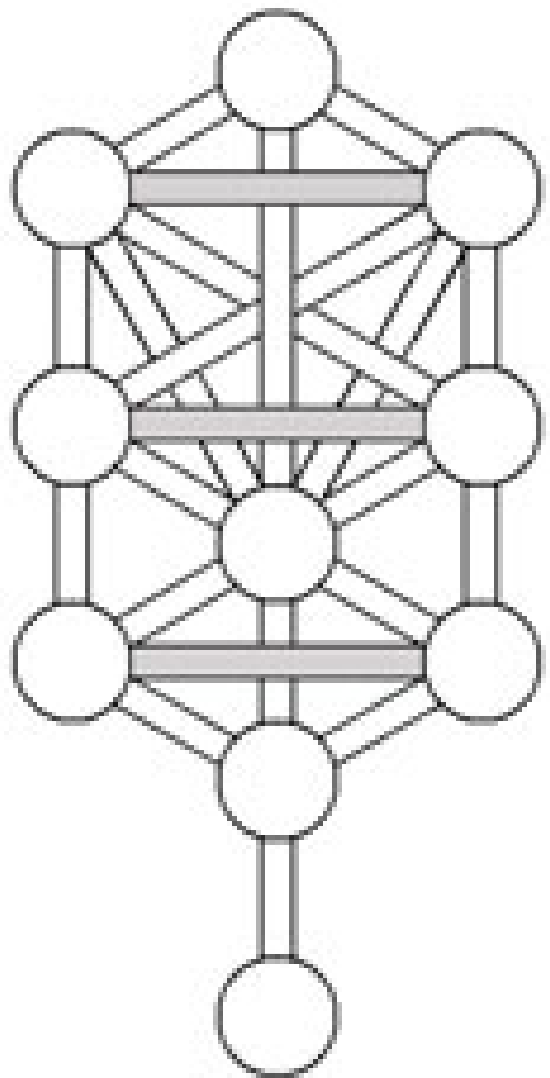


TAROT AND THE TREE OF LIFE



It is primarily Western occult and mystery schools such as the now defunct *Order of the Golden Dawn* that have pioneered the relationship between the twenty-two trump cards of the *tarot* and the twenty-two paths of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*. However, the *tree* they use is not the same version used by most Jewish *Kabbalists*, and the letter assignments they make to the paths do not create the same correspondence between the *tree* and the *Sefer Yetzirah* that we've been exploiting. Consequently, their assignments for the *Tarot* trumps also do not fit out scheme. Thus, in this slideshow I'm proposing what I believe the assignments ought to be for our particular *tree*. We'll begin with the three mother letters, *aleph-mem-shin*, and we'll follow with the seven double letters.

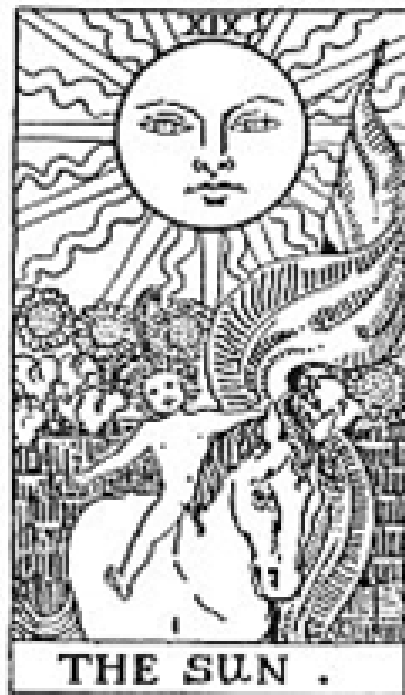
The three mother letters correspond to air, water, and fire, and fortunately, there are three trump cards that show a correspondence to these elements. The *Sun* card corresponds to fire, the *Moon* card to water, and the card known as the *Lovers* depicts clouds and the angel of air in their midst. Also, by showing male and female lovers, this card can represent the air element as the agent for mediation between the opposites. Hence, our first three paths on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* are represented as follows:



Shin

Aleph

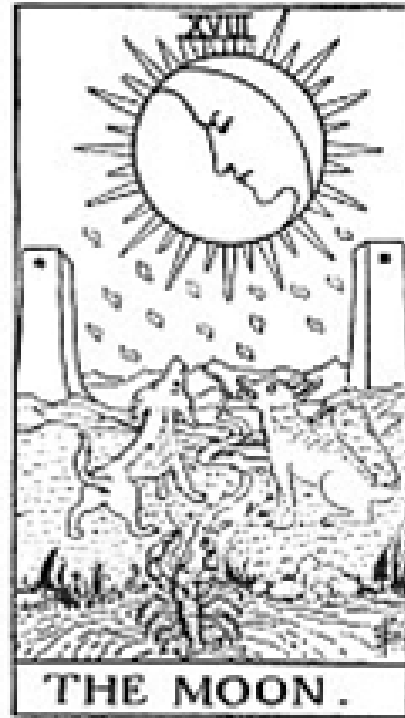
Mem



Shin - fire



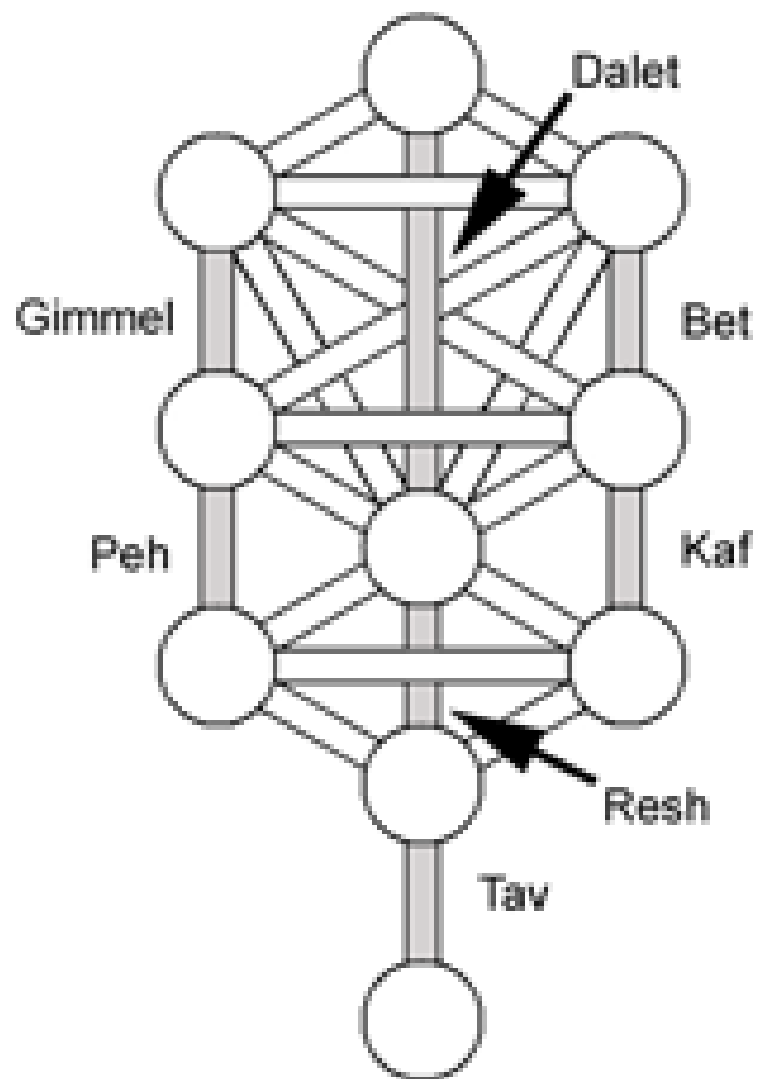
Aleph - *air*



THE MOON .

