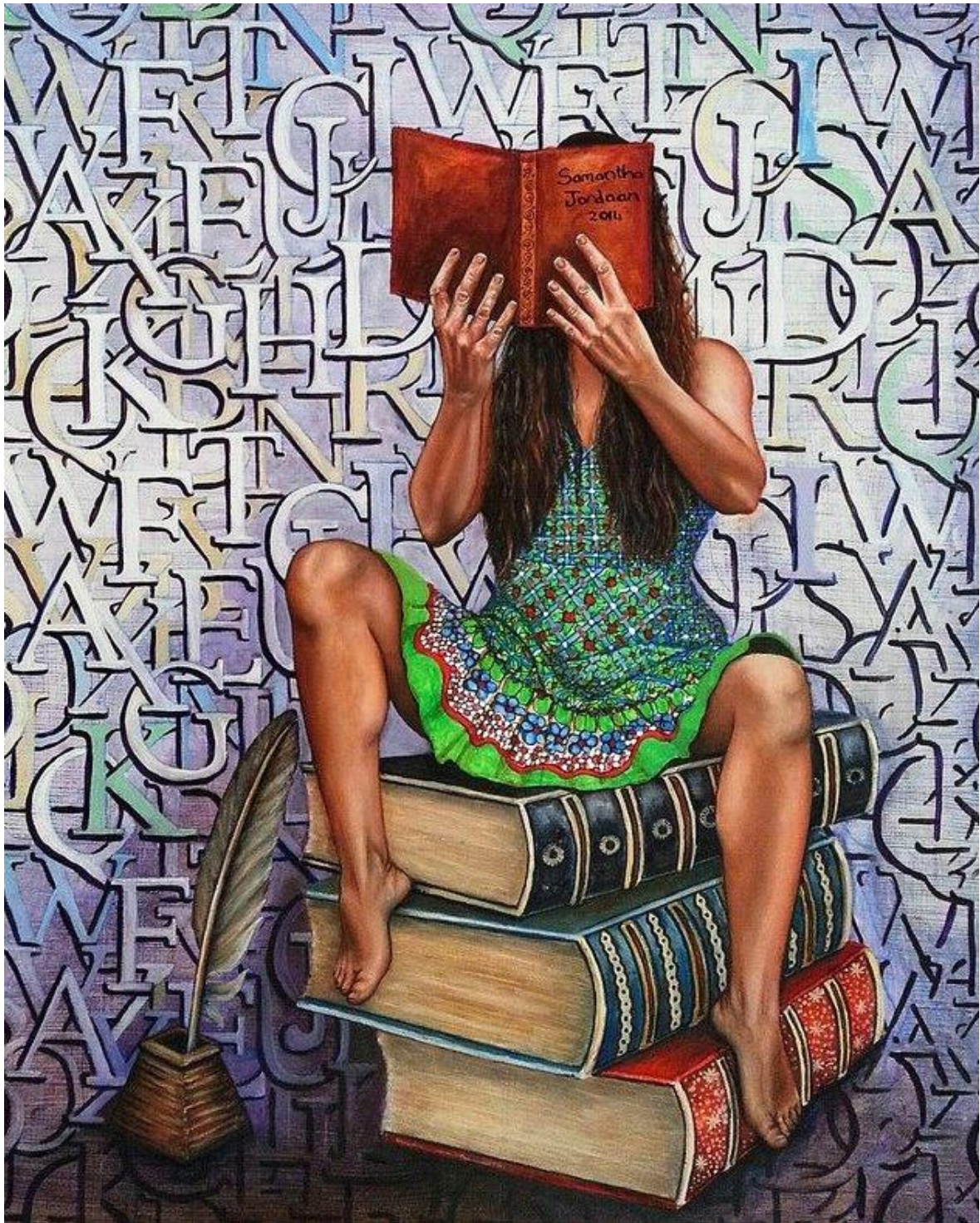


Occult Interpretation of Alphabets and Numerals



The occult systems of interpreting numerals solves the problem of cosmogony; and the systems of geometrical figures represents the numbers objectively.

