



General considerations on Judaic esotericism (I)

Josephus

As the esotericism of the Judaic tradition, Kabbalah lies beyond any systematization, for it is a metaphysical and an initiatory doctrine. The word *qabbalah* means *tradition*, or more accurate, “that which is received” through tradition, referring essentially to the continuous thread (Hindu *sutra*) or chain (*shelsheleth*) that binds the *shell* to the *kernel*. Thus Kabbalah is properly timeless and universal, having no mundane origin, that is, no birth in time and no individual author. Although universal, Kabbalah belongs, in its form, to the community of Israel.

The different approaches within it, although formally contradictory, they all lead essentially (in spite of all the appearances) to the orthodox display of the One and Only Reality. Thus, the principles constituting the very essence of any metaphysical doctrine (and the essence of any doctrine whatsoever), are fundamentally the same. That which differs is only their interpretation in conformity with each possible perspective, without meaning that these multiple viewpoints, which may falsely appear as contradictory, have their origin in distinct roots – “the Existence is unique”, to use an expression borrowed from the Islamic esotericism.

In reality, the principles are the same and the heterodoxy appears when the interpretation lacks the traditional orthodox support. Therefore, we insist on saying that also in the case of Kabbalah it is all about distinct perspectives approaching the same principles, perspectives that are all orthodox, with the exception of the individual or the profane points of view. The Hindu tradition, through its *darshanas*, displays an eloquent paradigm regarding this issue.

On the other hand, for one too many times Kabbalah has been considered to be “*Judaic mysticism*”. But a plain and clear distinction has to be made between mysticism and esotericism. The former belongs to the exoterically, religious domain, while the latter lies beyond any kind of “ecstatic experience”, for it targets (being simultaneously bow, arrow and target) *the transformation* (in the etymological meaning of the word) that implies permanent, uninterrupted metaphysical realization. The mystical experiences are temporary, impermanent psychic experiences, which impress by breaking the relative and fictive borders of the “normal life”. What is obtained on an initiatory level, being of a metaphysical nature, is assimilated for eternity, so to speak, and in the Absolute, for its domain is the spiritual one.

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The modern scholars have the inclination to establish conceptual filiations and genealogical tables for doctrines that, by their nature, escape any genealogy. This fact determines the loss of the essential significance of the ideas they use as their object of study, and simultaneously, their failure to produce a useful study, based on a real understanding of the matter approached and of the work itself. The scholarly enterprise that treats issues belonging to the sacred science, and that limits itself to being its own purpose, is not a fathomable effort, of a progressive unveiling of the symbolical message, meant to activate the effective realization of the essence (*ha-mahut*) of any teaching. On the contrary, all the scholarly work, limiting its targets to profane knowledge, proves itself to be a real emblem of horizontality.¹

But let us return to our matter of concern. The influences between civilizations exist only at the level of form, and never at the level of kernel, otherwise we would speak of a complete assimilation, where one civilization completely disappears, being engulfed thoroughly by the other one. If Aristotle and Platonism did provide the Kabbalists concepts that matched the meaning of the universal principles, provision that took place in a certain moment in time, there was no inconvenient to use them if they helped to a better understanding of what is traditionally true. Also, in this case, we can clearly see the fact that if such a matching was possible, we don't deal, in what concerns the Stagirite and the Platonism, with doctrines of an individual nature.

In the Kabbalah, *Ein-Sof* is the Universal Possibility which contains both the possibilities of manifestation and the ones of non-manifestation. Therefore, there could not *be* something that is not contained as possibility within *Ein-Sof*. It is important to stress this because when we ask ourselves whether the "tendency" towards manifestation is central or peripheral to *Ein-Sof*, we must answer that it is neither. And it is obviously so, since no one can speak of margin when referring to Infinity, for obvious reasons. Moreover, manifestation "takes place" where Infinity withdraws (*tsimtsum*), consequently manifestation cannot be related spatially to *Ein-Sof*.

This "tendency" must be understood as *activity*, but as an activity with non-action, like *the motionless first mover* of which Aristotle speaks. This *primordial activity* can be expressed by any symbolic determination, in such a way that man could conceive it and use it as support for realization. If this "tendency" can be symbolized as *Divine Will*, it is for the purpose that it can be approached and reflected upon by the kabbalist. However, *Will* or *Thought* or any other name used to designate Divine qualities, is not suited to exhaust *Ein-Sof*, these attributes representing only aspects of the Infinite, if we can use such expression.