Mem - water

Next, we have the seven double letters, *bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resh-tav*, that correspond to the vertical paths on the *Tree of Life*. The *tarot* cards that I assign to these letters are as follows:



Bet – The World

This assignment makes sense because of the tradition from the Zohar that the world was created with the letter bet which stands for a blessing.

Gimmel – The Hermit

Cards on the left side of the tree should correspond more to structure while those on the right side should correspond more to feelings and emotions. In this case, gimmel is on the left side corresponding to the left brain, and it connects to the highest level on this side. Hence, it is well represented by a seeker of intellectual enlightenment. Additionally, gimmel stands for gamal, a camel, and like a camel, the Hermit has to rely on his inner resources.

Dalet – Death

The path from *Tiferet* to *Keter* on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* is one of transformation in which the individual ego has to die in order for a more cosmic level of consciousness to emerge. Similarly, *Death* is also a transformation for one state to another.

Kaf – High Priestess

The *High Priestess* is a spiritually attuned woman, and she belongs on the right side of the *tree* rather than the left side because her path is devotional and intuitive as opposed to intellectual and deductive. Hence, she corresponds quite well to the *kavannahs*, the spontaneous devotions of the heart that are represented by the letter *kaf*.

Peh – Temperance

The letter *peh* is on the path from *Hod* to *Gevurah* on the left side of the *tree*, and it represents the discipline that one must undergo to hone the mind. This letter also represents the Hebrew word for “mouth,” and we’ve talked before about the necessity for controlling one’s tongue and appetites. Thus, the card *Temperance* fits in well with what is required on this path.

Resh – The Hanged Man

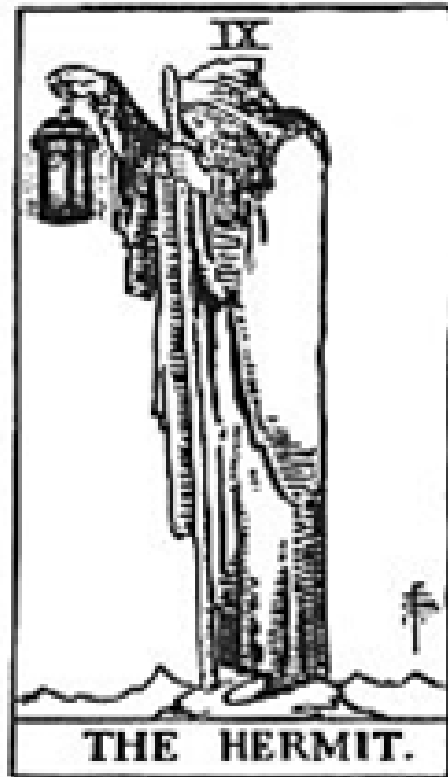
The path of *resh* connects *Yesod* to *Tiferet*, and it represents that transition from a consciousness that can only think about itself to one that is capable of compassion for others. This type of transition in consciousness begins in most people around puberty when they make that change from childhood to becoming a morally responsible adult. However, to make this transformation one's world has to be completely turned upside down, and that is what the *Hanged Man* represents.

Tav – Strength

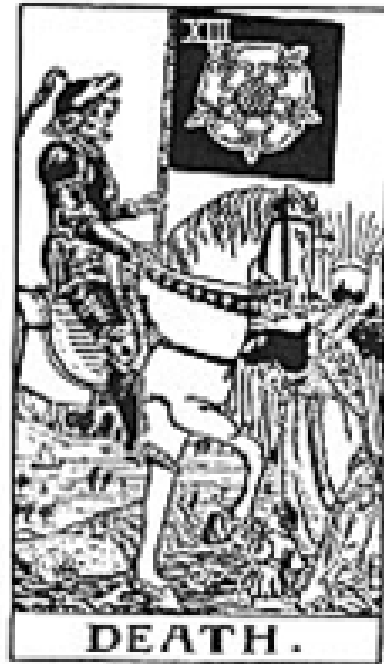
It is written in *Genesis Rabbah VIII:11* that man was created partly with characteristics of the beasts of the field and partly with characteristics of the angels, and how we fair in life all depends on which of these two natures we pay heed to. If we listen to our higher being, then we create a good foundation for ourselves and we develop righteousness. The *tarot* card for *Strength* shows a divine being subduing a lion, and since *tav* connects the path from *Malchut*, the earthly kingdom, to *Yesod*, our foundation, this card is once again a very good fit for this path.



