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**THE FRUITS
OF
THE TREE OF LIFE**
The Cabbalistic Tradition



Complete Works – Volume 32

P R O S V E T A

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Chapter One

How to approach the study of the Cabbalah

People sometimes tell me that they are interested in the Cabbalah, that they have read a lot of books by well-known students of cabbalistic science – people such as Lenain, Papus, Eliphas Levi, Dion Fortune, A. E. Waite and Israel Regardie – and that they would like my opinion and advice. Certainly, there is a lot to be learned from all these books, but the first thing I ask somebody who wants to know what I think about these books is *how* he or she has read them. And, all too often, the answer I get is, ‘Oh, from time to time I read a few pages, here and there.’ Well, I am sorry to have to tell you that that is not the way to study the Cabbalah. If you tried to study mathematics by beginning with differential and integral calculus, for instance, before mastering the four basic operations, the science of mathematics would remain a closed book to you! You have to begin at the beginning and understand the first lessons before trying to assimilate more difficult things. Only if you do that can you expect to make rapid progress. As long as some point is not quite clear to you, you must not try to go any further. You have to advance step by step, without rushing things. If this is true of mathematics, how much more so is it true for the Cabbalah. You cannot read the Cabbalah as though you were reading a magazine.

Before I go any further, I should make it quite clear that, although I sometimes talk to you about the Cabbalah (about the

sephirotic Tree of Life, the angelic hierarchies or the seventy-two planetary spirits, for instance) in my lectures, it is not because I think you should study it in detail, but because it is important for you to have an idea of some of the essential elements of the Cabbalah that can help you to grow spiritually. The Cabbalah is a very special science, quite unlike any other, and it demands very special qualities in those who want to study it in depth. In the first place, they are advised not even to begin before the age of forty and, only then, if they are truly destined to do so, if they have the mental and psychic capacities required and if they possess the moral integrity that will ensure that they never use their knowledge to achieve their own, personal goals. The Cabbalah is a mysterious, sacred doctrine and it presents many difficulties, even dangers, to those who venture to explore it. Cabbalists have a parable that emphasizes this: one day, four rabbis decided to meet in order to study the Cabbalah together. Not long after, one of them had abandoned the attempt, another had lost his faith and a third had gone out of his mind. Only the fourth had pursued his study and received great blessings from it.

I do not advise you to embark on a serious study of the Cabbalah, therefore. Learn only what can be useful to you, what is within your reach; for my part, I shall not reveal more than that to you. And, if you are not ready for it, begin with other subjects and other exercises which will prepare you to explore the Cabbalah later on. Believe me, it is an extremely difficult science; not everybody can undertake to study it. Indeed, it would be sacrilegious and even dangerous to do so without proper preparation.

If I say this, it is not because I want to discourage you but because I want to be useful to you. It is my duty to warn you that to launch rashly into the study of cabbalistic science can upset your psychological balance. If this happens, of course, it is not the Cabbalah that is to blame, but your own misplaced curiosity or your desire to gratify your own greed or ambition. I have

sometimes said to people, ‘You study the *Shem Ha-Mephorash* and learn the names and attributes of the seventy-two planetary spirits, but what do you intend to do with them once you know them?’ ‘I want to ask them to protect me and give me success, love and wealth.’ Exactly, and that is where the danger lies! In the first place it is extremely unwise to try to force these luminous spirits to serve human greed, and in the second place you must not imagine that they are ready to obey every Tom, Dick and Harry. You have to begin by reaching a certain stature in the spiritual world, otherwise the spirits will see through you at once and leave you to flounder along on your own.

The seventy-two planetary spirits are under no obligation to gratify your whims. If you want to give them orders, you must be possessed of great power, a very strong will and a high degree of self-mastery; it is not enough to know and pronounce their names. A great many people think this is all they need to do, and of course they get no results. Before launching out on your own, therefore, be sure to examine the whole thing very carefully in advance, especially as the danger in venturing alone and uninstructed into such practices, without the help of a guide or Master, is that it can lead to sorcery and black magic.

Look at all the publishers that have started to bring out books about the occult within the last few years. It is nothing less than witchcraft! Some of those books contain terrible formulas and even detailed explanations about how to make a pact with the devil. The tragedy is that a great many people – many more than you might imagine – are fascinated by such books and believe every idiotic word in them. Some of it is true, of course, but a great deal of it is not only a tissue of lies, it is also dangerous, but there are many who are gullible enough to swallow it all. I am well aware of all that goes on in this respect; I know that witchcraft is still very much alive in some country areas where people still use old books of magic to cast spells and conjure up spirits. They even try to call up the devil himself – and the astonishing thing is that they succeed! Why? Because, with their

faith and tenacity and, especially, their patience, they attract infernal spirits. These spirits attach themselves to them in order to feed on them. So, not only are these people in close contact with the spirits they call up, they also lend them life, as it were. I am aware that these things happen, and I am also aware that many people have fallen victim to their own practices and died as a result. You must never, never do things of this kind! That is not true spiritual science. The science you receive from me will never lead to your doing anything of this nature. What is the use of becoming rich and powerful and having all the pleasure in the world if you then find yourself bound hand and foot, persecuted and possessed, and end by having to go to an exorcist to be freed from an evil spell?

People do not realize how dangerous witchcraft is. The publishers and bookshops that sell these books have a heavy burden of responsibility in this respect. It seems that the more extravagant the titles, with their so-called Hebrew, Chaldean and Persian names, the more popular they are! But the names are distorted out of all recognition and have no connection with the originals, for the manuscripts have been handed down, from one person to the next, for centuries, and every time they are copied the errors they contain increase. But there is nobody to warn you of the dangers involved. You find it fascinating to practise some of these methods, but have you ever considered the psychic effects they will have on you?

