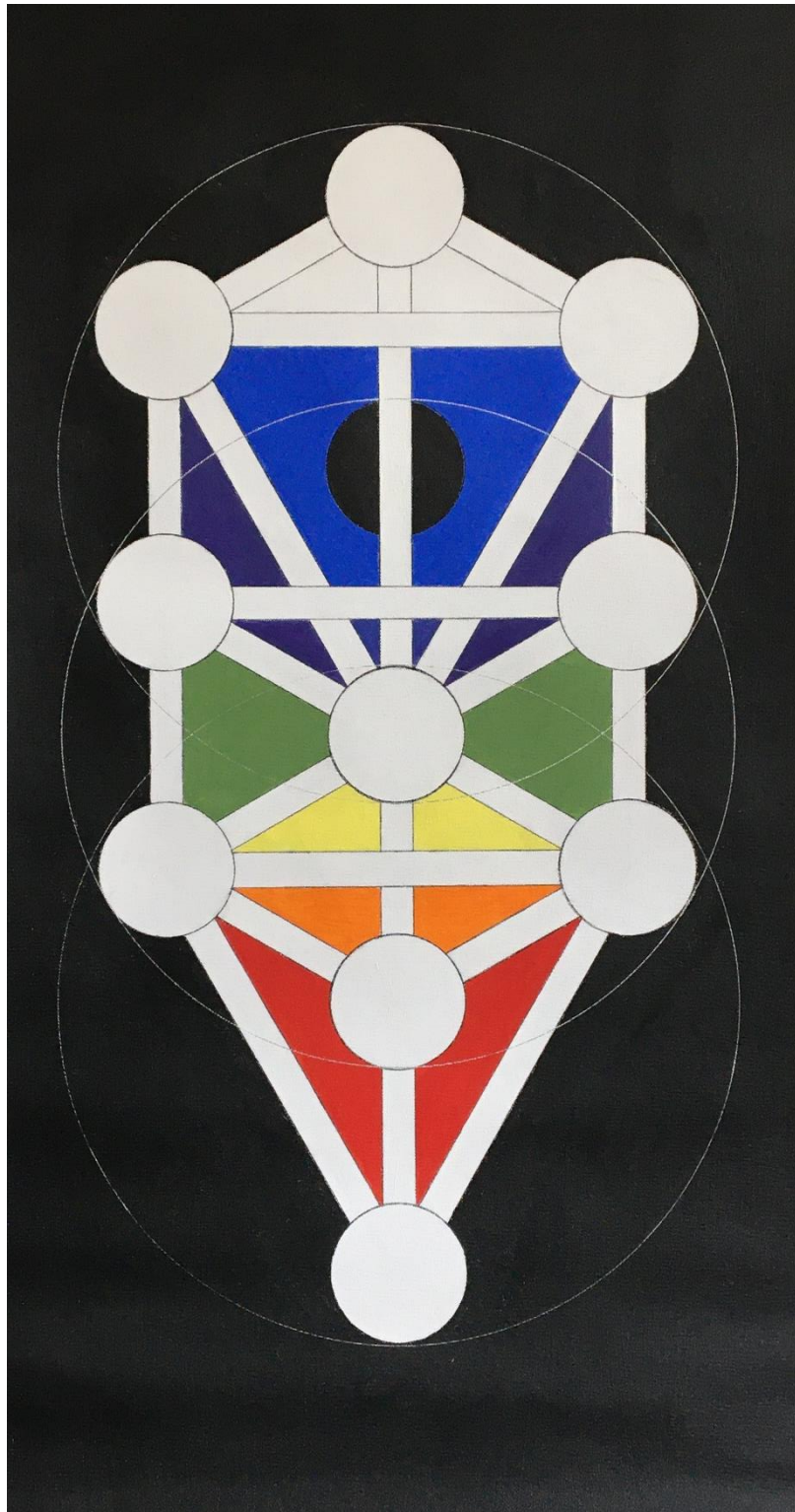


How To Draw a Diagram of the Tree of Life



A completed Tree of Life ready to be labelled
(Mahtab Clark, 2011)

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The dimensions of the completed Tree shown above are 72 cm by 40 cm. Smaller versions can be made but need more precision in both drawing and painting.