The possibilities of manifestation correspond to Being, as principle of manifestation, about whom the Hindu tradition affirms that it represents only one of Brahma's four

¹ Metaphysics, understood in its real acceptance, could never be contained in a discursive analytical manner, but, at the most, suggested in a synthetic symbolized modality. No metaphysical analytical discourse could ever contain the *essence*, the *kernel*. Nevertheless, the expression can get closer to the metaphysical core through initiatory endeavor. Thus, the style of the speech, or of the writing, mirroring the degree of metaphysical realization, will become less and less baroque, tending towards essential form. This being the case, the discourse reflects on the outside what shines with increasing power inside. The brighter the light gets, the easier is for the words to turn into one *mantra*, into vibrant murmur, until the syllable transforms itself into silence.

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legs.² The Infinite (*Ein-Sof*) excludes any determination. The *centre* and the *periphery*, at the level of *Ein-Sof*, represent conventional designations, meant to function within the parameters of the human mind, but they, in reality, do not exist as such. The issue about the “direction” (*qiblah*)³ of the first step is similar to the one regarding the immanence and the transcendence of the Principle. It is *neither this, nor that* (*neti, neti*) in Itself.

However, the *qiblah* towards manifestation is simultaneously the *qabbalah* of spiritual realization, binding, link by link, in the chain of tradition (*shelsheleth ha-qabbalah*) the Supreme with Itself, the transcendent to the immanent, and the *skin* to the *core*.

The initiatic effort is directed upstream, so to speak, and in the endeavor that the kabbalist undertakes, each step corresponds to a reversing process in the unfurling of manifestation. This means that the direction of the initiatory way does not descend, as it does in the cosmological process, but pulls back into immutability⁴. In other words, the actualization of these possibilities on the initiatory path, pulls the kabbalist out from the manifested into the non-manifested, or more specifically, from the formal domain into the super-formal one, and from there on, towards *the infinite*... This should be seen as a symmetrical, yet reversed, rapport between the cosmological possibilities and the initiatory ones. Nonetheless, the possibilities are identical, this constituting the reason why the regression is real and, basically, *possible*.⁵ This reversing process can actually be described as *essentializing*, while the cosmological one could be designated as the *substantializing* one. And it must be stressed that although it would seem that the station of the primordial man is closer to our present state than the one corresponding to the Universal Man, the truth is that the latter is present here and now more pregnant than the former. If this would not be the truth, there wouldn't be any possible way for pursuing spiritual realization. Only the greater contains the lesser. That is why the fallen individual man cannot contain the possibilities of the primordial individual man, and the latter cannot contain the possibilities of the Universal Man. Thus what is really happening in the initiatory process is the realization of the *spiritual poverty*, a state designated by the Islamic esotericism as *al-faqr*: the rejection of everything that is not essential. This is, the returning to the infinite simplicity. The kabbalist does not acquire but abandons, the utter abandonment being the renunciation of one's self.⁶

² Guénon mentioned that it is possible to see an analogy between the four states of *Ātmā*, that is, *Vaishvānara*, *Taijasa*, *Prājna* and *the fourth state*, and the four worlds of Kabbalah. We will enumerate them in correspondence to the former: thus, to the waking state corresponds *Asiyah*, to the dream state corresponds *Yetzirah*, *Beri'ah* to the dreamless state, and *Atziluth* to the fourth state. Certainly, a distinction has to be made: that which Vēdānta designates as *the fourth state* is not identical with the *Atziluth* world. In fact, none of the four states of the Hindu tradition are identical with the four worlds of the Kabbalah, but still, the analogy exists beyond all doubt.

³ *Qiblah* has the same root as *qabbalah*: *QBL*.

⁴ The human being possesses, as complete universal being (*Adam Kadmon*), all possibilities of manifestation. This is why the primordial man (*Adam*) virtually holds the position of the Universal Man (*Adam Kadmon*). Through spiritual realization, he activates these possibilities that, only from a specific and limited point of view, appear as virtual, although they are the pure cosmological activity.

⁵ Symbolically, this could be envisaged in the double spiral of the one *sutrātma*, where the transcendental *shakti* returns as the immanent *kundalini*. And, symmetrically, yet reversed, where the immanent *kundalini* returns as the transcendental *shakti*.

⁶ Therefore, it is absurd to consider initiation as evolution of the individual.