

An Exploration of the Sephiroth in Masonic Symbolism
Fr. Ernest R. Spradling, VII°

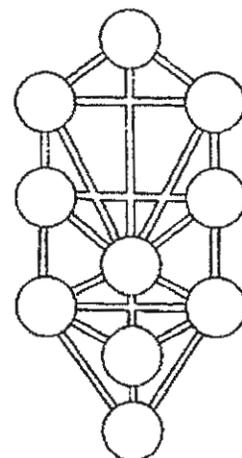
A very senior Freemason once lamented about the younger generation of Brothers, who were exploring the mystical in Freemasonry, it being only a social club. I really don't agree with that sentiment, and given what I have experienced over the years, I know fully that our gentle Craft is imbued with mystical spirituality that has accumulated since the first Lodge was founded. After all, everything in this Fraternity is, in a larger sense, a microcosm of the life led on this plane: if spirituality is found in all THE LORD'S Creation, why would there not be some form of the spiritual in the workings of the Fraternity?

I have experienced occasional "glimmers" of the Light, through various gradations in the Craft, when the conditions were right; this set me on this study of various mystical "trailblazers" that have been evident, and not-so-evident, in the Craft's symbolism. Being ever mindful of the admonition in the 32nd Degree of the Scottish Rite (Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A.):

"To know how to classify shells, flowers, and insects is not wisdom any more than it is wisdom to know the titles of books"

I must state for the record that, as Heinlein's protagonist put it in the novel, "Stranger in a Strange Land", "I am only an egg", I do not profess to have the knowledge of the Adepts, despite the occasional "glimmers" I've experienced over the years. A lot of this probably is old ground for some readers. However, as a civil engineer by training, and a traffic engineer by experience, at least I have some idea what a roadmap is and what trailblazer signs look like; they should be given heed.

Before we delve into what Freemasonry has as part of its symbolism, a little background information is in order, so we will better be able to see the symbolism behind the signs. One of the key, and I must say the most well-known, Kabalistic symbolic expressions is the Tree of Life, which is composed of ten Sephiroth, or "Spheres", arranged in a particular pattern. This presentation does not discuss the origin of the Tree of Life, other than to posit a theory that it may be hard-wired into our genetic make-up. This figure represents the most common form, which is a



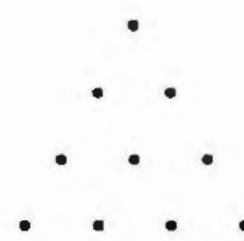
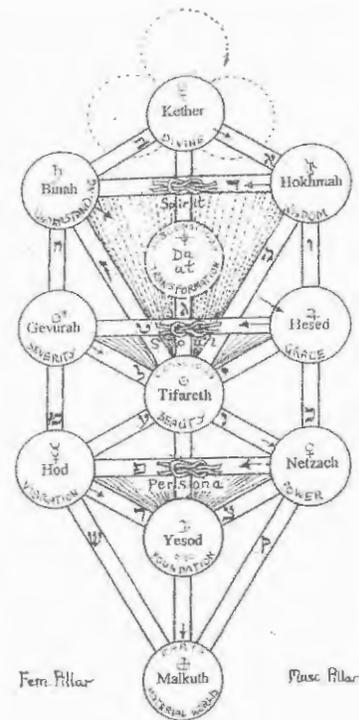
two-dimensional projection of what, if projected in this physical world, should be a three-dimensional model.

The ten Sephiroth are given names, which correspond to various emanations, through which Ain Soph (the Infinite) reveals Himself and continuously creates both the physical realm and the chain of higher physical realms. In the two-dimensional model, the emanations are arranged as shown in this figure:

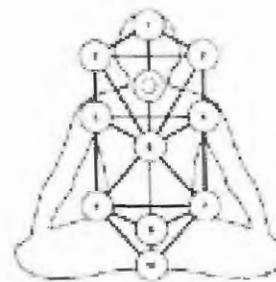
Between the ten Sephiroth in the Tree of Life are found twenty-two paths. Manly P. Hall posited that the ten Sephiroth and the twenty-two paths was analogous to the thirty-two degrees of Scottish Rite Freemasonry. Interesting enough; however, before continuing it may be fitting to take a short detour and introduce another symbol that should be mentioned: an old friend, the Pythagorean Tetractys.

