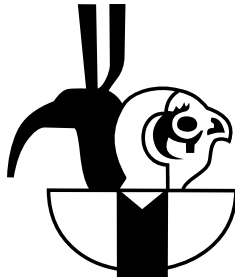


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“Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Isaiah 33:14

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

Of the riddles and mysteries set forth in Liber AL vel Legis, the most vexing is certainly that which occurs in the seventy-sixth verse of Chapter Two. Many are those who have aspired to resolve the string of letters and numbers into some coherent message. Indeed, it would seem that many see the accomplishment of such a translation as a seal of attainment or validation of special, even exalted, status.¹ With so much apparently at stake, the very claim that one has obtained a solution is likely to be met with skepticism and reserve, if not outright derision, in Thelemic circles. This is to be expected in any group of independent thinkers.

The plethora of inelegant qabalistic arguments that one encounters in association with occultists gradually wears down one’s enthusiasm for the entire field of endeavor, and one can only hoot and chuckle upon encountering yet another self-proclaimed “child of the prophet” declaring certain proofs of his own adepthood, cleverness, and privileged access to the Secret Chiefs. In fact, more recently, some commentators have taken to seeing *AL II*, 76 as a trap for anyone with the hubris to approach it seriously, an ironic jab at the folly of human reason, or at best as a pointed demonstration that all qabalistic work consists of breathing a life of meaning into dead and essentially arbitrary data. This last point has merit² but raises a

¹ The usual supposition is that he who solves the riddle must be Crowley’s spiritual heir or “magical child.” Even Crowley felt this was likely to be the case, naming Achad. Examination of the passage in question provides no compelling reason to make such an assumption, however. It simply states that the riddle will be solved by a person other than “the prophet.”

² The merit of such a position lies chiefly in its avoidance of yet more serious conceptual errors. It is accurate enough as an isolated statement, but insufficient as the basis for a general model.

much more difficult question. That is, to what kind of creature will our breathings give birth?

One principle of the ancient qabalah that is often neglected in modern Thelemic exegesis is that whatever one's analyses result in should support, elaborate on, or extend the surface meaning of the base text one is working with. The greatest flaw in solutions to *AL II*, 76 that have been publicly offered is that they often have trivial or self-absorbed implications. Some of them bear almost no relevance to Liber AL, the nature of the Law of Thelema, or even the remainder of the verse from which the "cipher" is taken. The worst of these are of a nature that their results would require no alteration if the source of the cipher were a cocktail napkin found in a bus station. The work of those who discover their own names, postal codes or shoe sizes in the cipher can almost invariably be placed in this category. The opposite problem also appears occasionally; analyses of the two lines of letters and numbers are expanded into recondite treatises longer than *Liber AL* itself. Rather than focusing on the particular exegetical problem of the cipher in context, these interpreters accost it with qabalistic fire and tongs, demanding that it disgorge the entirety of the Thelemic worldview. As with most hostages, one has the distinct impression that the cipher will say anything, if only to stop the beatings.

Other solutions, while offering interesting possibilities for new magical techniques or uses of symbolism, are also unsatisfying in the particular context of the cipher. The surface meaning of the text gives no reason for thinking that it conceals the proof of a new system of English gematria or the text for the 20th Enochian call. The revelations inspired by such work can sometimes be of quite high quality from an aesthetic or creative standpoint, but they are usually tangential to the core themes in *Liber AL*.

With these criticisms in mind, we may begin to see the direction to be taken for a fresh approach to this enigmatic verse. The first and most important ground rule with which to begin is to maintain focused attention on the scriptural context of the cipher. Its interpretation, regardless of the mechanisms or particular techniques used, must be explored primarily with reference to the text within which it is embedded. It may be considered

pedantic to enumerate the basic contextual features one will need to keep in mind, but for the sake of clarity, I will do so.

First, the cipher is a communication originating with Hadit and communicated through Aiwass to Aleister Crowley. An initial consideration is whether, as the “ultimate cause” of the cipher, it may encode some expression of his nature, his formula, or the messages he presents in the rest of the chapter. This is not to say that the message of the cipher must be redundant, but that the rest of the chapter should be seen as the ground from which its meaning springs. Second, some attention should be given to the position of the cipher in the progression of the second chapter. All too often, commentators on AL miss the forest for the trees by analyzing individual words or clauses rather than complete thematic passages. Although the cipher may seem to appear abruptly as a *non sequitur*, we should not assume *a priori* that it does not fit into a larger narrative structure. Third, we should be sensitive to the possibility that the method of solution may be indicated by the text itself. At the very least, we should consider potential textual clues before moving on to more arbitrary methods.

With the stage set, we are almost ready to look into the text itself. Before beginning the analysis proper, however, the system of English gematria that will be employed throughout requires a brief introduction. It is a system devised by the author by following certain suggestive passages in the text of *Liber AL*. It is prosaically referred to as Mars Kamea Gematria because the values for the letters are derived by placing them on the magic square of Mars from Agrippa in right-to-left and top-to-bottom order. The letter A is not placed into the square, but constitutes the qabalistic zero. The values are as presented in the table on the page following. Zodiacal, planetary, and elemental attributions are also given in the table, but they will have little bearing on the analysis to follow.

