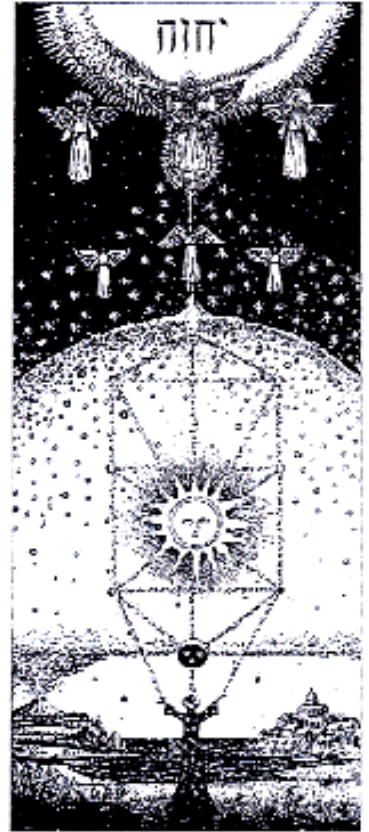


An Introduction to Kabbalah

Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi

Kabbalah is the name of a body of esoteric knowledge. Its origin is the inner teaching of Judaism. Its concern is God, the universe and humanity, and their mutual interrelation.



Tradition states that it was given by the archangel Raziel to Adam and Eve, after they had been cast out of Eden, so that they might regain entrance to paradise. This Torah or teaching has been passed on over the generations, although nearly lost from time to time. It is said that Abraham was initiated into the tradition by Melchizedek, who had neither father or mother, indicating that he was a supernatural being. Some say he was Enoch, the first fully realised human being.

From Abraham the knowledge was passed on through the patriarchs to Moses, who transmitted it to Joshua and the elders. It was then taught by a line of priests, prophets and rabbis. Changing its outer form and name from period to period, the teaching nevertheless maintained its essential instruction on the purpose and composition of existence and humanity's role. By the Middle Ages it had taken on the language of philosophy which, combined with biblical symbolism, came to be called Kabbalah or "What has been received."

Cast in a blend of metaphysics, cosmology and psychology, combined with various practices, it has come down to us today when it yet again is being reformulated in contemporary terms. This enables the present generation to comprehend this ancient spiritual teaching. What follows is a very brief account of the theory and practice of Kabbalah.

Diagram 1 Before the beginning of anything there was only God. Nothing existed, not even existence. Tradition states that the Absolute, called Ayin or No-thing and Ayin Sof or The Limitless in Kabbalah, wished to behold ITSELF and so Existence was willed into being to act as a vast mirror by which God could perceive the reflection of God. This process was accomplished, it is allegorically explained, by the Absolute withdrawing ITSELF from a portion of totality, thus allowing a void to appear in which Existence could be encompassed. Into this space the Holy One projected a line of light, a symbol of will, which unfolded in a specific sequence that was to be the structure and dynamic of a series of four universes, held together by Divine will.

[Diagram 2](#) Out of this process emerged the primordial design of ten sefirot or Numbers which were joined by twenty-two connecting paths, denoted by Hebrew letters, that produced sixteen triads. The resultant metaphysical figure was later to be known as the Tree of Life. It was also seen as the Garden of Holy Apples, the Glory of God and the first outline of God's image, which took on a human form called Adam Kadmon. This primordial world was to be the source of the human race.

Known also as Azilut, this Divine World of Emanation was the realm of the Eternal and the potential from which the subsequent worlds were to emerge in an outward and descending impulse of manifestation. These lesser universes would be based on the Divine laws as set out by the sefirot, paths and triads. As such they were to form a vast cosmic spectrum stretching from the original point of light to the densest of matter.

At the top of the Tree of Life is the sefirah of Keter or the Crown. This represents unity and the source of the system. From here, the Lightning Flash, as it is called, generates Hokhmah-Wisdom and Binah-Understanding which, together with Keter make the supernal triad at the head of the Tree. From them comes the central pillar of Divine will and the active and passive side pillars. They arise as the Lightning Flash descends in a spiral through the seven lower sefirot.

In terms of the humanoid symbol, they set out the anatomy of Adam Kadmon with its active and passive intellectual, emotional and practical levels as well as its central axis of degrees of consciousness. Seen metaphysically, the diagram can be related to the traditional Hebrew names and a modern understanding of their functions, such as the universal principles of origin, initiation, pattern, expansion, contraction, cycles, frequency and manifestation. The three sefirot on the central column, of image, essence and knowledge, relate to levels of perception.

[Diagram 3](#) Out of the primal Divine realm of Emanation, symbolised by Fire, emerges the second universe of Air or Spirit that is to become the world of Beriah or Creation. This is one remove from the world of The Eternal Unchanging. Here time begins with the Seven Days of Creation as Existence starts to unfold. This world parallels Plato's realm of ideas, that is pure essence or spirit which has as yet no form. At this point, as the Bible states, the concepts of Light, or Fire, and Air, as seen in the firmament, appear on the first and second days with Water and Earth appearing in their separation and differentiation on the third day, along with Life, as symbolised by plants. On the fourth day the cosmos is regulated by rhythms and cycles. The fifth day of Creation manifests the "birds of the air", or archangels, and "fish of the sea", or angels, followed on the sixth by the appearance of "beasts of the field" and a second, "spiritual", androgynous Adam. This biblical myth contains a very precise order, which is why Kabbalah has its source in the scriptures.

[Diagram 4](#) In esoteric work, symbolism is often more informative than metaphysics because poetic implication evokes the imagination. The process of creation described in Genesis is a prime example of the allegorical method of exposition. Here the description of creation cannot possibly be physical in so short a time. It is as yet without form or substance, like the concept of a temple before any plans are drawn up or a stone is laid. The next stage is the emergence of Paradise or the world of Formation. Here ideas become pure forms. The symbol of the Garden of Eden is an image of a perfect landscape with plants and animals in their pristine prime. In this third world the spiritual Adam has now become divided into male and female soul-mates who represent humanity at the psychological level.

The differentiation of Adam and Eve indicates an increasing complexity as the Divine process is removed further from its source. While the archangels remain formless spirits in the heavenly realm of Creation, the angels can only inhabit Paradise. Likewise, the physical manifestation of minerals, flora and fauna are confined to the lowest world of materiality. Together, all make up a chain of being known in Kabbalah as Jacob's Ladder of Existence.

Thus there are four distinct universes corresponding to the four Divine elements. Although they are quite separate realities, they do however interpenetrate, as the lower part of a superior realm is parallel to the upper section of an inferior world. So, for example, the coarser levels of the world of Formation, relate to the finer levels of the physical universe. Dreams, apparitions and psychic phenomena belong to this marginal region. Likewise, the higher sections of the psychological realm interpenetrate the lower regions of the spiritual.

From the foregoing it will be seen that Kabbalists perceive Existence as a hierarchy of worlds, each of which is based on the sefirotic model of the first world. These are all locked together by a fifth world composed of an axial line running up an down the central column of Jacob's Ladder. This vertical tree is the way the Divine is able to penetrate every level.

In this scheme humanity has a special function and that is to act as a conscious organ of perception for the Absolute. Mankind is an extension of Adam Kadmon. Adam and Eve, after their descent from the Garden of Eden, put on coats of

skin, symbolising incarnation. They now had to rise from the physical level, through the medium of evolution, towards self-realisation. The aim of this operation is to experience every level of Existence, so that God may behold God through human perception. This is possible because mankind, unlike other creatures, can enter all four worlds.

According to Kabbalah, men and women contain all the worlds within themselves; they are the microcosm of Existence and therefore can gain access to and operate beyond material reality. Human imagination and reason can penetrate to the smallest particle of matter and reach out to the most distant galaxy as well as have visions of Paradise and the seven Heavens. The Kabbalah considers the study of humanity at both the collective and individual level vital for its development as the agent of the Absolute. As one sage observed; "If one wishes to know about what is above, then observe what occurs below. The lower and higher worlds operate on the same principles."

[Diagram 5](#) The human body, for example, can be seen very clearly in terms of the sefirotic tree. Take, for instance, the passive and active functions of the body. The left pillar is concerned with structure, the right with its dynamics, while the lowest sefirah, Malkhut, is related to matter. The central column defines the levels of awareness from the physical senses to being actively alert, while the four horizontal divisions of the tree differentiate the physical, chemical, electronic and conscious layers of operation.