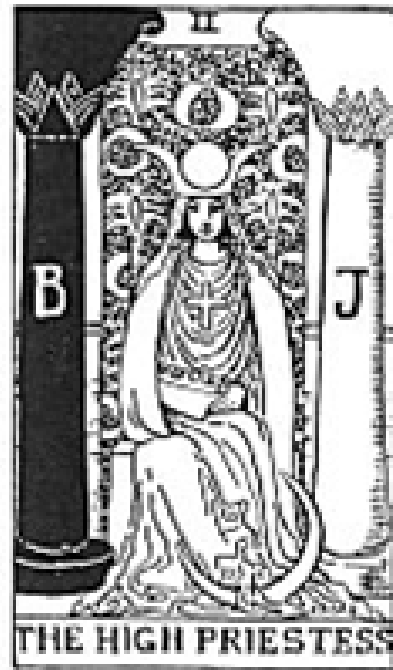
Bet – creating the world for a blessing



Gimmel – guided by one's inner light



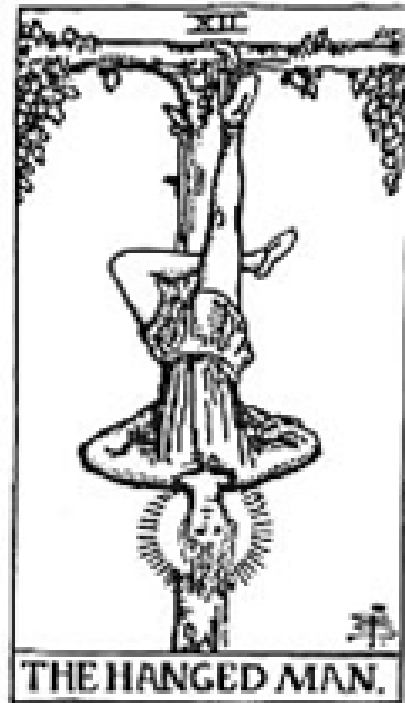
Dalet – transformation from self to beyond self



Kaf – *devotional worship*



Peh – disciplining one's thoughts

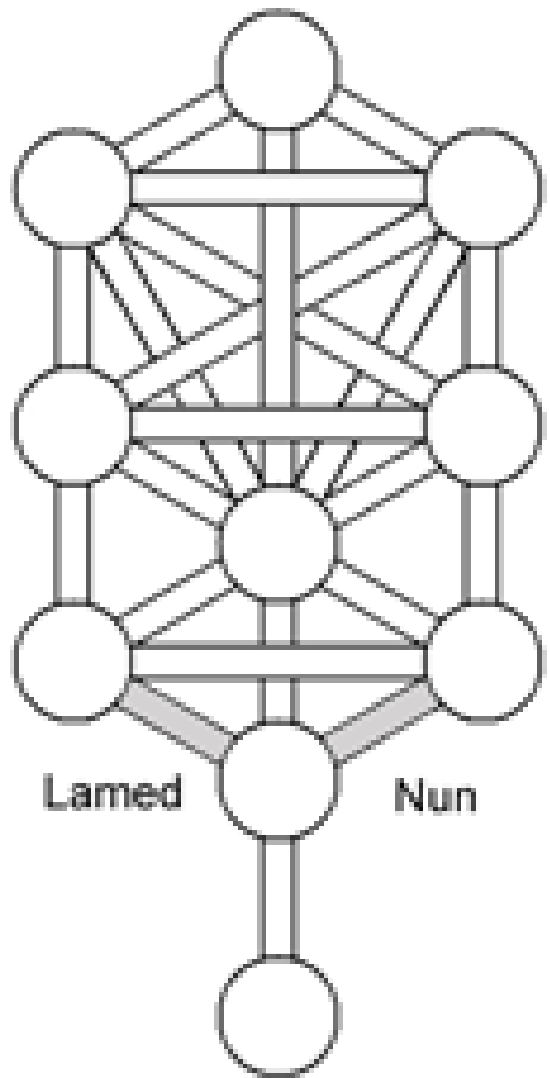


Resh – *reversing the focus from “me” to “you”*



Tav – *subduing the beast within*

We now begin our exploration of the remaining twelve plain letters, and we'll start with *lamed* and *nun*. Here are my *tarot* card assignments.