A list of the equipment and materials you will need is set out at the end of these instructions.

Ensure that the canvas is cut with four straight edges.

Use masking tape to secure the canvas to the smooth side of a sheet of hardboard. Pins can be used as an alternative form of fastening which makes life a little easier in the final stages of the construction but can sometimes make the canvas feel a less secure surface on which to work.

Make small marks midway (25 cm) across the top and bottom of the canvas and draw a light pencil line between them.

Keep this, and the succeeding lines, faint as they will be erased subsequently and the fainter the line the less likelihood that they will show through white paint.

Measure half way along the central line and make a small pencil mark to denote the central point (7, Figure 1)

Open the compasses to 16 cm, place the compass point on the pencil mark at the middle of the central line (7, Figure 1) and draw a circle, keeping the pressure light so the pencil mark is not too dark although it should be clearly visible.

Now draw a second circle, with the compass point placed at the lower intersection of the circle you have drawn and the central line (10, Figure 1).

Draw a third circle with the compass point placed at the upper intersection of the first circle you drew (from the middle of the canvas) and the central line (4, Figure 1).

All three circles should touch at the middle point of the canvas (7, Figure 1).

Find the points on each side of the central line where the middle circle intersects the lower circle. (8 and 9, Figure 1). Draw vertical lines from these points through the intersection of the upper and middle circles (5 and 6, Figure 1) and continue until the lines cross the upper circle (2 and 3, Figure 1).

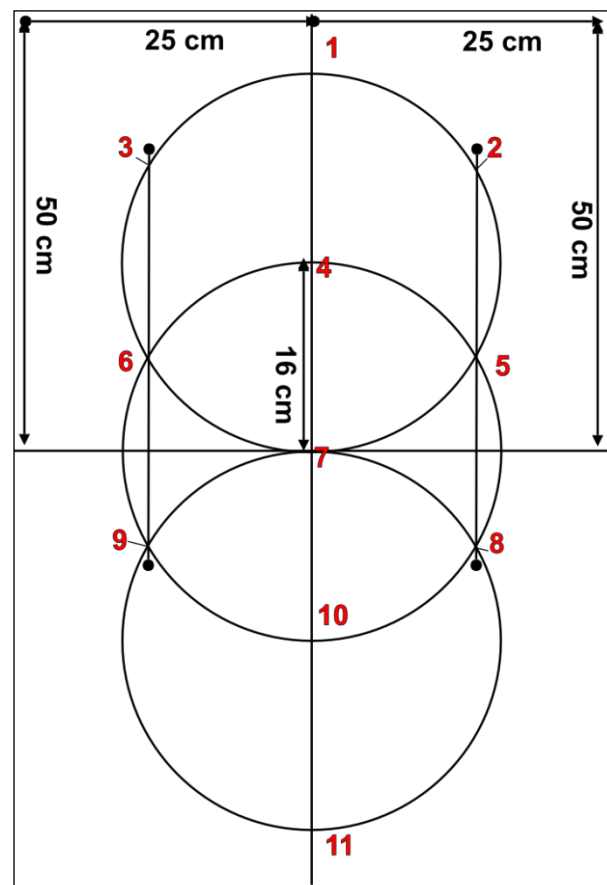


Figure 1

Draw circles of 4 cm radius on the central line where it intersects one of the three large circles (1,4,7,10,11 Figure 2).

