

THEOSOPHY AND THE MYSTERY TRADITIONS

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The East is associated with spirituality and for many this brings to mind yoga, meditation, mantra, chakras and gurus; but there are a great number of teachings and practices. East or West, countless philosophies stem from very deep schools of thought and these traditions have existed for millennia: from the very earliest of recorded history. For example in the Vedas and Upanishads, sacred manuscripts, rituals, and oral teachings handed down from 'mouth to ear'. Others are variations or corruptions of the original teachings. The one thing which all esoteric traditions have in common, is their values on human conduct and the spiritual path. They may vary in their guidance and the way in which it is presented, but they share many core values and principles. Some of these will be considered.

Yoga means 'Union' or 'to Yoke' and the Eight Limbs of Yoga philosophy are aimed at producing a conscious Union with the Divine - the One Life, the whole of creation. Yoga practices promote good conduct, meditation and mindful awareness, a balance in daily life, peace and harmony. It is a path intended to create a union of body, mind and spirit. The channels of the Ida, Shushumna and Pingala in the subtle energy system are balanced by yoga practices. The Eight Limbs of Yoga are:

1. Yama: Morality, compassion, truthfulness, honesty, control, abstinence, moderation.
2. Niyama: Personal observances: purity, self-study, discipline, contentment, contemplation.
3. Asanas: Body postures and physical practices.
4. Pranayama: Breathing exercises and control of prana (chi or subtle energy).
5. Pratyahara: Control of the senses, balance, harmony and peace.
6. Dharana: Concentration and inner perceptual awareness.
7. Dhyana: Devotion, meditation and contemplation on the Divine.
8. Samadhi: Union with the Divine - enlightenment.

Historically, any number of different Teachers are associated with yoga traditions and their schools concentrate on one or more of the Eight Limbs. Practices associated with each Limb focus on a particular line of development. Whichever may initially appeal to the student, over time a true understanding of one will cultivate an understanding of the others, promoting all of them; ultimately leading to the Eighth Limb – Union. The Buddha was familiar with these practices and after years of asceticism and meditation and his enlightenment he came to the essence of his Teachings, e.g.:

Three Qualities: Panna - Wisdom. Shila - Morality. Samadhi - Meditation.

Noble Eightfold Path: Right View. Right Thought.

Right Speech: Right Action. Right Livelihood.

Right Effort: Right Mindfulness. Right Contemplation.

The Seven Ways

to Enlightenment: Mindfulness, Enquiry, Effort, Joy, Tranquillity, Concentration, Equanimity.

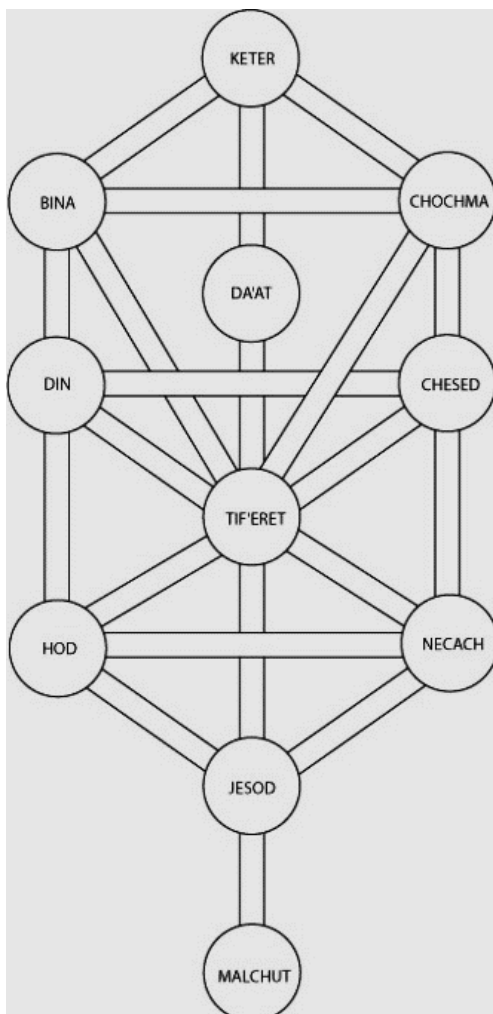
Some say such practices appeal largely to the 'Eastern mind'. We - in the West - tend to perceive them as being directed towards devotion and meditation and overcoming the trappings of the outer world. But there is a great deal of depth to the expanded teachings of these Schools. Western