Lamed

Nun

Lamed – The Magician

The letter *lamed* connects *Yesod*, foundation, to *Hod*, glory. The letter *lamed* stands for *lamad*, learning, and *Hod* represents the basic analytical function of the left hemisphere of the brain. Thus, this is where our cleverness resides and where the real magic of the mind takes place. Consequently, the appropriate card for this path is the *Magician*.

Nun – The Empress

The letter *nun* connects *Yesod* to *Netzach* which corresponds to our basic right brain functions such as timelessness and intuition. The image of the *Empress* is a woman seated on a throne surrounded by symbols of *Venus* and enjoying the moment. Hence, this a perfect match for the activities of the right hemisphere of the brain.

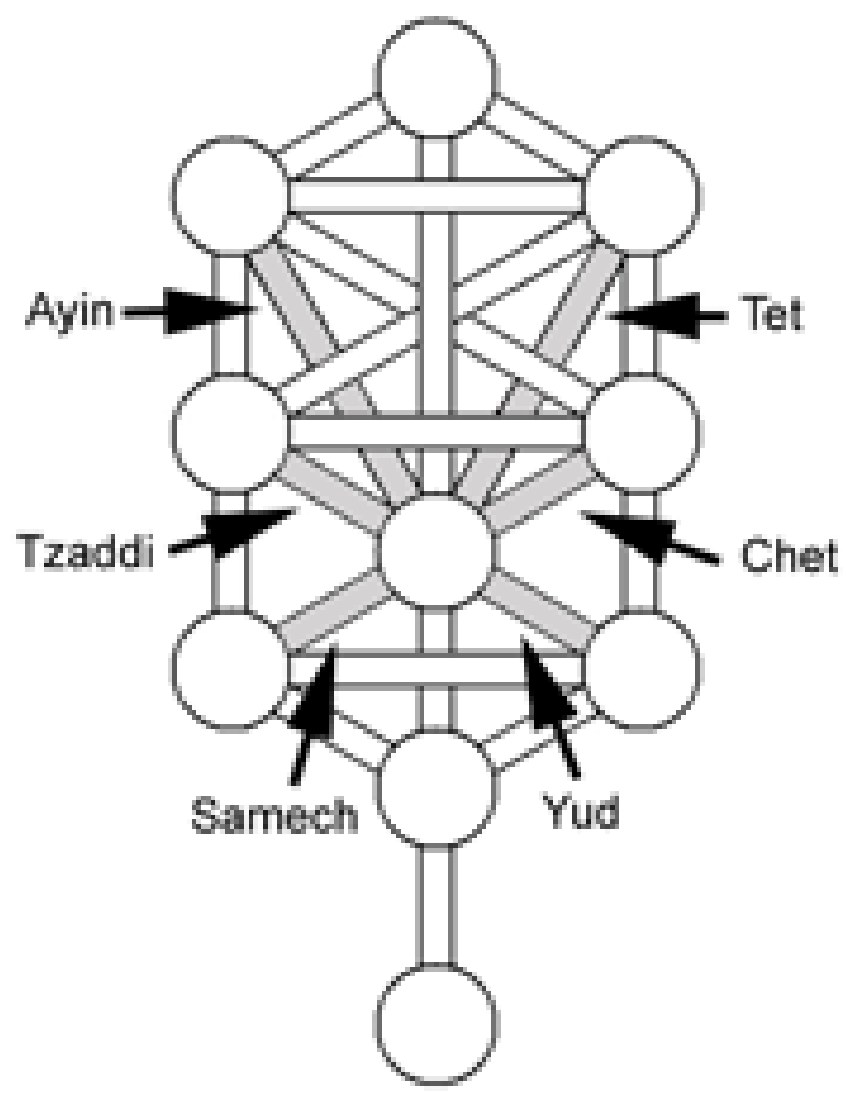


Lamed – the power of the mind



Nun – the beauty of the moment

Next, we'll look at the letters *samech-yud-tzaddi-chet-ayin-tet*. Here are the cards that I assign to these letters.



Samech – The Emperor

The letter *samech* stands for *samoach*, support, and the path for *samech* connects *Hod* to *Tiferet*, the very center of the *tree*. The center of the *tree* represents our ego, our sense of “I,” and sitting behind the eye is the silent observer. With respect to the other parts of our psyche, the ego is the king, the emperor of all, and it is the ego which must control and rule all the mental schemes of *Hod*. Thus, the *Emperor* is a good card for this path.

Yud – The Chariot

The early forms of mystical Jewish meditation and mental journeying were known as the *work of the chariot* after *Ezekiel's* vision of *God's* chariot.

