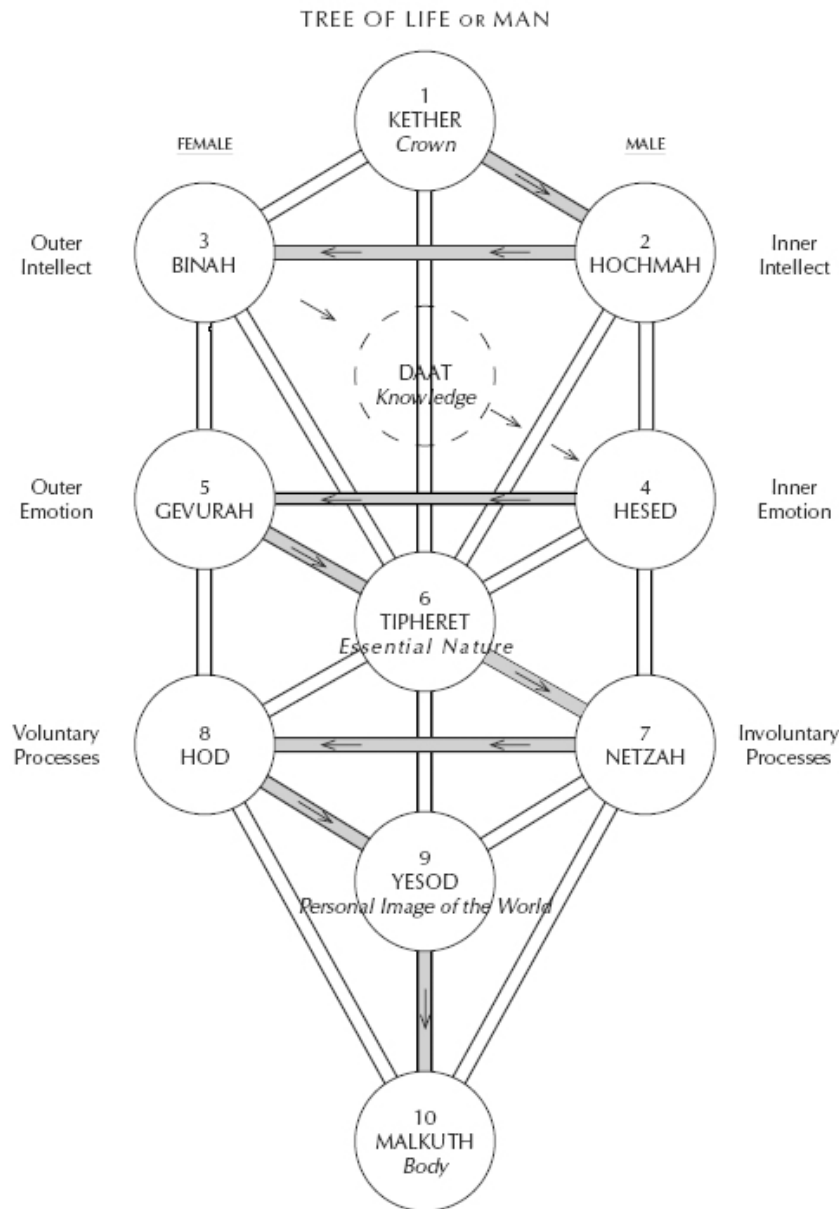


Towards a language for meaningful practice.

Recently I was struck by the similarities between the Tree of Life and some Taoist diagrams. I'd like to compare some of these and draw some parallels from their philosophy and various practices.

Here is a basic explanation of what we see in 'diagram 1', the most common version of a Tree of Life:



'diagram 1'

- There are 10 sephiroth (plus the 11th 'invisible' non-sephira of Daath) and each has a name
- We see the latest (12th, 13th century) and most common version of how the 22 paths join the 10 sephiroth together into an energetic network.

- c) We see the pathway taken by ‘the lightning flash’ showing how the sephiroth appear to be animated and interconnected by some type of ‘divine-current’ (*According to Z’ev ben Shimon Halevi’s description*)
- d) We see names for the qualities of the three pillars: male, female and the central pillar which represents ‘being’,
- e) We see the name for the four orders of reality from the most subtle to the gross (often referred to as the 4 worlds of Air-Atziluth –nearest to the divine-, Fire Briah–creation-, Water –Yetzirah-formation and Earth-Assiah-materiality or Gaia.

These 10 sephiroth show a process of transformation from the abstract and indivisible source- ‘the Oneness’ - to its division and multiplicity but also a way of return from multiplicity to oneness by way of the lightning flash. (Everything issues forth from the source and ultimately returns to the source).

What is not shown in this diagram are the three levels of ‘Negative Existence’ out of which the Oneness appears. (These are: Ain-void, Ain Soph-endlessness, Ain soph Aur-Limitless light-.)

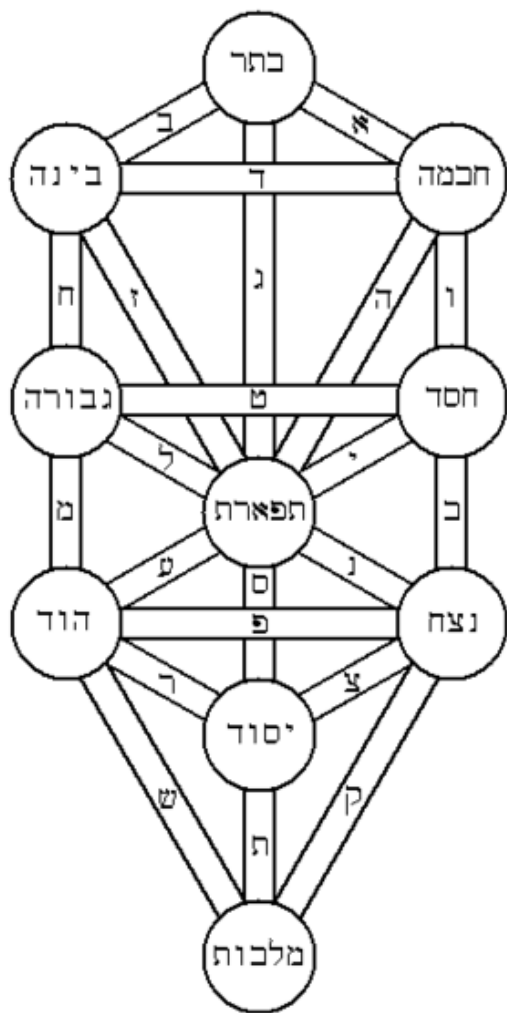
It is important to note that this cyclical process of creation and its dissolution are not just historical accounts of some moment in time, but that it describes each moment of creation that is happening right now to every one of us.

Although the sephiroth are meant to reflect objective principles or unities (the ultimate point of view), each sephira reflects the One in its own way, so its reality is like a hologram view of ‘the Oneness’ in one of its aspects. Each sephira is also a tree in miniature. Here is one tree showing the four worlds of each sephira. Diag.1a



diag 1a

On the other hand the 22 pathways that join these ‘vessels’ are not objective principles but represent the subjective connections humans operate and have discovered for themselves through experience and language. In ‘diagrams 2a and 2b’ we see two different versions of how 22 letters of the Hebrew language may be linked to the 22 paths.



