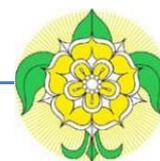


The Other Self: A Kabbalistic Viewpoint



The difference between the paneem or 'face to face' way and the a'hoor or 'back view' way of presenting the cabalistic Tree of Life.

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*And God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...
So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created
He him; male and female created He them. (Genesis 1: 26-27)*

In certain studies by students of Christian Cabala (derived from the Jewish Kabbalah), much has been made of man being the image of God as if he/she were a reflection in a mirror—the mirror of the divine mind. A mirror is indeed a traditional symbol of the mind, and the reflection a symbol of that 'image'—God in this case being associated with light, whose radiance or 'direct beam' (to use Francis Bacon's words) is turned into the 'beam reflected' by the mirror: -

The essential form of knowledge...is nothing but a representation of truth: for the truth of being and the truth of knowing are one, differing no more than the direct beam and the beam reflected.¹

However, if we take the 'mirror' point of view too literally, without also bearing in mind that the image spoken of is a 'likeness', it would mean that the observer would normally see the image as a mirror image, in which right and left-hand sides would be reversed. That is to say, the mirror image would not be the same as if seeing another person in front of you, facing you. The mirror image would not be another you, another person as such, but only a reversed picture of yourself, which would not be a true likeness. From this unfortunate interpretation of *Genesis* 1: 26-27 (quoted above), a whole neo-cabalistic philosophy has been devised, in which the cabalistic Tree of Life is turned left to right and right to left in respect of man, the microcosm, in his relationship to God, the Macrocosm.

Such a reversal has fundamental implications, for the right-hand of God, which cabalistically is described as Mercy or Grace and associated with the Wisdom or Word of God that crowns the right-hand side of the Tree, is made to correspond to the left-hand of man. Likewise, the left-hand of God, described as Judgement or Severity and associated with the Holy Intelligence or Understanding that crowns the left-hand side of the Tree, is made to correspond to the right-hand of man. Thus, because the left-hand side is traditionally considered to be the receptive, reflective, formative 'feminine' side and the right-hand side to be the forceful, initiating, creative 'masculine' side, mercy is considered in this viewpoint to be a receptive and feminine quality whilst judgement is seen to be a forceful and masculine one, in terms of man the microcosm.

This interpretation of the 'image of God' would seem to be an unfortunate mistake, derived from a misunderstanding of what a 'likeness' means. Even when painting a portrait of oneself, or commissioning an artist to make one, the artist would not produce a mirror image of the person being painted. What is painted is another 'self', so that the person can look at his portrait and see himself as his other self, standing before him. He sees himself as others would

see him—a being in his own right, where right is right and left is left: a true image or likeness, in other words.

This can be further understood in the words of the first of the Ten Commandments, where the likeness of anything is associated with a graven image—a graven image being primarily a statue of something, like the statue of the calf (a symbolic image of the incarnatory form of the god Osiris) that the Israelites made whilst Moses was communing with God upon Mount Sinai: -

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth...²

This is a most important point to understand. The likeness or image created by the Elohim³ in the divine mind is not a mirror image but a perfectly self-contained ‘other self’—a true image or likeness of God the Creator. A good analogy might be the laser-produced hologram.

In such a creation the whole of matter is involved. It is not left out, as it would be in the case of matter being simply a mirror reflecting the light. Matter, under the influence of the creative energy, takes on (or gives birth to) the form that is the image or other self. This matter is understood in Cabala to be an aspect of the Divine Mother, the matrix of all Creation—the divine mind or Holy Intelligence. It is She who gives birth in her womb to the child of light who is the ‘image’ of the Father: hence Jesus’ words, “The Father and I are One”—one in likeness, one in consciousness, one in realisation, one in truth.

The Divine Father, who is the Creator, is known as the Wisdom or Word. His ‘sound’ is that which moves matter, vibrating its etheric substance into the form or ‘image’: -

And God said, ‘Let there be light:’ and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.⁴

Using the analogy of sound rather than light, the ‘image’ can be referred to as the ‘echo’, as in Francis Bacon’s description: -

For whatever is worthy of existence is worthy of knowledge—which is the image (or echo) of existence.⁵

When we make an echo, we hear reflected back to us the note, sentence or song that we first made, in a copycat version of what we had spoken or sung. We do not hear an echo that is in reverse form to what we have said. If we did, it would be somewhat confusing! Moreover, we would have to finish what we were saying before the echo could begin to return to us, which is clearly not the case. In divine creation, the creative sound is still sounding and will continue to sound throughout the eternity of time, whilst the echo is already returning to its divine source in a continuous reflection of the continuous sound.

Existence, or pure Being, is the divine Word. It simply is. The cabalistic formula for this is the expression, ‘I AM’. Just as the image of sound is its echo, so the image of existence is the knowledge of that existence—self-consciousness, in other words.

There are two basic types of consciousness: innocent or pure consciousness that contains the wisdom but doesn’t yet know it, and self-consciousness or self-knowledge that does know.

Pure consciousness is associated with the pure but innocent intelligence—the intelligence of the heart—which has the capacity to know the wisdom that exists within it as its life or being, but as yet is ignorant of it and what it means. Self-consciousness, on the other hand, is the child of wisdom and intelligence, being the knowledge or illumination that occurs as a result of the wisdom becoming active in the intelligence and being given an intelligible or knowable form by that intelligence. We can sometimes glimpse what this means when someone tells us something new that strikes a chord in our hearts. We then might say, “Oh, but I knew that already!” However, the reality is that we did not *know* it before, as such, and yet we had the truth of it already in our hearts. We needed something, however, to wake it up and bring it to our mind as knowledge of that truth.

