

The Three Great Lights of Freemasonry



A short description of the ancient theonyms of the Three Great Lights of Freemasonry and their connection with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

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The Three Great Lights

The three Grand Principals of the higher degrees of Freemasonry, associated with the Holy Royal Arch and higher degrees, are personifications of the Three Great Lights which constitute the Holy Trinity. These Three Great Lights are represented by Sephiroth 1, 2 and 3 on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. The Hebrew word *sephiroth* means 'emanations' or 'illuminations'.

The ancient God-names given to the Holy Three are (i) **AN**, (ii) **BAL**, and (iii) **YHVH**.

1. **AN** (or **ON**) is the Sumerian name for 'Sky', 'Heaven', 'The Most High', the King of the gods.

AN is the Sumerian equivalent to the Hebrew AL (usually rendered as EL), the Divine Father. AL is the male aspect of ALAHIM (Elohim), a plural word meaning Divine Father-Mother. The feminine aspect is ALAH (Divine Mother). As Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning Alahim (Elohim) created the heaven and the earth," and then went on to create light and all things. ('Light' is the usual translation of the Hebrew word אור, AVR, usually written as *Ohr*, meaning 'delight', 'happiness', 'joy'.) The Sumerian equivalent to ALAH is ANNA, who becomes Ki, the 'Earth'.

In Hebraic and Canaanite religion, Al is the Supreme God, the One and Only God, whose Son is Bal (Ba'al). The full descriptive title is Al Elyon (Hebrew: אֱלֹהֵי יוֹן), meaning 'God the Most High', 'The Heavenly Power', or 'The Heavenly or Supreme Mind'.

The letter A, with its numerological value of 1, particularly signifies this first aspect of the Holy Trinity, which is Sephira #1 of the Tree of Life. Freemasonry refers to this first aspect of Divinity as **The True and Living God Most High (T.T.A.L.G.M.H.)**.

2. **BAL**, or **BA'AL** is a Semitic word meaning 'Son of AL' – i.e. 'Son of God'. This refers to the Wisdom or Word of God. BAL is the Creator, Author, Architect of All, known in Freemasonry as **The Great Architect of the Universe (T.G.A.O.T.U.)**.

BAL is derived from three letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, *Aleph*, *Beth* and *Lamed*, which are the leaders or representatives of the three groups of letters in the Hebrew Alphabet. *Aleph* is the representative of the three 'mother' letters (*Aleph*, *Mem*, *Shin*), *Beth* is the representative of the seven 'double' letters (*Beth*, *Gimel*, *Daleth*, *Kaph*, *Peh*, *Resh*, *Tav*), and *Lamed* is the representative of the twelve 'single' letters (*Heh*, *Vav*, *Zain*, *Cheth*, *Teth*, *Yod*, *Lamed*, *Nun*, *Samech*, *Ayin*, *Tzaddi*, *Qoph*).

BAL stands for the whole Alphabet, which represents the sum total of vibrations of the Word of God, from which all other words are created and then given form.

Numerologically, in Hebrew Kabbala, BAL is represented by the mystic number 33 (i.e. B = 2, A = 1, L = 30). 33 refers to the 33rd Degree, and is rendered as TT in Capital Code cipher. 33 is represented geometrically by two equilateral triangles placed in the form of Mystical Marriage, thereby forming Solomon's Seal, which in perfect union becomes the six-pointed Star of David or Christ Star, emblematic of the perfected or Christed soul. In the English Baconian-Rosicrucian Simple Cipher, BAL numbers 14 (i.e. B = 2, A = 1, L = 11), which is the number of parts into which Osiris (the Secret Doctrine) is divided.

The letter B, with its numerological value of 2, particularly signifies this second aspect of the Holy Trinity, which is Sephira #2 of the Tree of Life. But not only this. The whole name, BAL, signifies the Three Principals and the Three Great Pillars of which the Principals are the heads. B signifies the right-hand Pillar of Wisdom (*Jachin*); the A signifies the Middle Pillar of Beauty (*Maha-On*); and L signifies the left-hand Pillar of Strength (*Boaz*). The letter L represents the Masonic Square that symbolises the mind or intelligence that 'squares' the circle of wisdom in order to understand it. For this reason, the person who leads and directs the Pesach or Passover feast, or an agape feast (love feast), traditionally leans upon his left elbow, wherein his arm then forms an L-shape or 'square'.

3. **YHVH** (also written as **JHVH** and known as the Tetragrammaton) is a Hebrew theonym known as the Great Name of God, in contradistinction to the Word of God (BAL). YHVH refers to the Intelligence of God, which gives form to the Word or Wisdom, so that the Wisdom can be understood, made manifest, and known. Freemasonry refers to this third aspect of Divinity as **The Grand Geometrician of the Universe (T.G.G.O.T.U.)**, for Geometry gives form to the Wisdom, and the Sephiroth become circles or spheres.