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (VARIOUS OCCULT SYSTEMS OF INTERPRETATIONS OF ALPHABETS AND NUMERALS) XIV pp. 95-102.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL METHODS OF THE KABBALAH must not be mentioned in a public work; but its various systems of arithmetical and geometrical ways of unriddling certain symbols may be described. The *Zohar* methods of calculation, with their three sections, the Gematria, Notaricon and Temurah, also the Albath and Algath, are extremely difficult to practice. We refer those who would learn more to Cornelius Agrippa's works.¹ But none of those systems can ever be understood unless a Kabbalist becomes a real Master in his Science. The Symbolism of Pythagoras requires still more arduous labour. His symbols are very numerous, and to comprehend even the general gist of his abstruse doctrines from his Symbology would necessitate years of study. His chief figures are the square (the Tetractys), the equilateral triangle, the point within a circle, the cube, the triple triangle, and finally the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid's *Elements*, of which proposition Pythagoras was the inventor. But with this exception, none of the foregoing symbols originated with him, as some believe. Millenniums before his day, they were well known in India, whence the Samian Sage brought them, not as a speculation, but as a demonstrated Science, says Porphyry, quoting from the Pythagorean Moderatus.

The numerals of Pythagoras were hieroglyphical symbols by means whereof he explains *all* ideas concerning the nature of things.²

The fundamental geometrical figure of the *Kabbalah*, as given in the *Book of Numbers*,³ that figure which tradition and the Esoteric Doctrines tell us was given by the Deity Itself to Moses on Mount Sinai,⁴ contains the key to the universal problem in

¹ See *Isis Unveiled*, II pp. 298-300. Gematria is formed by a metathesis from the Greek word *γραμματα*; Notaricon may be compared to stenography; Temurah is permutation — a way of dividing the alphabet and shifting letters.

² *De vita Pythagoræ*, Amsterdam 1707

³ We are not aware that a copy of this ancient work is embraced in the catalogue of any European library; but it is one of the *Books of Hermes*, and it is referred to and quotations are made from it in the works of a number of ancient and mediaeval philosophical authors. Among these authorities are: Arnaldus de Villa Nova's *Rosarius philosophorum*, Franciscus Arnolphinus Lucensis' *Tractat de lapide, etc.*, Hermes Trismegistus' *Tractatus de transmutatione metallorum*, *Tabula Smaragdina*, and above all the treatise of Raymond Lully, *De angelis opus divinum de quinta essentia*.

⁴ *Exodus* xxxv, 40

its grandiose, because simple, combinations. This figure contains in itself all the others.

The Symbolism of numbers and their mathematical interrelations is also one of the branches of Magic, especially of mental Magic, divination and correct perception in clairvoyance. Systems differ, but the root idea is everywhere the same. As shown in the *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*, by Kenneth R.H. MacKenzie:

One system adopts unity, another, trinity, a third quinquinity; again, we have sexagons, heptagons, novems, duodecimals, and so on, until the mind is lost in the survey of the materials alone of a science of numbers. Numbers also are related to proper proportion, and as one scale or the other is adopted in a system, so the proportion varies; and with the devarication¹ we obtain dissimilar forms of architecture. It is impossible to deny the multiplication table, or to assert that the three angles of any triangle do not comprise two rectangles.²

The Devanāgarī characters in which Sanskrit is generally written, have all that the Hermetic, Chaldaean and Hebrew alphabets have, and in addition the Occult significance of the “eternal sound,” and the meaning given to every letter in its relation to spiritual as well as terrestrial things. As there are only twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and ten fundamental numbers, while in the Devanāgarī there are thirty-five consonants and [fourteen] vowels, making altogether [forty-nine] simple letters [or 7 x 7], with numberless combinations in addition, the margin for speculation and knowledge is in proportion considerably wider. Every letter has its equivalent in other languages, and its equivalent in a figure or figures of the calculation table. It has also numerous other significations, which depend upon the special idiosyncrasies and characteristics of the person, object, or subject to be studied. As the Hindus claim to have received the Devanāgarī characters from Sarasvatī, the inventress of Sanskrit, the “language of the Devas” or Gods (in their exoteric pantheon), so most of the ancient nations claimed the same privilege for the origin of their letters and tongue. The *Kabbalah* calls the Hebrew alphabet the “letters of the Angels,” which were communicated to the Patriarchs, just as the Devanāgarī was to the Rishis by the Devas. The Chaldaeans found their letters traced in the sky by the “yet unsettled stars and comets,” says the *Book of Numbers*; while the Phœnicians had a sacred alphabet formed by the twistings of the sacred serpents. The Neter Khari (hieratic alphabet) and secret (sacerdotal) speech of the Egyptians is closely related to the oldest “Secret Doctrine Speech.” It is a Devanāgarī with mystical combinations and additions, into which the Senzar largely enters.