The cabalistic name for this knowledge, image or echo is ‘That’: hence the complete formula or god-name for both the Holy Trinity and the Son of God is ‘I AM That I AM’. In Hebrew this is rendered by ‘*AH IH Asher AH IH*’. *AH IH* refers to ‘the Living God’ (‘I AM’), the parent of ‘That’.

When the possibility of time and change, or gradual unfolding, is brought into the equation, the formula becomes ‘I AM all that hath been, and that is, and that shall be’. The god-name signifying this unfolding state of divinity is *JHVH*, meaning ‘He who was, is, and is to come’. This is essentially the name of the ‘Image’ or ‘Son’ of God, known as the ‘great name’ or ‘revealing name’, from which is derived the more personal name of *Jehoshua* or Jesus, the *Messiah* or Christ. The idea of the unfolding nature of this revelation or knowledge of God is embodied in the story of the two main appearances of the Christ: first as the shepherd, then as the king. *Messiah* means ‘king’. The shepherd is not a king, but one day he will be.

If we were to see Jesus now, as a personal manifestation in human form of the Son of God, we would not see a mirror image but a real, live person, complete in his own right. So it is with ourselves also, each of us being a child of God in the unfolding. When we see each other it is possible that we may see the image of God, where mercy is associated with the right hand that can bless and give good things, and judgement with the left hand that has the sensitivity to receive and assess the truth. Hence, for instance, a priest will always bless with the right hand, and we will always offer the right hand in any gesture of friendship such as shaking hands.

The sovereign also uses the right and left hands symbolically. For instance, the sceptre that is held in the sovereign’s right hand, and the orb in the left hand, symbolise mercy and judgement respectively—mercy being a creative force for good (hence the sceptre, symbol of force and radiance) and judgement being associated with law and order and the governance of the realm (hence the orb, symbol of form and the world). In classical terms, the sceptre is equivalent to Jupiter’s thunderbolt or lightning flash, whilst the orb expresses the original symbol of Mars (i.e. a circle surmounted by a cross). Jupiter is associated with Mercy, and Mars with Judgement, in the Tree of Life.

In more martial terms, the classical spear-shakers, Apollo and Pallas Athena, each held a spear in the right hand. Athena also held a shield in her left hand. The spear represents a ray of light vibrating (i.e. shaking) with creative sound. The shield signifies the mirror-like state of the mind which can receive, reflect and give form to the light: however, the image shown on the shield is always a ‘face-to-face’ image, as in heraldry, and not a mirror image. These two attributes, the spear and shield, like the sceptre and orb, represent the creative aspect of mercy and the protective aspect of judgement respectively.



Frontispiece illustration to Francis Bacon's 1641 French edition of *The Wisdom of the Ancients*.

Another reason for the unfortunate reversed interpretation of the Tree of Life seems to be a misunderstanding of the way the Tree is usually presented in Jewish Kabbalah, which is from the back. That is to say, the diagram is drawn in such a way that it represents God the Macrocosm and man the microcosm as seen from behind (the *a'hoor* way).

This is not the only way Kabbalah presents the Tree of Life, for it also uses the *paneem* or 'face to face' way.

However, the *a'hoor* way is the most common and is the one that has been misunderstood, with certain people misrepresenting it by treating it as if it were face on to the viewer. This confusion causes left and right to be mixed up, so that the Wisdom and Mercy attributes of the right-hand side of the Tree of Life are made to appear as belonging to the left-hand side, and the Intelligence and Judgement attributes of the left-hand side are made to appear as belonging to the right-hand side. This confusion is not just a modern phenomenon but can be traced as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries (although most cabalistic books and illustrations of that era show the correct interpretation).

‘self’ to love. The divine image is essential to the creative process, which process Cabala teaches is for the purpose of self-knowledge—so that God might know God.

As God is love, and as true knowledge only comes by experience, so knowledge of love only comes through the expression and experience of that love. God’s *alter ego* is His friend, His beloved, the human soul, whilst our truest friend and lover is God.

Man, the ‘image’ or ‘likeness’ of God, was created male and female in imitation of the divine Male and Female, the Father-Mother God, who are in a perpetual unified state of love and love-making.

Our human loves, such as between male and female, enable us therefore to manifest that divine love in our human relationships, so that we may become true likenesses or children of God. Eventually we might be able to look at each other and say, with truth, “I see my friend, my beloved: I see God.”

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Endnotes

¹ Francis Bacon, *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning* (1605).

² Exodus 10: 4.

³ The creative Logoi of God as God the Creator—hence the plural tense is used: “And God said, ‘Let Us...’”

⁴ Genesis 1: 3-4.

⁵ Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Bk I, Aph.120 (1620).

⁶ Exodus 13: 19.

⁷ Exodus 13: 20.

⁸ Exodus 13: 23.

⁹ e.g. Isaac Myer’s *Qabbalah: The Philosophical Writing of Avicbron*, pp 252-3. This book comprises a translation of the philosophical writings of Solomon Ben Yehudah Ibn Gebirol and their connection with the Hebrew Kabbalah and the *Sepher ha-Zohar*, described as perhaps the finest work on the Kabbalah as it has ever had.