Introduction to Comparative Qabalism

**Recap of numerological alchemy and transyncretic approach to occultism**

Course document for September 2, 2015—Deicidus, Internet School of Magic

*As always, please leave questions and comments in the document if you do not mind sharing them with other students (Ctrl-Alt-M). This makes it much faster and easier for me to answer the questions, in-context. This document will be publically viewable.*

I am writing this week something that could serve as an introduction to my book Comparative Qabalism. The book is woefully incomplete, but I encourage you to [download it](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bz4MYv32sIrfaWtNUHBiQ0k2Ync) (.pub) and take a look at the pictures as you read this class.

These ideas will be familiar to students who have been following along, but I haven’t yet taken a broader look at the transyncretic approach and its implications.

# What are Aspecting Systems?

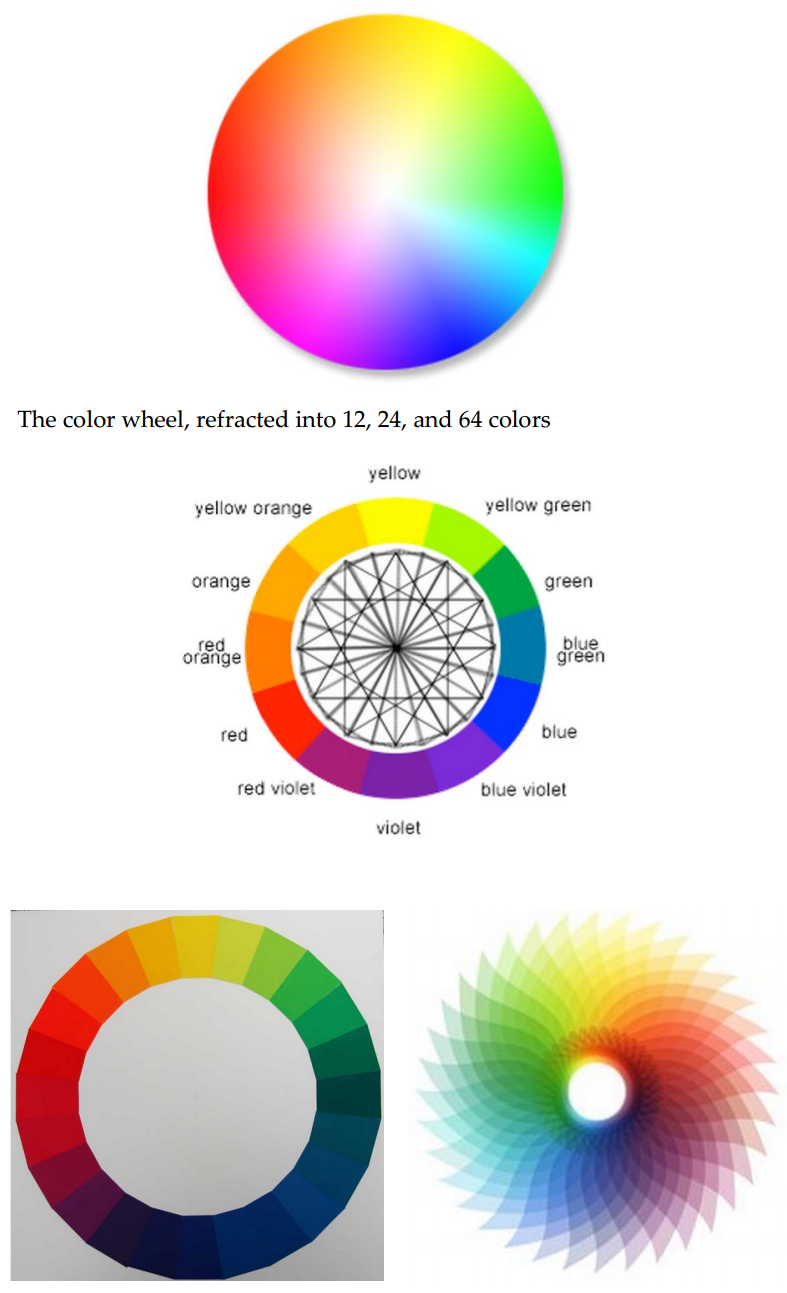
A central puzzle of occult study is the proliferation of tables of correspondences, magical alphabets, and glyph-based divination systems. A given tradition usually prefers one magical alphabet that is also used in divination, and systems which combine multiple traditions syncretically usually develop one “official” set of attributions between all their various traditions. These attributions link the letters/glyphs/elements of one system with corresponding letters/glyphs/elements in another system.

