

An Introduction to Kabbalistic Astrology

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Kabbalah (Hebrew for “receive”) is an oral tradition of wisdom which traces its origins to early Biblical times. Legend tells us that God, wishing to behold His own image, created the Universe to act as a mirror. In order to serve God the work of the Kabbalist is the perfection of the (visible and invisible) world(s).

In accordance with the maxim of “as above, so below” the position of the heavenly bodies has an effect on the physical world while the reverse also applies - “as below, so above” not only means that our actions in the physical world can lead to harmony or discord in the higher worlds but places a greater degree of responsibility for our actions upon us than we might otherwise think.

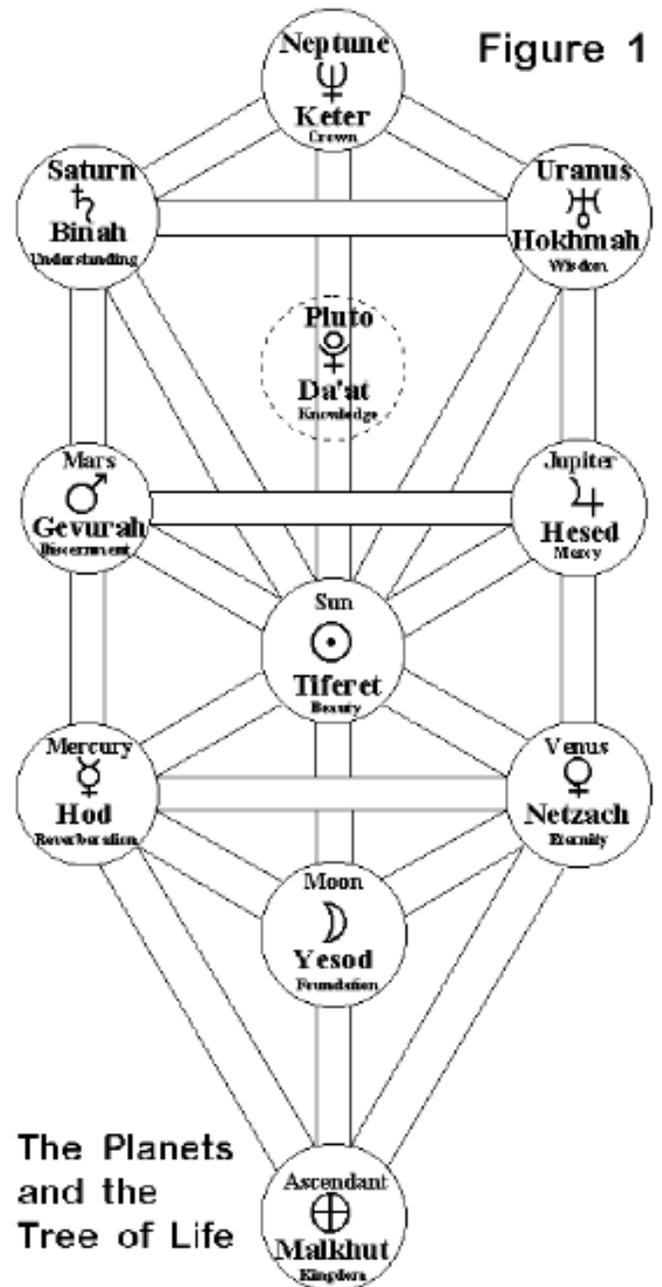
One of the principal tools of Kabbalah is the diagram of the Tree of Life, consisting of ten circles linked by twenty-two paths and which describes the way the universe works.

The diagram has three columns, or pillars - the right pillar symbolises expansion or energy and the left pillar symbolises form, structure or contraction while the middle pillar is known as the pillar of consciousness.

Each circle (Sefirah in Hebrew, plural Sefirot) constitutes an aspect of God such as compassion, beauty or discernment while an eleventh circle (shown with dotted lines but not designated as a Sefirah) shows the place of knowledge (Da’at).

Since the diagram is said to represent the entire universe, any and every situation we encounter may be set upon the Tree - including astrology. When these correspondences are examined interesting - and perhaps unexpected - insights may be gained.