In the midst of the lowest triad, composed of muscles, nerves and organs, is the autonomic system at the body's Yesod. Above this is the central nervous system at Tiferet, the central junctional position. Over this pivotal sefirah, Daat or the place of Knowledge acts as the bridge between the body and the lower psyche. This is also the same position as the Yesod of the psyche or ordinary mind of the ego. The Crown of the physical tree connects with the Tiferet of the psychological tree and the Malkhut of the tree of the Spirit. This indicates that there are three aspects to the Self. At death, contact is broken with the physical level. However, although the body decomposes, the psychological tree survives to be reborn, as Kabbalah subscribes to the idea of reincarnation.

One of the first practical exercises in Kabbalah is to get to know the body and how it has an instinctive mind of its own. In observing the four levels of mineral, vegetable, animal and human activities within it, one learns how each level has its special capabilities and needs. This leads to an understanding of the relationship between the body and the lower psyche which is necessary if the mind is not to be dominated by the Nefesh or vital soul which animates our instincts.

Over time, the influences of the elemental states of solids, liquids, gases and radiations are recognised, and how they respond to the external environment, such as a dull or bright day or barometric pressure and humidity. The Kabbalist also notes the vegetable level's endless hunger for food and sex, and how the animal level reacts in fight and flight modes, is full of curiosity and seeks the company of like-minded groups, due to the inherent herd instinct. Most people believe that dressing up and eating out in a smart restaurant with a potential partner, is sophisticated and peculiarly human when, in fact, it is a mating ritual designed to propagate the species. Nature is quite impersonal.

To be truly individual and human requires imagination, invention and reflection. These lead to insight, innovation and vision. Without such capacities, a person cannot rise above the lowest world of Assyah or Action which confines anything physical to that dimension. To be a fully human being one has to be able to rise beyond the senses and instinct. To know the abilities and limitations of the body and the possibilities of the psyche is the first step to self-realisation. Without this recognition, it is impossible to reach the spiritual and Divine levels.

[Diagram 6](#) The human psyche, as noted, is half immersed in the world of Nature with its upper part or the deeper parts of the unconscious parallel to the lower level of the Creative realm. This leaves, according to Kabbalah, the triad of the Soul to float freely in between. This is the flexible aspect of mind centred on the Self which, as said, has three components. These are the highest level of the of physical awareness, being the Crown of the body, the midpoint of the psyche and the lowest level of the spirit. Situated around the self are the active and passive emotional and intellectual triads that contain all that person's experience. This is the zone in which Freewill is exerted because it is not directly influenced by the body or the two higher worlds. It is here we make important decisions. In most people's cases such events are almost unconscious and subject to the largely unknown balance and composition of their particular psyche.

To enter and gain control of the unconscious and so make a choice that is not subject to one's conditioning, one must first study, identify and master habitual thoughts, feelings and actions which reside in the triad clustered around the ego. To do this, attention must move up the central column to Tiferet and hold a position in which one is "conscious of being conscious". This state means one is beyond the threshold of the lower mind and in the Awakening triad.

At this level the expression "I was beside (or above) myself" takes on a new meaning as the social persona we wear most of the time is seen to be a kind of psychological mask. This façade is made up of what we have learnt from our background and acquired from our genes. The practice of being conscious of being conscious, over time, can bring about a release from being dominated by our instincts, habitual emotions and fixed ideas and initiate the beginning of individuation.

To be true to oneself is to come into direct contact with the Soul triad at the heart of the psychological tree and the possibility of adjusting any emotional imbalance, strengthening the will and freeing ourselves from the cultural bonds that bind whole communities into collective reflex actions. Few people realise how profoundly herdlike attitudes rule their lives. In some places, for example, a fatalistic view pervades and so little progress is made personally or collectively. In contrast, at the family level, an optimistic outlook can make a dull and lazy person work. Many of life's losers and winners are the result of cultural compulsions rooted in the Super-Ego-Ideal of a clan, class or even nation. The American Dream is a classic example.

[Diagram 7](#) In Kabbalah the aim is to develop in order to be useful to God. This can be difficult without the help of a mentor or a school of the soul. Where wise instruction is given, the process is quite different from that of a conventional university, in which individuation is not the aim. Like other esoteric disciplines, Kabbalah is not concerned with qualifications but the soul and spirituality. It uses ancient and well tried methods to make it possible for an aspirant to go beyond the natural world and so begin to ascend Jacob's Ladder. An introductory technique for beginners, for example, is to identify one's bio-psycho type. Is one by nature a thinker, feeler or doer? Should a person be action-oriented, then the cultivation of feeling and thought is needed, while the intellectual type requires to be more practical and aware of their moods. The often plump "feeler", in contrast, has to learn to be more physical and think things through.

These activities teach the ego to become obedient to Tiferet, the self, and discard many old patterns. Such a process occasionally causes a student to begin to doubt their identity as the original persona dies and their true self begins to appear. This transformation also sometimes precipitates a psychological crisis as family and friends can no longer relate to what they are now becoming. Some break-ups inevitably occur where people cannot accept the individual's changing attitudes, values and new interests. The loneliness caused by this stage of development is identified with the "dark night of the soul", spoken about when one begins the path of self-development. In reality, one is not alone, as Heaven begins to take a direct interest in one's life. Unusual coincidences occur that indicate help is at hand.

People in this state are seen and regard themselves as "outsiders". They follow the archetypal myth of the person who is on a quest. Like the classical hero or heroine, they face many hazards and temptations to return to the old situation, but this is not possible because they know too much. Seen positively, this period is to test and develop their individuality. Can they be independent in the face of difficulty? Assistance is close but it must not be given openly until the person can truly stand alone and not be side-tracked by unimportant issues and petty desires. It is better not to start on the path until one is truly ready.

[Diagram 8](#) "When the student is ready, the master appears" is an old esoteric adage. It is then one encounters, as if by accident, someone connected with a school of the soul or one's inner teacher, who has been there all the time in the hidden position of Daat, or higher knowledge. They draw attention to someone wiser than oneself or the door to a school of the soul. Such events often appear to be an accident but they are not. It is that most people do not recognise a teacher or school until they have reached the triad of awakened consciousness on the tree of development.

The personal mentor might be an old friend who has been waiting for you to reach that point or it could be a seemingly chance acquaintance. Such a teacher may be in the form of a rabbi, priest or candlestick maker. There is no official role for esoteric instructors. One great master was a dockyard porter, another a carpenter, while yet another was a merchant banker. However, at this early stage it is better to have a tutor who is just one or two steps ahead.

One element all these people have in common is that they belong to a spiritual tradition. The obvious lines are to be located in the great religions and philosophies but where the door to them is not so easily to be found. Such esoteric groups are hidden behind all sorts of façades. Only those who are awake will recognise the signs of their presence.

[Diagram 9](#) What is a school of the soul and how does it operate? Let us use the Kabbalistic model as an archetype, as the tree applies to any esoteric tradition, providing it is a genuine one. As can be seen from the diagram, there are various levels and functions that correspond to the mind. The body is the equivalent to the physical place where the school meets, while the ego relates to the students and the self to the teacher. The initial disciplines are concerned with the training in the ways of contemplation, devotion and action in accordance with the theory and practice of that school's tradition.

As there are seven levels of the psyche, so there are seven levels of a school. These are called the lesser mysteries. They are primarily concerned with the soul and the mind. What are called the Greater Mysteries are involved with advanced spiritual activities that require the aspirant to have passed all the tests needed to show integrity, reliability and maturity. This level begins at the point of Tiferet of the school and proceeds seven stages up into the spiritual tree.

Here it should be noted that there are living and dead schools with a range of growing or withering ones in between. The reason for this phenomenon is that some teachings and methods can lose their vitality and veracity after the founder has died, and become outdated and rigid institutions. These fossilised organisations are often run by people who practise the form, but not the content, of their traditions. Such places can become psychological prisons that bind their members by irrelevant rules and outmoded attitudes instead of helping them to gain inner freedom. The medieval scholastic line began as a school of the soul but in time became the basis for academic institutions. Some schools that started with the devotional approach have become places where only the music mattered while another, once a school of action, became just concerned with empty ritual. One must discern the quick from the dead.