For example, Aleister Crowley’s seminal book, *777*, is so important to the history of modern magic(k) because it syncretizes the magical languages of several major magical traditions, and it also began to synthesize Western and Eastern magical languages. The endless tables in the book comprise a complete system of attributions (or correspondences) between planetary magic, medieval alchemy, tarot cards, Egyptian myth, and various other systems. Crowley went on to depict his meta-system of combined attributions and imagery with Frieda Harris in his *Thoth* tarot.

The difficulty is that these tables of correspondences are not useful in and of themselves, and their use is not obvious. The real value in aspecting systems comes from their use in developing a sense of the elements and their alchemical combinations.

I call a system which splits a whole into a number of discrete elements an ‘aspecting system’—and if these elements are also considered letters a ‘magical alphabet’ or more broadly (to include the assemblage of various components of the magical system, including an aspecting system) a ‘magical language’.

# The Wheel

An aspecting system splits a whole up into a number of discrete elements. We can depict this whole as a wheel, sliced like a pie into differing numbers of slices by different systems. Using a color wheel makes the dynamics of aspecting systems visually intuitive.

For example, here is a list of several aspecting systems:

* The fundamental duality of the I Ching (Heaven/Earth)
* The 3 alchemical elements (mercury, sulphur, salt)
* The 4 elements
* The 5 elements (including ether/spirit/akasha or in Chinese elements, metal & wood)
* The 6 planets of renaissance magic
* The 7 planets (6 + Sun) or colors
* The 8 directions
* The 10 zones on the numogram or sephiroth of the tree of life
* The 12 houses of the zodiac
* The 16 subdirections (NNE, SSW, etc.)
* The 22 major arcana of the tarot
* The 24 elder futhark runes
* The 26 letters of the English alphabet
* The 64 hexagrams of the I Ching
* The 78 cards of the tarot deck
* The gods in a given pantheon

Each of these systems attempts to present a balanced image of “the whole”, split up into a number of discrete elements. Some of these systems are more balanced, such as the 8 directions or the zodiac (because they explicitly take a wheel as their origin) or the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching (because the alchemy is based on careful binary doubling/splitting), and some of them are less balanced. An example of a less-balanced aspecting system is the tarot, whose 78 cards include 4 sets of 10 (the suit cards) plus 4 sets of 4 (the court cards) plus a set of 22 (the major arcana)—really it’s two or three separate aspecting systems of different grain size all shuffled together—which is not unbalanced in itself—but its reliance on the (to my eyes) rather arbitrary mappings between the sephiroth and the pathways on the Tree of Life bend it out of shape from a perfect circle.

The quality of an aspecting system is in the care and accuracy in the naming or characterization of its elements. The more perfectly balanced the spreading of qualities around the wheel, the more useful the system will be in identifying and correctly placing energies in the system. The more unified in theme and precisely categorized and name each element in the system is, the more insightful, evocative, and revelatory will be the system. The accuracy and “voice” of a divination system that uses discrete elements depends upon the balanced distribution of fundamental qualities throughout the set of elements. (For example, Crowley’s *Thoth* tarot is slanted toward the hypermasculine, producing archetypally precise but almost snarky readings.)

# The Source of New Elements

What happens when we go from a 4-element system to a 5-element system? Where does the extra element come from? Do the existing four elements lose something which is combined into a 5th element, or does the 5th element bring in something entirely new? If the 5th element brings in something entirely new, how can a 4-element system be said to present a balanced “whole”?

These sorts of paradoxes are the result of what I call the ‘slippage problem’. If you look at the color wheel above, you will see what I mean. Going from a 12 to a 24-element system (e.g., the zodiac to the elder futhark) is fairly straightforward: simply cut all the aspects (elements/pie slices) in half and split each quality/essence dualistically. However, what would happen if we only added a single element?

First of all, where would we add it on the wheel? Aries (cardinal fire, the start of summer) which cleanly links with the first letter, Yod in YHVH, is the traditional starting point in many systems, but there is also a good argument to be made for starting in Spring or just after the midpoint of Winter, and adding new elements there. Some of my research suggests a sort of haphazard and imperfect—but completely predictable—‘threading’ or ‘weaving’ pattern for adding elements one-at-a-time, with each additional element being placed at a different place around the wheel.