Each of the planets and the earth corresponds to one of the Sefirot. The diagram of the Tree (Figure 1) shows the Hebrew transliteration of each of the Sefirot together with the planetary correspondence.



Newcomers to Kabbalah who have some knowledge of astrology are often surprised to find that Mars, the planet of assertion, is to be found on the passive side of the Tree at Gevurah, while the peace-loving and harmonious Venus is placed on the active side of the Tree at Netzach.

This can be explained by using the analogy of the martial artist whose essential mode of attack is non-movement, striking only occasionally and at precisely the right moment. Such discipline and judgement is the hallmark of Gevurah.

Netzach, which corresponds to Venus, the young girl, symbolises the principle of attraction. Often it is she, rather than the man with whom she is about to form a relationship who “makes eyes” or moves her body in a suggestive sort of way to attract her mate - she is anything but passive.

To the astrologer with a “traditional” outlook, however, the Kabbalistic placing is more logical, for the right hand side of the Tree emphasises growth and therefore contains the benefic planets, Venus and Jupiter while the left-hand side, symbolising destruction and decay contains the malefic planets, Mars and Saturn.

Since moistness is associated with fertilisation and growth it is appropriate that the planets which have moist natures (Jupiter is warm and moist while Venus is cool and moist) should be on the active side of the Tree which symbolises growth. Conversely, Mars and Saturn both have dry natures (hot and dry for Mars, cold and dry for Saturn) and so are placed on the side of the Tree which symbolises destruction - nothing can grow without water.

Both columns are necessary for existence to be sustained and in this context Mars and Saturn are to be welcomed as the destroyers that prepare the path for the new rather than shunned or avoided. Like the symbol of the Yin and Yang, where the dark portion contains the dot of light and vice versa, the Tree of Life shows that if existence becomes too staid then action eventually occurs automatically in order to move back to equilibrium while excessive action would eventually lead to the fragmentation of the universe and so a halt or contraction must be triggered in such circumstances in order to restore a balance.

In living consciously we seek to be neither excessively active or passive but to hold fast to the central column of our consciousness drawing a measure amount of the qualities offered on either side of the Tree.

Mercury, changeable in its nature, is placed on the left side of the Tree at Hod - reverberation. As with Mars and Saturn (see above) it has a dry (and cold) nature. Although Mercury takes on the nature of any planet with which it is placed in a chart, its essence is that of the juggler, throwing balls in the air but not actually moving forward. It is therefore more representative of form than energy and properly belongs on the passive side of the Tree of Life.

The Moon and Sun represent ego consciousness and self-consciousness respectively - the everyday world of one who follows mass consciousness and the world of the true individual who acts according to his or her own conscience. The path between them is known as the path of honesty.

Understanding the relationship between the Sun and Moon in this context can provide a new perspective in a natal chart. The Moon at Yesod symbolises the everyday world and the way we react to situations whereas the zodiac sign in which our Sun is placed shows how we make our decisions from a higher perspective.

The Moon at Yesod makes a good servant for we live in the everyday world and must deal with it accordingly. Our ego is invaluable for such a purpose but when the ego tries to usurp the position of the Sun as ruler of the personality it makes a poor master. When we observe someone apparently behaving out of line with their sun sign it is often because they are letting their Moon take charge.

A good example of the interaction between Sun and Moon occurred in my work as a financial adviser. My client's Virgo Moon took control of most of our first and second meetings with many queries about detailed clauses of the pension contract we were discussing. This Virgoan flavour was so overwhelming that when I finally started to fill in application forms at the close of the second meeting I did so far more slowly than usual lest there be any mistake whatsoever, however small, which her Virgo Moon would find intolerable.

After a minute or two my client suddenly said that she hoped we wouldn't be much longer as she had a lot to do. Without warning she had switched to her Aries Sun. The careful Virgo sensor, having done its work and told her that all was well with the proposal, was now able to submit to the Aries Sun which wanted to make swift decisions about the outstanding matters.

If she had continued with her Virgo Moon in control we might never have finalised the contract or she would have inevitably found a fault which meant it did not go ahead - apparently in defiance of her Sun sign which wished to implement the plan.