The power and potency of numbers and characters are well known to many Western Occultists as being compounded from all these systems, but are still unknown to Hindu students, if not to their Occultists. In their turn European Kabbalists are generally ignorant of the alphabetical secrets of Indian Esotericism. At the same time the general reader in the West knows nothing of either; least of all how deep are the traces left by the Esoteric numeral systems of the world in the Christian Churches.

¹ [Any two things, crossing one another]

² *Sub voce* “Numbers.”

Nevertheless this system of numerals solves the problem of cosmogony for whomsoever studies it, while the system of geometrical figures represents the numbers objectively.

To realize the full comprehension of the Deific and the Abstruse enjoyed by the Ancients, one has to study the origin of the figurative representations of their primitive Philosophers. The *Books of Hermes* are the oldest repositories of numerical Symbolology in Western Occultism. In them we find that the number *ten*¹ is the Mother of the Soul, Life and Light being therein united. For as the sacred anagram Teruph shows in the *Book of Keys* (Numbers), the number 1 (one) is born from Spirit, and the number 10 (ten) from Matter; “the unity has made the ten, the ten, the unity”; and this is only the Pantheistic axiom, in other words “God in Nature and Nature in God.”

The Kabbalistic Gematria is arithmetical, not geometrical. It is one of the methods for extracting the hidden meaning from letters, words, and sentences. It consists in applying to the letters of a word the sense they bear as numbers, in outward shape as well as in their individual sense. As illustrated by Ragon:

The figure 1 signified the living man (a body erect), man being the only living being enjoying this faculty. A head being added to it, the glyph (or letter) P was obtained, meaning paternity, creative potency; the R signifying the walking man (with his foot forward), going, *iens*, *iturus*.²

The characters were also made supplementary to speech, every letter being at once a figure representing a sound for the ear, an idea to the mind; as, for instance, the letter F, which is a cutting sound like that of air rushing quickly through space; fury, fusee, fugue, all words expressive of, and depicting what they signify.³

But the above pertains to another system, that of the primitive and philosophical formation of the letters and their outward glyphic form — not to Gematria. The Temurah is another Kabbalistic method, by which any word could be made to yield its mystery out of its anagram. So in *Sēpher-Yetzirāh* we read “One — the spirit of the Alahim of Lives.” In the oldest Kabbalistic diagrams the Sephirōth (the seven and the three) are represented as wheels or circles, and Adam-Kadmon, the primitive Man, as an upright pillar. “Wheels and seraphim and the holy creatures” (*Hayyōth*) says Rabbi 'Aqiba. In still another system of the symbolical *Kabbalah* called Albath — which arranges the letters of the alphabet by pairs in three rows — all the couples in the first row bear the numerical value ten; and in the system of Shimeon ben-Shetah (an Alexandrian Neo-Platonist under the first Ptolemy) the uppermost couple — the most sacred of all — is preceded by the Pythagorean cypher: one and a nought — 10.

All beings, from the first divine emanation, or “God manifested,” down to the lowest atomic existence, “have their particular number which distinguishes each of them and becomes the source of their attributes and qualities as of their destiny.” Chance, as taught by Cornelius Agrippa, is in reality only an unknown progression; and time

¹ See Johannes Meursius [Johannes van Meurs], *Denarius Pythagoricus, etc.*, 1631

² Ragon, *Maçonnerie Occulte*, p. 426, fn. [Paris: E. Dentu, 1853]

³ *ibid.*, p. 432, note

but a succession of numbers. Hence, futurity being a compound of chance and time, these are made to serve Occult calculations in order to find the result of an event, or the future of one's destiny. Said Pythagoras:

There is a mysterious connection between the Gods and numbers, on which the science of arithmancy¹ is based. The soul is a world that is self-moving; the soul contains in itself, and is, the quaternary, the tetractys [the perfect cube].