**In any case, you can see the central problem: When we add a new element (increase the number of pie slices), all of the existing elements shift a little bit (you’ll recognize this messiness from the decans of the zodiac). We have to decide, qualitatively from our own thoughts, where to draw the line and how to characterize the elements of the system.**

# Developing Your Own Aspecting System

The great religions and magical traditions of the world came from standout originators, enlightened people who developed or received through inspiration a complete and perfect magical system. It is possible to use such a system and get results. But, since the point of such systems is to bring about enlightenment, it would be better to work to understand such a system and become independent of pre-given systems, so that we might also reach the level of insight where we could create our own magical system from scratch.

This involves choosing one or more aspecting systems and making them your own. Getting to know all of the glyphs of a given system fully, we come to a fuller understanding of all the fundamental energies of existence. Comparing multiple systems, we develop the ability to decompose and recompose elements into different sets with different numbers of elements. We also get a feel for different ‘modes of aspecting’ or ways of slicing and combining elements, e.g., masculine/feminine versus positive/negative versus active/passive—which are all slightly different ways of dividing an element up.

This is why numbers can be so helpful. Rather than using someone else’s pantheon, someone else’s alphabet, or someone else’s table of correspondences, we can use the abstract placeholders of number, which function as a blank canvas. (Using an unknown alphabet can have a similar effect—for example, the elder futhark runes tend to be a very balanced system simply because we know little about them, and so we naturally project a wheel onto the alphabet which mirrors our current orientation of psychological development, enabling growth through working the symbol-set.) Using numbers, we can choose arbitrarily the number of ‘gods’ we would like in our system, and then allow associations to accumulate to those numbers over time. The abstractness of numbers (or an unknown alphabet) lends to them being used to ‘code’ other systems, quickly reducing other systems to our own, bolstering our own field of associations which is forming around numbers (or our chosen set of glyphs).

A related method is to generate your own sigil library, and then to classify and synthesize the various types of sigils made. One of my teachers had a library of thousands of sigils she had designed, and from this collection she selected 23 sigils which functioned for her as an enclosed magical alphabet.

In developing our own aspecting system, the goal is to develop a feel for the fundamental energies and their modes of splitting into ‘smaller’, more specific energies, so that we might eventually become independent of aspecting systems and the number of elements in a given system, and be able to approach any situation and identify its energies accurately and within a system of the appropriate number and character. However, we are helped in this quest by a profound property of number.

# The Miracle of Number

The solution to the question posed above: “If we add a 5th element to a 4-element system, do the existing four elements lose something or gain something?” is a remarkable miracle. **My research has shown that every natural number has a unique energy frequency (essence) which is both *objective* and *specific*, even concrete.** This is truly remarkable because it means that the gods/archetypes/numbers can be known. It also synthesizes gods/pantheons with hierarchies of demons and with systems of elemental qualities (essences).

What this means is that in any system, 8 is 8. In any system, 7 is 7 and 3 is 3. However, there are a few definitional caveats: this is assuming the system counts from 1 or 0 sequentially up to its number of elements, without leaving anything out or skipping a number. There is also the question of the subaltern elements, the elements left out of the system, and how they are included or ‘folded into’ the element within the system. However, all traditional aspecting systems can be assumed to follow the first parameter, and the second caveat is part of the miracle being described.

The way that lower-order (dæmonic) elements fold into their higher-order (godly or angelic) elements preserves the information in both orders of aspecting. This is a miraculous property of the alchemical imagination. For example, if we were to take North and Northeast from an 8-element system, and combine them back into a 4-element system, we would see that information is preserved. Northeast is an energy of absolute priority and primacy, preemptive energy that gets in before anything else (even North). East is an energy of grinding and acceleration, swiftness. North is an energy of pure absolutism, perfect relevance and the pillar of the Self. You can see how Northeast combines the qualities of both North and East, and how if we were to combine Northeast back into North, North adequately covers the meaning of Northeast as well, since in a 4-element system, it is North rather than Northeast which will preempt all other elements in the ordering. (A better way to say this than “combine Northeast back into North” is “allow the qualities of Northeast to return to North and East” so that the East-y parts of Northeast do not get unnecessarily absorbed into North, producing an unbalanced view of the 4 directions).