Placing the world of astrology on the Tree we can see the current debates are accurately reflected. On the right-hand pillar we have the innovators who, for example, might be interested in the latest asteroids while on the left hand pillar we have the traditionalists who are more concerned with retaining the knowledge of the past.

The different methods of working are also shown by these two columns. To the right pillar belong the action-oriented astrologers - including sun-sign astrologers - while the left pillar describes the more academic approach, whether this relates to traditional or modern astrology.

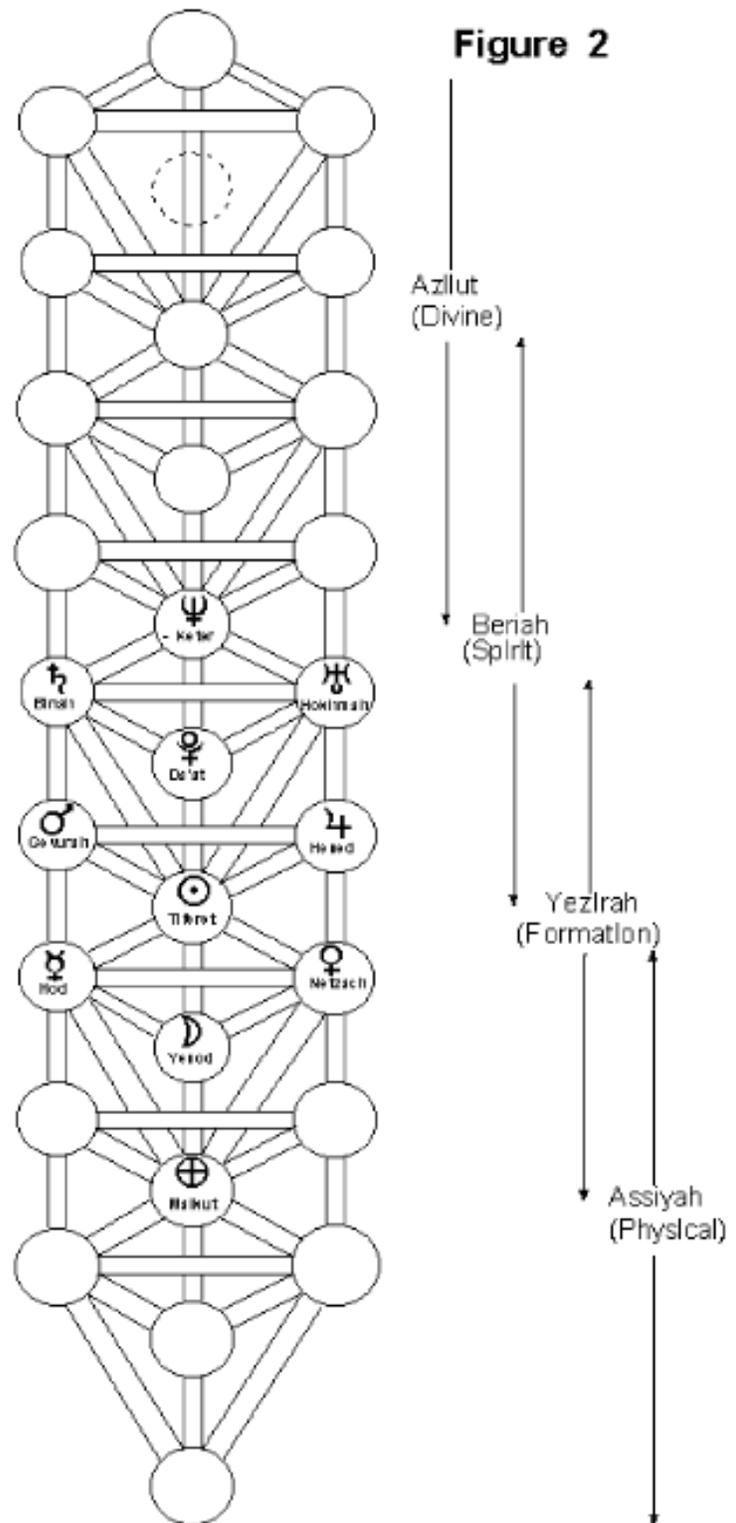
In Kabbalah, the ideal is to plot one's path along the central column drawing from the functional aspects of the Sefirot on either side as required while gradually raising one's consciousness. It is through this central column that we are each able to draw on the higher worlds and have the capability to imbue our work with the highest quality whether it is a sun-sign column or an essay on the use of the Arabic Parts.