A				
F ₁₁ ☿	E ₂₄ ♃	D ₇ ♎	C ₂₀ ♄	B ₃ ♀
K ₄ ♎	J ₁₂ ☾	I ₂₅ ♀	H ₈ ⊕	G ₁₆ ☾
P ₁₇ △	O ₅ ☉	N ₁₃ ☿	M ₂₁ ♂	L ₉ ♎
U ₁₀ ♎	T ₁₈ ♃	S ₁ ♃	R ₁₄ ♀	Q ₂₂ ♄
Z ₂₃ ♄	Y ₆ ♂	X ₁₉ △	W ₂ ♎	V ₁₅ ♃

Mars Kamea Gematria

The portion of the second chapter of *Liber AL* with which the analysis will be principally concerned is quoted below. Because of the necessary emphasis on context, it is perhaps longer than one might expect.

70. There is help & hope in other spells. Wisdom says: be strong! Then canst thou bear more joy. Be not animal; refine thy rapture! If thou drink, drink by the eight and ninety rules of art: if thou love, exceed by delicacy; and if thou do aught joyous, let there be subtlety therein!

71. But exceed! exceed!

72. Strive ever to more! and if thou art truly mine--and doubt it not, an if thou art ever joyous! -- death is the crown of all.

73. Ah! Ah! Death! Death! thou shalt long for death. Death is forbidden, o man, unto thee.

74. The length of thy longing shall be the strength of its glory. He that lives long & desires death much is ever the King among the Kings.

75. Aye! listen to the numbers & the words:

76. 4 6 3 8 A B K 2 4 A L G M O R 3 Y X 24 89 R P S T O V A L.
What meaneth this, o prophet? Thou knowest not; nor shalt thou know ever. There cometh one to follow thee: he shall expound it. But remember, o chosen one, to be me; to follow the love of Nu in the star-lit heaven; to look forth upon men, to tell them this glad word.

77. O be thou proud and mighty among men!

78. Lift up thyself! for there is none like unto thee among men or among Gods! Lift up thyself, o my prophet, thy stature shall surpass the stars. They shall worship thy name, foursquare, mystic, wonderful, the number of the man; and the name of thy house 418.

79. The end of the hiding of Hadit; and blessing & worship to the prophet of the lovely Star!

There are certainly ambiguities, but this particular series of verses seems to follow a pattern, indicating the way to live, the way to die, and the way to what may variously be called immortality, deification, or the after-death state. Here we see Hadit's cardinal property of constant motion or "going" applied as a sort of moral imperative to the course of human life. In this paradigm, death is seen not as a final end, but as the culmination of a process of continuous expansion and refinement. It is the complement to the injunction of Nuit to "come unto me." Especially in verses 76-78, there are parallels with Egyptian models of the afterlife, in which one becomes a stellar being called an *akh* (in older sources, it is transliterated as *kehu*). The verses give instructions to "follow the love of Nu in the starlit heaven," and to "lift up thyself." The prophet is told "thy stature shall surpass the stars."

The cipher occurs precisely at the transition between the commentary on death and the "immortality instruction." In fact, the wording of verse 75, which introduces the cipher, would lead us to believe that it is meant as an affirmation of what has immediately preceded it: "He that lives long & desires death much is ever the King among the Kings. Aye! Listen to the numbers & the words." These contextual elements can act as a constraint for further elaboration along qabalistic lines. It is not impossible that the cipher has some import unrelated to the plain text, but we have no reason to assume at the outset that it has. Let us proceed then with looking at the cipher itself.

4 6 3 8 A B K 2 4 A L G M O R 3 Y X 24 89 R P S T O V A L

Upon initial examination, we find that the symbols of the cipher are of two kinds, letters and numbers. As a first step, then, let us calculate the value of letters and numbers separately. This gives us the value 143 for numbers and 176 for letters. The next line of text, “what meaneth this, o prophet?” can be seen as a play on words in which the verb “meaneth” refers to the function of the numbers and letters as means in a mathematical series. It should be kept well in mind that Crowley – or rather perhaps the intelligence that inspired his creative efforts – frequently used just this kind of double entendre to communicate underlying meanings, particularly in his sex-magical instructions. It is a kind of what is called *sandhyabasa* in Eastern tantric writing, “intentional language” or “twilight language” that conceals divine teachings in gross, often transgressive images.³ If Crowley is to be taken as a model, this technique *certainly* can be considered one of the hallmarks of the literal English Qabalah.

There are various distinct senses in which the word “mean” can be taken mathematically. In perhaps the most useful sense, we have the *harmonic mean*, in which the same ratio governs each adjacent pair of terms in a series of numbers. For two numbers, the harmonic mean is a middle term that stands in the same relation to the larger number as the smaller number does to it. Practically speaking, this is expressed by the mathematical formula:

$$m = 2ab / (a+b)$$

So, for example, taking our two terms 143 and 176, the harmonic mean is:

$$50336 / 319 = 157.8$$

³ Also brought to mind are the various festivals in Greek religion in which the gods are worshipped by uttering profanities. The *aischrologia* were particularly tied to the worship of the Goddess Demeter and to women’s festivals generally.