‘diagram 2a’ Golden Dawn system

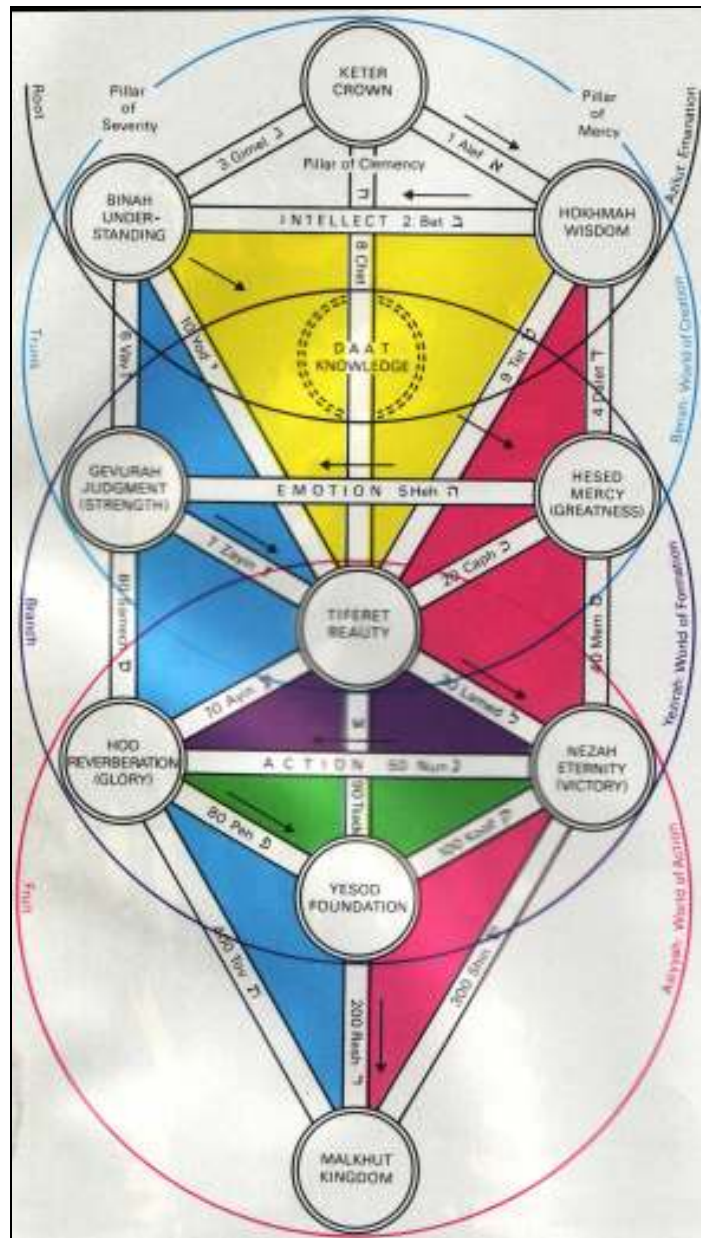


diagram 2b
(Davies/Zev ben Shimon Halevi)

Over the years there have been many different versions of ascribing letters, tarot cards, zodiac signs, planets, colours, sounds, alchemical terms etc to the Tree of Life. The diagram itself first appeared in some form probably between the 11th and 13th centuries and it was the by-product of early Kabbalistic texts such as the ‘Zohar’, ‘Bahir’ and ‘Sepher Yetzirah’. But there are early magical links to it too as it appears in Kircher’s ‘Oedipus Aegypticus, 1652). During the 19th century

along with the romantic movement of the day there was an awakening interest in the mystical and magical aspect of human life and so this diagram was adopted and adapted by occult or esoteric groups such as the ‘Golden Dawn’, ‘Society of the Inner Light’ etc and then spread worldwide. Today the Tree of Life is widely used to support the philosophies of many a group from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Here are some more versions of the 10 sephiroth and their paths. ‘In diagram 3’ the arrangement emphasizes the notion of a double cube, one within the other to show how spiritual and material worlds interact.

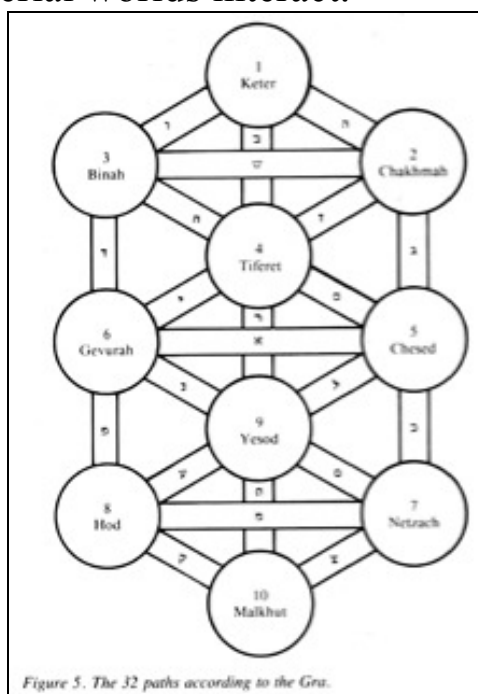
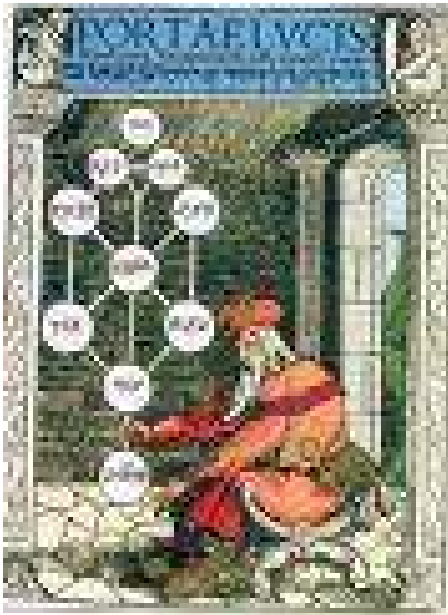


Figure 5. The 32 paths according to the Gnu.

‘diagram 3’

In diagram 4a we see a man or a King holding or planting a tree of Life which seems to me to imply an active practice and participation in the creative process.

Diagram 4b shows how the Tree is directly connected to humans and that the seeds for transformation and transcendence are already within us.