YHVH is derived from three 'simple' letters of the Hebrew Alphabet (*Yod, Heh, Vav*). All 22 letters of Hebrew Alphabet are consonants (but with *Aleph* also acting as a vowel), as the vowels were considered too sacred to write down. This is because the vowels represent the holy spirit or breath of heaven, whilst the consonants signify the waters or earth that grounds them. But in order to pronounce the Great Name, both vowels and consonants are needed, just as the breath is needed together with movements of the throat, mouth, tongue and teeth in order to pronounce the Great Name, or any other name or word.

The correct pronunciation of YHVH was (and still is) considered a secret, known only to those who discover it through initiation and are suitably inspired as how to sound the Great Name. The sacred vowels required are three in number, which in the English language are AIO. These are associated respectively with the three basic or craft degrees of initiation, in which the initiate learns to develop good desires (goodwill), good thoughts (understanding), and good action (charity). These are the main stages of the process of life when done well, with love, which is the image or likeness of the divine creative process of life, which AIO represents.

When sounded, the first A is virtually silent, referring to the first emanation of the divine wisdom or will from the heart, as also to any desire we might have, which we don't normally realise what it is until we have thought about it. But once all three sounds have been uttered, and the action completed, the first A (the will of God) can be fully recognised for what it was, or is, and thus known and 'named'. This is expressed as a final

A, so that the vowel sequence then becomes AIOA. This has led to the pronunciation of the Great Name as Jihovah (usually written as Jehovah). The final 'Ah' is the revelation of truth, the knowledge of truth, which is illumination. The 'Ah' is the sound of the Hebrew word אור, AVR, meaning 'light', 'delight', 'happiness', 'joy'. It is the sound we naturally make when we have experienced something good and realised it. It is a state of delight, happiness, joy, which lights us up, so that we then spread that light or joy to others.

IOA is the subtle name of the Holy Breath (Spirit), which is symbolised by the Dove. Besides Jihovah, other forms and derivatives of this special name include Johannes (John), Jonah, Jihoshua, and Iona. The Ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, Druids and others all used this sacred IOA name. The Druidic representation of this name is as the Three Rays or Columns (Pillars) of Light. The word 'column' is derived from the Latin word *columna*, which is associated with the Latin word *columba*, meaning 'dove'. Columcille was the Celtic name of St. Columba of Iona fame.

To summarise, **AN**, **BAL**, and **YHVH** are the ancient theonyms of the Three Great Lights of Freemasonry, which the three Grand Principals of the Holy Royal Arch and higher (Rosicrucian) degrees represent. The Three Great Lights are themselves the emanations (*sephiroth*) of the Holy Trinity, which in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life are Sephiroth 1, 2 and 3. The three Great Lights are also represented by the three Rays, Pillars or Columns of light of the Tree of Life, known in Freemasonry as the three Great Pillars, wherein AN signifies the Middle Pillar (Maha-On), BAL the right-hand Pillar (Jachin), and JHVH the left-hand Pillar (Boaz). These Holy Three are further denoted by: -

- the three letters of BAL, which, in the Hebrew Alphabet, are the representatives of the three main groups of letters – the three mothers (A), the seven doubles (B), and the twelve singles (L). B signifies the right-hand Pillar, A the Middle Pillar, and L the left-hand Pillar.
- the three Hebrew letters YHV (*Yod, Heh, Vau*) of YHVH, which represent fire, water and air respectively, wherein Y (fire) signifies the right-hand Pillar, H (water) signifies the left-hand Pillar, and V (air) signifies the Middle Pillar.
- the three mother letters of the Hebrew Alphabet (*Aleph, Mem, Shin*), wherein *Aleph* (air) signifies the Middle Pillar, *Mem* (water) signifies the left-hand Pillar, and *Shin* (fire) signifies the right-hand Pillar.

Truth is a multi-faceted jewel, and this alone indicates some of the many facets; yet, as Kabbalah notes, there is one Truth but ten emanations of it, and each emanation has the complete truth within it, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Truth is conceived of as a sphere of wisdom (i.e. a cross and circle in three-dimensions), in which the three axes, the six 'facets' or 'faces' arising from three axes extended to their limit, and the centre, form what is called the Tree of Life. In other words, a three-dimensional Cosmic Cross. But then, each of the ten has another complete ten within it. However, it is as a two-dimensional diagram that we normally are shown it, or in terms of architecture as the Temple of Solomon. Then, of course, there are multitudinous ways of understanding all this, and this is but one of those ways.

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