Many books on Kabbalah include reference to astrology but the main source on which I have drawn in this article is that of Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi who numbers among his spiritual ancestors the Spanish Kabbalistic astrologer of the twelfth century, Abraham ibn Ezra, and the Spanish poet of the eleventh century, Solomon ibn Gabirol.

Ibn Ezra was both a commentator on the Torah (Five Books of Moses) and an astrologer whose most well-known astrological work is *The Beginning of Wisdom*. Ibn Gabirol, to whom Halevi's book on astrology, *The Anatomy of Fate*, is dedicated, composed the epic poem *Keter veMalkhut* ("The Crown and the Glory" or "The Royal Crown"). This contains a litany of astrological description just pages before the list of sins for which orthodox Jews ask repentance on the Day of Atonement. Those who oppose astrology on religious grounds are not aware, one imagines, of such a connection.

The diagram of the Tree was evolved in medieval Spain and while most modern Kabbalists are in agreement about the correspondences between the planets and the various Sefirot it is Halevi's use of the extended Tree, or Jacob's Ladder as it has come to be called, which sets him apart and makes him the principal practitioner of what is now known as the Toledo Tradition (named for Toledo, Spain, where Kabbalah flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries).

In the Jacob's Ladder (Figure 2) each of the four worlds Azilut (the Divine), Beriah (Creation or Spirit), Yetzirah (Forms) and Assiyah (Physical) overlap each other and it is upon the second lowest of these worlds, Yetzirah, that the planetary system we know as astrology may be placed. This is also known as the world which corresponds to the psyche of the human being, the understanding of which is frequently the object of astrological study.



While the Tree of Life diagram was evolved hundreds of years ago we have, of course, subsequently witnessed the discovery of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. These have provisionally been placed at Hokhmah, Keter and Da'at respectively and, as with all developments in Kabbalah, the validity of a proposition is tested by the question "does it work?" or "does it make sense?"

Traditionally, the zodiac itself (representing the accumulated wisdom of all twelve constellations) was placed at Hokhmah and the First Swirlings (the beginnings of the universe) at Keter.

Uranus, with its highly tilted orbit, certainly seems to symbolise the eccentric or the different while the nebulosity of

Neptune appears to encapsulate something of the quality of Keter. Pluto, with an orbital inclination of seventeen degrees to the ecliptic, hardly belongs to the solar system, according to Halevi, and therefore corresponds to Da'at, which forms an access point to the next highest world.

Before the discovery of these planets Saturn, so slow in motion compared with the other visible planets and bounded by rings, represented the sole point of connection with the higher world and the limits of known existence.

In horary astrology, which is predominantly concerned with the mundane affairs of mankind it would seem inappropriate to include these planets in the judgement. In the grander scale of eclipses and ingresses the transpersonal planets may well have something to say to us. Although the ancients managed perfectly well without them we should note that the scale of time as perceived by humankind has itself changed with the advent of modern methods of travel and communication.

Since the discovery of the modern planets with Uranus, instead of the zodiac being placed at Hokhmah, the signs of the zodiac have been distributed around the various triangles of the Tree of Life - the placings and reasons for these attributions is outside the scope of this article which is only an introduction to the subject.

Although, at first sight, the diagrams of the Tree of Life and Jacob's Ladder may appear complex they are of stunning simplicity when compared with much Kabbalistic literature! While articles such as this may serve as an introduction they are only about Kabbalah which is an oral tradition.

For this writer, astrology provided a the bridge he needed from the sterility he observed in the general practice of his religious tradition and the teaching which, although it had always been available, had remained unknown to him. The (spiritual) law, as the Bible says (Proverbs 3:18), "is a Tree of Life to those that grasp hold of it." And for those who do "Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace." (Proverbs 3:17)

Reference List

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[Back to top](#)

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