Diag 4a

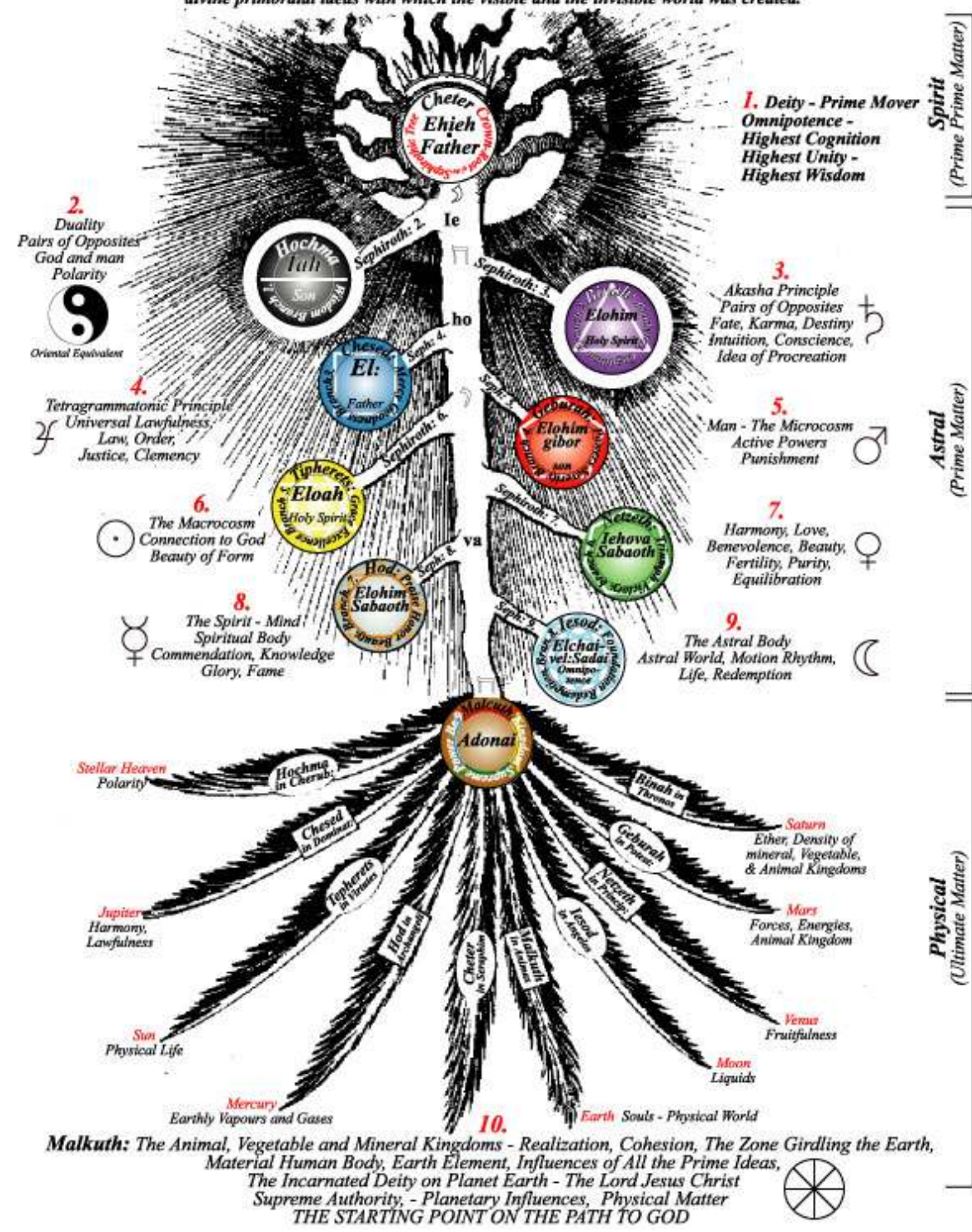


diag 4b

From 1708 'Pa'amon ve Rimmon'

Robert Fludd's drawing of a tree of life in mirror image, 'diagram 4', resembles an upside down tree with its roots in heaven bearing leaves and fruits ready to be picked by us on earth. This is a very meaningful symbol. This tree is not only a ladder to transcend one's self, or a creation myth but also as a reminder that earthly fruit are a gift capable of connecting us to a higher order of reality. Fludd was an alchemist and would have aimed to transmute 'base metals into gold'. As we shall see later in this article esoteric alchemy was the foundation of most Taoist practices.

THE SEPHIROTHIC TREE by Robert Fludd
 The Numbers 1 -10: The Kabbalistic cardinal numbers corresponding to the divine primordial ideas with which the visible and the invisible world was created.

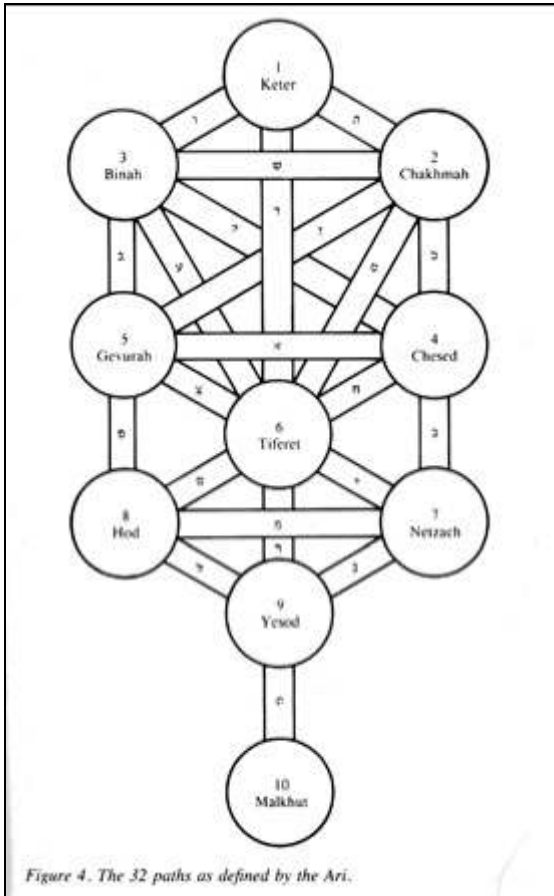


‘diagram 4’

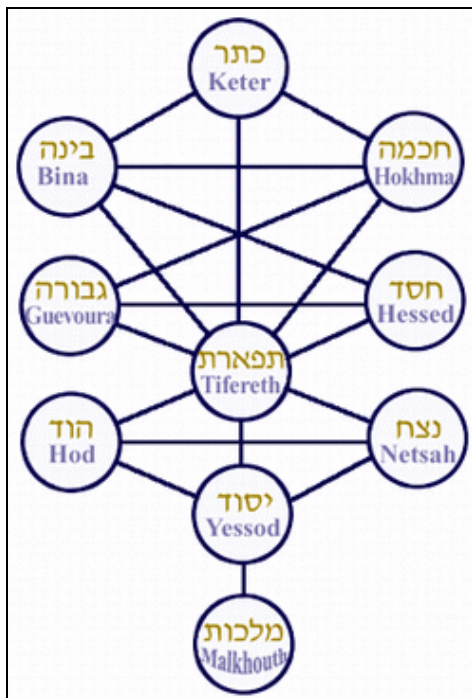
In the following three versions ‘diagrams: 5,6,7’ we notice that the 10th sephira of Malkuth (the kingdom or the bride) is connected to only one of the 9 remaining sephiroth (Yesod-Foundation). Also we see a different arrangement of the paths with connections of Binah and Hokhmah to Hesed and Gevurah. More differences, in diagrams 5&7, are the inclusion of Daath as a sephirah (11 sephiroth instead of 10). Furthermore in ‘diagram 6’ there are no vertical

paths between Hokhmah and Hesed or Binah and Gevurah.

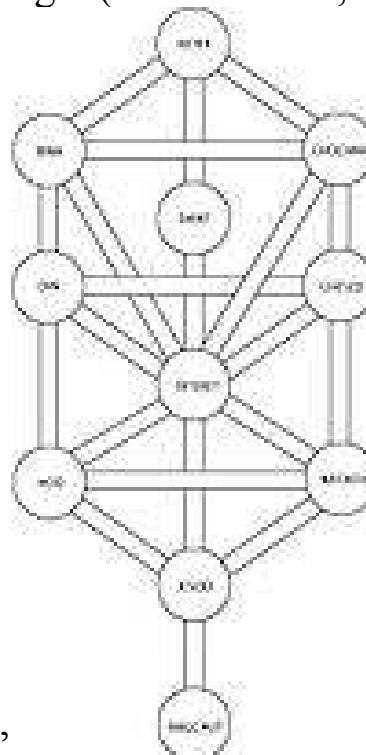
The idea here I believe is that there are two different trees (diag 1 and diag 5). One is the tree before ‘the Fall’ (diag 5) and the other one is the tree ‘after the Fall’. (diag 1 & 2). The ‘Fall’ is the biblical story of the expulsion of primordial man and woman from paradise.



diag 5 (‘Porta Lucis’, Ausburg, 1516)