Here and there are schools which claim they have esoteric secrets and are led by initiates. Some may indeed be in possession of a fragment of real knowledge but they use it to exploit inexperienced seekers. The ancient myths and legends are full of such examples, symbolised by bad magicians and evil seducers. Fortunately, there is usually a Merlin or Fairy Godmother around to warn one about such false teachers. In real life these guardians appear in many forms from a seemingly casual meeting to an event that is clearly an alerting omen.

Many beginners on the Path want to have a Buddha as a teacher. This is one of the first romantic delusions that has to be dispensed with. Such masters are very rare and mostly work with people who have gone well beyond the personal level. Only then can they understand what a great Teacher is about and be able to participate in some global operation, such as founding or rejuvenating a civilisation, as Buddha or Zoroaster did.

As can be seen from the school diagram, much has to be learnt. The pain triad relates to the conscious suffering that is experienced when giving up old patterns, negative emotions and now useless ideas. The pleasure triad is about growth, freedom and love that come with interior work and transformation. One happiness, often experienced, is to become part of a soul group within the school. This solid companionship is vital as a support, especially when things are difficult as regards the outside world, which generally resents change. Consider the resistance every prophet has met.

The transpersonal views represented by the great triad of a tradition bring in the dimension of Reason and Revelation without which an esoteric school cannot function. In this case, the place of the inner teacher may be seen in terms of the original founder, or the presence of their spirit. Moses still has an influence on Kabbalah even after over three thousand years, while other long-departed masters still preside over their particular schools. Some traditions call them guardian angels or ancestral guides.

Every school has a distinct style. The Whirling Dervishes have a turning ritual to raise their conscious level while Buddhists apply deep meditation to lift the attention. Kabbalists use everyday events as a discipline. As one rabbi observed, "One can learn even from a thief who always looks out for opportunities to practise his profession." The Kabbalist regards life and their particular fate or Karma as the teacher.

When a certain degree of interior integration has been achieved, then the higher centres of consciousness begin to open. This leads to a more profound insight into the Nature of Existence and one's own place in it. Needless to say, these higher stages of evolution require a greater sense of responsibility and candidates are repeatedly tested to see if they are trustworthy in taking care of other people's development. When they have proved themselves they are usually given an assignment. This could be to start a group, work in a certain profession so as to influence its evolution, or carry out some mission such as scattering hints about the tradition for seekers to pick up on.

[Diagram 10](#) All this leads to the point of kabbalistic work. First comes a commitment to personal development. Then comes an involvement with others on the Path. Out of this comes Kabbalah's contribution to the evolution of civilisation. Without esoteric schools, humanity would still be at the level of savagery, or at least barbaric. Nationalism, which is merely a sophisticated form of tribalism, has almost destroyed the world. What progress that has ever been made to produce the world's religions, philosophies and the best of science and art, is the result of the work done in esoteric schools. For example, Sir Isaac Newton was a Freemason, as was Mozart. Shakespeare was undoubtedly a member of a school of the soul; so too were Madame Blavatsky, Pythagoras and Confucius.

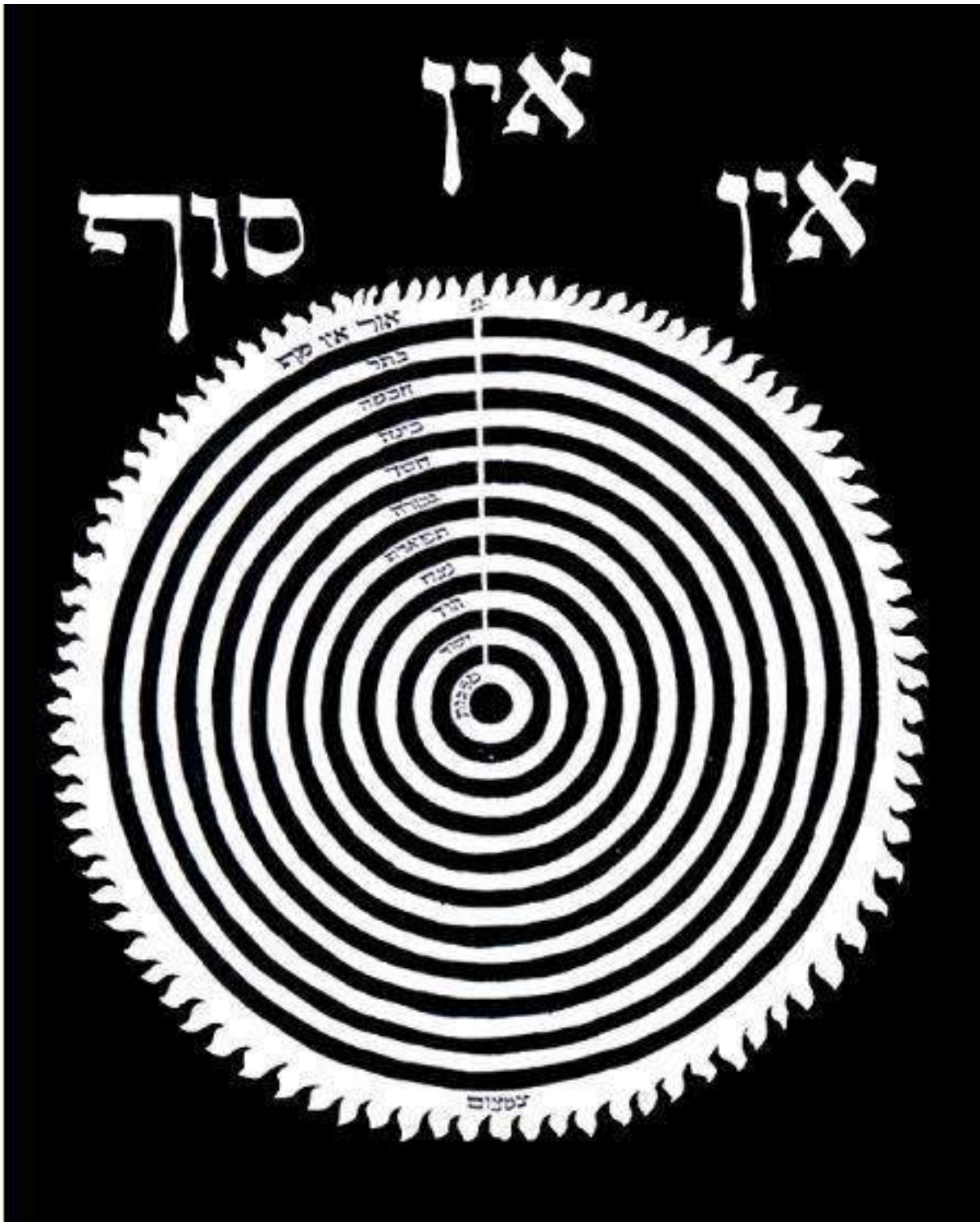
[Diagram 11](#) What your part is in the divine drama that is going on is for you to discover. Kabbalah may be your way; if not there are many other schools of the soul to explore, if you know what to look for.

Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi

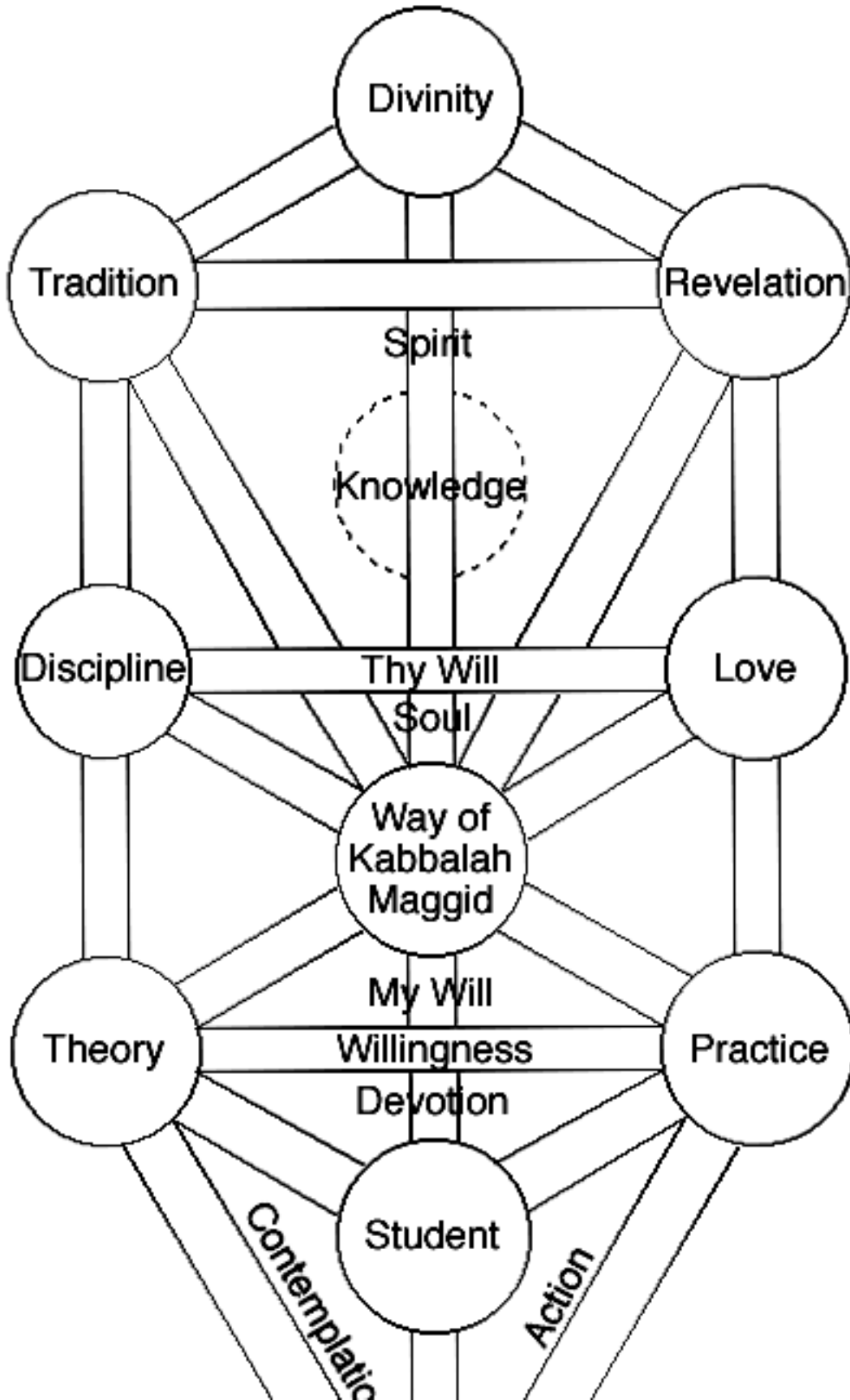
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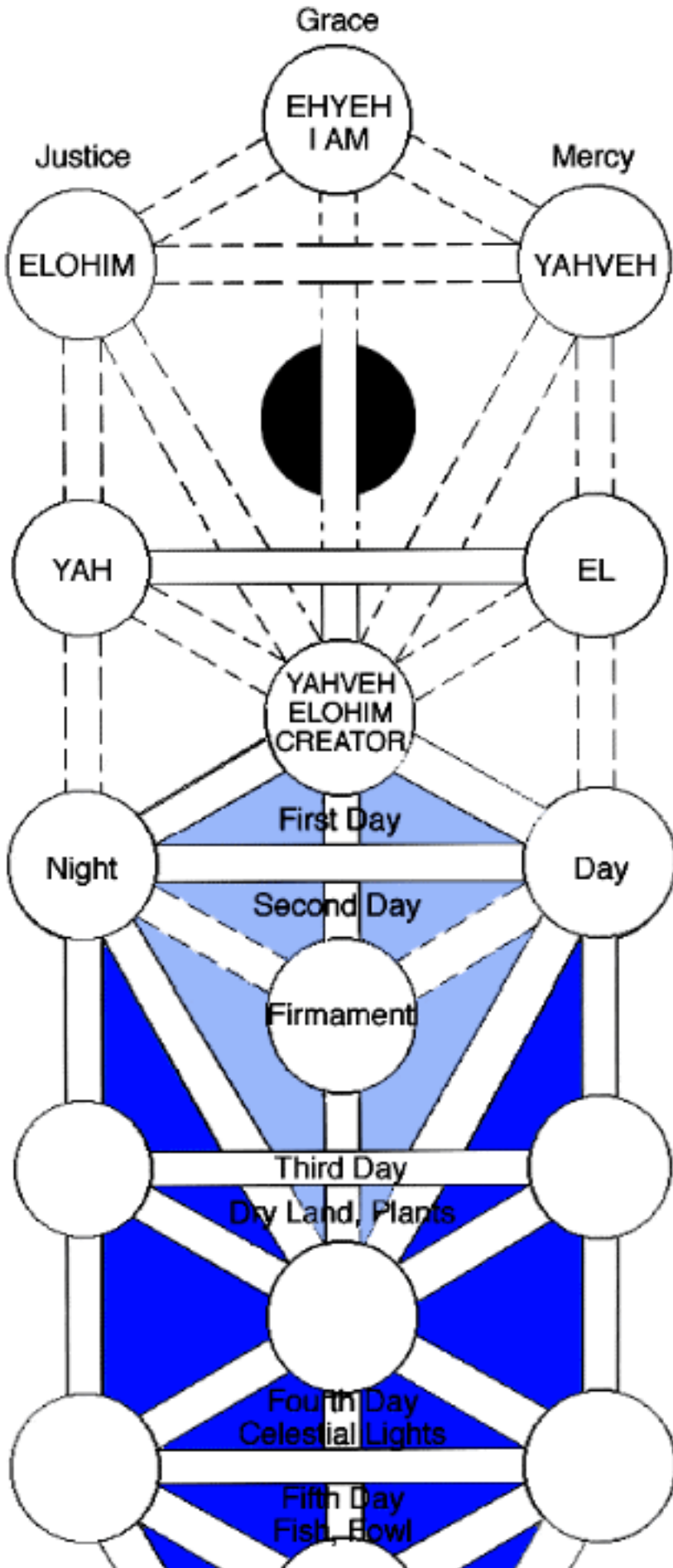
An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 1
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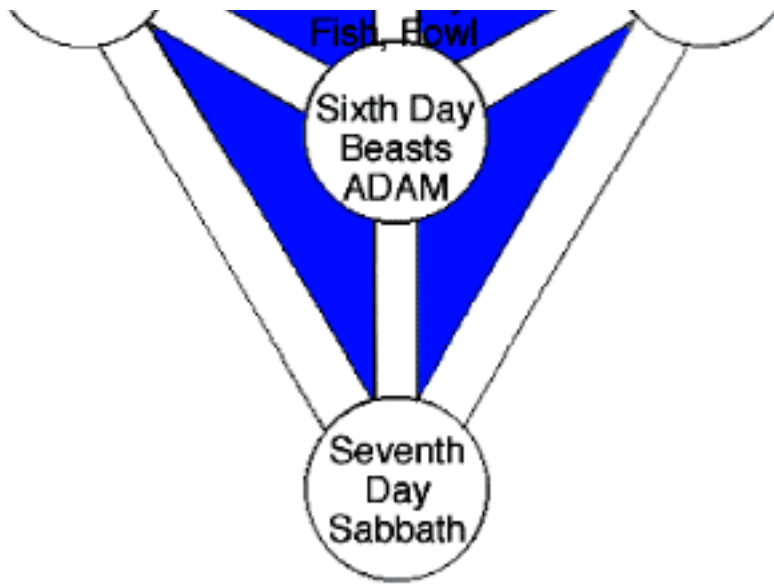


