

Kabbalah: A Way of the Heart

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'To those that understand themselves will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of paradise.' (adapted from Revelations 2:7)

The Kabbalah is a system of self realisation and personal development based on the map called the Tree of Life. Like many ways of working on and healing oneself, the Kabbalah could be described as a way of the heart, so let's start with an experiment to connect with heart energy. As you read this, make yourselves as comfortable as you can and let your attention turn inwards. Imagine you are standing in a beautiful garden, facing the setting sun which is gently warming your face. You can hear birds singing. In the distance you can hear the faint voices of children, happily playing. You feel your body relax. As the sun warms your face, it also warms your chest. As it does so, you become aware of your heart. A bird chirps nearby, sharing in your stillness... You take a deep breath - do it - and feel your heart open to the warmth of the sun. There is a tingling of pleasure in your legs as you feel yourself firmly rooting into the warm, nourishing earth. You turn your face up to the sun and you enter a deeper silence, a stillness in which your heart is bathed with light.

Compare how you feel about yourself now, after having read this heart focusing exercise, with how you felt before. How did turning inwards in this way affect your awareness of yourself?

If we are asked to describe ourselves, most of us begin in our heads and engage our thinking function. After focusing we re-tune our attention somewhere else - in the case of this exercise, into our hearts. It is a very different experience. After doing this or similar exercises, people often describe themselves as feeling 'more grounded', 'more in touch', 'soulful', 'calmer', 'energised'. Whatever words are used, many people assert that there was definitely a difference before and after tuning in to their heart energy. It is important to stress that there is no right or wrong way of doing this. It is more about trusting your own perceptions.

You'll find it most powerful if you focus into your heart along with someone you trust. After such experiences in groups, people usually describe a greater level of contact, of 'moving from that intellectual way of speaking to something that was more heart.' Expressed more straight forwardly, I remember someone simply saying: 'we ended up both smiling at each other.' I notice that when I ask people to do an exercise of this sort during a course, when they speak after the heart focusing, there is a different kind of silence. It's an experience where words start becoming

too much, or not relevant, or not adequate to describe the feelings, the sensations, the inspiration that comes to us when we are focused on our hearts.

The Kabbalah aims to give us a context for such experiences, indeed, all our experiences. Central to the Kabbalah is a diagram or map called the *tree of life*. The purpose of this map is to help us sort out different aspects of our psyches, and more clearly be able to work with heart energy rather than just with intellectual knowledge. We have minds, feelings and bodies so we can be incarnated here on the planet earth to do our work, whatever that work might be. There are many ways of experiencing these aspect of ourselves, and all the work we do with these experiences is a form of healing.

When you first look at the Tree of Life it looks very complicated, but it really is very simple, composed of just three triangles, one the right way up and two upside down directly underneath. The three triangles are the basis of the whole tree of life image and if you can imagine - and remember - this, then you have already learned one of the most important aspects of Kabbalah. Of course, the Tree of Life is little more complicated than that. At each of the corners of the triangles there is a sphere, or in Hebrew *sephirah* which means number. The Kabbalah teaches that numbers are more than just a way of counting but embody divine principles. These 'numbers' are usually drawn as circles, but are depicting something of more than two dimensions.

The three spheres on the bottom triangle represent personality, what we have to experience life with and to express ourselves with, in the present moment. Here we are, here and now, with these three modes somehow or another activated within us and activating us. There is an extra sphere in the centre of these other three spheres that represents the past, something which we all carry around within us, affecting how we experience the present.

The other factor that affects us in the here and now is the future, our inner potential. Everything that is potential can happen in the future. This is represented by the top triangles on the Tree of Life. Most of the time, though, we are not aware of it. We might be so caught up with experiences from the past, or so busy in the present moment, we forget about our potential. It is still there, however, always manifesting.

The Kabbalistic system, as well as being a way of heart, is also a way of everyday life. The Kabbalah focuses on manifesting soul energy into everyday life. The danger for many 'spiritual seekers' is that they like it on the sun so much they never want to leave there. They become so involved being the sun, being a light source, that they forget the shadows they cast. In terms of the solar system, in terms of our heart energy, if we stay just there, there aren't any shadows. Absolutely, and that's a wonderful place to experience. But often it is the shadows, the dark places, that reveal to us more things about how we are going to manifest. If everybody existed in a place of no shadow, there'd be no need for relationship, for contact, for service. We need places with shadows to remind us of our mortality and our totality. Indeed, a

core Kabbalistic teaching is that our task for being alive is to truly come to earth. It is through connecting to the heart that we are able to truly do so.

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