‘diag 6’



diag 7

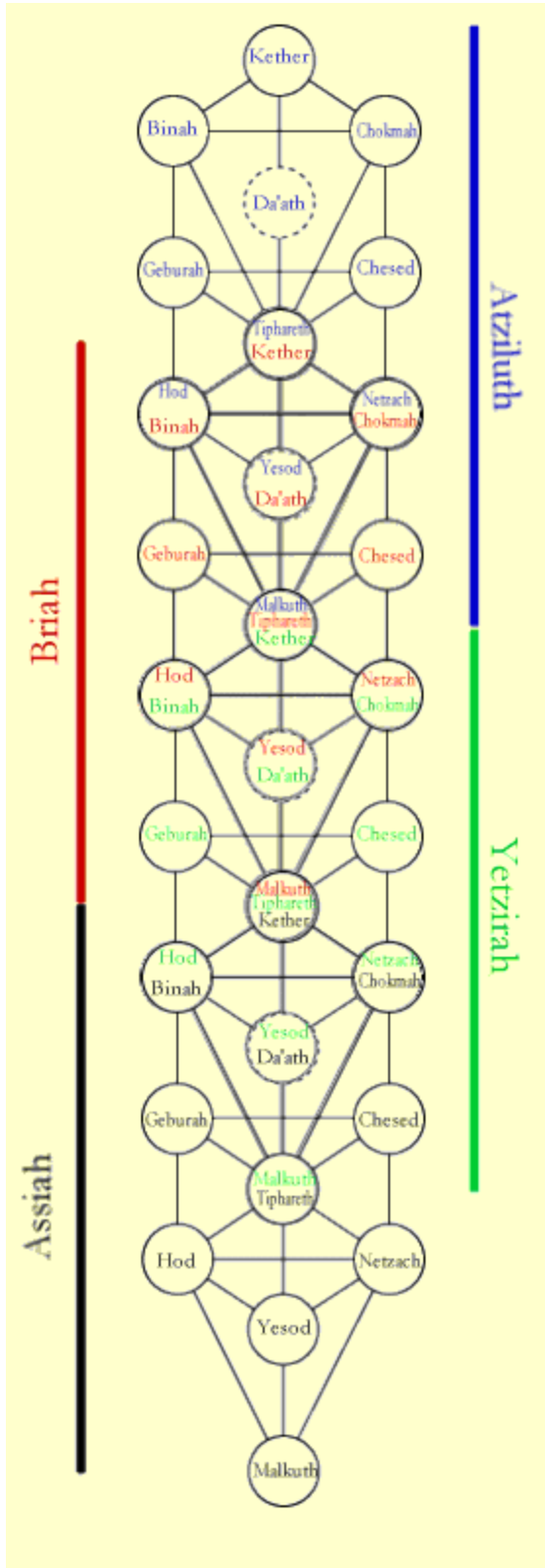
I shall return to this idea of before and after the ‘Fall’ later in this article when I discuss two different arrangements of trigrams in Taoism.

There is a Kabbalistic saying “Keter is in Malkhut and Malkhut is in Keter”. In other words that the King, or the crown, is in the kingdom and that the kingdom reflects the being of the king and his crown. Also it infers that the macrocosm of divine operations and the microcosm of human beings mirror each other and so Oneness pervades all of creation.

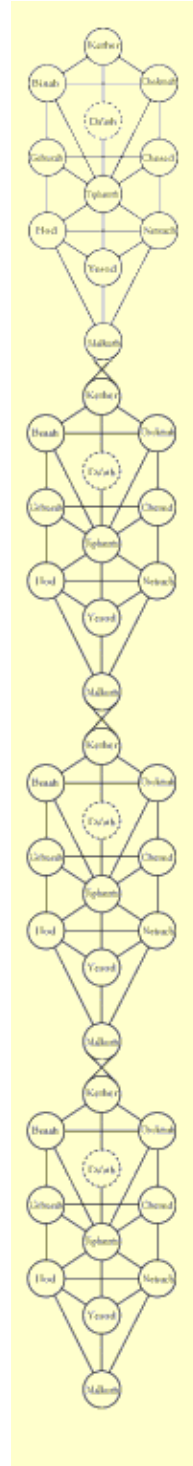
This idea was developed and shown in extended trees of life to show how the different orders of creation, ie each world of Earth, Water, Fire or Air (different systems don’t always arrange these in this particular order) is also a complete tree in itself and that it interacts with all the other worlds too. Here are two diagrams that try to show this communication between worlds.



diagram 8a



Diagrams 8b



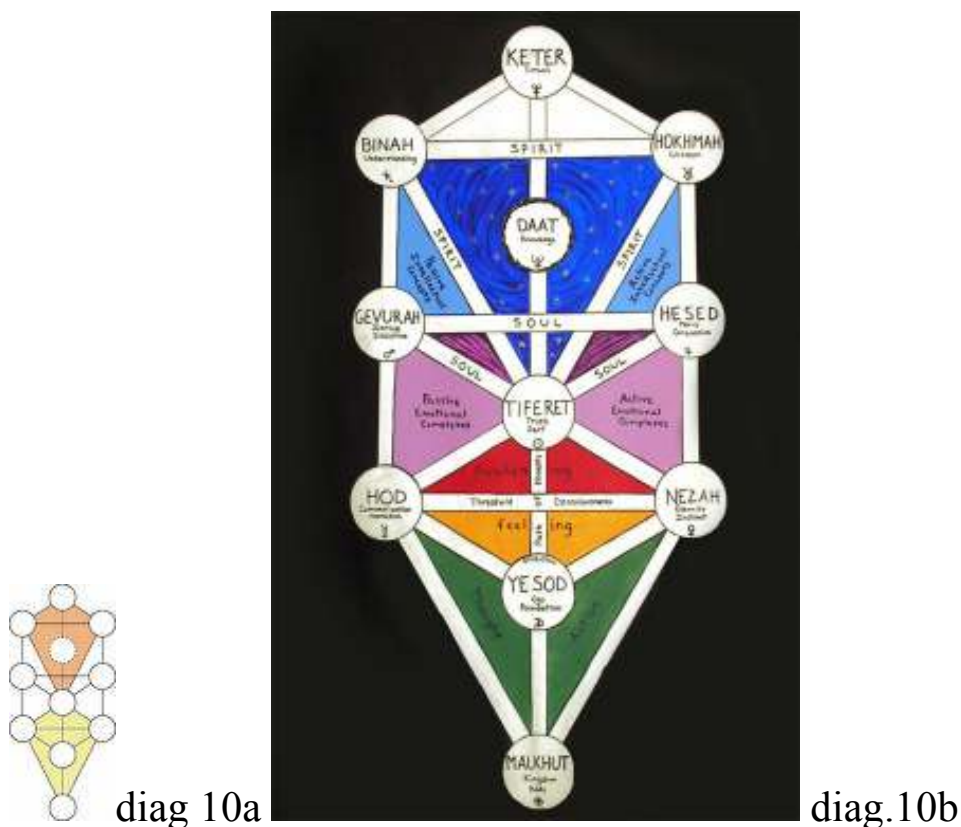
diag 9

Diagrams 8a & 8b (Davies/Kenton) show how the 4 worlds interpenetrate each other. The three central sephiroth of Malkuth, Tipheret and Keter can co-exist within one another, so for instance Tiferet of Assiah is also the Malkhut

of Yetzirah and Kether of Asiah is simultaneously the Malkhut of Briah and Tipheret of Yetzirah.

Diagram 9 is simpler in that it shows how each world supports the next one. So the Keter of a world is simultaneously the Malkhut of the next one up according to the aforementioned principle of “as above so below”. In reality all four worlds exist in potential within all created things. (Just as water can be solid ice, fluid water, airy steam and the creative principle elements of Hydrogen and Oxygen). This idea of an interdependence of worlds was also echoed by many other philosophers, one example being Plato/Socrates who postulated an abstract world of ‘forms’ echoed in our own material world which reflects these ‘forms’. So even though each horse might look different to the one next to it they all reflect the one ideal ‘form of horseness’.