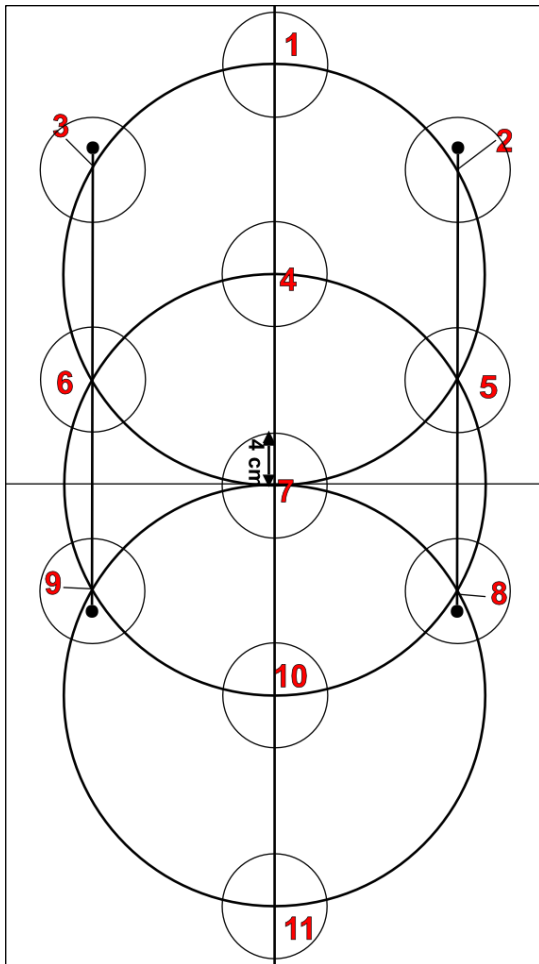


Figure 2

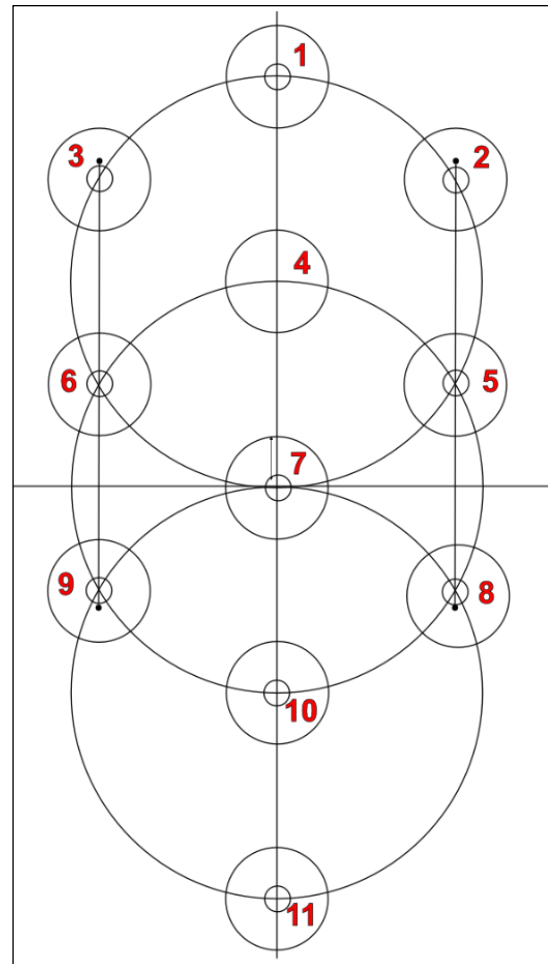


Figure 3

The points on each side where the two large circles intersect with each other form the centres of the lower two Sefirot on each of the side pillars (5, 6, 8 and 9 Figure 2).

Draw circles of 4 cm radius at each of these points to create the next four Sefirot (Figure 2).

Draw the final two 4 cm radius circles centred on points 2 and 3 of Figure 2 where the vertical line crosses the uppermost large circle.

Close the compasses to 1 cm and draw a circle with the compass point at each of points 1 to 11 except number 4 (Figure 3).

Now draw the paths – starting with the horizontal paths.

Begin by joining Hokhmah and Binah. Place the ruler across the intersection of the small circle in Hokhmah and the vertical line and the corresponding point in Binah.