An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 2 / Tree of Life
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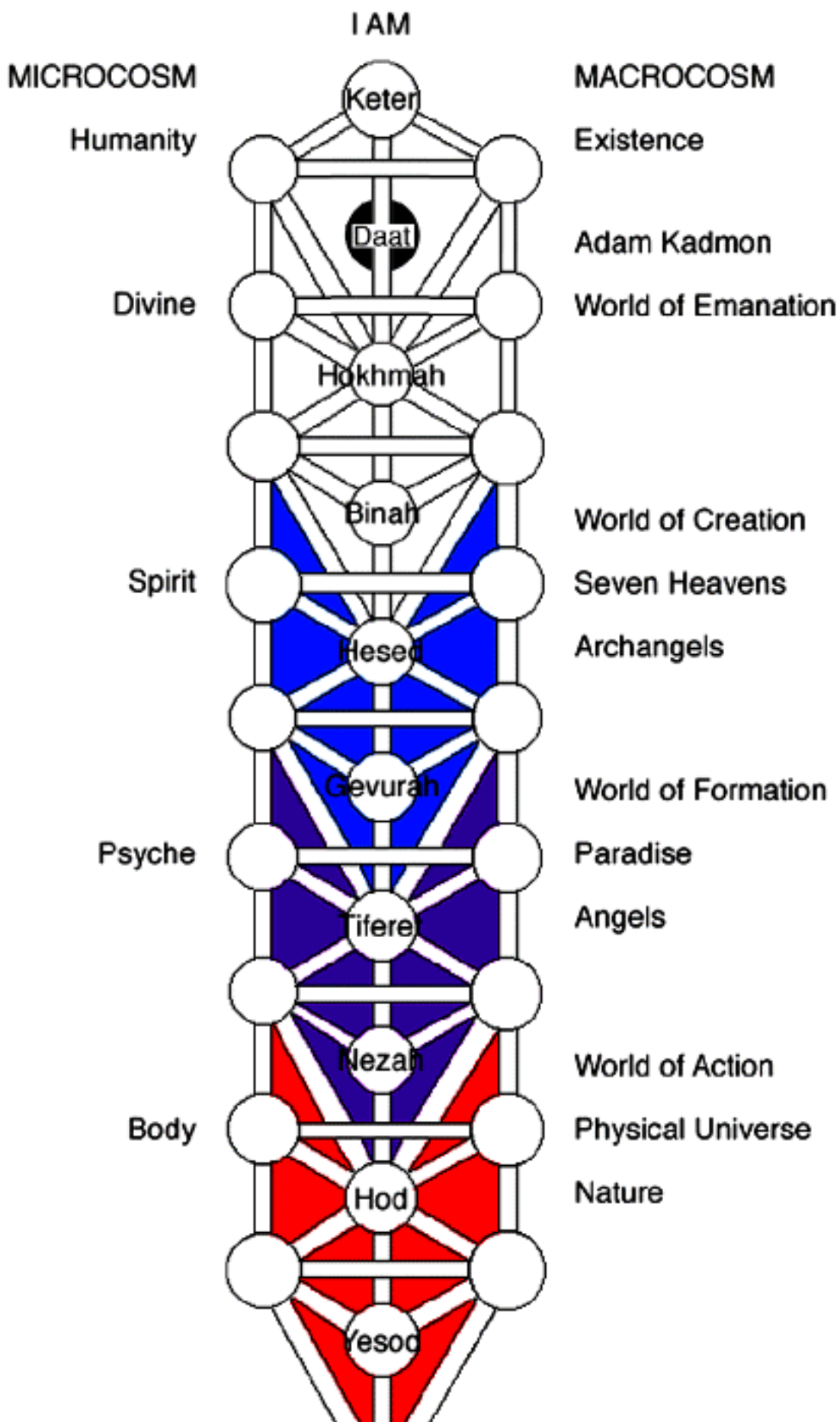


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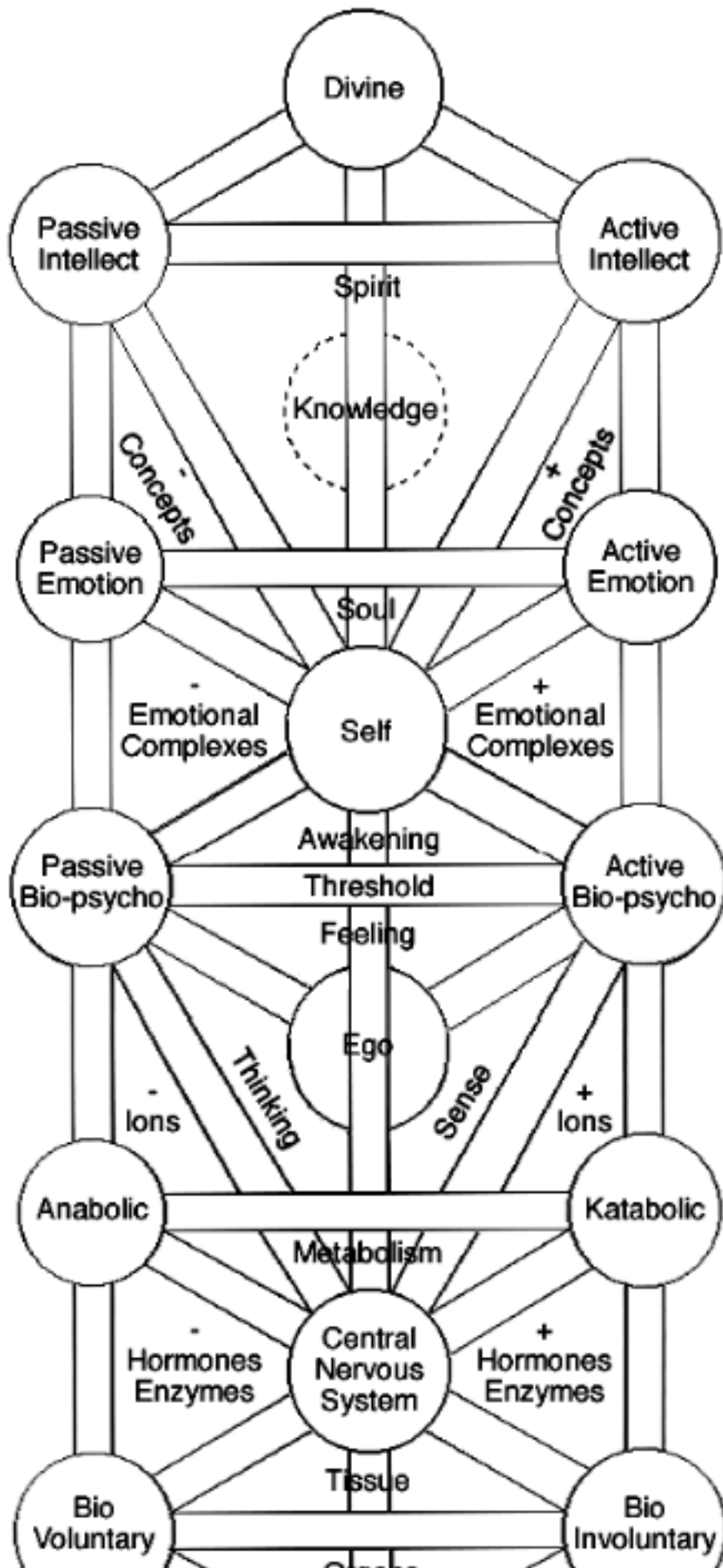