I want it to be quite clear in your minds that I shall never lead you into ventures of this kind. Try to understand the difference between our spiritual, initiatic Teaching, whose only goal is the light, and other occult practices. In this Teaching you are perfectly safe. If you want to venture into other areas, without a guide and without the light, you are free to do so, but you run the risk of sinking to the level of black magic. You are free to dabble in all this if you want to, but I cannot answer for your safety if you do. If you decide to abandon the Teaching I cannot be responsible for you any more.

Before approaching the sacred science of the Cabbalah, you must purify yourself, purify your heart and your mind; otherwise the heavenly spirits will see that you are committing a sacrilege and put obstacles in your way. On the other hand, the spirits of darkness will be delighted to snare one more gullible creature by dazzling him or her with the prospect of easy success. It takes a great deal of effort to keep climbing upwards, but it is all too easy to slide downhill, down to hell; it is enough to follow the pull of one's own lusts and appetites.¹

I sometimes say to people: 'Why are you so strongly drawn to occult practices? Why do you neglect the great truths I have given you, which could help you improve your health and have better relations with your fellow human beings, as well as with the intelligent forces of nature and heavenly entities, and even with God himself? These truths don't really interest you very much, do they? There are other things that interest you more – the hope of some rather dubious advantages, perhaps, or the urge to fulfil an ambition? If you are truly honest and upright you will begin by studying these great truths. There is enough there to keep you busy and happy for the rest of your life. If you neglect them, it means you are driven by inferior motives, you want to command the spirits so as to get money, love and worldly success, without taking the trouble, first of all, to acquire purity, intelligence and kindness. Let me tell you that this makes you a member of the Black Lodge. It is the Black Lodge that gives you this desire to command the spirits before you are worthy to do so, before you are a true son of God.'

Of course, the desire to study the Cabbalah has, in itself, nothing to do with witchcraft. The only thing is that, before discovering its secrets, you must be willing to pass through all the preliminary stages, to work on yourself and improve your own character, and to prove yourself both worthy and capable of going further. But, if you are in too much of a hurry, if you want to skip the preliminaries and force your way into the realms of the sacred before you are fit to do so, you will not

be allowed to. You will be held up by the guards at the gates and refused permission to go any further until you have passed some tests and given sufficient proof that you possess such and such a virtue.

On the other hand, nobody will make you pass any tests if you want to do evil. On the contrary, the viler and more malignant you are, the more readily you will be recognized as a hero and leader, someone to be respected by others of your kind. What happens in a gang of cutthroats? The most brutal and violent of the gang is spontaneously recognized as the leader. This is simply a reflection of the way things are done in hell, where the leader is the blackest of all its inhabitants. In heaven, on the contrary, it is the gentlest and most luminous, the one who is most full of love, who reigns. This is why the Cabbalah sometimes compares the universe to a white head, which is reflected in the form of a black head. The black head is the shadow, the inverted reflection of the white head. Hell is the image of heaven in reverse. In hell it is the most degraded who rules; in heaven it is the most exalted.²

‘What is below is like what is above’, said Hermes Trismegistus. What is at the bottom, therefore, is like what is at the very top. The sephirah *Kether*, at the summit of the Tree of Life, is reflected in an inverted *Kether* at the bottom. And in this world of human beings, who are the rulers? Are they the best and most worthy? Have those who hold the reins of power – the men in charge, the barons of finance, politics and economics – been chosen because they are nobler, more generous and more disinterested than their fellows? On the contrary, they are the most ambitious, the most self-seeking. This is the world that lies below the diaphragm, the world of the inverted reflection, or, to use Dante’s image, ‘the inverted cone’, and those who hold sway in this world are those who are most suited to do so. To be sure, there are some happy exceptions, but, generally speaking, those who are best equipped are those with the longest fangs, the sharpest claws and the hardest hoofs. Here and there,

fortunately, there are still a few exceptional, disinterested beings in government and industry, men of intelligence, competence and integrity. True, but they are few and far between.

But, to get back to the question of the Cabbalah: you would do much better to begin by studying in depth all that I have already given you in my lectures. You have not begun to see how useful these truths are; it has not yet occurred to you that you can do tremendous work with their help. You say, 'I want a formula that will enable me to command the spirits!' No, it is too soon; you are trying to go too fast. Read my books again, two or three times, and you will realize that they contain all kinds of rules and many revelations about the highest magic, the highest cabbalistic science, even about theurgy. I have quietly slipped these things into my lectures from time to time, without insistence or special emphasis, without raising my voice, because they are for those who are awake to these things. Have you never noticed them? It is up to you, now, to look for them.

You are probably not aware that, in the past, most of what you learn here was virtually inaccessible except to initiates. My lecture about Egyptian initiations, for instance, showed you how difficult it was and how many trials one had to go through to be accepted as a candidate for initiation in one of the temples. The postulants were even ready to risk their lives in order to be admitted and given access to this knowledge. Today, the invisible world allows Initiatic Science to be diffused much more widely, for the enlightenment and instruction of men and women, but if they misuse it and turn to black magic they will be punished most terribly.

Notes

1. See *'Et il me montra un fleuve d'eau de la vie'*, Synopsis Coll., Part X, chap. 1: 'La porte du monde psychique: Yesod'.
2. See above, Part IX, chap. 1: 'Le fleuve de la vie divine'.

‘The sephirotic Tree, the cabbalistic Tree of Life, is an image of the universe, which God dwells in and imbues with his essence. It is a symbolic representation of the divine life that flows through the whole of creation. The Tree of Life is a system which can be of tremendous importance in helping us to avoid dispersing our spiritual activity. If you work with this Tree for years, if you study it and savour its fruits, you will be introducing the balance and harmony of cosmic Life into your own lives.’

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