersonality work - recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration and synthesis - and comments: '(In) the final steps ... the old pattern is ... pulled apart so that reformation or transformation can take place. The core archetype - a meaning, idea, or function - remains stable and is the basis for transformation.' (page 72)

PSYCHOPHYSICAL FUNCTIONS

Whitmore (Psychosynthesis Counselling in Action' 1991) writes 'Identification with predominant subpersonalities has already been discussed, but identification also occurs with psychophysical functions. For example some people seem to have an overall identification with their body ... Others are more identified with their feeling life ... Yet others are identified with their minds and describe themselves in intellectual constructs. Psychosynthesis recognises these functions as instruments of experience, perception and action - but not as our essential core.' (page 93)

Sliker, combining Jungian psychology and psychosynthesis, writes, 'Jung's discussion of psychological types is a description of subpersonality types. He observed that four basic psychological functions - thinking,

feeling, sensation and intuition - give rise to four psychological types.' She mentions mandalas (symmetrical visual patterns) as archetypes of wholeness, saying, 'Many show a balanced figure of four points within a circle,' equating such figures with 'four equally developed subpersonalities around a point of balance, a center.' She continues, 'Jung indicates that the pull for balance between the parts of the psyche results in the definition of a center.'

SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Whitmore describes self-identification as disidentifying from 'the changing contents of consciousness' and 'remembering that we are essentially a self ... an essential tool for psychological health. (ibid. pages 93-94) In the appendix to her book she defines the four stages of basic self-identification, recognising and disidentifying from body, feelings and mind in turn, then identifying with 'what remains.' 'It is the essence of myself, a centre of pure consciousness ... I am a centre of being and of will, capable of observing, directing and using all my mental, emotional and physical processes. I am I.'

MENTAL IMAGERY

Whitmore says, 'The psychosynthesis counsellor primarily uses mental imagery in one of two ways, or in combination: evocatively by drawing out that which already exists in the unconscious, and by consciously choosing to recondition the psyche with imagery that is positive.' She goes on to say that 'With mental imagery the creative myth-making, story-telling function of the unconscious is at work.' (page 47-48)

SUMMARY

In the briefest possible way we have glanced at the egg diagram, the Star diagram, subpersonalities, psychophysical functions, self-identification and mental imagery. Giving the last words to Whitmore and to Assagioli himself,

the essence of the psychosynthesis perspective is: 'that each of us has a purpose in life ... analogous to a journey ... Each step forward contains the possibility of actualizing our potential.' (ibid. page 1) Later she writes, 'Assagioli maintained that the purpose of psychosynthesis is to help integrate, to synthesize, the multiple aspects of the individual's personality around a personal centre and later to affect a greater synthesis between the personal ego and the Transpersonal Self.' (page 9)

2. QABALAH

In the second section of this essay we will look at a number of Kabbalistic models and techniques, drawing parallels with the above material where appropriate. It is intended that comparable elements of Qabalah will be given in the same order as above, and previous explanations may be taken to apply in every particular to the following concepts except where differences are shown.

QABALAH

Qabalah with a 'Q' generally refers to the western adaptation of a secret body of wisdom, while Kabbalah with a 'K' can often denote the original Jewish tradition from which Qabalah derives. Many, many books have been written on both since the sixth century A.D., most of them within the last twenty years, and most rehashing a very few original works. Qabalah, however spelt, is in essence a mystic vision of the ultimate reality behind the world of form, and attempts to quantify the varieties of mystical experience in a communicable way.

David Fontana ('The Secret Language of Symbols', 1993) writes, 'The Kabbalah is an extraordinary system of theoretical and practical wisdom designed to provide its students with not only a path of mental and spiritual growth, but also a symbolic map of creation itself. Rooted in third century mysticism ... (its) powerful appeal led to its incorporation into certain aspects of Christian thinking

in the sixteenth century (and it was thought to hold the key to) the classical Greek teachings of Pythagoras, Plato and the Orphics.

