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THE TREE OF THE SEPHIROTH.

To the materialist the phenomenon of growth is a movement from within outward, a kind of expansion, for by this process form came into existence. To the philosopher, however, growth is a movement from without inward; not a contraction, but a directionalization of consciousness toward the center of being. The forced culture by which the Hindu magician produces in a few brief moments a full-grown mango tree from its podlike seed is analogous to the processes of philosophical mysticism by which the tree of the soul is caused in a miraculous manner to unfold and bear fruit ages before its normal season. This soul-tree, by an almost incomprehensible process, grows inward toward the source of its own seed, and at last, like the beanstalk of nursery rhyme, connects two worlds. The Qabbalistic tree of organized manifestation is not only a macrocosmic symbol but also the emblem of man himself, for he, too, is rooted in spirit; and to attain perfection he must ultimately retire through the four worlds into the seed of himself. To a certain degree man's consciousness functions on that level of existence corresponding to his thoughts. Thought and emotion are the basis of all attachment. Consequently, he who is attached to physical things is termed worldly, for his consciousness is the servant of his material ambition. Affirming his ability to lift his consciousness to the level of his thoughts, the ascetic devotes his life to contemplation of divinity. Ascetics of every age have justified their attitude by declaring that the rapture attendant upon their momentary glimpses of a higher life amply compensate for self-imposed austerities. Whereas such attain their fleeting spiritual experiences through mortification of the flesh, philosophy declares that if any man will unfold his latent faculties he ultimately can function continuously in the divine worlds. The tree is the emblem of philosophic growth, while the shirt of wool and the implements of flagellation signify a sincere but unnatural effort toward the higher life.