traditions use different models and structures for their activities and are said to be more suited to the 'Western mind'. However, both stem from exactly the same core Teachings. There are esoteric schools which take a particular section of the Wisdom and others are very wide ranging. Either way, some understanding of the Esoteric Keys will unlock the doors to most of them – at least so far as the student is able to discern them and in as much as the Teachings have been made available. Sometimes there is confusion concerning different systems in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of the East and West, but true esoteric schools convey Universal Truth, though their methods may differ. Not all traditions are all-encompassing and some suit certain temperaments better than others.

Kabbalah, the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge, is known as a Western Tradition and is chosen to illustrate a very different approach. It has a much longer history, but in the modern age its methods originate in Judaism and later Christian and New Age offshoots developed. Kabbalah means 'receiving tradition' and teaches the tenets and principles of the Ancient Wisdom; albeit using very different terminology and iconography. Some Kabbalah groups are more exoteric, but Esoteric Kabbalah uses esoteric methods and disciplines. Kabbalah has a complex system of concepts and diagrams, concerning the cause and purpose of existence and the spiritual path. So only a simple overview can be given here.

There are three basic divisions in Kabbalah, which broadly speaking deal with:

1. Higher dimensions of Reality and the spiritual worlds.
2. Meditation and training to reach higher states of consciousness.
3. Symbolic ritual and mystical exercises.



The basic Tree shows the ten symbolic 'Sefirot' (emanations), or centres of activity, is arranged on three columns or pillars.

Left column:

Binah - Understanding
 Geburah – Justice.
 Hod – Glory.

Right column:

Chokmah – Wisdom.
 Chesed – Mercy.
 Netzach – Eternity.

Centre Column:

Kether – Divine Will.
 Tiphareth – Beauty.
 Yesod – Foundation.
 Malkuth – Kingdom.

Da'at - Knowledge, shown as a circle on the middle pillar, has a mystical meaning and is not counted as a Sefirah.

The Tree represents the cosmos from the origins of creation, to nature and human evolution. Sefirot are active on all planes of existence, but have different applications and associations, depending upon the realm to which they are being applied and the state of consciousness

they represent. The Tree may be used to assist an understanding of the human condition, as well as different dimensions and models of Reality. Each application of the Tree has associated names, numbers, sounds and colours, which carry specific meanings. Different Sephirot and paths, represent aspects or changes in condition, for example consciousness on the spiritual journey.



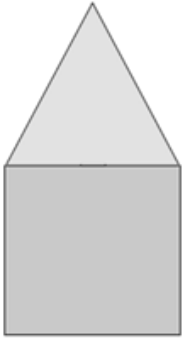
Variations in terminology occur because teachings were conveyed in different forms at different times, as most suited for their era. So we find differing metaphors, allegories, symbols and imagery. The six pointed star and triangles, connect to various spiritual traditions, representing the 'Trinity', the 'Three Divine Attributes', 'Brahma, Vishnu and Siva', 'the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory', and aspects of the human path; amongst other things.

In order to get to grips with some of the language and images in different spiritual teachings and esoteric philosophies, it is a great help to get to know about the basic principles which lie behind them. It must also be remembered that for the most part, esoteric teachings were kept secret and revealed only to proven pupils. A very limited exoteric explanation was given out to the public. Some of these concepts and portrayals can be very puzzling, but become an 'open book' once we start to understand various keys to the Inner Teachings. This is the reason why in the late 19th century Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB) was asked to start a new theosophical movement: 'The Theosophical Society'. This was done to openly bring forward Theosophical Doctrines (Divine Wisdom), for the 20th century and beyond and to promote the Theosophic Life. HPB was chosen as the person with the spiritual development and faculties most suited for this work. Two of the higher Initiates, Masters Koot Hoomi and Morya, believed such an effort could help humanity's progress at this particular time, though what they were free to disclose only lifted a tiny corner of the veil. They took upon themselves any karmic repercussions which might occur as a result of making these Teachings available to all.