I’ll just mention very briefly that in some systems there is importance also placed in the operational triads between any three or four sephiroth.



For instance (in diagram 10a) the sephiroth: Keter-Hokhmah-Tiphereth-Binah form the ‘upper face’ of the Tree or ‘superconscious’ levels in archetypal Man, whereas the sephiroth: Tiphereth- Netzah-Malkhut-Hod describe the ‘lower face’ of Man which include conscious and subconscious levels of operation.

Examining the tree in groups of triads diag.10b (or threeness) is very useful first of all because it stops one from seeing the world merely in simplistic terms or dualisms such as 'good' and 'evil/bad'. Instead one examines how two things may work together to produce a third element so that there is flow. In the most common type of tree of life (diag 1&2) by examining the interactions of the triads: Malkhut-Yesod-Hod (Matter, ego or ordinary based mind and reverberation or repetitive belief systems) we might see how what we usually perceive (Yesod) in the material world (Malkhut) as solid is only a surface appearance of our own inflexible and repetitive belief system (Hod). By the same token work on this triad such as a detailed study (Hod) of any material object(Malkhut) can alter our surface perception of it (Yesod) and so change our state of being in doing so (Yesod –Nezah-Tiferet).

Humans can apprehend reality at a variety of levels. Holding a banana in your hand can give you the immediate direct knowing of having food in your hands and this is one type of understanding we share with animals. But of course there are finer types of food we can enjoy and so we can also apprehend 'that' which is not belly-food at all!

By induction and deduction the mind can know the nature of things but humans are capable of even knowing the nature of their own mind that is performing these operations.

Time –the “merciless Heropass” as the mystic Gurdjieff would say is not on our side. Some of our senses are fully developed by the time we were borne but others we must develop ourselves within certain time frames. For instance if a child doesn't learn how to speak a language by the time they are adolescents they will probably never be able to learn how to speak. On the other hand most of us who have learnt to speak at an early age can then also learn more languages by ourselves.

The same goes for feeling and intuition. These faculties can be used to apprehend subtler levels of reality and one can train to use them naturally. Indeed if you don't use some senses you might lose them altogether.

As humans we can also perceive reality in an allegorical fashion and this can impact our perception of our world and ourselves using rarely used parts of the brain.

- Is the story of Adam and Eve really true and if so what difference does that make to your life now?
- Do these diagrams purporting to show the principles behind creation hold any real power capable of moving you if so how?
- So what if there were a divine world or if there weren't one?
- What is the difference in merely believing a story or myth and having to believe in it?
- And when should one simply drop the myth and move on?
- How do you make sense of such diagrams that try to show 'all about everything', and how could these be specifically useful? After all when you turn the lights on in your home you expect to have more light, not for the WC to start flushing. So can these principles be used in a scientific fashion where a specific action will bring about specific desired results or effects?

I guess such questions have been asked for thousands of years now! But each of us must ask these a new and fight to find the answers for oneself. And the motivation to do so must come naturally from within oneself. I believe it is counter productive to try to 'help' or to indoctrinate others no matter how altruistic you might think yourself to be. Why reveal to others your beliefs anyway? What people choose to believe, or not is a very personal affair and this should be respected.

So if for example you believe the Tree of Life, the Scriptures and the Hebrew letters were a gift from the divine worlds handed to Adam and Eve to show them how to return to their real home that is absolutely fine by me provided you then act on that belief in some creative or meaningful way. The opposite is true too. If you find these diagrams to be nothing more than useful and artful devices created by some clever fellow either leave them alone or if you find them useful use these to understand yourself and the world in a better way. In the final analysis beliefs are there to be used creatively by us and not to rule us!

By 'creativity' I mean to be moved by an inner 'knowing' or intuition towards practices that you accommodate into your daily life to explore your full potential and the variety of ways of tuning in to your real mind and beyond. Being creative I maintain is keeping up a practice that becomes part of *your own life* and not trying to become like someone else or to become someone else's mouthpiece. Otherwise you'll always be a second rate copy and without

true power. I don't mean of course that you can't learn from others by copying, but that you must eventually create your own dream, find your own real purpose and your own words of power. Without such 'knowing' and work on one self there can't be any real sense responsibility for what one does, because one has handed the reins to others instead.

At this point I'd like to show some diagrams from Taoism and Chinese Buddhism that have many similarities to the Tree of Life and its philosophy. These Eastern diagrams come from cultural backgrounds very different to our own Western one and it seems they have been developing independently over the centuries. I find it very interesting how humans working independently at different corners of the globe have come up with such similar conclusions. Many of these Eastern classics predate Kabbalah by many hundreds of years or more and most have not even been translated yet! (Not that the antiquity of a source is any indicator by itself as to the truth or validity of what it reveals, but it does mean that there is a large amount of statistical data gathered by the people using such ancient traditions.)

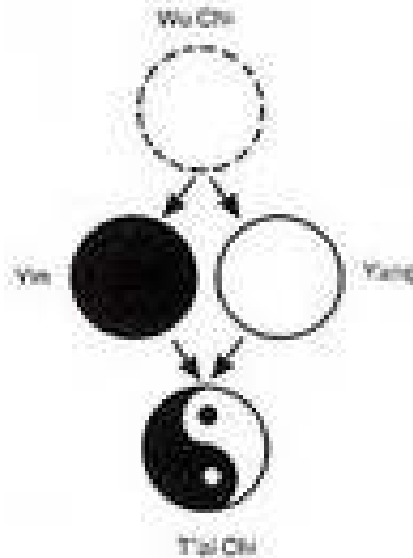
Now some would warn that someone from the West should not follow, or need a system from the East, or vice versa, because as they claim one has to stick to one's own race and culture or socialization rules and that it's impossible to go deeply into a system that is not of their own race or creed. Well I beg to differ! And here's why:

Ignorance and sickness are worldwide phenomena. Humans don't suffer from 'African measles', 'Indian cancer', 'American heart disease' or 'German depression' nor are the diagnosis and cures of such diseases that different from one culture to another. So let's be open-minded because historically humans have shown they can transcend both their cultural conditioning and their own suffering by using any method discovered world wide provided of course they learn how to apply it wisely to themselves! At the end of the day practicing a way is a matter of personal choice.

In Taoist classics such as the "I Ching" –Book of Changes- the origin of which has been traced to 1143 B. C, and the "Tao Te Ching"– Classic of the Way of Life- origin of which has been traced to the late 4th or early 3^d century BC, the following philosophy presents itself:


From a state of void or non-creation (Wu chi) arise two opposing forces Yin (dark, soft, female) and Yang (bright, strong, male). These twin polarities are opposite to one another in their respective natures. 'The Way' which is


symbolized by the ‘Tai chi’ symbol shows the state and art of reconciling or transcending these two opposing forces of Yin and Yang . (diag. 11)



diag 11

‘Tai Chi’ literally means ‘Ultimate polarity’ or ‘Supreme Ultimate’ and depicts an expression of Oneness where the Yin and Yang are working together, complementing each other in the process of creation**. The symbol of tai Chi represents “the origin of Heaven and Earth and all matter in the world. So Tai Chi transcends the limits of both space and time. Taoists called it the Tao, meaning

‘The Way’. *** An earlier Tai Chi symbol was  which shows polarity

held together by a strong centre whereas the later symbol  shows the interdependence and harmonious workings of the two opposing forces.