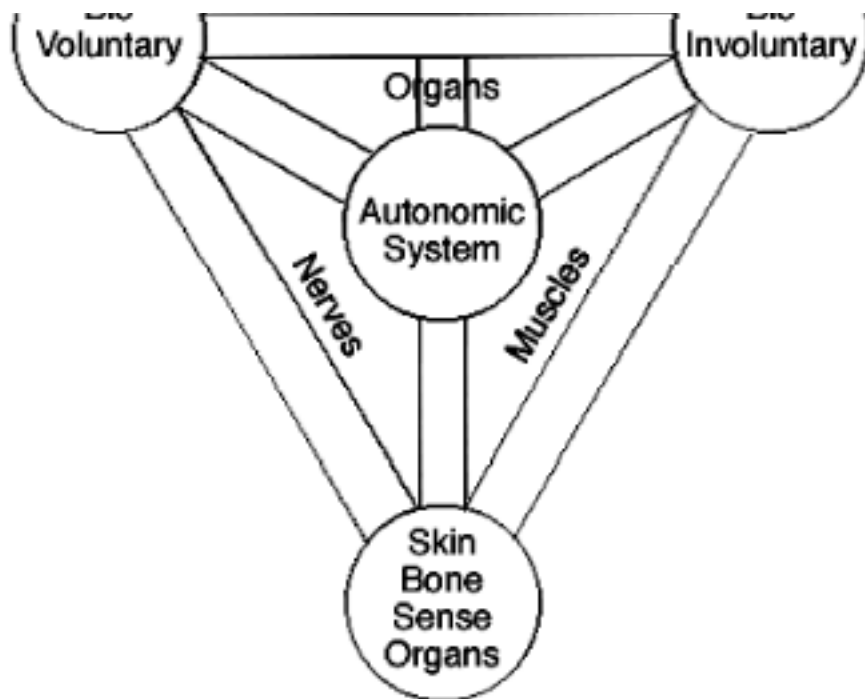
An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 4 / Jacob's Ladder
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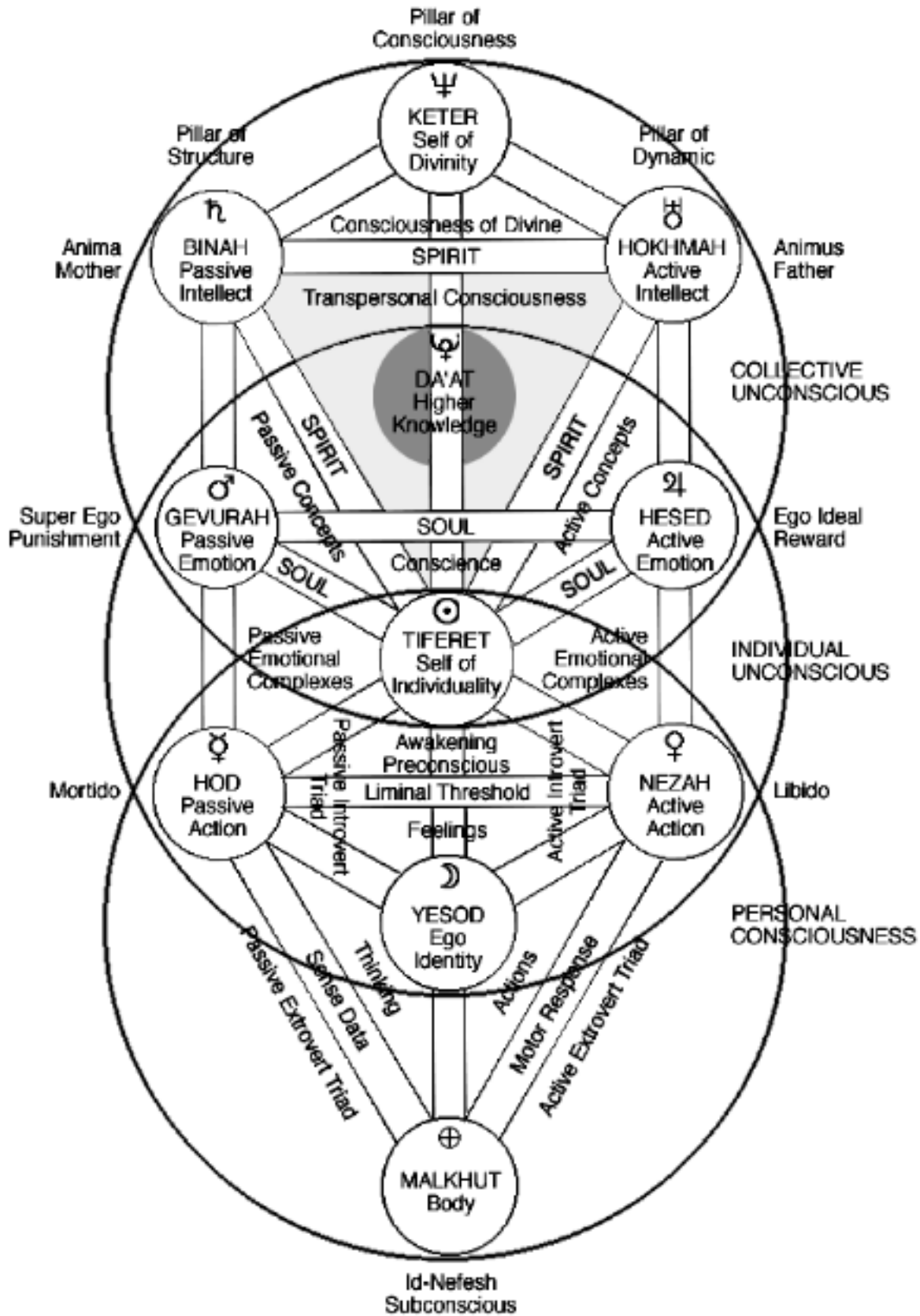


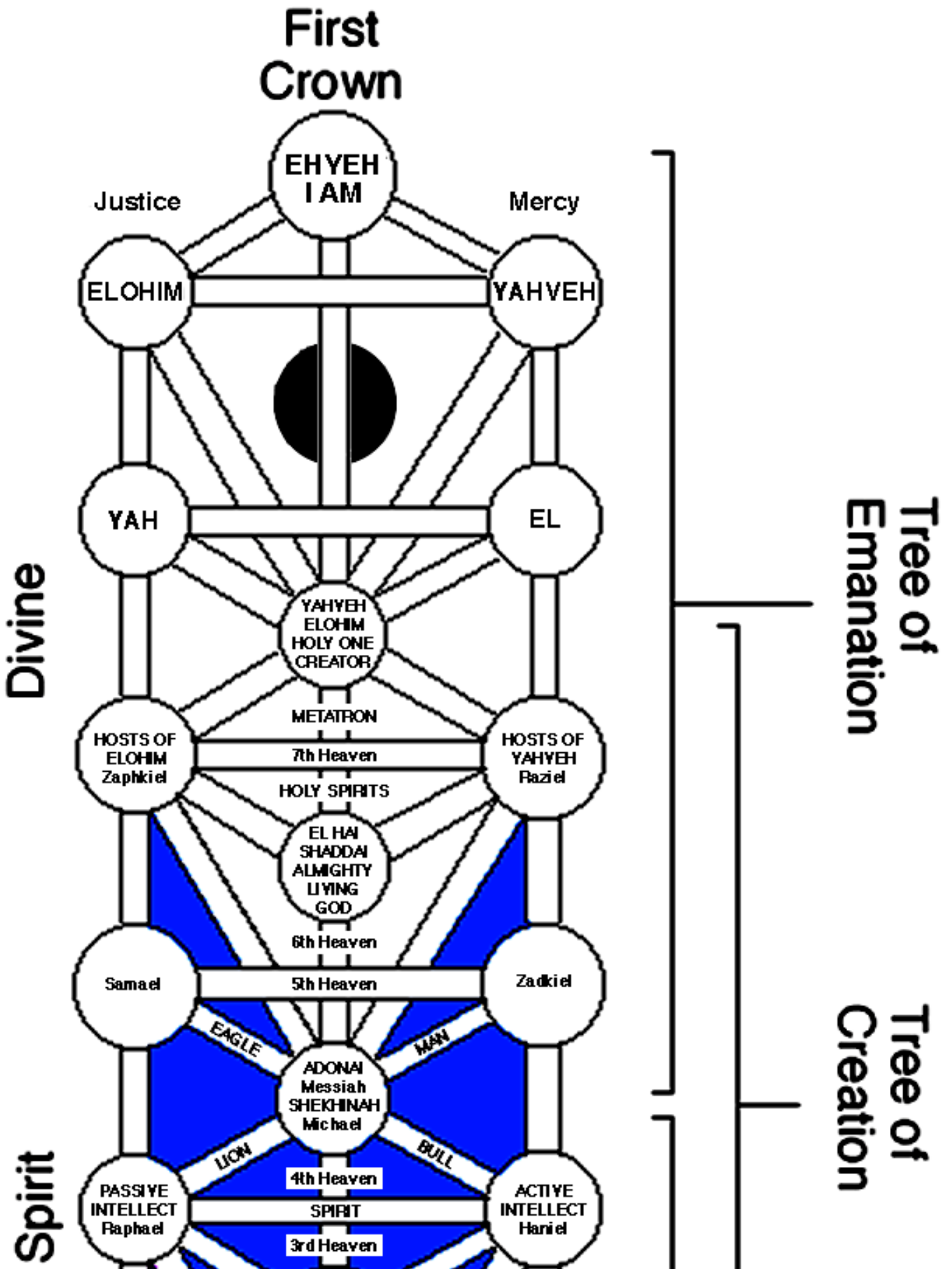
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An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 6 / Consciousness
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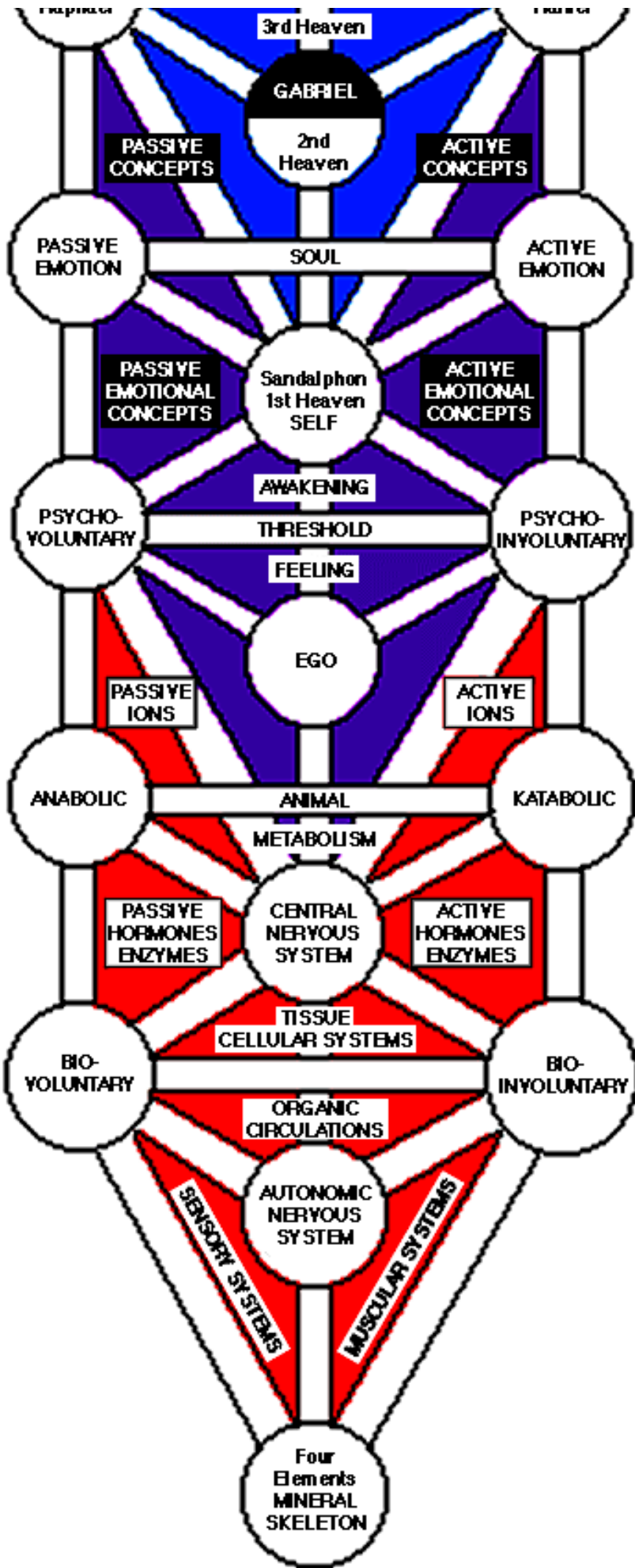