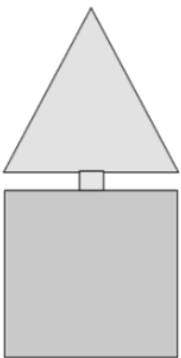
Knowledge of the Septenary Nature of a human being is essential to understanding the basis of some of these teachings and an outline from HPB's 'Key to Theosophy' (the 'Key') is given in the table below:

The Septenary Nature of Men and Women			
	Sanskrit	English	Explanation
G.	Atma	Pure Spirit	One with the Absolute, as its radiation.
F.	Buddhi	The Spiritual Soul	The vehicle of pure universal spirit (Monad). The reincarnating Ego.
E.	Manas	Mind/Intelligence	A dual principle, which light, or radiation links the Soul, for the lifetime, to the mortal man.
D.	Kama Rupa	The desire body, seat of animal desires and passions.	This is the centre of the animal man (the personality or ordinary ego), the line of demarcation which separates the mortal man from the immortal Ego.
C.	Linga Sharira	Model body	The Double or phantom body (the inert vehicle on which the physical body is moulded).
B.	Prana	Vital principle	Necessary only to a, c, d, and the functions of the lower Manas, which embrace all those limited to the (physical) brain.
A.	Rupa or Sthula-Sharira	Physical body	The vehicle of all the other "principles" during life.

Higher Imperishable
Triad



Lower Quaternary



The Lower Quaternary (A. B. C. and D. above) relates to the everyday human being we are most familiar with – our personality, the lower self. The Upper Imperishable Triad (E. F. and G.), relates to Higher Mind, the Spiritual Soul and Pure Spirit. In Theosophical teachings "Spirit" means that which is one with Universal Consciousness. This septenary division, the lower quaternary and higher triad are often shown as a square and triangle – see left.

It is this higher triad which is the reincarnating entity. The lower principles, the quaternary, disintegrate at death and the Ego is reborn into a new human body on the physical plane at the start of the next life. This has been part of the esoteric teachings for millennia. And whilst there are many sceptics, there are a lot of recorded cases of people who recall past lives and remember names, details and events. Similarly, there are examples of near death and out of body experiences, which occur when consciousness leaves the physical body and full awareness is retained when it re-enters.

Lower mind (Kama-manas) is closely intertwined with desire and emotions, which fluctuate between one state and another. Higher mind (Buddha manas) is able to give expression to the Spiritual Soul or reincarnating Ego. The mental principle acts with the lower nature when more strongly associated with desires and impulses, and with the higher faculties when the mind has developed more spiritual tendencies and the Soul is awakened into action. Higher mind and Spiritual Soul are impersonal, not swayed by the emotions or moods of the personality. This fundamental knowledge is found in ancient and modern esoteric

When we knowingly set foot upon the spiritual path, we are striving to achieve a deeper understanding - a higher state of consciousness. And as we progress, we start to build a bridge with our Spiritual Soul - the Antahkarana. When this link is established it becomes the 'Rainbow Bridge to Wisdom'. This happens when the mind gravitates to the spiritual rather than the material, and in time the Spiritual Soul is increasingly able to find expression in the material world. Atma-Buddhi, is a self-conscious state of being, not a conditioned state: a mystical experience of integration.

We have freewill and the 'Key' HPB says: We have freewill and in the 'Key' HPB says: "The future state and the Karmic destiny of man depend on whether Manas gravitates more downward to Kama Rupa, the seat of the animal passions, or upwards to Buddhi, the Spiritual Ego. In the latter case, the higher consciousness of the individual Spiritual aspirations of mind (Manas), assimilating Buddhi, are absorbed by it and form the Ego."

Various symbols are associated with the Teachings. A Five-Pointed Star signifies our five limbs and the five senses and our spiritual journey towards Wisdom. It is the star of Initiation and of perfected man, the integration of the upper and lower, when the Soul has full expression through the lower principles.