Traditionally, the start of this journey was described by the phrase *yordei merkabah*, descent into the chariot, and our *Tree of Life* diagram helps us make sense of this phrase. On the *tree* we see the letter *yud* on a path from *Tiferet* (our ego) that descends to *Netzach* (our right brain and subconscious). Hence, the *work of the chariot* begins with a descent into the less structured type of mentation represented by the right hemisphere of the brain, and from there we ascend to the more exalted states of consciousness that are represented by the *sefirot* on the right side of the *tree*.

Tzaddi – Justice

In Hebrew, the letter *tzaddi* stands for *tzaddik*, a righteous or just person, and so it is only appropriate that the *tarot* card for this letter be *Justice*.

Chet – Star

The letter *chet* stands for *chai* and *chaim*, life, and in the imagery of the *tarot* card *Star*, we see a pool of living water.

Ayin – The Devil

The numerical value of the letter *ayin* is seventy, and it says in *Jeremiah 23:29* that the word of the *Lord* is like a hammer that breaks the rock. Rabbinic tradition says that the rock is broken into seventy pieces, the numerical value of *ayin*, and the mystical understanding is that this represents the transition from unity to multiplicity. And it is in this sense that the *Devil* card applies. When we enter the world of multiplicity and lose sight of *God's* unity, paradise is lost and we are enslaved by our mistaken perceptions. However, in the imagery of this card, the man and the woman are only loosely bound, and it is in their power to remove their chains at any moment.

Tet – Wheel of Fortune

The letter *tet* connects *Tiferet* with *Chochmah*, the higher wisdom of the right hemisphere of the brain. In particular, *Chochmah* represents an unstructured type of knowing and apprehension and the “aha” moment of sudden enlightenment. We can always prepare and hope for inspiration, but its appearance is always governed by chance rather than strict causality. And that is why the *Wheel of Fortune* is a good fit for this path.



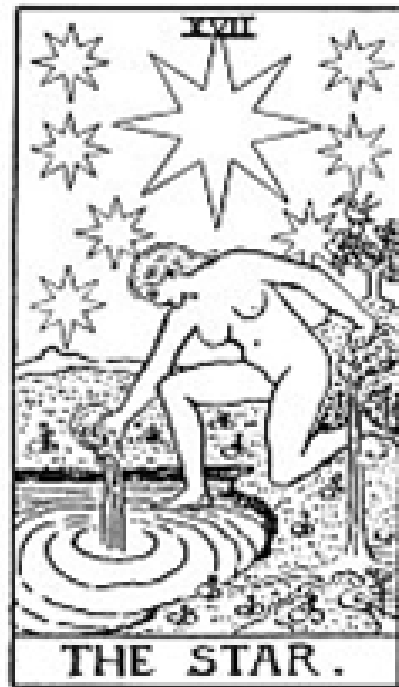
Samech – the ego is the ruler of the mind



