

# The Two Ways of Seeing Truth

---



*The two fundamental ways of seeing truth as known to, described and used in the wisdom traditions, religions, symbolism and mystery schools of initiation.*

Author: Peter Dawkins

## Back View or Face-to-face

There are two fundamental ways of seeing truly, which are referred to in the wisdom teachings as either seeing the back of someone or something, or seeing someone or something face-to-face. (Seeing a mirror image, wherein reality is reversed, it should be noted, is not seeing truly.)

For this reason, in Kabbalah there are two ways of seeing the 'Tree of Life' – the *a'hoor* ('back view')<sup>1</sup> way, or the *paneem* ('face-to-face')<sup>2</sup> way. This is referenced in Exodus, the second book of the Hebrew Torah<sup>3</sup> and Holy Bible (Old Testament), when Moses goes up Mount Sinai for the eighth time, in order to see God (Jehovah)<sup>4</sup> in all God's glory. For this, God tells Moses beforehand that Moses will only be able to see God's back: "Then I will remove My hand, and you will see My back, but My face shall not be seen."<sup>5</sup> In the New Testament, however, the 'face-to-face' view is described, such as in the Transfiguration experience on Mount Hermon, when, witnessed by his three senior disciples, Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah, transfigured with light, after which all six are covered by a cloud of glory.<sup>6</sup>

St Paul puts it slightly differently, but essentially it means the same: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (1 Corinthians 13:11-12).<sup>7</sup>

## The Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries

In terms of seeing truth, these two ways of seeing refer to the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries of initiation. The Lesser Mysteries concern our life on earth, incarnate in a natural body, in the natural world, in the course of which we strive to develop good desires or goodwill, good thought or understanding, and good action or service. St Paul refers to these as faith, hope and charity. They form the fundamental degrees of initiation. In Freemasonry they are called the Craft degrees.

If we do this well, in love ('good' means loving), and undergo what is referred to as 'sacrificial death' as a result of doing good – i.e. sacrificing one's own life or self-interest so that others might live better – then that best part of ourselves is 'resurrected' in a new form of consciousness. This resurrected or raised consciousness is known as illumination, but it also has a form – a celestial form that is angelic-like. This celestial form is transmuted from our natural form, just as a burning candle transmutes itself into light. To set our hearts on fire with love, which we do by means of love in action, is another description of this, as also the imagery of the flaming heart. Christianity uses the flaming heart of Jesus as an illustration of

this. The Orphics used the imagery of Persephone being set on fire with love and birthing Dionysus as a result.

Both Jesus, the man, and Persephone, the virgin, symbolise the natural human soul whose heart is set on fire with the labour of love. The result is the birth of light. Something of the natural soul is transmuted into a form of light, referred to as a celestial or spiritual soul. The sun aspect of the light then shines through the face, lighting up the eyes and creating a halo around the head. St Paul refers to this when he says: “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.” (1 Corinthians 15:47.)

It is also referred to in Numbers, when the Lord (Jehovah) instructs Moses to tell Aaron to bless the children of Israel with these words: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”<sup>8</sup> The ‘countenance of the Lord’ is the meaning of the name ‘Michael’, the archangel of the sun and the heart. The sun is the orb of light in the loving heart’s flame of love. By means of devotedly intensifying and increasing love-in-action, this heart-flame and its sun grows larger and larger, and rises higher and higher. It is thereby lifted up until the sun shines through the face. The person has then become illuminated, sainted. That saintly person is shining with the countenance of the Lord, the face of love, for God is Love. This is true peace. It is also what is known as ‘Truth Revealed’.

However, for someone else to see this truth in someone’s face, and recognise it for what it really is – i.e. to see truth (God/Love) face-to-face, and know it – requires that someone else to also be in a state of illumination. Jesus, for instance, challenged his disciples to see this truth in him when he asked his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Simon son of Jonah (Peter) was the first or quickest to answer truly, seeing this truth ‘face-to-face’ in Jesus, and recognising it sufficiently to be able to name it. It was for this reason that Jesus gave Simon the additional name of Peter, with all that the name means.<sup>9</sup>

## Mystery School Practices

In terms of mystery school practices, such as with King Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem, the twin Great Pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which stood at the entrance to the temple, were key references or markers.<sup>10</sup> For instance, anyone approaching the temple from outside, via the outer and inner courts, would see the pillars and temple entrance ‘face to face’, with the left-hand pillar Boaz to the viewer’s right, and the right-hand pillar Jachin to the viewer’s left.