'Essentially, the Kabbalah is an esoteric teaching centered on a system of symbols, which are held to reflect the mystery of God' and the universe, and for which the Kabbalist must find the key. (These keys) allow him to understand the spiritual dimensions of the universe, while at a practical level they allow him to use powers associated with these levels for magical purposes - that is for the processes of physical, psychological and spiritual transformation ... Just as God is hidden, so too are the inner secrets of his divine message (in holy scripture). These secrets may be revealed by decoding the scriptures through a system of numerical equivalences or Gematria, in which each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a number (and a meaning) associated with it.' (page 152) Gematria has no psychosynthetic equivalent.

On the topic of the Qabalah as an elaborate symbol system, a quote is here included that are intended to be suggestive rather than didactic. 'The Holy Qabalah, based as it is on pure number, evidently possesses an infinite number of symbols. Its scope is coterminous with existence itself, and it lacks nothing in precision, purity, or indeed any other perfection. But it cannot be taught; each man (and woman) must select the materials for the main structure of his (or her) system. It requires years of work to erect a worthy building, Such a building is never finished; every day spent on it adds new ornaments. The Qabalah is therefore the living temple of the Holy Ghost. It is the man (or woman, her or) himself and the universe expressed in terms of thought whose language is so rich that even the letters of the alphabet have no limit. In the light of the Qabalah the shadows of transitory things are instantly banished' (The 'Master Therion', quoted by Parfitt 1995)

Gonzalez-Wippler writes, 't is an accepted fact that the universe is based on numbers. And Carl G. Jung said that numbers were pre-existent to

consciousness; they were discovered, not invented. He further stated that it is not an audacious conclusion to define numbers psychologically as 'archetypes of order' that have become conscious. He also states that numbers and synchronicity (meaningful coincidence) are deeply linked. A number is a symbol used to convey an idea, an abstraction, and may be the most primitive element of order in the human mind.' (1974 page 12) She continues, 'The Kabbalah teaches that God created the universe by means of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are twenty-two states of consciousness of the cosmic energy, the essence of all that exists. In Hebrew the letter Beth (for example) not only means 'house', it is the essence and archetype of all dwellings and containers.' (ibid. pages 13-141)

Gretchen Sliker ('Multiple Mind' 1992) writes, 'The mythopoetic (function) is the natural, fundamental language of the mind, a process laid down before the acquisition of a cultural language. The 'words' of this primordial

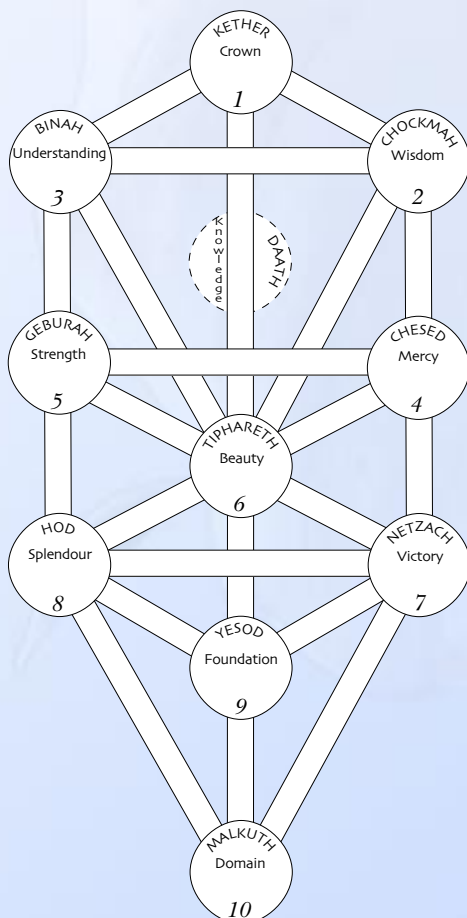
language are symbolic pictures, some of which are numinous, that is, highly energised and psychoactive.' (pages 71-72)

From the basic premise that numbers are archetypes of order, a progression of emanations from the singularity of the divine to the multiplicity of matter, and that language is a development from, and link with, the deeper levels of the symbol-using unconscious mind, the Qabalah has evolved a complex schema. Add to this premise a belief that the human psyche mirrors the divine psyche that is the universe, and can link microcosmic aspects of the self with their macrocosmic counterparts - the archetypes 'writ big' - and channel or affect those energies, then one may appreciate the theoretical potential of the Qabalah as a vehicle for transformation.