There are lucky and unlucky, or beneficent and maleficent numbers. Thus while the ternary — the first of the odd numbers (the one being the perfect and standing by itself in Occultism) — is the divine figure or the triangle; the dyas was disgraced by the Pythagoreans from the first. It represented Matter, the passive and evil principle — the number of Māyā, illusion.

While the number *one* symbolized harmony, order or the good principle (the one God expressed in Latin by Solus, from which the word Sol, the Sun, the symbol of the Deity), number *two* expressed a contrary idea. The science of good and evil began with it. All that is double, false, opposed to the only reality, was depicted by the binary. It also expressed the contrasts in Nature which are always double: night and day, light and darkness, cold and heat, dampness and dryness, health and sickness, error and truth, male and female, *etc.* . . . The Romans dedicated to Pluto the second month of the year, and the second day of that month to expiations in honour of the Manes. Hence the same rite established by the Latin Church, and faithfully copied. Pope John XIX, instituted in 1003 the Festival of the Dead, which had to be celebrated on the 2nd of November, the second month of autumn.²

On the other hand the triangle, a purely geometrical figure, had great honour shown it by every nation, and for this reason:

In geometry a straight line cannot represent an absolutely perfect figure, any more than two straight lines. Three straight lines, on the other hand, produce by their junction a triangle, or the first absolutely perfect figure. Therefore, it symbolized from the first and to this day the Eternal — the first perfection. The word for deity in Latin, as in French, begins with D, in Greek the delta or triangle, Δ, whose three sides symbolize the trinity, or the three kingdoms, or, again, divine nature. In the middle is the Hebrew Yōd, the initial of Jehovah,³ the animating spirit or fire, the generating principle represented by the letter G, the initial of "God" in the northern languages, whose philosophical significance is generation.⁴

As stated correctly by the famous Mason Ragon, the Hindu Trimūrti is personified in the world of ideas by Creation, Preservation and Destruction, or Brahmā, Vishnu and Śiva; in the world of matter by Earth, Water and Fire, or the Sun, and symbolized by

¹ [A form of numerology where divination is made through numbers, especially those associated with the letters of a person's name.].

² Extracted from Ragon, *Maçonnerie Occulte*, p. 427, note

³ [See Éliphas Lévi's *Dogme et Rituel*, *etc.*, I, 154]

⁴ Summarized from Ragon, *ibid.*, p. 428, note

the Lotus, a flower that lives by earth, water, and the sun.¹ The Lotus, sacred to Isis, had the same significance in Egypt, whereas in the Christian symbol, the Lotus, not being found in either Judaea or Europe, was replaced by the water-lily. In every Greek and Latin Church, in all the pictures of the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel is depicted with this Trinitarian symbol in his hand standing before Mary, while above the chief altar or under the dome, the Eye of the Eternal is painted within a triangle, made to replace the Hebrew Yōd or God.

Truly, says Ragon, there was a time when numbers and alphabetical characters meant something more than they do now — the images of a mere insignificant sound.

Their mission was nobler then. Each of them represented by its form a complete sense, which, besides the meaning of the word, had a double² interpretation adapted to a dual doctrine. Thus when the sages desired to write something to be understood only by the savants, they confabulated a story, a dream, or some other fictitious subject with personal names of men and localities, that revealed by their lettered characters the true meaning of the author by that narrative. Such were all their religious creations.³

Every appellation and term had its *raison d'être*. The name of a plant or mineral denoted its nature to the Initiate at the first glance. The essence of everything was easily perceived by him once that it was figured by such characters. The Chinese characters have preserved much of this graphic and pictorial character to this day, though the secret of the full system is lost. Nevertheless, even now, there are those among that nation who can write a long narrative, a volume, on one page; and the symbols that are explained historically, allegorically and astronomically, have survived until now.