If one entered the temple, however, as a priest, to live a life of service (the Lesser Mysteries), then one could turn around and view the entrance and pillars from within the temple. Then the left-hand pillar Boaz would be on one’s left, and the right-hand pillar Jachin would be on one’s right. This also corresponds to the temple’s left and right. This is because the temple, like all temples (and churches), is symbolic of the body of a holy person or incarnate god-goddess lying on his-her back on the ground, supported by the earth and facing up into the sky, to heaven above. In Solomon’s Temple the head was represented by the Holy of Holies, and the body by the Holy Place. The Holy of Holies was to the west, and the temple entrance was to the east, with the whole temple laid out on an east-west axis.

Normally the veils of Solomon's Temple would be kept drawn, but at the equinoxes the veils would be drawn aside and the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, where he would stand by the Ark of the Covenant and face eastwards, looking out through the entrance and to the sun rising on the horizon. The light from the sun, as it rose above the horizon, would shine straight along the east-west axis and into the temple – into the Holy Place and Holy of Holies, both of which had their walls and ceilings inlaid with gold. The experience for the high priest in the Holy of Holies would have been one of illumination, enveloped in a 'cloud of glory', during which, looking into the light shining from the east, he would see the light, the sun, 'face-to-face'. Moreover, this glorious experience was not just a natural, physical one, as a metaphor of truth, but also gave a metaphysical, spiritual experience which could truly illumine the mind or soul of the high priest.

To become a high priest was, at least metaphorically, to enter the Greater Mysteries. To do this, the high priest had to offer himself as a living sacrifice at the Altar of Incense marking the heart of the temple, and thereby become a holy person. The burning of incense on the Altar of Incense was symbolic of this. It represented himself, offered as an oblation on the fire of love, with the rising 'air' of perfume representing his resurrected form, transmuted from his lower, natural self, and rising, like a phoenix, to become a celestial soul in the heavens above. Only then could he enter the Holy of Holies, turn around, and see truth in all its glory face-to-face.

In terms of the Kabbalah, in the Lesser Mysteries the student needs to study him or herself internally, therefore the Tree of Life is shown the *a'hoor* ('back view') way. In the Greater Mysteries the fully fledged initiate sees the Tree of Life the *paneem* ('face-to-face') way. The transference from one way to the other is a 'turning around'. It is akin to a psychological death and a resurrection – the death of the lesser and birth of the greater.

In Speculative Freemasonry, which uses Solomon's Temple as the symbolic imagery for the Craft Degrees, the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree culminates in a symbolic death. This death is followed by an entombment and a resurrection. Then follow the higher degrees of the Greater Mysteries, beginning with the Holy Royal Arch degree. The symbolic imagery for this is the rebuilt (instaurated) Solomon's Temple, known as the Second Temple or Zerubbabel's Temple,<sup>11</sup> which was built on the foundations of Solomon's Temple, the latter having been destroyed by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II, c.70 years earlier.<sup>12</sup> This imagery of the two temples was used as a metaphor for the sacrificial death of the natural soul, followed by the resurrection and ascension (exaltation) of the celestial soul.

In Christianity, the church or cathedral is built on an east-west axis, but is purposely 'turned around' so that its head (the chancel) is in the east and the entrance is in the west. This is because all baptised Christians are treated as if they have entered the Greater Mysteries and, looking east, can see God face-to-face.

## Pictures and Sculptures

All sculptures, and most symbolic or naturalistic pictures, are painted so that they are viewed 'face-to-face' – i.e. as they are or would be in reality. It is the same with heraldry. However, some symbolic pictures are painted using the 'back' view, but this is for the purpose of

students in the Lesser Mysteries. With the ‘face-to-face’ paintings and sculptures, it is up to the viewer to either take what they see at face value, or to look deeper and see the real truth face-to-face.

Copyright © Peter Dawkins, 2022

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> From Hebrew: אָחֹר (phonetic: achor, a’hoor), ‘hind side’, ‘back part’, ‘behind’, ‘rear’.