Figure 4 shows the line drawn in full to identify the start and finish points but, when making the Tree in practice, it is better to draw only the portion between the edges of the two Sefirot. This avoids unnecessary pencil marks lines inside the Sefirot.

Repeat this procedure at the bottom of the inner circles in Hokhmah and Binah and then join Hesed and Gevurah and Netzach and Hod in the same way (Figure 4).

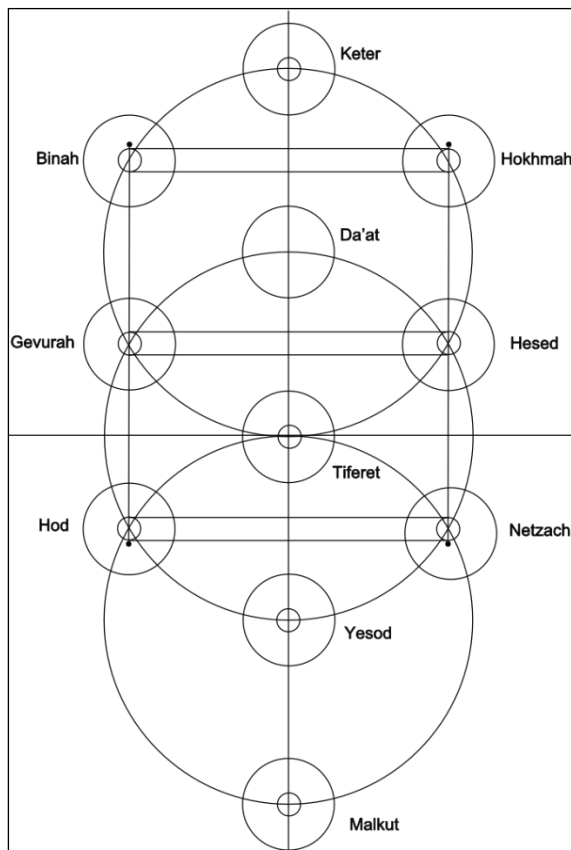


Figure 4

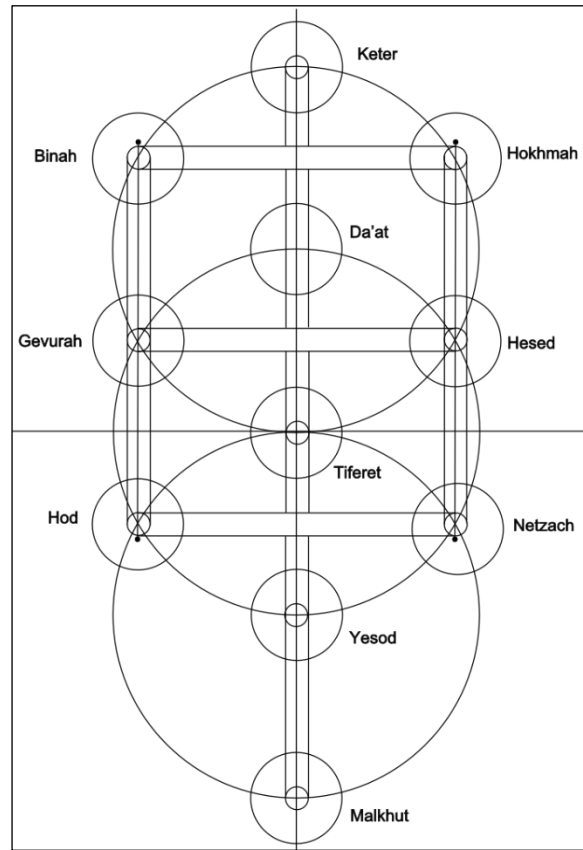


Figure 5

Draw the left column vertical line by starting at the middle point on the left hand side of the inner circle at Binah. (Figure 5).

You can either estimate the middle point by eye or, if you want to be really accurate, extend the line drawn from the midpoints of the inner circles of Hokhmah and Binah to the edge of those circles in order to find the intersection for the beginning of the vertical line.