The Tetractys was a very important symbol in Pythagorean worship. It is a triangular form, of ten dots, arranged as shown in the figure on the right. The Kabbalists substitute Yods, or arrange the Tetragrammaton, in place of the dots. Known as the Lesser Tetractys, it prominently figures in the Scottish Rite Craft Lodges, as well as in the "higher" grades of that system. In addition to the traditional explanation that it embodied the Four Elements, it is often considered another representation of the Tree of Life. We'll touch on this again, later; but back to the Sephiroth.

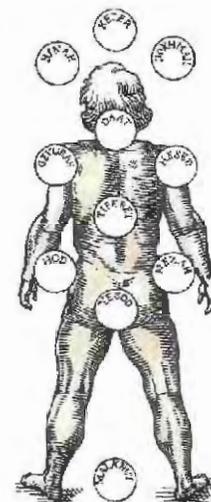
As one can see, the more one delves, the more complex it becomes, with the several esoteric societies and authors heaping more expressions in an effort to understand the Divine emanations, including the assignment of certain archangels and planets to each Sephira, depending on the interpretations of the writer. Brother Timothy Hogan proposed a rather intriguing arrangement of the attributes of both the ten Sephiroth and the twenty-two paths. For our purposes, we can use a few much simpler models, to explore how they are represented in the forms of Freemasonry as we practice them today.



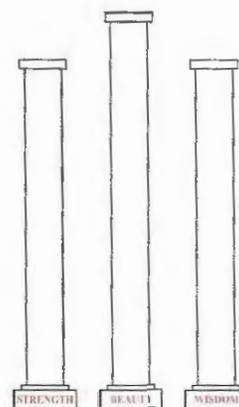
The first of these models is the correlation of the Tree of Life with the human body. The next two figures show a couple of interpretations of the theory, one being a human, sitting in a lotus position, in an attitude of meditation, and the other standing erect. Note that there is a line of Sephiroth along the spine (Kether, Da'ath, Tiphareth, Yesod, and Malkuth). More on that later.



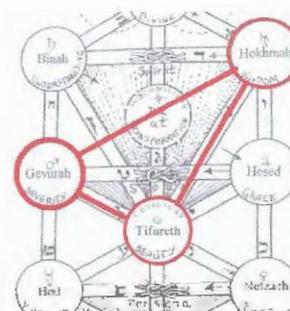
As alluded to in the title of this presentation, there are manifestations of the Sephiroth throughout Masonic Ritual, if only one has eyes to see.



Let us start with the Craft Lodge, where we are first introduced to two Pillars, then three. The first two pillars are our old friends, Boaz and Jachin, which we are taught represent Establishment and Strength. These are the constructive and destructive attributes, which we are admonished in the Scottish Rite 32nd Degree (Southern Jurisdiction), ever to hold and maintain in equilibrium. They are also representative of the Worshipful Master in the East and the Senior Warden In the West. The third column is Beauty, which in this diagram is placed between Wisdom and Strength and represented in the Craft Lodge by the Junior Warden. This third column furnishes the fulcrum (the "Middle Pillar") by which Equilibrium may be maintained between the constructive and destructive forces. When we consider the Middle Pillar, we will find that it follows the Sephiroth Kether, Daath, Tiphareth, Yesod, and Malkuth. As an aside, in some English esoteric circles, it is interesting to note that what we know as the Substitute Word is the name given to the Middle Pillar.



Tracing the paths between Wisdom (Chokmah), Strength (Geburah), and Beauty (Tiphareth) , we will see another old friend from the Craft Lodge, the triangle surrounding the Altar of Obligation. This symbol is left unexplained, not only in the Craft Lodge, but also in the Scottish Rite Consistory.