This is half of the miracle: Whether we are combining two elements or decomposing one element into multiple elements, we find that no qualities are lost or gained, merely accounted for at a different level of detail. In this way, all aspecting systems can be syncretized.

This is the other half of the miracle: Each additional number that we count introduces a new *unique* essence, which adds combinatorially with all the existing elements, producing new unique relationships between them. (This is the Net of demons in the numogram, separated into phases based on the highest number component of the demon. E.g., 7::2 is a 7th-phase demon, what happens when 7 is introduced and alchemically mixes with 2.) This means that the number of relationships between elements balloons much quicker than the number of elements as we add elements to the system.

Most miraculously of all, this implies an endless progression of elements which count up, each number revealing an *objective*, *specific,* *concrete*, and *unique* element/essence/tool/god/demon, or ‘power’, which are revealed in an *objectively-defined or revealed order*. In other words, the gods are absolute and objective, and their aspects or qualities are rationally discernible and intelligible as specific characterizations. Moreover, these elements, through myth, tradition, and elaboration in magical system, have accumulated *specific and actual content*, which allows them to be understood as *real mythic actors* in the mythic realm of the imagination (and through that, the human world as well). In other words, numbers give us a way of counting the archetypes, which, despite their ambiguity and multifariousness, bow to number as their ordinal indexing. (The endless golden staircase, by the way, is a property and power of 5, the Hierophant in tarot—the authority of teachers and the linear progressive setup of reality.)

# Gotta Catch ‘Em All

This sets up a fascinating and endless program of study for the dedicated student of the alchemical imagination. Each element can be “captured” by “getting its number”—like the idiom, ‘to have someone’s number’ meaning to have someone pegged. My research has shown that these reductive peggings of elements to specific known essences are not illusory, but surprisingly, paradoxically, and miraculously actual—but that there are always new elements, new powers, new aspects of existing powers, to uncover and develop.

For example, I recently attended a class on Hinayana Buddhism and was struck by the similarity of two lists (this section of the book also mentioned 252 more specific ‘poisons’ which were split into nine groups of 27 plus a group of 9 ‘rulers’ of each group[[1]](#footnote-0)):

**The Five Faculties of Buddhism (Aids to Enlightenment):** prajna (wisdom of emptiness), samadhi (one-mind), mindfulness, vigor, and confidence.

**The Branches (Fruits) of Enlightenment:** prajna, samadhi, mindfulness, vigor, joy, suppleness, equanimity

I didn’t know exactly what ‘vigor’ and ‘confidence’ meant in a Buddhist context, but my teacher assured me that they meant their ordinary definitions, vigor and confidence in following the Buddhist path.

What struck me about these lists is that they shared four elements! suggesting that the second list was an extension of the first list—specifically, the splitting of ‘confidence’ into three parts: ‘joy’, ‘suppleness’, and ‘equanimity’. I was easily able to link these qualities with the numbers:

| **Number** | **Faculty Aiding Enlightenment** | **Power or Fruit** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 0 | prajna | prajna |
| 1 | samadhi | samadhi |
| 2 | mindfulness | mindfulness |
| 3 | vigor | vigor |
| 4 | confidence | joy |
| 5 | — | suppleness (?) |
| 6 | — | equanimity (?) |

I am less confident about my attributions of ‘suppleness’ and ‘equanimity’, since I haven’t discussed what those mean exactly (in the original Sanskrit) with a Buddhist scholar, but I am confident of the other attributions (0 thru 4). ‘Prajna’ is the wisdom of emptiness, linking perfectly with [0 as I have characterized it](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kezi3MRAp9O9iwlpe6Fd9Oo2RQDikJOn5ECNyheK_j4/edit?usp=sharing). ‘Samadhi’ is ‘one-mind’, the state of complete unity and absorption, linking perfectly with [1 as I have characterized it](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NIyk_fcoDQYSspxi2MoNXN6SnfkyLxmg75GYjtidP8M/edit?usp=sharing). ‘Mindfulness’, which can be read as ‘mind-full-ness’, is the spaciousness and poise which allows awareness and insight/discernment, which links it nicely with [2 as I have characterized it](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OxFCGhe-Zxi8e4oBJ7X4JJnMwVYaT0SzV_DWJDnmKbI/edit?usp=sharing), as providing space for awareness through multiplying possibility (generating spaciousness). ‘Vigor’, a bright word of innocent effort, links nicely with the bright energy of 3 (Earth). ‘Confidence’ links clearly with the masculine energy of [4 as I have characterized it](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KXIgpKMwBZyrixyns3jCRlFuaECnidCAmOHVIg5wM_8/edit?usp=sharing). ‘Joy’ also links well with 4 as I have characterized it, with aspects of completion, emotionality, death, complete expression, and Christ on the Cross which 4 brings with it. ‘Suppleness’ links well with 5 because 5 is the number of the higher intellect (flexible and perfectly intelligent), and that leaves ‘equanimity’ to link with 6—the last element in a system is often more vaguely matched or ambiguously-labeled, precisely because it acts as a placeholder for all of the unnamed elements which reside outside of the current system, and have yet to be introduced.