Moreover, there exists a universal language among the Initiates, which an Adept, and even a disciple, of any nation may understand by reading it in his own language. We Europeans, on the contrary, possess only one graphic sign common to all, & (and); there is a language richer in metaphysical terms than any on earth, whose every

¹ Ragon mentions the curious fact that the first four numbers in German are named after the elements.

“Ein, or one, means the air, the element which, ever in motion, penetrates matter throughout, and whose continual ebb and tide is the universal vehicle of life.

“Zwei, two, is derived from the old German Zweig, signifying germ, fecundity; it stands for earth the fecund mother of all.

“Drei, three, is the *trienos* of the Greeks, standing for water, whence the Sea-gods, Tritons; and trident, the emblem of Neptune — the water, or sea, in general being called Amphitrite (surrounding water).

“Vier, four, a number meaning in Belgian fire . . . It is in the quaternary that the first solid figure is found, the universal symbol of immortality, the Pyramid, ‘whose first syllable means fire.’ Lysis and Timæus of Locris claimed that there was not a thing one could name that had not the quaternary for its root . . . The ingenious and mystical idea which led to the veneration of the ternary and the triangle was applied to number four and its figure; it was said to express a living being, 1, the vehicle of the triangle 4, vehicle of God, or man carrying in him the divine principle.”

Finally, “the Ancients represented the world by the number five. Diodorus explains it by saying that the number represents earth, fire, water, air and aether or spiritus. Hence, the origin of *Pente* (five) and of *Pan* (the God) meaning in Greek all.” (Cf. Ragon, *op. cit.*, pp. 428-30) It is left with the Hindu Occultists to explain the relation this Sanskrit word *Pancha* (five) has to the elements, the Greek *Pente* having for its root the Sanskrit term.

² The system of the so-called Senzar characters is still more wonderful and difficult, since each letter is made to yield several meanings, a sign placed at the commencement showing the true meaning.

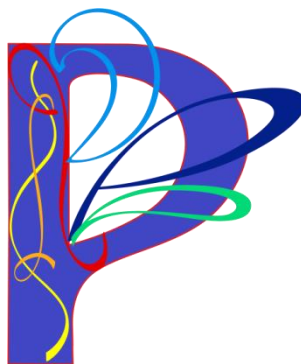
³ Ragon, *op. cit.*, p. 431, note

word is expressed by like common signs. The *Litera Pythagoræ*, so called, the Greek m (the English capital Y) if traced alone in a message, was as explicit as a whole page filled with sentences, for it stood as a symbol for a number of things — for white and black Magic, for instance.¹ Suppose one man enquired of another: To what School of Magic does so and so belong? and the answer came back with the letter traced with the right branch thicker than the left, then it meant “to right hand or divine Magic”; but if the letter were traced in the usual way, with the left branch thicker than the right, then it meant the reverse, the right or left branch being the whole biography of a man. In Asia, especially in the Devanāgarī characters, every letter had several secret meanings.

Interpretations of the hidden sense of such apocalyptic writings are found in the keys given in the *Kabbalah*, and they are among its most sacred lore. St. Hieronymus assures us that they were known to the School of the Prophets and taught therein, which is very likely. Franz Joseph Molitor, the learned Hebraist, in his work on tradition says that:

The [two and twenty] letters of the Hebrew alphabet were regarded as an emanation, or the visible expression of the divine forces inherent in the ineffable name.²

These letters find their equivalent in, and are replaced by numbers, in the same way as in the other systems. For instance, the twelfth and the sixth letter of the alphabet yield eighteen in a name; the other letters of that name added being always exchanged for that figure which corresponds to the alphabetical letter; then all those figures are subjected to an algebraical process which transforms them again into letters; after which the latter yield to the enquirer “the most hidden secrets of divine Permanency (eternity in its immutability) in the Futurity.”



¹ The Y exoterically signifies only the two paths of virtue or vice, and stands also for the numeral 150 and with a dash over the letter Y for 150,000.

² [See pp. 341-42 (§ 432) of *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition*, etc. Munster: Theissing, 1827–1855.]