THE TREE OF LIFE

'Etz Hayim, the Tree of Life, is a glyph, a composite symbol that represents both the Heavenly Man, Adam Kadmon, conceived as the macrocosmos, and man in the material world, seen as the microcosmos. It resembles, in essence, Yggdrasil, the mythological (world) tree of the Scandinavians. The Tree of Life is composed of ten spheres known as 'sephiroth' (singular sephira). The spheres are interconnected by twenty-two lines that are called 'paths', representing the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The sephiroth are numerical emanations, representing the abstract forms of the numbers one to ten, and symbolises a development and an attitude of the Deity, as well as of man. The paths are phases of 'subjective consciousness' by means of which the soul becomes aware of cosmic manifestation.' (Gonzalez-Wippler 1974 page 73)

The Tree of Life is in essence a map of relationships. The spheres are archetypal functions of the psyche (and the larger universal psyche), spheres of consciousness that are forces in man and in the world. Although the Jewish religion is monotheistic, the various names and



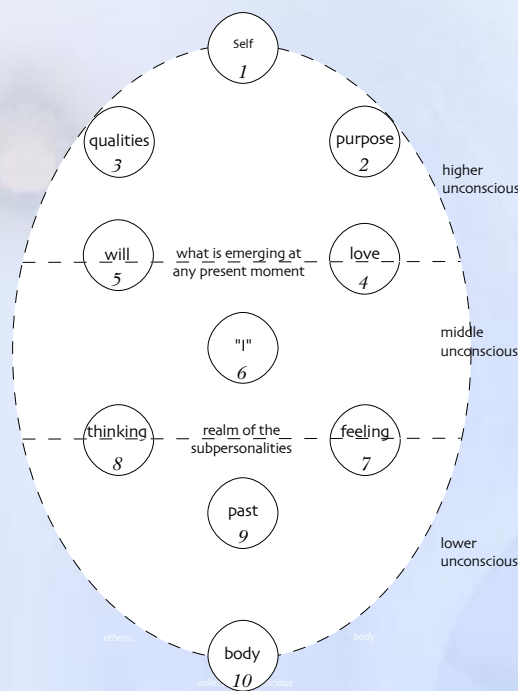
titles of the one God that appear in scripture are seen by Kabbalists as being precise metaphysical terms describing aspects, principles and manifestations of Divine purpose - 'archetypes of order'. The paths between the spheres are states of consciousness 'moving' between the spheres. Some ancient Jewish literature compares the two aspects to chariots and palaces.

Obviously a key of some sort is needed to unlock the concepts outlined above, and we will turn to psychosynthesis to provide a set of possible keys. Depicted below is a representation of the Tree of Life, with Assagioli's 'egg' diagram for comparison. The Tree may be viewed as having the same levels. At the base is the lower unconscious, containing repressed material, functions of the autonomic nervous system, complexes and primitive drives. The lowest sephira is seen as representing a sphere of awareness mainly centered around the body and senses. This, according to Qabalists, is our normal state of awareness, lost within the past and ruled by unconscious projections. The metaphor is that of an apple that has fallen (or been plucked) from a tree, and represents man's fall from grace, from a direct relationship with his Self. Above this is a sephira representing a sphere of awareness which may be compared with the mythopoetic function (see previous page), a 'place' of contact with the Self through the medium of the individual's symbolic inner world and through an awareness of the similarly symbolic nature of the outer world of events. Events are exchanges of energy within the psyche; the individual psyche and the world psyche. The two spheres above this are polarised functions, thought and feeling, depicted on the Tree as being half way between the lower and middle unconscious.