In the opening chapter of the “Tao Te Ching” we read:

“The Way that has a name is not the constant Way, The Name that has a name is not the real Name, The nameless was the beginning of heaven and Earth the named was the mother of the myriad creatures”

**** Note that “Tai Chi Chuan” means “supreme fighting art” (chuan means fist) and is a way of using energy in the most economical way (i.e. power) when confronted by others. By a process of minimal or no unnecessary action (wu wei) one learns to maintain Oneness even in adverse conditions. This is essential because here on earth conflict is inevitable. So the real aim of Tai Chi Chuan is to learn to both operate and to also develop oneself according to the natural Way or “Tao”. Tai Chi Chuan is also the basis of all martial arts because it provides a philosophical structure for forces used in creative conflict and this I believe is very important. As the charismatic Bruce Lee once said it is “the art of fighting without fighting”.**

*** D.J.Docherty Wutan Tai Chi Chuan

I'm sure one could find many parallels here between these Taoist classics and the philosophy behind the 'Tree of Life'.

'Wu chi' represents negative existence; Yang and Yin represent both the passive and active pillars of the tree, as well as the great Mother and Father principles (Adam and Eve) in Hokmah and Binah. 'Tai chi' is the principle of dynamic Oneness in Keter and it represents what is referred to in Kabbalah as the Ancient One and the 'equilibrium of balance'. (The three Mothers reflecting the one Will according to Saros philosophy)

The "Tao Te Ching" continues: ... "These two –the nameless and the named (or Yang and Yin) are the same but diverge in name as they issue forth. Being the same they are called mysteries, mystery upon mystery- the gateway of manifold secrets.

This gateway sounds to me very similar to the non sephirah of Daath, the gate between the divine and created worlds and through which emanate the male and female principles to perpetuate creation.

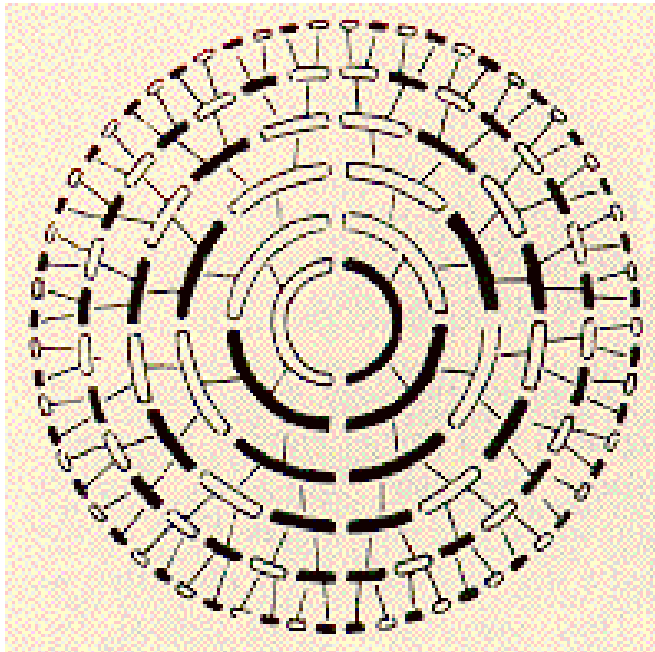
So how is creation brought about through the Yang and Yin principles? These twin polarities are responsible for the various cyclical processes that maintain the Oneness. This is the subject of the Taoist classic the 'I Ching' (Classic of Changes).

Energy constantly moves from the male to the female and back again and from their interactions the basic identities are formed, first in pairs then in triples and then in pairs of triples. So see the evolution of the 8 trigrams and the 64 hexagrams ($8 \times 8 = 64$). These form the basis of the myriad things, so all created beings carry on their back the Yin and the Yang principles.

This evolution of being and identity is similar to the central column of the Tree of Life which represents 'being and consciousness' as reflected in the sephiroth of Tiferet and Yesod which are constantly being affected by the outer two pillars of force and form.

Similar to Kabbalah, in Taoism another polarity is set between Heaven (Yang) and Earth (Yin). Man is given the role of mediator or transformer of the energy between Heaven and Earth and must accomplish this in a righteous way, according to the natural principles of the Tao. (Again here I believe there is a similarity to the function of the Zedek or righteous man (the letter tsaddi on the path Tiferet-Yesod, or path of honesty –from Davies/Halevi ordering of letters and paths,diag 2b-). The righteous man who who is likened to a pillar or foundation for creation according to some Kabbalistic texts (Bahir) performing the great work of unification so that the Oneness above is mirrored by the Oneness below: ***Proverbs, "Righteous is the foundation of the world."***




Here is how the Yin-Yang interactions are build up in pairs, triples and sixes. (diag 12):








diag 12

Yin   Yang 


The next set of twin forces builds on top of the old foundation and there are four possibilities:

On top of the Yang  we may either get:   Old (supreme)Yang where the Yang force is increasing as in noon or summer. It is an expansive movement outwards associated with the element of Fire and the direction is South.

Or   Young (small) Yin because Yang is decreasing and Yin increasing as in evening or autumn. It is an inwards movement of energy associated with the element of Metal and the direction is West.

On top of the Yin  we either get:   Old (supreme)Yin where the Yin is decreasing more , it has reached its zenith so it is now the darkest midnight or winter. The movement of energy is as withdrawn as possible and is associated with the element of Water and the direction is North.



Or  Young (small) Yang where Yang is ascending over Yin so it is the morning or Spring. It is an initiating movement of energy outwards associated with the element of Wood and the direction is East.

By a similar process of interaction between the yang and yin the above ‘twin forces’ or bigrams can produce or change into the following eight trigrams (or Pa Kua) that rule over the growth and evolution of all living beings (referred to as the 10,000 things). Their shape and their respective symbolic names are:

- ‘**Kun**’ or Earth 
- ‘**Ken**’ or Mountain 
- ‘**Kan**’ or Water 
- ‘**Sun**’ or Wind 
- ‘**Chen**’ or Light 
- ‘**Li**’ or Fire 
- ‘**Tui**’ or Sea and River 
- ‘**Chien**’ or Heaven 

Philosophically the three lines of any trigram represent heaven above, the earth below and man the mediator in the middle. This is very similar to the Kabbalistic concept of righteousness I mentioned earlier.

1	CH'EN						
2	KUAI						
3	TA YU						
4	TA CHUANG						
5	HSIAO CHU						
6	HSU						
7	TA CHU						
8	TAI						
9	LU						
10	TUI						
11	KUEI						
12	KUEI MEI						
13	CHUNG FU						
14	CHIEH						
15	SUN						
16	LIN						
17	TONG JEN						
18	KO						
19	LI						
20	FENG						
21	CHIA JEN						
22	CHI CHI						
23	PI						
24	MING I						
25	WU WANG						
26	SUI						
27	SHIH HO						
28	CHEN						
29	I						
30	CHUN						
31	I						
32	FU						
33	KOU						
34	TA KUO						
35	TING						
36	HENG						
37	SUN						
38	CHING						
39	KU						
40	SHENG						
41	SUNG						
42	K'UN						
43	WEI CHI						
44	HSIEH						
45	HUAN						
46	KAN						
47	MENG						
48	SHIH						
49	TUN						
50	HSIEN						
51	LU						
52	HSIAO KUO						
53	CHIEN						
54	CHIEN						
55	KEN						
56	CHIEN						
57	PI						
58	TEUI						
59	CHIN						
60	YU						
61	KUAN						
62	PI						
63	PO						
64	KUN						
	SIXTY- FOUR KUA	THIRTY- TWO KUA	SIXTEEN KUA	PA KUA	SEI JEUNG	LEUNG YEE	TAI CHI
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1



diag 13.

The evolution of groupings of 1,2,3,4,5,6 that form the 64 hexagrams is shown in the above chart. The traditional Chinese names are given. For a complete description of the 64 their meaning and how they change into each other consult the Classic of Changes (I Ching).