The line from Binah can be drawn straight through the left hand edge of Gevurah to the left of the middle horizontal of the inner circle at Hod although, as stated earlier, the line needs only to be drawn from the edge of each Sefirah to avoid unnecessary pencil marks and subsequent rubbing out.

Repeat for the right hand side of the paths from Binah to Hod.

Follow the same procedure for the right hand vertical paths – Hokhmah-Hesed and Hesed-Netzach.

For the vertical column in the centre start the first line from the intersection on the left hand side of the inner circle of Keter.

Note that the *horizontal* paths are continuous so the path on the central column should not cross over the top of them (Figure 5).

There is an important reason for the horizontal lines not to be interrupted. The 22 paths of the diagram symbolise the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet which are divided into three categories.

The sounds made by what are known as the three mother letters represent the extremes of activity (“sh”), passivity (“mm” with closed lips), and consciousness (the silent letter “aleph”). These three mother letters (which are the most important or fundamental) are symbolised by the three horizontal paths which should be continuous.

You have now drawn three horizontal paths and seven vertical paths.

The seven vertical paths represent the seven Hebrew letters known as Doubles which can make two sounds according to the way the text is punctuated.

The remaining twelve diagonal paths are drawn by placing the ruler along the outer edges of the two inner circles of the Sefirot which are being connected and drawing from the outer edge of one Sefirah to the outer edge of the other Sefirah.

These twelve paths represent the remaining twelve “Single” letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 show these in two stages – in practice it usually works better to draw the paths first which complete the outer frame of the Tree and, finally, the internal paths.