Above these is the sphere of consciousness that is the 'I', the personal self. On the Tree, that which is above us rules us, and polarities must be explored, balanced (and disidentified from) before we can move 'up'. Above them are the archetypal functions of Love and Will,

(mercy and judgment). Above this polarity is a 'sphere that is not a sphere', the place of direct relationship with the Transpersonal realms, from which the 'apple' can be said to have fallen. Above these are a trinity of sephiroth - the polarity of spiritual understanding and spiritual purpose which are love and will on a higher level: and at the 'top' (which is also the innermost point within), the Higher Self.

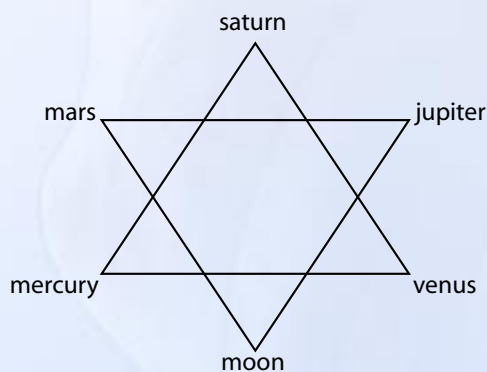
Broadly speaking, the Tree can be seen to show the ascent of consciousness through the levels of body, personality, soul and Spirit, or the descent into manifestation of Divine consciousness into matter. It differs from the implication of psychosynthesis that we 'start' work at the place of the 'I'. Each of the middle sephiroth on the Tree are seen as unifying centres, projections of the Self, and developmental stages of consciousness.



The spheres, in Qabalah, are often correlated with the astrological planets, which may give an immediate insight into the nature and 'personality' of the sephirothic functions. If the planets are taken as metaphors for archetypal functions of the psyche, then their changing cycles of relationship may elucidate the supposed link between microcosmic and macrocosmic forces.

The planets are also 'Gods' (in Qabalah, aspects of the one God, in psychology, functions of the Self), and it would be (and is) possible to use this mythological link to map out any pantheon, ideology or belief system onto the structure of the Tree as if it were a living psychic filing cabinet. For example, the 'Star diagram' may be compared to the 'planetary hexagram' shown below, which is itself extrapolated from the Tree (with the minor difference that Saturn stands in for all three Transpersonal 'planets' as being the most accessible aspect of the Higher Self).

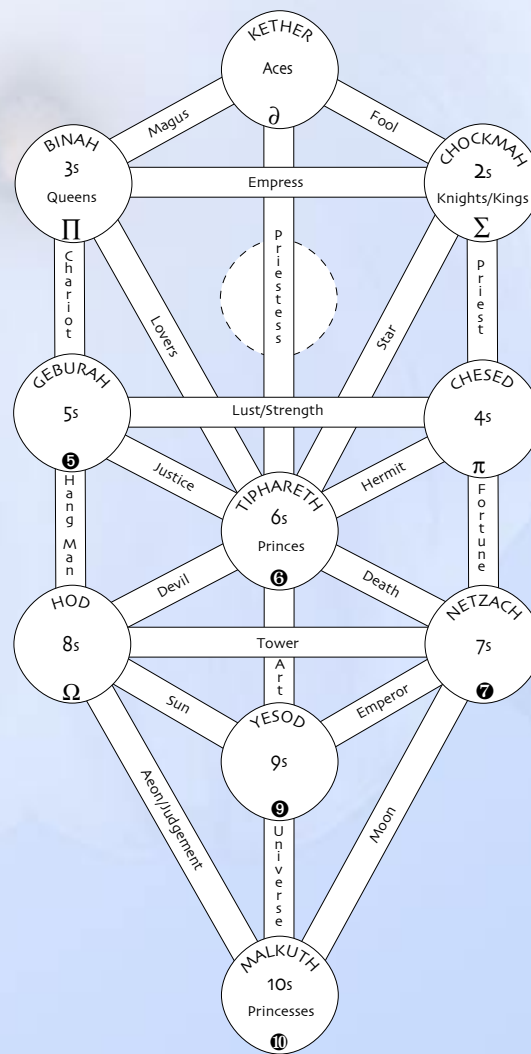
Although the correspondences of the Star diagram differ slightly (perhaps because 'will' has been moved to a more central position next to the 'I' leaving a gap to be filled in) one can see that a magician who draws a hexagram on the floor and stands in the centre to evoke or banish planetary forces may be engaged in a process of identification, disidentification and coordination that would not be out of place in psychospiritual training or therapy.