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Psyche

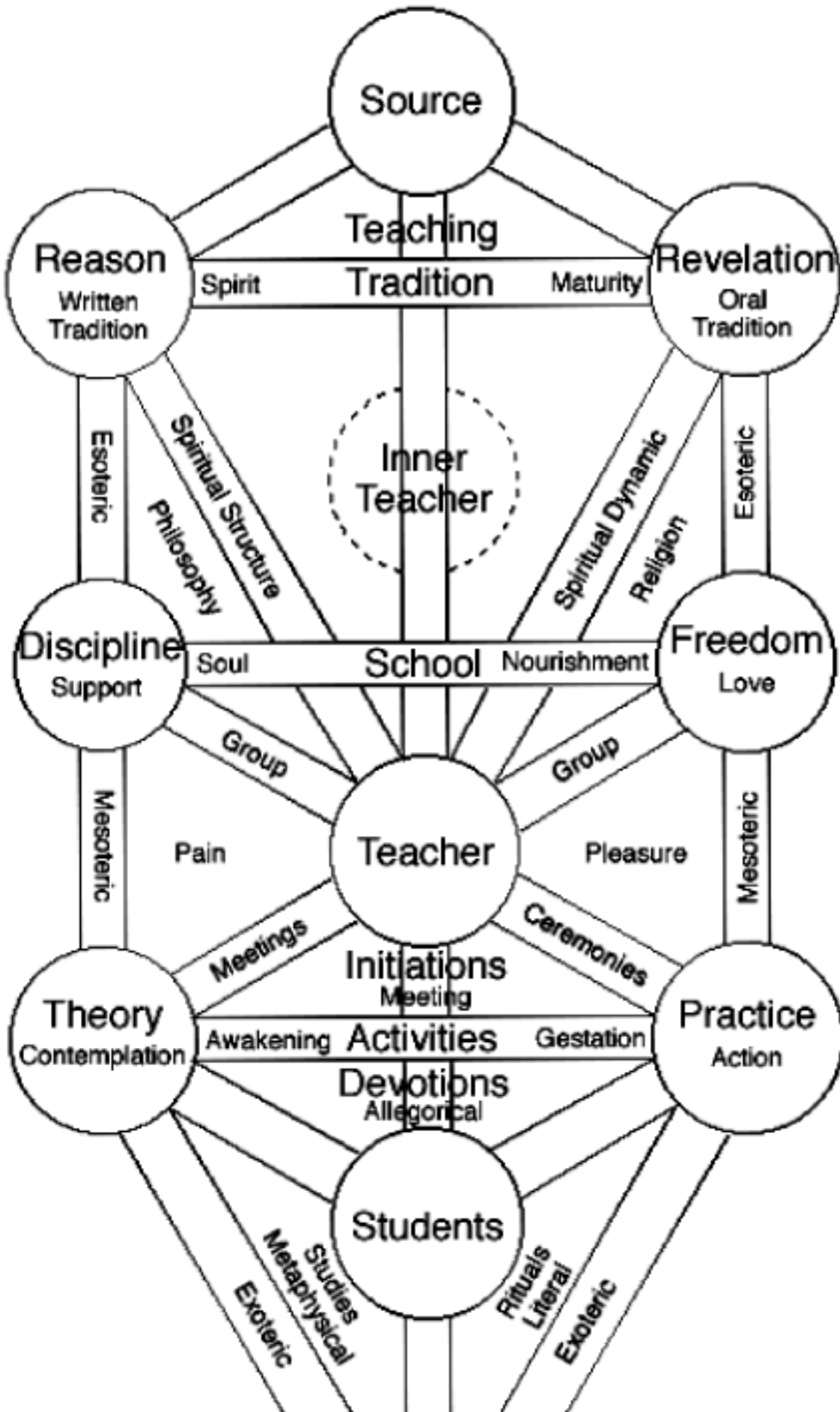
Body

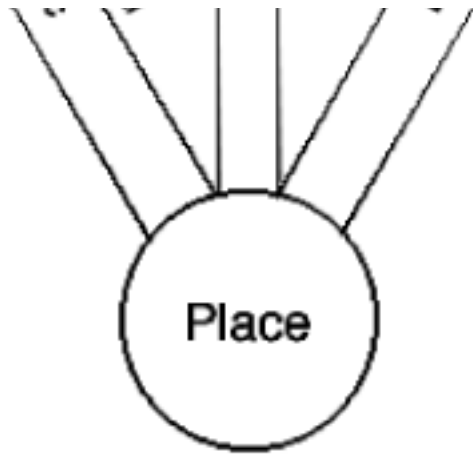


Tree of Formation

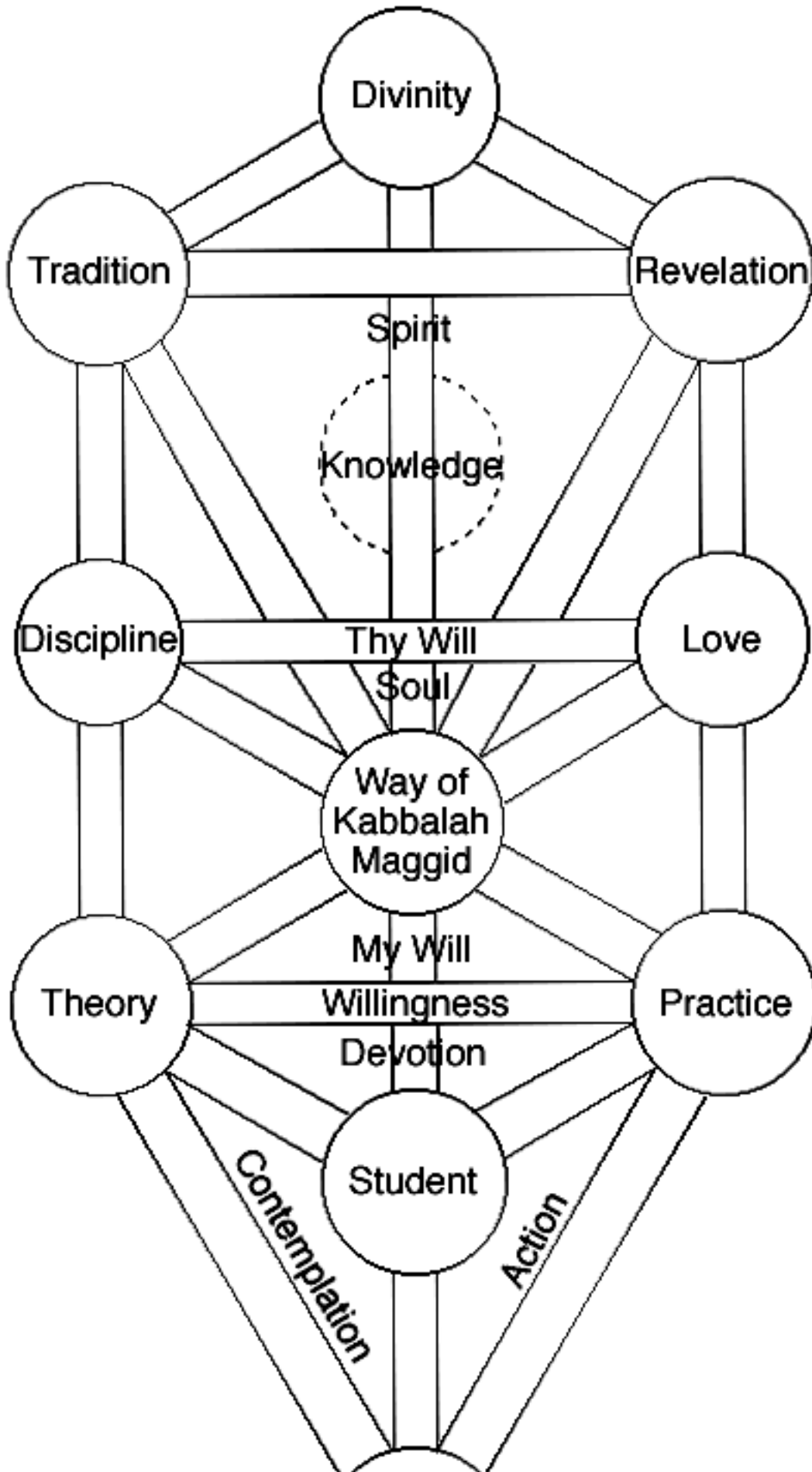
Tree of Making

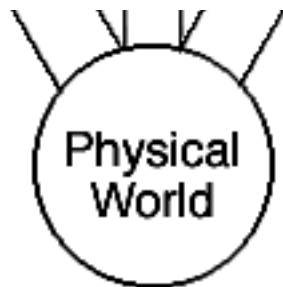
An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 8 / Esoteric School
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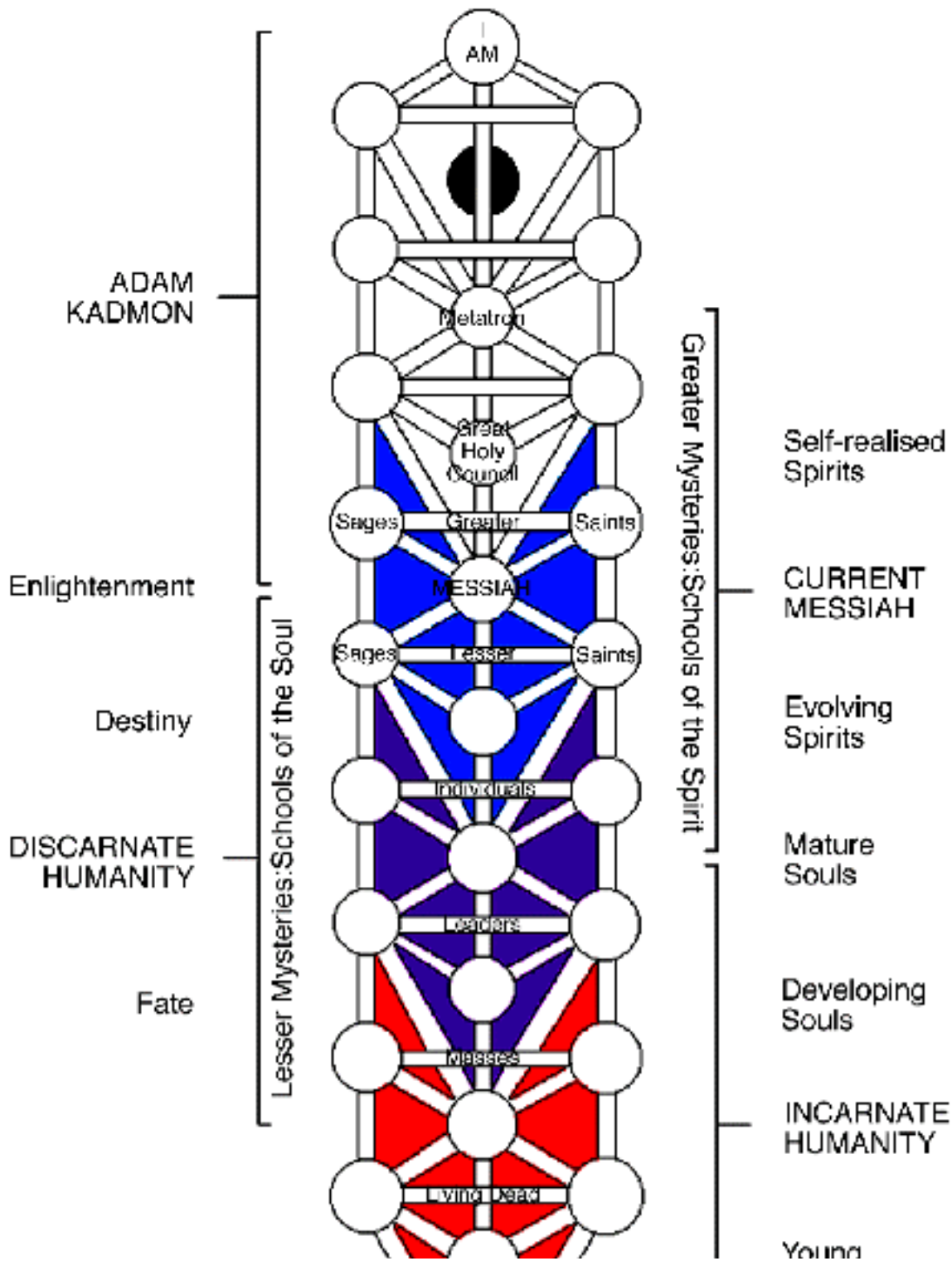
An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 9 / School of the Soul
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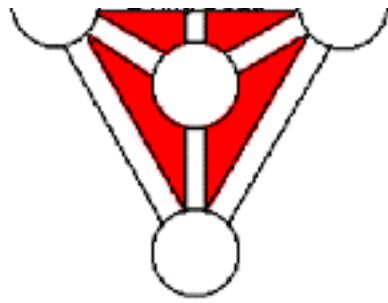




An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 10 / Path of Return
Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi

Here are all the stages of human SELF-realisation. Such an ascent has to be executed by each individual in order to return to the Divine. This process takes many lives as each fate develops the possibility of fulfilling a person's destiny.





Young
Souls

An introduction to Kabbalah / Diagram 11 / Mankind's Role
Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi

History is humanity's contribution to aid God behold God. Each of us is an organ of perception by which Adam Kadmon can see the Absolute's reflection through our experience. With the Resurrection at the End of Time will come the recognition that all that has ever happened was planned. The key is to find out what one's particular part is.