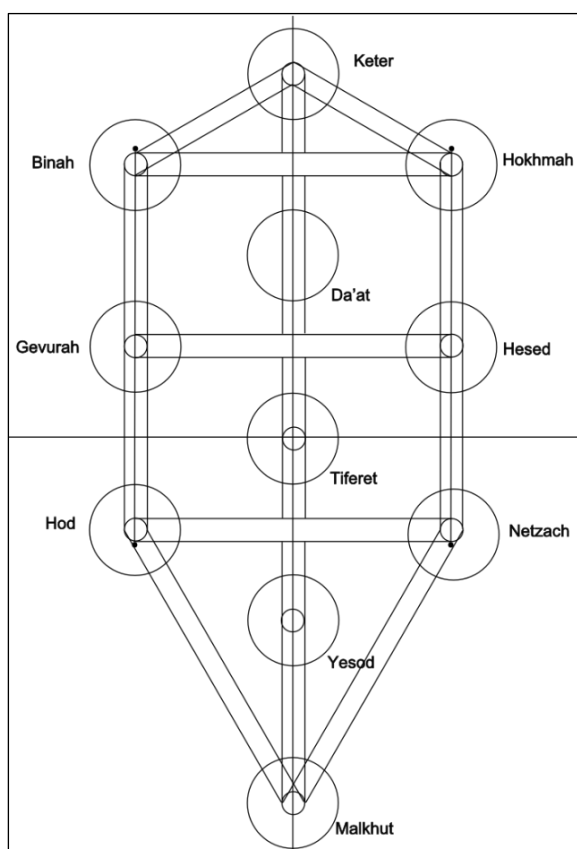


Figure 6

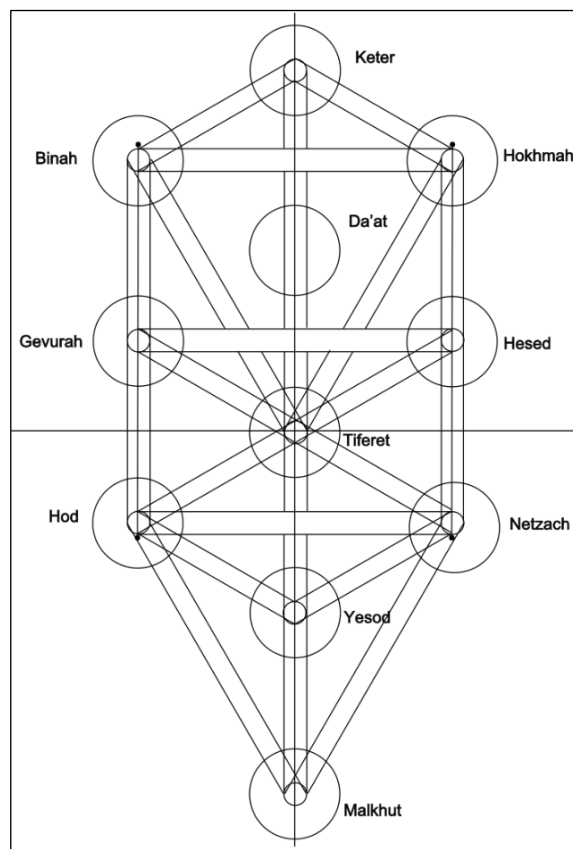


Figure 7

Take particular care to make sure that you stop the pencil from crossing the horizontal paths when drawing Binah-Tiferet and Hokhmah-Tiferet.

Erase the horizontal line drawn across the whole canvas and the three large circles which were drawn initially.

Erase any pencil markings inside the paths or the Sefirot - the Tree should now appear as in Figure 8.

The pencilled circles and paths can now be inked in if you wish. If you ink at this stage it makes it easier to apply the first coat of paint as you have a clearer line against which to paint. If you don't ink now, then you will save some time at this stage - just ink the lines once when the painting is completed.

Take care with Da'at - there is no line at the top or bottom of Da'at across the central column. Figures 6 and 7 show a complete circle at Da'at but you will need to erase the parts where it crosses the central column – see Figure 8.

Building a Kabbalistic diagram is an active meditation. The diagram you create will show your psychological and spiritual state at that time. It also becomes a tool for contemplation once you have hung it on a wall.

The greater your awareness while working, the more you will get out of the exercise. Pay special attention to areas which work well or which you find particularly difficult.

If one of the Sefirot gives problems during construction then it may show an area of the psyche which needs developing.

For example, if the compass is not firmly anchored when drawing Yesod, the pencil may fly off the canvas and could symbolise an ego which is not fully under control.

On the other hand, allowing black paint from the border to spill into Hesed might indicate a lack of generosity.

Building a Tree is probably best done over two days. It is theoretically possible to do it in a single day but much will be lost in the process by concentrating too much on reaching the finish line on time. At the other extreme, I once built a Jacob's Ladder which took me five years to finish – some of the focus was lost, to put it mildly.

Two days is long enough to complete journey and short enough to maintain the focus.