QABALAH SUBPERSONALITIES AND TAROT

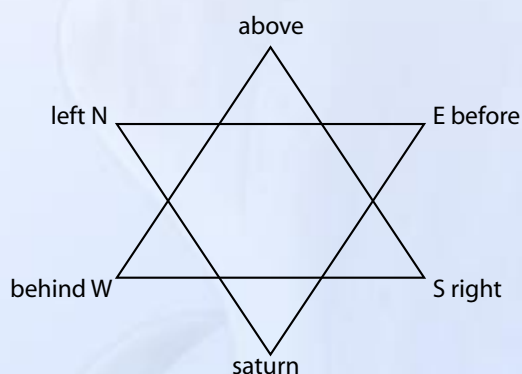
For reasons of space it will only be possible to give a brief view of this vast topic. Perhaps the clearest way to introduce this subject is through the use of another diagram, showing the cards of the Tarot on the 'filing cabinet' of the Tree. The major arcana, the twenty-two picture cards, are assigned to the paths, and the 'pip' or number cards are assigned to the ten spheres. The four suits and types of court cards are assigned

to the four levels of the Tree. The twenty-two trumps (sometimes exalted keys) are seen as archetypes 'moving' between the spheres. The four ones or aces are assigned to the first sphere, the four twos to the second sphere, etc. The court cards (usually King, Queen, Prince and Princess or Knave) are linked with the suits of wands, cups, swords and discs, and are roughly congruous in this context with Spirit, soul, personality and body - the stages of manifestation from Spirit into matter. It is vital to understand that the Qabalist uses this system in order to connect with self aware aspects of his own psyche in a transformative way, and that the cards are doorways to these aspects and not rigid definitions. Again, psychosynthesis will provide a key (see section on subpersonalities above).



The Tarot and the Tree of Life

In Qabalah, each aspect of the psyche is seen as having the same structure as the whole psyche. A similar idea is that subpersonalities may be viewed as having the same general structure as the egg diagram - that they encapsulate a Transpersonal quality that is expressed as a need, a want and a behaviour at different levels. Another way of viewing this would be to use the example of a cube. A cube has six faces - above, below, and four outer faces (plus a centre). Similarly each aspect of the Self, as well as the psyche itself, is seen in Qabalah as having a higher potential, a lower aspect, and four equal aspects that may be equated with Jung's view of mandalas and his theory of psychological types. This may differ slightly from the psychosynthetic view that subpersonalities exist as one aspect and on one level, with the potential to move to other levels by transformation or degradation. Qabalah views these aspects as continuums, present at each level in differing forms. Archetypes are the original 'seal' of an energy, subpersonalities the imprints of that seal (or 'ectypes' - an impression of a seal or medal) on different levels. 'An archetype is an energy, a power, but an ectype has a face.' (Macbeth 1991)



SELF IDENTIFICATION, QABALAH AND PSYCHOPHYSICAL FUNCTIONS

Referring again to the Tree of Life, the self-identification exercise may be seen as being similar to moving up the lower spheres to the central place of the 'I' although the correspondence

is not exact. Viewed in terms of Jung's psychological functions, self-identification might be viewed as disidentifying from body, feelings and mind and presumably identifying with intuition, a seeming exercise in imbalance. What is, however, possible is that these types or aspects operate vertically as well as horizontally within the psyche. In the Qabalah, the 'elements' (comparable to Jung's personality types) are both horizontal and equal aspects, like the four outer faces of a cube, and also vertical and developmental, like the levels of the suits and court cards on the Tree. The image of four stacked cubes or linked Trees is useful.