Yud – we descend into the subconscious before ascending to higher states



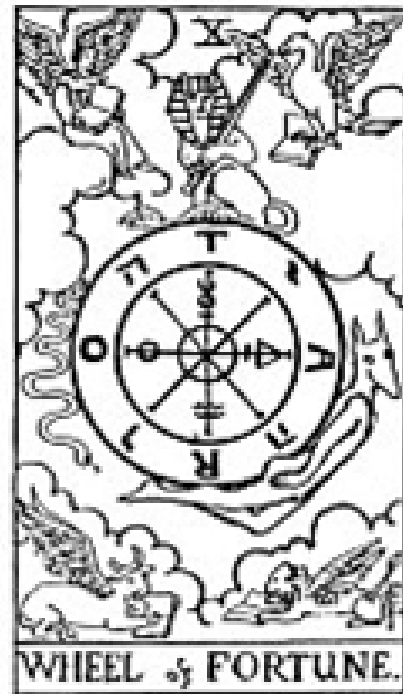
Tzaddi – the tzaddik pursues righteousness and justice



Chet – our minds must drink from the waters of life

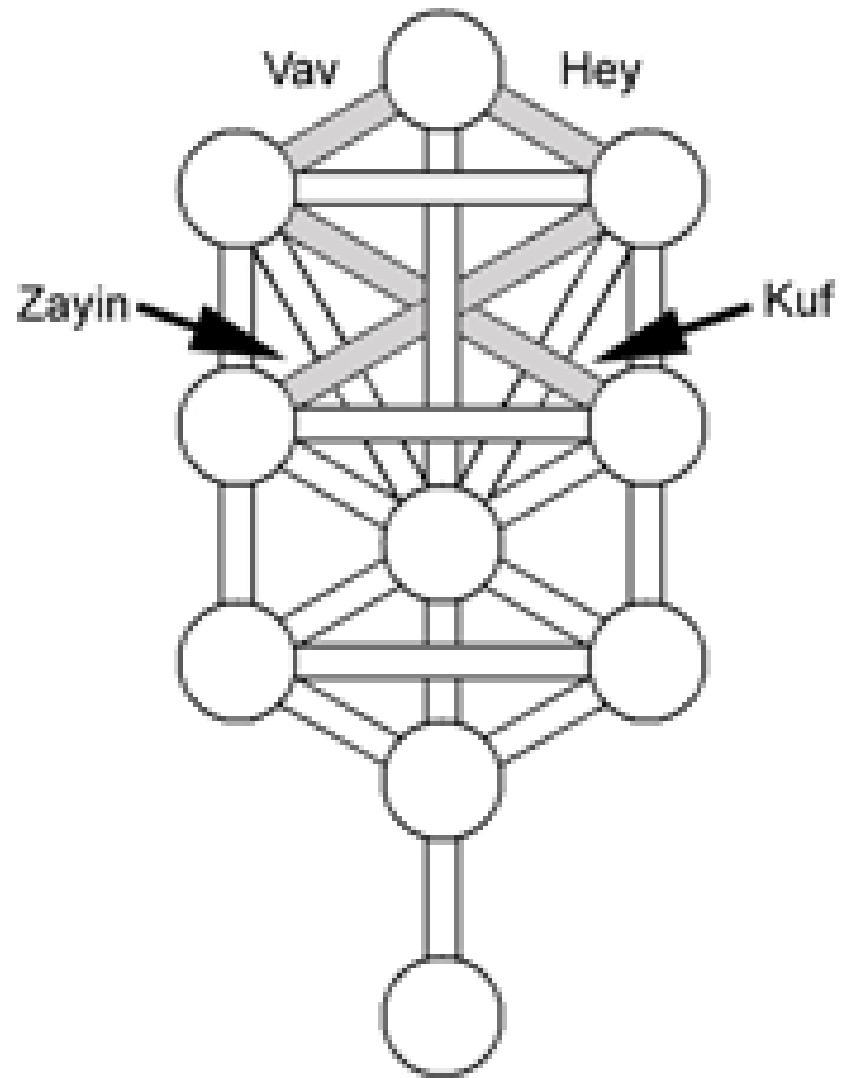


Ayin – when we lose sight of the One, illusion keeps us in bondage



Tet – at the highest level we find spontaneous illumination

And now we have just four letters left, *zayin-kuf-hey-vav*. Here are the cards that I assign to these letters.