Numbering these lists in this way reveals the interesting way in which they share elements, and the interesting way in which ‘confidence’ is replaced with 3 elements in the longer list, suggesting that it has been decomposed into three new elements. Furthermore, the fact that the first list is a list of qualities that will aid in enlightenment, and the second list is the grown “branches” or fruits of enlightenment, suggests that the qualities develop in a somewhat linear fashion—first one would work on honing the first 5 qualities, and then as one continued, one would find that ‘confidence’ gave way to more nuanced qualities and powers of enlightenment.

# The Endless Golden Stair

Looking at number and aspecting systems this way, it becomes clear how each additional loop (or echelon) of numbers (e.g., 0-9, 10-19, 20-29 in base 10[[2]](#footnote-1)) builds upon and details its lower-echelon (higher-order) parent element.

This sets up an occult program of study which involves the gradual untanglement and development/intensification of specific essences in a roughly linear fashion. This is precisely the program of alchemy—separate the elements, develop their natures, and then recombine them in full nuance. Later study of more specific aspects reveal more specific, more intense powers (due to imbalance—more “dæmonic” powers) whereas study of the early numbers (0-5 especially) reveal highly archetypal, fundamental, godlike or humanlike powers, because these earlier elements are less split. Thus, *prajna* becomes the ultimate wisdom (0), which unfolds into more detailed wisdoms, aspects or powers (or demons/poisons if split negatively)—or any theme that the aspecting system begins with (colors, flowers, foods, etc.). It also strongly suggests that the “true meanings” of each (numbered) archetype are the same across people—in other words that there is an objectively true meaning for each number. This opposition of objective perfection and subjective unfoldment of further detail mirrors the original meaning of the word ‘mystery’ itself—not as something unknown to be pursued and eliminated through ‘solving’ it, but as a quality of profound confrontation with the unknowable, which only deepens as we attempt to know it.

# Further Reading

* [Syncretism: The True Theology](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27g5Xs4lHUk) (and [Part 2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WA6R2ztG4E)) by Santos Bonacci is an AMAZING and BRILLIANT exposition of the ideas in this class—absolutely must-watch for any aspiring occultist. Wish I’d seen this video when I was getting started—would have saved me years of figuring these things out on my own.
* [The Alchemy of Alphabets](https://www.academia.edu/4351644/ALCHEMY_OF_ALPHABETS_-_INCLUDING_HEBREW_RUNES_and_OGHAM) by Judith Dillon was a major inspiration in my understanding of this numerological thinking. It shows how different alphabets can be linked together in traditional meaning, suggesting ways in which the alphabetic elements evolved over time.
* [Destiny & Control in Human Systems](http://smile.amazon.com/Destiny-control-human-systems-chronotopology/dp/157898727X?sa-no-redirect=1) by Charles Musès gives a brilliant account of how synchronicity, time, and symbolic elements interact.
* [Number & Time](http://smile.amazon.com/Number-Time-Reflections-Unification-Psychology/dp/0810105322?sa-no-redirect=1) by Marie-Louise von Franz gives insight into the characterization of individual numbers using the psycho-numerical and archetypal properties.

1. Deleuze & Guattari discuss this extra meta-group of ‘nomadic rulers’ drawn from all the other groups in their chapter on The War Machine in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Note also the suggestion of an ‘endless golden staircase’ in that book title—despite the book’s insistence on rhizomatic, poetic thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Verifying these loopings of qualities in other base systems reveals *supportive*, rather than contradictory, smaller loopings of qualities throughout all bases. For example looking at gods in sets of 9 rather than 10 gives us echelons of 0-8, 9-18, 19-27, etc., and when written in base 9 it will be found that the properties compose and decompose rationally and in complement with base 10 encodings. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)