<sup>2</sup> From Hebrew: פָּנִים (phonetic: panim, paneem), ‘face’, ‘facing’.

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew *Torah* is a word that means ‘Instruction’, ‘Teaching’, or ‘Law’. There is a Written Torah and an Oral Torah. The Written Torah is also known as the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses. These are the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, and are, in translation, the first five books of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible, namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

<sup>4</sup> In order to distinguish between the different names for God, which are used in the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament, English translations use ‘Lord’ for יְהוָה (JHVH), Jehovah, whilst they use ‘God’ for אֱלֹהִים (ALHIM), Alahim, but usually pronounced and spelt Elohim. The Hebrew letter י (Yod) is normally rendered as either Y or J in English translation, but it can also be rendered as I, since I and J were once considered the same letter, and Y can be pronounced as an I. The different names refer to different modes or aspects of the Divine Being.

In the Hebraic/Judaic wisdom tradition there are seven most holy names of God; all other names are mere epithets. The seven most holy names are: אֱלֹהִים, Alahim/Elohim (‘Father-Mother God’, the ‘All’); אֵל, Al/El (‘Father God’); אֱלֹהִים, Alah/Elah, or אֱלֹהִים, Aloah/Eloah (‘Mother God’); יְהוָה, Jehovah (‘Father-Mother-Son-Daughter God’); שְׁדַי, Shaddai (‘Almighty’); צְבָאוֹת, Tzevaot (‘Hosts’); and אֶהְיֶה, Ehyeh (‘I Am’).

There are also 72 names of God, which refer to the divine attributes of Sephiroth #4, Chesed (Mercy), #5, Gevurah (Judgement), and #6 Tiphereth (Beauty) – three of the ten Sephiroth of the Tree of Life. It is said that they constitute a formula which Moses used to part the Red Sea – a formula which has the power to overcome the laws of nature. But to use this power, one has to master these attributes by becoming what they each mean.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 33:23: -

Hebrew: וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת־כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אֲחֹרַי וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרְאוּ

English: “Then I will remove My hand, and you will see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36. To be covered (enveloped) by a cloud of glory is the same as being taken up in a cloud of glory. It refers to the raising of consciousness to the highest levels, symbolised as Sephiroth #3, Binah (Divine Intelligence), and #2, Chokmah (Divine Wisdom), on the Tree of Life. It is an experience of pure Light, which is All-Love.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 9-12:

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

---

<sup>8</sup> Numbers 6:22-26.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 16:13-20. The name 'Peter' (derived from Greek *petra*, 'stone', 'rock', a translation of the Aramaic *kefa*, 'stone', 'rock') is the name symbolising the hierophant, who can hear, see, know, speak and reveal the wisdom. It is the hierophant who has the keys of heaven and earth. The hierophant is known as the doorkeeper or gatekeeper. This refers to the role of a sovereign-priest (or sovereign-judge) who used to sit enthroned on the threshold of palace, temple and city gateways, bestowing mercy or judgement, together with teaching and testing. It relates to the unnumbered Sephira *Daath* ('knowledge', 'illumination') on the Tree of Life. The symbolism of the stone or rock refers to the Foundation Stone of the Universe, which contains all wisdom: hence the term 'Rock of foundation'.

<sup>10</sup> The twin Great Pillars of Solomon's Temple are akin to the Great Pillars of temples elsewhere (sometimes obelisks, pylons, towers, etc.), which all carry the same meaning and significance. They are known in tradition as, for instance, the Pillars of Solomon, the Pillars of Hercules, the Pillars of Atlas, the Pillars of Hermes.

<sup>11</sup> Zerubbabel was the prince of Judah who led the first group of Jews out of Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem, where, under the direction of Zerubbabel, they rebuilt the ruined Temple of Solomon. The new and more magnificent temple was known as the Second Temple, or Zerubbabel's Temple.

<sup>12</sup> The captivity of the Jews in Babylonia is referred to as the 'Seventy Years Captivity'. This is a metaphorical number of years. The number 70 was and still is used as a synonym for 72, which relates to the 72 names of God and the magic that they can perform (see endnote 4).