Zayin – The Tower

This letter connects the path from *Gevurah*, representing a well-honed analytical brain, to *Chochmah*, the higher but unstructured enlightenment of the right hemisphere of the brain. The imagery of this card is that of a tower being blown apart by lightning, and that is what happens to all our structure when enlightenment occurs. Thus, the *Tower* is an excellent fit for this path.

Kuf – The Hierophant

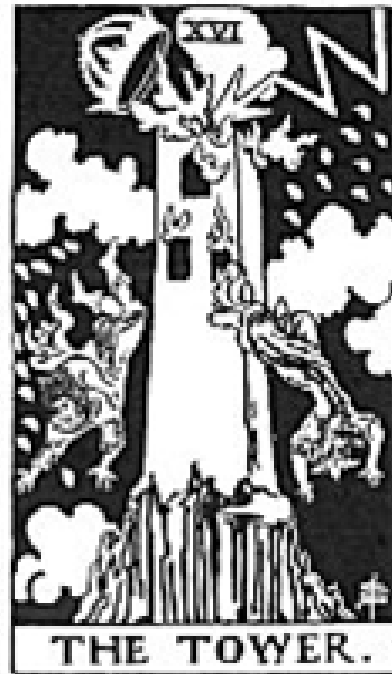
This path starts at *Chesed* on the right side of the *tree* and takes us to *Binah* on the left side. This destination is the pinnacle of understanding that may be achieved through the activities of the left hemisphere of the brain. It is an intellectually enlightened state, but one that it is still surrounded by structure, and this is also what the *Hierophant* represents. The *Hierophant* denotes spiritual understanding within the context of the structure of a religious institution.

Hey – The Fool

We often think of the path of *hey* as representing the first step from the world of spirit to the physical plane. When we begin this journey, we are like a new born babe, we are simple and without guile, and this is the higher meaning of the *Fool*. The *Fool* is not necessarily a stupid person, but one who is without schemes and devious complexity. Their inside is like their outside. Thus, this card represents the purity of our first steps.

Vav – Judgment

If *hey* represents the beginning of our journey, then *vav* represents the end. We have developed our brains as much as possible and solved as many riddles of the universe as we could, and now it is time to rejoin with the Oneness. However, a step in that process is to review our lives and what we've done, both the good and the bad, and in that way we judge ourselves. This *Judgment* of self is the last step in our journey back to wholeness.



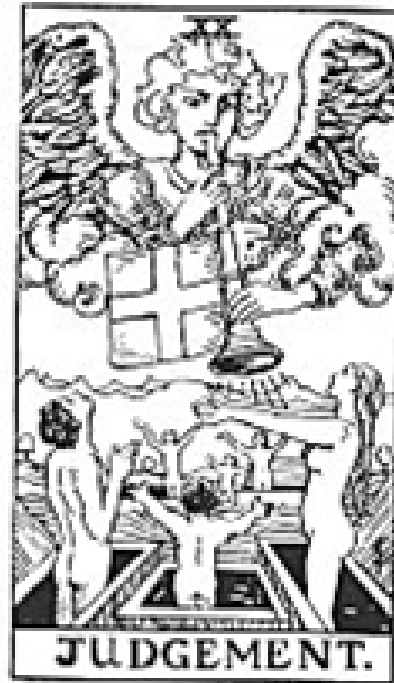
Zayin – the flash of enlightenment disrupts our old routines



Kuf – holiness is often found first within the structure of our own religious beliefs



Hey –simplicity is a virtue, not a fault



Vav – we are judged by our own thoughts