The six-pointed star with interlaced triangles of dark and light, represents spirit and matter. The dark facing downwards - spirit falling into matter (involution) and the light facing upwards - matter seeking spiritual light (evolution). It symbolises the six planes and principles, synthesised within the seventh (the Divine Self, God or the Absolute). The six-pointed star also has another name - the Blazing Star, signifying the Light, Life and Love of the World. It is the Divine Flame, the Star of Glory, divine harmony and balance. The six can also be symbolised by a cube, which has six sides, spirit manifest in the material world.



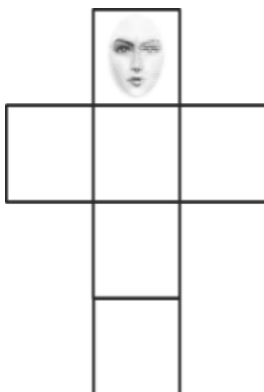
It is not by accident that we see the six-pointed star in the emblem of the square and compass of Freemasonry. The compass symbolises stability of the mind and wisdom in action: the lower mind and animal-self sublimated by the Ego or Spiritual Soul, i.e. when higher mind (Buddhi Manas) is steering the course of life. At the apex of the compass is the fulcrum, the point of clear perception, reached when balance and harmony are achieved.

The square is a symbol for the lower self, morality and good conduct, as well as other masonic principles. Each degree on the Masonic journey offers an opportunity to rise towards the Light. From a spiritual perspective, this is the whole basis of the masonic journey which takes the apprentice through different allegorical stages on the Path. Masonic teachings are designed to instil morality, reveal the meaning of Strength, Beauty and Wisdom, and raise a Mason to a condition of Knowledge of Life and Death and the Perennial Wisdom. As Michelangelo puts it: "I saw the angel in the stone and carved until I set it free".

Though each Masonic Lodge and every Mason will interpret the symbolic working of the Lodge at their own level, Masonic allegories and rituals reflect the spiritual path common to all traditions. In pursuing this journey, the spiritual aspirant seeks Wisdom, and comes into closer relationship with the Spiritual Hierarchy. For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, Theosophy and truly esoteric traditions provide the keys to the Teachings and knowledge of it makes all things clear.



Seven is closely associated with the mystery schools. When comprised of a triangle inside the square, it signifies higher mind has control of the lower. The seven-pointed star symbolises the sevenfold structure of the universe e.g. the Divine Intelligences: the 'Seven Stars', 'Seven Sons of Light' or 'Seven Spirits Before the Throne'; the 'Seven Pillars', 'Seven Candlesticks'; the 'Septenary Cycle', the 'Seven Planes of Manifestation', the 'Seven States of Consciousness', the 'Seven Ways to Enlightenment', the 'Seven Ages of Man', and the 'Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences'.



The lowest of the seven planes is our visible universe. Seven can also be expressed as the unfolded Cube, four vertical squares (spirit into matter - male) and three across (mother-nature - female). This represents deity on earth, or the cross of flesh ever 'crucifying' or 'putting to death' the Divine Logos or his Higher Self to manifest into matter. Conversely, selfless service and a search for Spiritual Wisdom. The unfolded Cube represents the ensouled living man (Ego).



Seven can also be represented by the Crux Ansata or Ankh, the key of life, which comprises a Tau cross and circle. The top arm of the Tao represents the cross upon which human passions have been conquered. The circle on top is the triumph of spirit over matter, life over death or resurrection. It represents the upper triad in a state of completeness or Unity, unification with heaven. This can also be depicted as the Ankh-tie, a looped rope signifying a door or mouth. The straight gate which leads to the Kingdom - the Soul passing through the eye of the needle.

Symbols are at the core of the Esoteric Teachings and each has a different quality depending on the state of consciousness from which it is being observed. Theosophy provides the keys to these Ancient Mysteries and reveals the profound Wisdom at the heart of all esoteric science, religions, philosophies, fables and myths. It is a Truth we must each discover for ourselves.