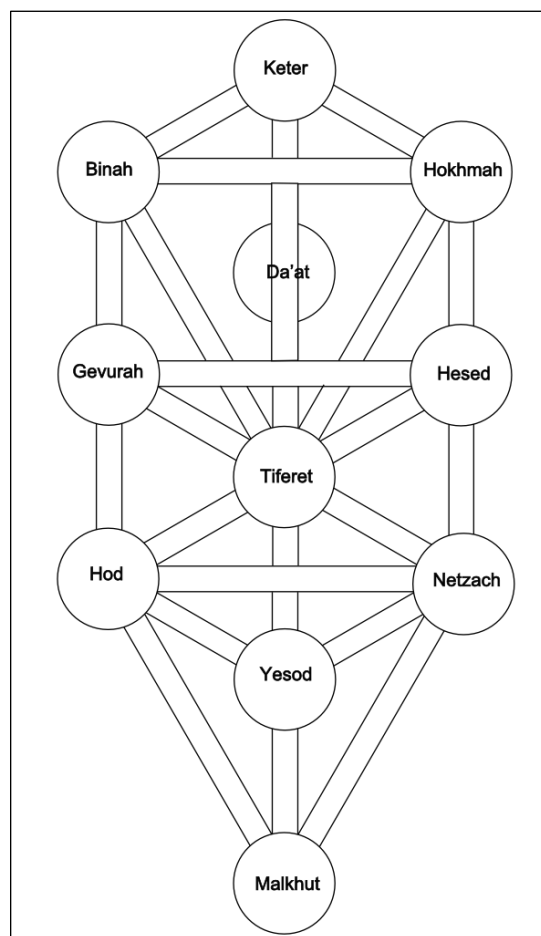


Figure 8

Although you can construct a Kabbalistic Diagram in your own home, much is gained if the opportunity arises to do the work as part of a group. Such groups are usually quite small – a ratio of one tutor to six students works well – and the various members of the group may well be engaged on different designs.

These workshops often allow time for students to share their experiences in constructing the diagrams and to see a collection of these newly completed pieces of sacred geometry hanging on a wall is a special moment for tutor and students.

It is now time to colour the triads as desired. Alternatively, you can firstly paint the paths and Sefirot white and then colour the triads.

Although there is no set colour scheme for a Tree the following is offered as a suggestion since it corresponds with the chakra system and the colours of the rainbow.

- Red Hod-Yesod-Malkut and Netzach-Yesod-Malkut
- Orange Netzach-Hod-Yesod
- Yellow Netzach-Hod-Tiferet
- Green Hesed-Netzach-Tiferet and Gevurah-Hod-Tiferet
- Blue Hokhmah-Binah-Tiferet
- Purple Hokhmah-Tiferet-Hesed and Binah-Tiferet-Gevurah
- White Keter-Hokhmah-Binah.

The central part of Hokhmah-Binah-Tiferet between Tiferet and the Hesed-Gevurah path is sometimes coloured as a mixture of blue and purple to signify the quality of freewill which the individual can exercise at this point. Either he or she will act according to their conscience (Soul Triad of Hesed-Gevurah-Tiferet) or else allow the possibility that Grace will descend from Heaven (Spirit Triad of Hokhmah-Binah-Tiferet).

The order in which you paint the Tree is a matter of choice but what you choose has a symbolism since you are effectively creating your own universe. The completed Tree is an indication of your psyche at the time you create it. Drawing and painting the Tree from bottom to top is a very different experience from drawing and painting it from top to bottom as those who have completed the exercise both ways will testify!

If you start at the bottom then, symbolically, you are on firm ground in the physical world and gradually ascending to the unseen worlds which may be more uncertain. Starting from the top and working downwards has more of a sense of bringing something into physical form from the invisible worlds.

Paint the Sefirot and paths white if you have not already done so. Some people prefer not to use white paint but to leave the paths and Sefirot the colour of the canvas.

Using a black marker pen or similar draw (or redraw) the edges of the paths and the Sefirot to give a clearer definition.

It usually takes two coats of acrylic paint to get a good finish, perhaps three for some areas. As of 2020 I only recall two or three people out of more than 100 attending a workshop in which I have been involved whose diagrams have needed just one coat of paint.

Remember that if you paint the black surround before you paint the Tree you will need to let the paint dry before you can work inside the Tree. A good place to stop at the end of day one is to finish the black surround and then paint the Tree on day two.



Figure 9 – Work in Progress. This Tree had the internal triads coloured first. The white paths and the black surround were completed the following day.

If you have been mixing colours you will be able to keep the same mixture for a second coat an hour or two later. If mix colours on the first day they may not keep and you might not find it easy to recreate exactly the same colour the next day.

Be particularly careful when re-working the paths and Sefirot with a black pen that you don't drag the ruler (which will have taken some of the ink) over the clean paintwork. Always work from the line furthest away from you to the line nearest to you. Similarly, when you come to label the Sefirot it is better to do it from top to bottom to avoid smudging what has already been written with an unwary nudge of the hand.

Draw three circles of 20 cm. radius centred on Da'at, Tiferet and Yesod - the middle three Sefirot on the central column. Use a silver marker pen for this which will fit into the extended compass arm.