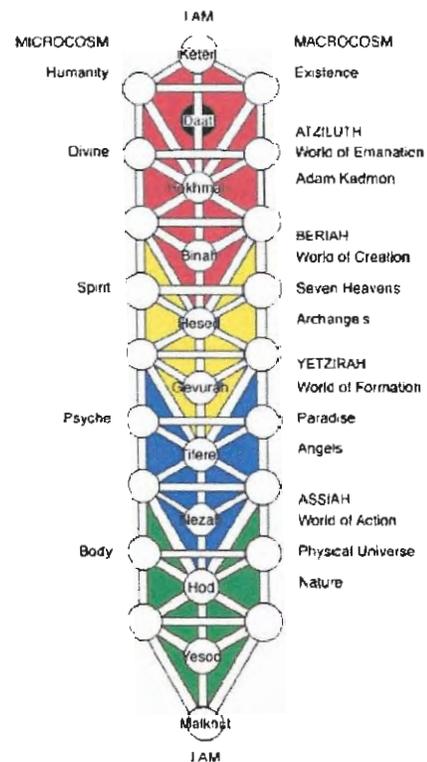


These should be reminders of what we are supposed to be undertaking within the Craft Lodge.

Most of the traditional work in contemplating the Sephiroth is carried out using the two-dimensional model that is seen, in varying forms, throughout the literature on the subject. However, we live in a four-dimensional world, with the three spatial dimensions and the dimension of time. If Bernard Perona were to be believed, the reason we only sense four dimensions is due to the fall from the higher spiritual planes from whence we came, to eke out our existence in the material world to which our spirits have become attached, until we can learn again how to reach the higher planes and be reintegrated with our Creator. Of course, among the sources from whom Perona cribbed the material for his writings, he took ran with this particular idea from Pasqually, who wrote on the concept.

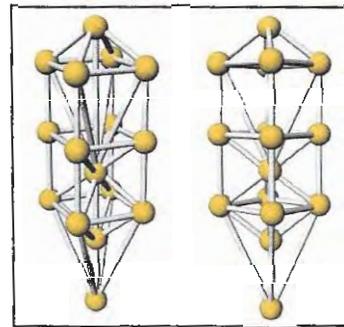
Fratre Steve Burkle wrote some interesting papers on the Sephiroth from a three-dimensional perspective, wherein he referred extensively to the works of Robert Wang, of Golden Dawn fame. I mention Burkle's presentations, because his graphical representations of Wang's work are worth sharing.

According to the Kabbalists, the Sephiroth are emanated through four worlds: the World of Elements, of Formation, of Creation, and of Emanation. These are sometimes graphically presented as four versions of the Sephiroth, stacked on atop the other, which is sometimes referred to as "Jacob's Ladder". The figure on the right is the traditional two-dimensional model of Jacob's Ladder. Another author colored the four levels as blue, purple, scarlet, and white, which should be familiar to Royal Arch Masons of American and Scottish origin.



Wang interpreted the Jacob's Ladder as a three-dimensional model, with the four worlds interlaced. The next figure shows Wang's interpretation, with essentially forming a "double cube" rotating around

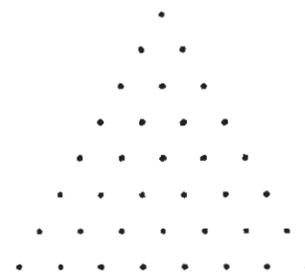
the Middle Pillar. Visualizing the Emanations as a three-dimensional manifestation should make their understanding easier.