We find then that:

$$143/157.8 = 0.9 = 157.8/176$$

However, extending this process, the harmonic mean defines a harmonic series of more than three terms, so that each term in the series is the harmonic mean of the terms before and after it. Given any two terms, an entire series may be determined. Again, using the numbers of the cipher, we have:

$$x/143 = 143/176 = 176/y$$

$$\begin{aligned} x/143 &= 0.8125 \\ x &= 116 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} 176/y &= .8125 \\ y &= 217 \end{aligned}$$

When *II:76* asks “what meaneth this, O Prophet” we observe that the numbers derived from the letters and figures act as means for the extreme terms 116 and 217. When added, 116 and 217 make 333, an important Thelemic number, which is also the number of the demon Choronzon, Lord of the Abyss, from the Enochian pantheon. In relation to the textual sequence elaborated earlier, we may also notice that the cypher is placed at the position of the abyss. It is an ugly, senseless irruption in the aesthetically noble flow of the prose. It is a void of apparent meaninglessness interposed between the mundane and sensible spheres on one side, and the divine creative immanence of the supernals on the other.⁴

⁴ That is, for orthodox qabalists, between Assiah and Yetzirah below and Briah and Atziluth above.

We find additional support for this idea in textual resemblances between the rest of *II:76* and Crowley's central mystical experience of the Abyss in the Call of the 10th Aethyr from the *Vision and the Voice*. Here, Choronzon is quoted as saying "Thou canst tell me naught that I know not, for in me is all Knowledge: Knowledge is my name."⁵ This echoes the voice of Hadit, who says "Thou knowest not, nor shalt thou know ever." Earlier in *II:12*, Hadit says "Because of me in thee which thou knewest not. for why? Because thou wast the knower, and me." A lack of knowledge is usually interpreted as a privation, a state of ignorance; however, a lack of knowledge may also be taken as the state obtaining when the subject and object are become one – where there is no division, there can be no knowledge. To "know not," this negation of knowledge, is an affirmation of higher union. Hence, when Choronzon says "thou can tell me naught that I know not," despite his pride, he is tragically affirming his lack of center and the radical division that is his nature. When Hadit says "thou wast the knower, and me," he is essentially describing the same relation as in *II:23* "I am alone, there is no God where I am."⁶

The cipher as a whole, then, is taken to "mean" the abyss, to literally stand as a middle term within it. The implications of this are subtle, but important. By "meaning" what is "meaningless," the cipher provides a structure to what is structureless; as a pattern or proportion, the cipher is a kind of *logos*, the "glad word" spoken of at the end of *II:76*. Let us look further into the series of numbers we have obtained.

We have the series 116-143-176-217. In MKG, 116 is "division," and 217 is "the chance of union." In a sense, these are fitting symbols to stand at either end of the abyss, since it is here that the divine emanation from the supernals becomes the consciousness of division experienced in all the lower

⁵ Of course, Knowledge is the English translation of the Hebrew *Da'at*, the name for the region of the Tree of Life between Chesed and Binah, associated in Hermetic Qabalah with the Abyss.

⁶ Andre Chouraki, a devout Jewish thinker and translator, expressed the same sentiment in his profound epigram "God is an atheist because God has no God."

Sephiroth below the Abyss. It is also the gate through which one must pass to achieve the state of union with the divine creative impulse in Briah.

Taking the intervals between terms in our series, (hence obtaining a sort of “sub-series” that is also harmonically structured), we get the numbers 27-33-41. These are the numbers, in sequence, of the words in the phrase “my star burns.” This is the essence of the “meaning” or structuring of the Abyss. Furthermore, as confirmation of this interpretation, the numbers of our “sub-sequence” add to 101, the value of “meanest,” “thou shalt know,” “know ever,” “a word not known” and “lovely star.” This confluence of concepts, besides which there are several others within *AL*, suggests that we are on the right path.

Given this analysis, what is the message of the cipher? It seems to me that what is being communicated in very dense symbolic form is an instruction for crossing the Abyss, that is, passing through the underworld and emerging in the celestial realm. The “glad word” is that “my star burns,” that the monadic point of Hadit, the spark of divinity that is alone in union with God, burns in each heart of man. It is by *being* Hadit, following “the love of Nu in the starlit heaven,” that the adept passes naked and brilliant into the celestial realm. The emergence of this star above the grinding crush of division and facticity constitutes the formula of N.O.X., the withdrawal of the light, the *tikkun* of esoteric Judaism, or the “return of sparks” to the light of the divine source. It is the “end of the hiding of Hadit.”

Love is the Law, love under will.

Frater R.I.K.B.,
AN IVx, 2 April 2003 e.v.
Sol in Aries
Luna in Aries
Dies Mercurii
1:16 a.m.