

CHAPTER ENDNOTE: QABBALISM AND KUNDALINI YOGA

When one is first exposed to other religions, especially if this occurs when a person is young and has been heavily indoctrinated into a particular faith, his first reactions are probably fearful one. He is probably judgmental of 'that' religion, and discounts it, really out of fear. Judgements we make arise from problems inside of us. Judgement doesn't seem, usually at least, to be an accurate statement about anything, rather is a window on one's own soul and its problems. In any event, fear is our initial response to other faiths. We perceive them as being different.

However, as one looks at more faiths, and looks deeper into them than a superficial naming, it becomes apparent that there are a surprising number of parallels between faiths. The most obvious one is the simple fact that faiths all have creation stories, and that the central actor(s) in these stories are divine beings. Why should that be so? Pure coincidence? We think not. Right living, good choices are also common to religious systems. Why should that be so? There are satanic groups whose emphasis isn't on good works, so it is definitely possible to have religions whose focus is not good. So why are the vast majority of faiths predicated on good? Fear is probably the answer. Fear that the malignant powers that most faiths believe in will mistreat us if we mistreat them, or mistreat other people. So out of a fear of punishment, or a desire for rewards, i.e. bounteous crops, rain, etc., religions persuade people to do good.

However, there are considerably more complicated comparisons between some religions, parallels that cannot be explained in this simple-minded way. The example we are driving at is Qabbalism and Kundalini Yoga. Qabbalism is a Jewish belief system several millennia old, that espouses doctrines based on a set of sefirah, which are, in the simplest sense, a set of values. These are drawn up into a tree which is used to illustrate many things. Numerology is central to this system, as is the attribution of arcane meanings and values to the Hebrew letters that also appear in the tree. The point of this system is to explain why things are as they are in this world, how we should behave in relationship to each other, what sort of religious system should be practiced, what sort of relationship should exist between man and wife, etc.

Kundalini Yoga, a frightening form of Tantric yoga practiced in Tibet and North India, is founded on the belief in the existence of spiritual centers in human beings that can be activated through practices of various kinds. These centers, which are six in number, are termed 'chakras' and they 'exist' along the spinal cord.

These two faiths, if that is a correct designation to use, share

remarkable similarities that we wonder about: whence cometh such deeply important, complex similarities?

SEFIROT AND CHAKRAS:

The first one we will note is the comparison between the sefirot and chakras. The sefirot (singular 'sefirah') are given 'anthropomorphic representations'¹ which are displayed on the following page in the left column. The chakras are also given physical approximations which are described on the following page in the right column. You will note for yourself how many parallels there are between the two. Is that surprising? Perhaps not if one begins to look for parallels between religions concepts and our anatomy and physiology. The question is, then, what lead these two faiths to do that?

The second comparison to note is the dominant role of sex in both schemes. The surprise is the amount of sexual detail provided in the Qabbala. However, rest assured that there is equally great amounts of sex permeating the chakras. The table of chakras simply summarizes the centers, but says nothing about the activities or sex roles involved in the liturgy.

The third comparison is the role of the mind, head or skull. Both grant pre-eminence to this thing, which isn't really surprising since it seems to all of us to be the thing that runs the show.

A fourth comparison between the two that isn't evident from the tables is the relationship of the sexes. The Qabbala² places her at the bottom. Malkhut is the Sacred Daughter, the wife, the sister, etc. And she is sort of off the tree if you ever see it drawn out. So she seems to be given secondary status. In Tantrism, the female seems also to be given secondary status. She sits in a three and a half coiled pile in the perineum. However, both religions afford a remarkably powerful role to their females. To the Cabalists, a man is only complete when he is in congress

¹These are from Kaplan 1979. Similar representations are available in virtually any text on cabalistic practices, i.e. Waite's THE KABBALAH.

²For any red-pencil English teacher who staggers this far into this mess, please rest assured that we have not gone off our nut. The variety of spellings of this name is a) the richest we know of any word in any language, and b) acceptable. It's like we gave a spelling bee for a gaggle of fourth graders, and offered this word as the first one, after which we kept the rich variety of spellings. Even if these variations don't show up in your OED or any other dictionary, be assured that they are found in the rich literature on this topic. (And remember that a dictionary isn't a law-giver anyway. It's merely a historical snap shot of the state of the language at a particular point in time. We merely afford it authority out of desperation for someone to be in charge of spelling!)