MENTAL IMAGERY

In Qabalah this is usually called pathworking, skrying or the spirit vision or (incorrectly) astral projection. This is one of the major ways to explore the Tree of Life, and many and varied techniques and practices exist for drawing out, engaging with, or reconditioning the psyche. I have included in the bibliography a selection of recommended reading on both Qabalah in general and pathworking in particular. Knight (1975 page 146) says, 'The principle vehicle of consciousness by which we come to terms with the inner side of creation is the visual imagination, and early magical training consists of the development and disciplining of this faculty'. He continues on the next page, 'We must first, then, build compass points on the 'inner' so that we can orient ourselves ... There are many ways in which this can be done and all occult symbol systems, be they the Tree of Life of the Qabalists, The Tarot, The I Ching, the magician's circle or mandala, the image of the heavenly sphere of astrology, are all methods towards this end. Properly speaking they are models of the universe (inner and outer) and by learning to find one's way about the model so do we better equip ourselves to orient in respect of the larger actuality.'

3. FINAL CONCLUSION

It may be that I have only succeeded in insulting two rich and fascinating belief systems by taking a few concepts from each for the purposes of comparison. It is my hope that each may elucidate the other, suggesting new possibilities and ways of working. To close with a final quote, this time from Drury's 'The Shaman and the Magician - Journeys Between the Worlds' (1982 page 21), 'Clearly in dealing with the shaman we are not assessing whether what he believes to be taking place (in trance) is true or false. What is more crucial is the nature of his experiential domain: what he perceives, how he relates to it, what he claims to learn from his experience. We have already noted that in trance the shaman, as it were, enters his belief system. What is quite crucial is the extent to which his belief system allows profound insights, transformations of consciousness and identity and a renewed sense of being within the world.'

Whatever the belief system - Alchemy, Sufism, Buddhism, Christianity or the various psychologies, for example, - we are being offered an interface with inner and outer principles, laws, stages and concepts, a structure with various points of reference to 'hang' our (or our client's) experiences on. It may be that all products of the creative imagination and analytic mind reflect aspects of inner psychic structure, and the outer world of which we ourselves are a product. A shaman may explore his three 'worlds' or levels of inner experience (via a central tree or mountain) in trance, and connect with his Self and the larger World Soul. The magician may build a tower or 'four square citadel' in imagination, with a doorway at each compass point through which to explore his inner landscapes of the elements - body, feelings, mind and intuition, earth, water, air and fire, in a horizontal direction, with vertical elemental stories rising upwards through each of the 'worlds' - body, feelings, mind, intuition and Spirit (with four windows at each story). Spirit is at the centre of every level, and above, and in

every quarter and place. The Qabalist may 'build the Tree', in imagination, within his own aura, awakening energy centres as he 'rises through the planes', making of his body a 'living temple of the Holy Ghost'. The Eastern mystic may use the power of visualisation to connect with chakra centres and Kundalini energy. The practitioners of Transactional analysis, Jungian psychology, Gestalt, Kleinian therapy, object relations, systems theory and many others all offer both a scheme of the psyche and how it works, and names for aspects of the psyche.