****Diagram13 from D.J.Docherty's Wutan Tai Chi Chuan*

INTERLUDE

Divination and the I Ching

A translation of the Richard Wilhelm edition of the I Ching can be found here:
http://www.onlineclarity.co.uk/html/wiltrans/wilhelm_translation.html

Other than using the traditional yarrow sticks which is a cumbersome and complex process the best way to cast the I Ching divination system is not by throwing coins (Tails and Heads symbolizing Yin and Yang).

Mathematically there is much greater precision in the following method which is as good as using yarrow sticks.:

Preparation

Into a bag or covered bowl place 16 marbles of four different colours in the following proportions:

7 blacks indicating a Yin Line -- --

5 whites indicating a Yang Line -----

3 greens indicates a moveable Yang Line ----8---- for a degree of change, or moveable Yang because it will soon change into a Yin line.

1 red indicating a moveable Yin Line --x-- for a degree of change moveable Yin because it will soon change into a Yang line.

Divination

1) *First ask the question out loud.*

2) *Without looking into the bag or covered bowl place you hand and select a marble. Its colour will tell you according to the above table, what the first line of the hexagram will be. Write it on a piece of paper.*

(--- , -----, -----8-----, or --x--)

3) Replace the ball into the bag or bowl, mix and select again. Once again the colour of the second marble will tell you what type of line to draw on top of the first line on your piece of paper.

4) Repeat this process until you have drawn 6 lines. (The bottom first line is the first ball you chose and the top last line is the sixth ball you chose.)

5) Consult your table of hexagrams from a reliable I Ching book to find the meaning of your chosen hexagram. (For instance if lines were:

<i>Water</i>	<i>Sixth ball</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>Yin</i>
	<i>Fifth ball</i>	<i>-----8-----</i>		<i>moveable Yang</i>
	<i>Fourth ball</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>Yin</i>
	<i>Third ball</i>	<i>-----</i>		<i>Yang</i>
<i>Wind</i>	<i>Second ball</i>	<i>-----</i>		<i>Yang</i>
	<i>First ball</i>	<i>-----x-----</i>		<i>moveable Yin</i>

This hexagram is called 'The Well'  (number 48) as it is composed of two trigrams the bottom one being 'Wind' and the top one being 'Water'.
The oracle says: (according to Richard Wilhelm edition of I Ching):

The Judgment:

*"The town may change but the well abides.
But if one's rope is too short,
Or if one brakes the jug.
Then one's thirst remains. Misfortune."*

The Image:

*"As a plant lifts water to lift itself,
So a wise ruler encourages his people
To work and to help one another."*

The degrees of change the first and fifth lines say:

- 1) *“No one drinks the mud of the well:
No animals come to an old well:
Time just passes it by.”*
- 5) *“A clear, cold spring. One should drink.*

Because we had degrees of change on the first and fifth lines this hexagram will now change into hexagram number 11, “Peace”:

----- Yin
----- Yin
----- Yin
----- Yang
----- Yang
----- Yang

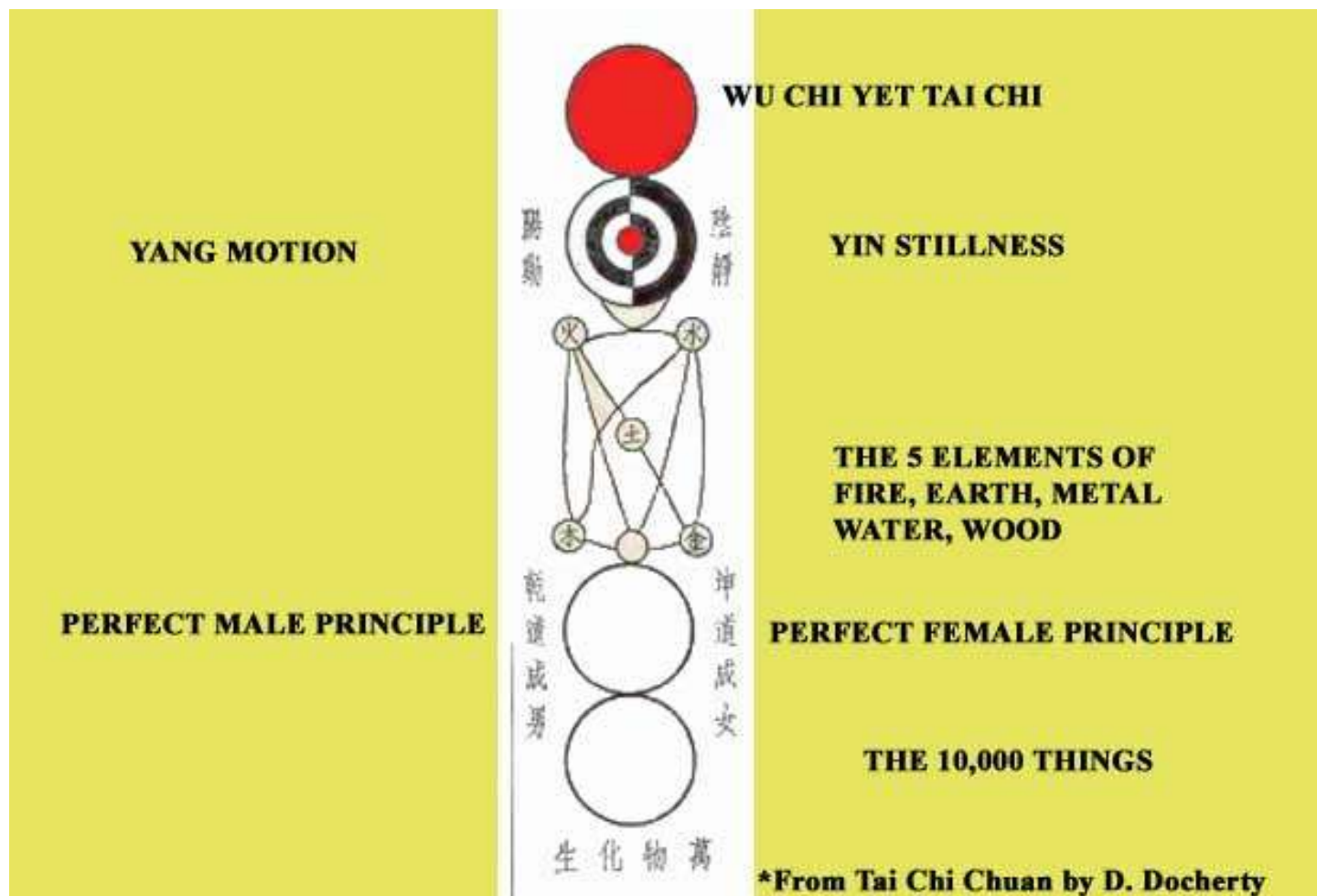
The Judgment:

*Peace means union, inter relation,
As the small departs, the great approaches.
Strength is within: the yielding is without.
In this way does each receive its due.*

The Image:

*As heaven and earth unite in due season,
So the wise ruler divides and completes,
He furthers and regulates
The gifts of heaven and Earth.
Thus does he aid his people.*

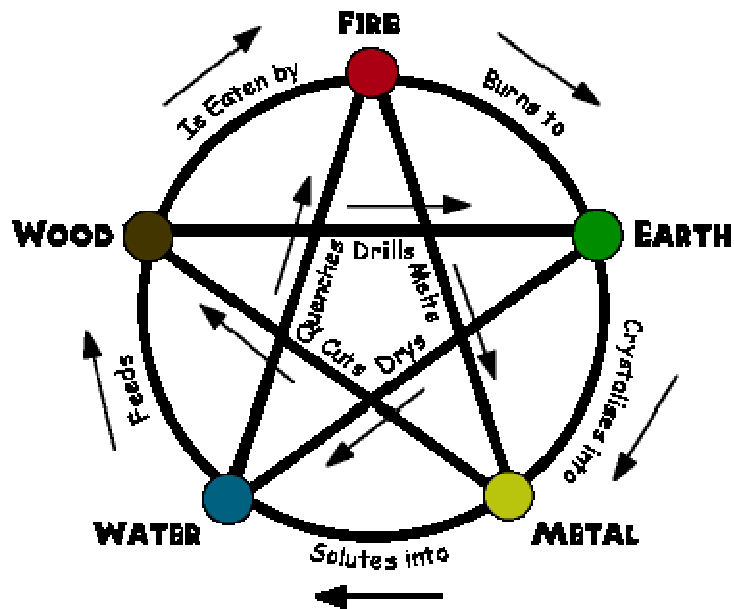
Here is a 'Taoist Tree of Life' by Zhou Dun-yi (1017-73) (diag 13)



diag13.