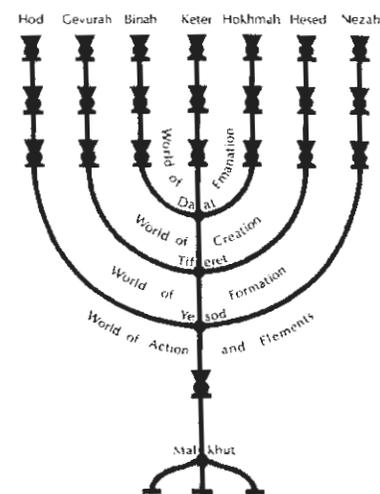
One thing not touched upon is how the paths are followed through the various Sephiroth. That would be a good topic suitable for its own presentation; however, in both models of the Jacob's ladder, one could begin to see a representation of a double helix when tracing pathways. Although DNA was only recently (re?)discovered, the similarity shouldn't be discounted, if one lends credence to the concept that what is manifested in the Spiritual Realm ("As Above") would also be manifested in the Material Realm ("So Below").

Now that the concept of a three-dimensional model has been presented, we will go back to more symbolism in a Masonic context. But, before we do, there are a couple of other items worth mentioning.

If the Tetractys, introduced earlier, is considered to be a different representation of the Sephiroth, and the Jacob's ladder is considered to be a representation of its layout through the four worlds, then the Greater Tetractys should be considered a representation of the Sephiroth through the four worlds. In it can be found four copies of the Lesser Tetractys. This symbol is introduced, without explanation, in the 32nd degree of the Scottish Rite (S.J.). Sometimes it is composed of seven points, sometimes eight, sometimes eleven (abracadabra!).



In looking for three-dimensional models in the physical world, one doesn't have to look very far. The Sephiroth are manifested throughout the emblems and trappings of the degrees beyond the Craft. The Menorah is found in Jewish Houses of Worship, as well as in most, if not all, Jewish households. Among Kabbalists, is a physical representation of the Sephiroth. Once that explanation is understood, several Scottish Rite degrees of the Lodge of Perfection (read "completion"), and the walk-on part it makes in several of



the Capitular and Cryptic grades, make more sense; at least it did, to me. Unfortunately, no effort is made to explain the meaning of this sign and its symbolism in the grades, no more than the Platonic Solids are explained after their introduction in the English Royal Arch ritual. But, I digress.

Other allusions to the Sephiroth include the long journey and the passing of the Veils in the Royal Arch degree. Hogan's treatise provides some useful clues. Another useful reference would be Wilmshurst, although he was more interested in presenting what the four Craft Grades meant to him, rather than how they correlate to the Tree of Life.

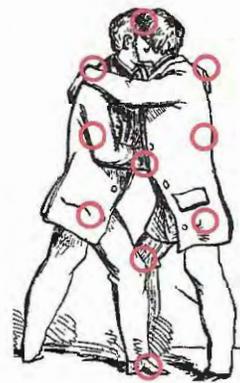
Of course, the burning questions now become: why does the Tree of Life find itself displayed in so many ways in the various Masonic systems? What is its importance, despite it never being explained in the Ritual, but simply left to the Neophyte to conclude for himself? Maybe there is an esoteric purpose to the Ritual that isn't explained, or more probably, understood. After all, they are still part of the furniture (as in essential parts) of the Lodge, even though no one gets it. How is the knowledge they allude to imparted, despite the hobbling of our ceremonies?

The latter question should be answered by acts of psychic transmission during the ceremonies. Greer discusses this aspect, albeit fleetingly, in his book on adopting Western Lodge systems in magical Lodges. In this case, the transmission should take place at various stages of the ceremony, and could begin as simply as the obligator laying his hand on the hand of the Aspirant during the giving of the Obligation. And it continues in other ways through the various ceremonies.

One representation of the Tree of Life may be interpreted as being through the Five Points of Fellowship. On the right is an old woodcut taken from Duncan's Ritual, showing the Five Points, with which all of us should already be familiar. However, closer examination of the woodcut strongly suggests a traditional arrangement of the Sephiroth, with the feet, knees, breasts, and heads forming the Middle Pillar. This should allude to a transmission, or imparting, or imprinting, of the knowledge of the Emanations from the Master to the initiate, provided that all present are aware of what is really going on, with the hope that the Master is attuned to the purpose of the Five Points, and the Aspirant is capable of receiving it, on a spiritual level – although



some may catch on quickly, others may take a while to reach the intended result, and still others will never get it.