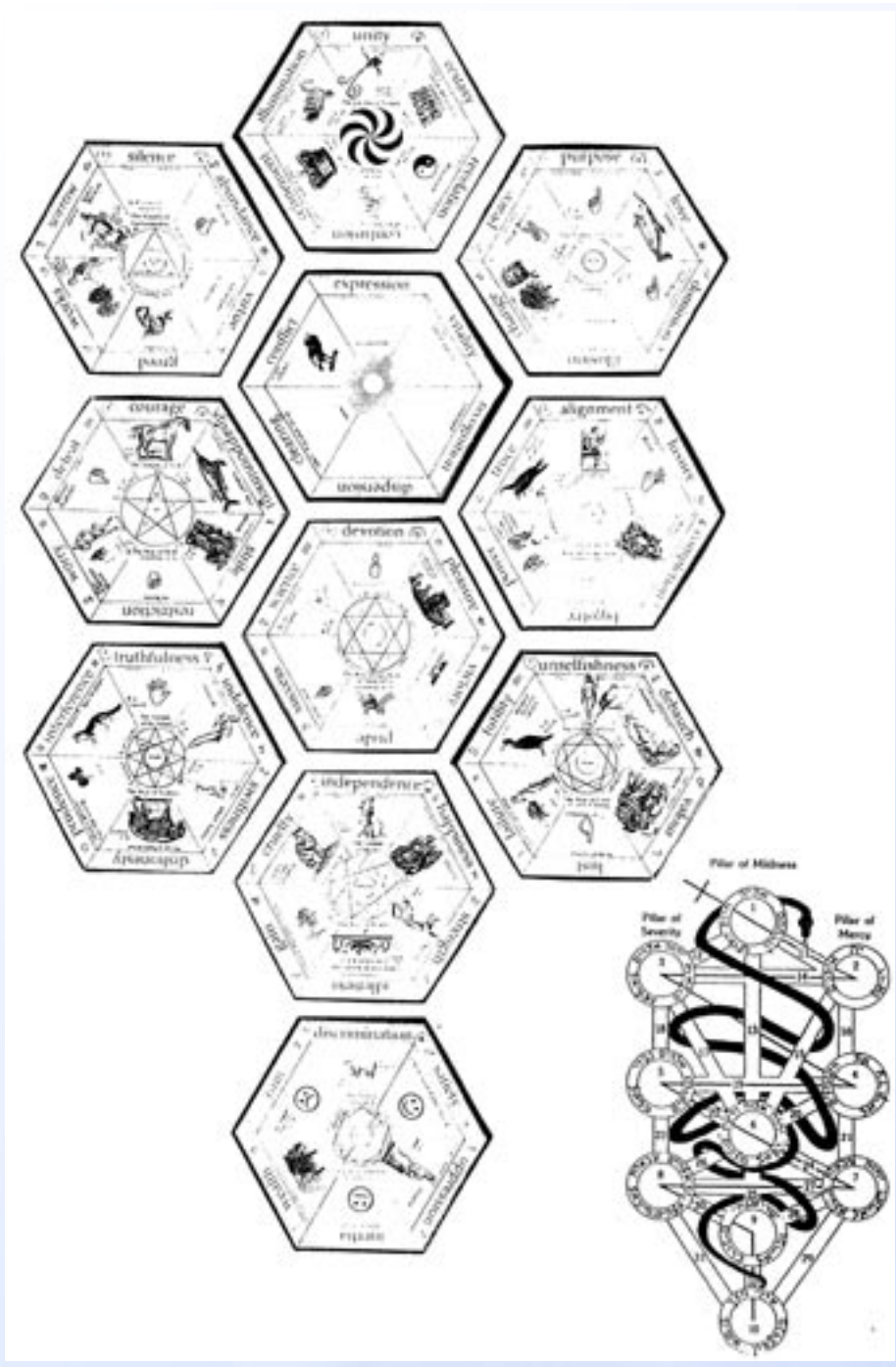
It may be that Psychosynthesis is unique in recognising that its maps, models and theories are simply tools - 'This is not the truth!'. The Qabalist views the Tree of Life as comprising similar levels to the egg diagram; he also often pictures each level as a 'Tree' in itself, and the model of four linked Trees of Life is an important concept. He would argue that there are 'finer' realms co-existent with our own, following similar structures but different laws, and that it is possible to visit and affect those realms that are nearer to the source of continuous creation - comparable to the 'mythopoetic' levels of reality.

The magician climbing the spiral staircase of his tower, or lifting the flagstone to, descend into the tower's crypt, might say, 'This is the truth at this level.' The psychosynthesis guide, recognising that a client is identified with a part of the self, will know that 'this is the truth, the world view, of this aspect'.

In terms of belief systems, like musical instruments, it may be best to simply pick one that one feels comfortable with and learn to play it. As for 'What I Did in the Holidays' by starting to build a composite 'instrument', I feel that I have caught an echo of the 'music of the spheres', a sense of the harmony behind the notes that any one instrument can play.

I think I was probably trying to build an electric guitar.





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