QABBALAH

NAME OF SEFIRAH	BODY PART
1. Chakhmah	skull, mind
2. Binah	right brain
3. Chesed	left brain, heart
4. Gevurah	right hand
5. Tiferet	body, torso
6. Netzach	right foot, right kidney, right testicle
7. Hod	left foot, left kidney, left testicle
8. Yesod	sexual organ
9. Malkhut	mouth (of organ), mate

TANTRISM

NAME OF CHAKRA	LOCATION ALONG SPINE
1. Sahasrara	Lotus of a Thousand Petals
2. Ajna	Pineal eye (Behind eyes)
3. Vishuddha	Throat
4. Anahata	Heart
5. Manipura	Naval
6. Svadhishthana	Sex organs
7. Maladhara	Perineum

ANTHROPOMORPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF SEFIROT

with a woman^[3], not just in a state of marriage. And a woman is the source of inspiration that is called down, or can descend, on the male who honors his wife. To the yoga, Mother Kali, simultaneously transcendently beautiful and horrible, resides in the male's body in the perineum. As he starts his journey to enlightenment, she is coaxed to rise upward, piercing each chakra in order. If he succeeds, he does so only because he is successful at persuading her to rise, she retaining the power to sit still. His attainment of the Lotus of a Thousand Petals, the state of temporary enlightenment, is only possible if She is present. Then, to literally save his life, he must coax her to recede downward, closing each chakra in order. In both religions, the female plays equal roles with the male.

It is interesting to note that the Jewish faith gives the female power the same description as Tantrics:

**Who is she who looks forth at the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible like an army with banners?"
Song of Songs 6:10**

To the ancient Jews, the Song of Songs is more than just another poem. Kaplan says:

"The Song of Songs is thus said to be the Holy of Holies. The 'Holies' are the six male Sefirot of Zer Anpin, while the 'Holy of Holies' is the 'Holy'^[4] that pertains to these 'Holies', namely Malkhut-Kingship. (1979:180)

But note his next comment, that emphasizes the similarities between the two faiths:

"Similarly, when a person enters into a mystical state, he is said to enter the realm of the 'Holies', that is, of the Sefirot. But the one Sefirah through which one must first pass is Malkhut-Kingship, and it is there for the 'Holy of Holies'". (1979:180)

The status of Kingship being given to the female, not the male, is indicative of the major role of the female.

³Which is properly accomplished at midnight on the Sabbath.

⁴At one point, the term 'holy' even refers specifically to the female receptacle. Kaplan suggests that all comparisons and meanings be kept in mind at all times, in order to comprehend Qabbalism at all levels. This is a good example.

Another comparison involves the spinal cord. The chakras are actually described as located on the spinal cord. The spine is given the name Mount Meru, and Kali must ascend Mt. Meru on her voyage. The surprise to us is that Qabalists also attribute importance to the spinal cord. Kaplan said, "...the lulav is the spinal cord." (1979:180) In the Feast of Tabernacles^[5], non-edible vegetable matter plays a central role. At one point in the celebration, people grasp two bundles of branches: in the right hand is a combination of lulav (palm), myrtle and willow, while the left holds etrog (citron) which is the female portion. At one point, the two are placed together to symbolize the joining of male and female. The lulav is the part we are interested here. It is used as an emblem or symbol of the spine and ribs. Both religions utilize that symbol in their belief systems.

Another comparison that will surprise most readers is that between the final states sought in both faiths. The object of Tantrism is to attain what Westerners call perfection, which to them is voidness. At that point, reincarnations cease and the soul has completed its development. Note that we don't say 'achieved perfection' or 'is happy', etc. The term used to designate the final state of being is voidness because there is nothing. No good because that would mean that bad would be present, no happiness because that would mean that sadness was present. Nothing. To most Christians and Jews this seems like a peculiar thing to seek. However, the Qabbalist has a different belief. Kaplan notes:

**"As a suffix, Yod means 'my', since, even though it can be perceived by us, it is still a level that belongs solely to God. This is also the level of Atzilut-Nearness, which we experience as Nothingness."
(1979:103)**

So to the Cabalist, Nothingness plays a role in his faith, just as to the Tantrism. The two faiths also share a belief in opposites. Kaplan says:

**Once we have the concepts of cause and effect, another concept comes into being, namely that of opposites. In order to speak of opposites, however, we must also be able to speak of similarities. Two new concepts thus come into being, namely similarity and oppositeness. In the language of philosophy these are thesis and antithesis, while in Kabbalistic terminology, these two are Chakhmah-Wisdom and Binah-Understanding, the Yud and initial Heh of the Tetragrammaton."
(1979:105)**

⁵ This festival turns out to be THE central Jewish celebration. Everything in that faith is derived in some fashion from this seven day party.

It is this same belief in the pairing of opposites that seems to lead Tantrism to the conclusion that the final state that can be attained is one of voidness. One thing implies its opposite, so there can't be anything there. To the Qabalist, this state of Nothingness is simply one of four creative levels, so isn't the final state.