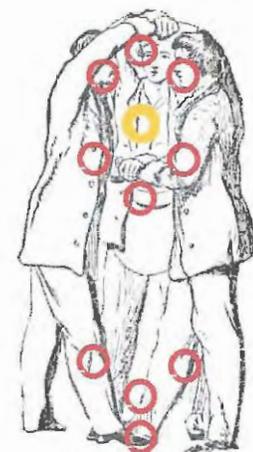
But, what is the point of this effort to transmit this great secret that is hiding in plain sight? Part of the practice of High Magic is to invoke and bring to this plane some physical manifestation of the spiritual energies of the Godhead, for whatever is the intended purpose.

Taking this concept further, another representation may be found in the Royal Arch grip, with which all of us should be familiar. It is given by three times three, in the presence of three, under a Living Arch and over a Triangle (the formula varies by Royal Arch jurisdiction, but it is essentially the same).

On the right is another woodcut from Duncan. It shows the Royal Arch Grip after the Living Arch is raised. Note that there are four triangles manifested in the grip: the feet should be Yesod, Hod, and Nezah; the lower hands Tiphareth, Geburah, and Chesed; the three Companions' heads would be Binah, Chokmah, and Kether, which also should be represented by the Three Principals. Malkuth is the ground on which the three Companions are standing.



What of the fourth triangle, comprised of the Companions' hands? When the Royal Arch Word, and Grand Omnific Word, are given, the hands are at Ain Soph Aur, or the Infinite Light. Da'ath is represented as being in the Middle Pillar, with the Secrets being deposited in the repository of faithful breasts, which in this case may include the connection between the brain and the spinal column. This is important because Da'ath represents subconscious transformation. Now knowing what the Grand Omnific Word is, in conjunction with the name for the Middle Pillar (the "Substitute Word"), the candidate receives the complete information intended to be transmitted through the teachings of Ancient Craft Masonry, which is The Word. While it only takes one to imprint (teach) another, it takes several attuned to implement (work) the action.



As the Scriptures say, if three or more are gathered together in THE LORD's name, then they THE LORD is with them – provided, of course, that all of the participants are truly in a spiritual mindset, to allow reception of the Emanations from The Infinite. With this perspective, it may be reasonable to say that while the Master Mason may transmit the roadmap of the Emanations from one Brother to another, it takes three Companions to take the journey and maintain equilibrium, so the Middle Pillar is manifested in the Chapter.

So, to where does this lead us? Let us follow an altogether different direction, although it may be related to this presentation. Signe Dean, in a June 13, 2017 *Science Alert* article, wrote that neuroscientists, using algebraic topology, which is a classic branch of mathematics, along with a supercomputer, used these tools to peer into the structure of our brains in a new way, at least on a theoretical level. According to the article, they discovered that the brain could be full of multi-dimensional geometrical structures that were operating at a quantum level, constantly constructing needed connections, and destroying them once their purposes had been completed. These structures were operating in as many as 11 different dimensions. This is an interesting number, because there are 10 Sephiroth, plus Da'ath, which makes 11. Perhaps the brain is still capable of acting on other dimensions, despite our inability to perceive at our level? Perhaps science is catching up to metaphysics? Maybe Bernard Perona was on to something?

These explorations have led me to the conclusion that we are all striving to reintegrate with our Creator, and Freemasonry, while not a religion with sectarian arguments, is a forum to learn to attune the mind and spirit to receive THE LORD's many blessings, among like-minded Brothers and Companions. We are all here to help one another to attain the ultimate spiritual outcome; unfortunately, most Master Masons and Royal Arch Masons may not get beyond the superficial in their spiritual journeys, and, since enlightenment is experiential, those who do are unable to express their perceptions that come through this journey.

This presentation is but a roadmap showing my own journey, which is only starting. But then, elsewhere in "Stranger in a Strange Land" another character laments humanity's unwillingness to accept simple Truth when it is in plain sight. More food for thought. That being said, this author knows this journey of study is only beginning.

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