In Taoist cosmology there are five elements, winds or processes: The traditional order is: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water. I briefly mentioned four of these in connection with the 4 'bigrams' or twin forces but omitted Earth. The element Earth is like the centre of a square where every side of a square is assigned to one of the four directions. The season for 'Earth' is traditionally between mid summer and autumn and its qualities are neutrality, pause or balance. So it must be understood that these 'five elements' are not static states but transitory processes.

In traditional Chinese medicine the five elements are associated with the five major internal organs (Wood: Liver & Gallbladder, Fire: Heart and pericardium, Earth: Spleen and pancreas, Metal: Lungs, Water: Kidneys and adrenals). (diag 14). Assigning elements and astrological correspondences to the internal organs and parts of the human body is also done in the Kabbalistic text of the Sepher Yetzirah. The Chinese have based acupuncture treatment on this philosophy as a way of bringing harmony and health.



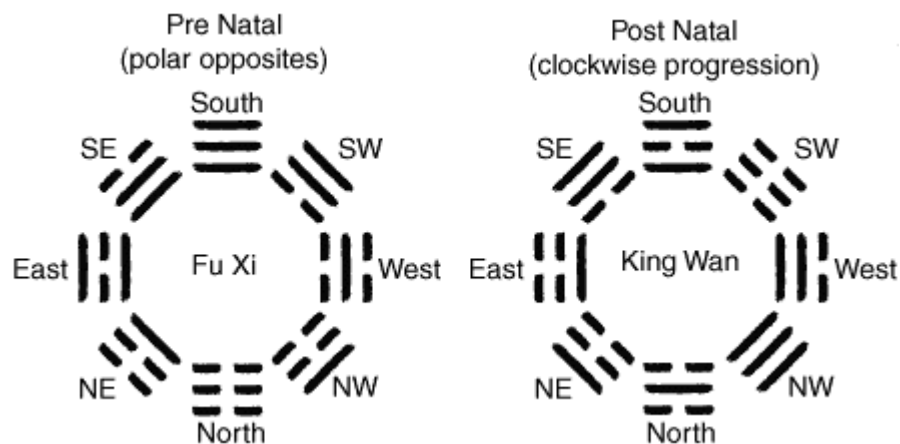
diag 14

The traditional order for the 5 elements is also called the generative or creative cycle an example of which was mentioned earlier in connection with the natural changes in the seasons. We could imagine how out of the 'Earth' come 'Metals' as found in trace minerals in the soil for example or the mining of gold and silver. These trace elements of Metal enter the Water. Metal also melts and becomes liquid when heated. Water then nourishes and is responsible for the growth of trees and plants (Wood). Wood is necessary to light a Fire and when something is burnt it becomes ashes (Earth). But some metals are heat resistant and so out of the ashes come metals ... The cycle continues, it is the endless generative cycle.

The order of the governing or destructive cycle is: Metal, Wood, Earth, Water, Fire. Here it can be seen how Metal chops Wood, Wood is implanted into the Earth and can acquire roots, Wood absorbs Water, Water can put out the Fire and Fire melts Metal. It is important to note that there must be enough quantity for these operations to take place. So the metal saw for instance must be strong enough to cut Wood and there must be enough water to put out the fire otherwise it will fuel it instead. In traditional Chinese medicine the aim is to keep all the elements in balance.

Again I can see similarities between the five elements and the sephiroth and the 'constructors' in Saros philosophy. Wood is regenerative in nature and could be associated with Hesed which is expansive in nature. Fire consumes and has the qualities of Gevurah. Water could be associated either with Yesod the endless flow of dreams or Nezah the energy provider. Metal could be likened to the treasures of study (Hod) and Earth has the stability of Malkhut.

I mentioned earlier that there have been two main types of ‘Tree of Life’. Before and after the ‘Fall’ of humans from a state of Grace. In Taoism there is a similar working concept because there are also two different cyclical arrangements of the eight trigrams (Pa Kua) called: ‘Earlier Heaven’ or ‘prenatal’ arrangement attributed to the legendary Fu Xi (mid 2800s BCE) who is credited with the origin of the I Ching and many other arts such as cooking fishing and writing. The ‘Later Heaven’ or ‘postnatal’ arrangement is attributed to King Wan (born BC1231).



The earlier Heaven arrangement is used in Chinese divination, astrology and Feng Shui (geomancy) to indicate Fate and Destiny. It indicates the way things were ordered to be and it is a mark of human wisdom to follow this natural way of Heaven. Also in matters of health when one’s mind and body are working at their optimum level the energy follows this arrangement of ‘earlier heaven’. It’s also called the prenatal arrangement because before babies are born, from inception till birth their energetic structure follows the Fu Xi model.

At birth however there is a separation of the Spirit and the newly born’s energetic arrangement begins to change as the passion mind (Xin) begins to slowly take over.

The Taoist and Chinese Buddhist aims of immortality or Enlightenment are a return to the earlier natural state of oneness in the Tao and to accomplish this there are at least two very old inner alchemical traditions, North and south in China . One could call these Taoist Yoga.

The basic concepts of inner alchemy are used in Taoism, Tantric Tibetan Buddhism and in Chinese Buddhism too. The practical details of the practices are far too intricate to go into and anyway to learn these one has to be initiated first into the tradition. But whether you work with the mind, or the body or both the message is crystal clear:

We are truly capable of changing our state at will and transmuting our negative emotions into positive ones. Just as we can recycle waste products to create good compost and fertilise plants so that they can bear better fruit, so too we can change our inner state through discipline to be more effective, healthier and happier. So anger for instance can be changed into kindness if one is able to shift perspective. The same poison can either kill you or heal you, if it's taken as medicine at the right dosage. To create such medicine is a matter of long term work. (Kung Fu)

I believe Kabbalah or any esoteric system aiming towards an increased awareness has very similar aims. Knowledge must be claimed it isn't handed to one as a gift -not in my experience-.

The Tree of Life, the diagrams and the philosophy are just morsels of useful information I believe. It's only with the practice and application of these principles that one's view of things is corrected.

Ideally at some point one has to create one's own tree out of one's own experiences.

I hope this article has reminded its readers of those things they already knew but have forgotten. I'd love to hear your questions or comments.

Byron Zeliotis
October 2009

Acknowledgements

- *Passages and quotes from the following authors:*
- *Lao Tzu. Tao te Ching Penguin Classics*
- *Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi. Tree of life. Rider Press.*
- *Dan Docherty. Taichi chuan Crowood Press.*
- *Dan Docherty: Tai Chi Chuan.*
- *The Pocket I Ching . Richard Wilhelm. Penguin books*

- *Images from: Dan Docherty. Taichi Chuan 1983 Crowood Press and Tai Chi Chuan 2008*

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