These circles show the limits of our experience depending on the point where our consciousness rests. If we are focussed on Yesod (ego or personal consciousness then we are able to access Malkut and Tiferet (physical and self-consciousness respectively) but cannot access the wisdom of the higher worlds which enters our psyche through Da'at.

Only when we remain centred on Tiferet do we have access to Da'at.

Do not despair if the finished product doesn't look perfect. You have been working on the canvas at very close range and, when it is hung on a wall, these apparent blemishes will be hardly noticeable.

Prior to fixing the wood to the canvas you have the option to trim the top and bottom of the canvas to your own preferred size.

Measure the two pieces of wood against the top and bottom of the canvas and cut to size with a hacksaw. Sandpaper the rollers all over then paint black and allow to dry – this takes no more than about twenty minutes. Glue the rollers to the canvas and then fix the cord to through the canvas to the top piece of wood with a drawing pin on either side.

Label the Sefirot and other parts of the diagram – there are many different schemes and the table below provides a few of the most frequently used sets.

<u>Hebrew</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Translation</u>	<u>Planet</u>	<u>Biblical Character</u>	<u>Jungian Archetype</u>	<u>School of the Soul</u>
כתר	Keter	Crown	Neptune ¹			
חכמה	Hokhmah	Wisdom	Uranus ²	Adam	Animus	Oral Teaching
בינה	Binah	Understanding	Saturn	Eve	Anima	Written Teaching
דעת	Da'at	Knowledge	Pluto	Melchizedek	-	Inner Teacher
חסד	Hesed	Lovingkindness ³	Jupiter	Abraham	King	Love
גבורה	Gevurah	Strength ⁴	Mars	Isaac	Hero	Discipline
תפארת	Tiferet	Beauty	Sun	Jacob	Self	Teacher
נצח	Netzach	Eternity	Venus	Moses	Maiden	Practice
הוד	Hod	Reverberation	Mercury	Aaron	Trickster	Theory
יסוד	Yesod	Foundation	Moon	Joseph	Ego	Students
מלכות	Malkut	Kingdom	Ascendant	David	Body	Room

¹ Known as the “First Swirlings” (Reshit Halgalgalim - ראשית הגלגלים) before the discovery of Neptune

² The whole zodiac was placed at Hokhmah before the discovery of Uranus

³ Often translated as “mercy” which is not quite correct – “rachum רחום” is the word for mercy. Hesed was previously known as “Gedulah גדולה (greatness).

⁴ Sometimes also translated as “discernment” or “discipline.” Previously known as “Din דין” (judgement) and “Pechad פחד” (fear).

Materials and Equipment

1. One sheet of hardboard

The standard size is 1220 mm x 607 mm x 3mm.

2. Masking Tape

3. One sheet of medium weight acrylic canvas – 100 cm x 50 cm.

4. HB pencil.

Some people also like a softer pencil – B or 2B.

5. Pencil sharpener.

6. 30 cm Perspex ruler with at least one bevelled edge

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7. One metre ruler or a one metre continuous straight edge.

8. Eraser

On the soft side is better.

9. One good quality pair of compasses

I use eCobra or Rotoring. These should be capable of opening to 16 cm radius without an extension with an attachment that allows you to insert a pen. An extension arm may also be necessary in order to draw circles of 20 cm radius.

10. A fine black pen.

I use a Staedtler 0.3 mm pigment liner but some people prefer a thicker line for this size of diagram so get a bigger pen – probably no more than 0.7 mm.

11. Paintbrushes

Which brushes you use is a matter of personal preference to some degree. Most people work with something like a Davinci size 10 (round). You may also like to use a smaller brush for getting in the corners of the various triads. Some people also prefer a flat brush for painting up against the lines on the diagram. You will also need a larger brush e.g. 38mm for painting the large area surrounding the Tree.

12. Paints

You will need the following colours for the suggested scheme:

- Red
- Orange
- Yellow
- Green
- Blue
- Purple
- White
- Black

I recommend spending a bit extra on good quality paints – I've found Winsor & Newton to be the best by some way but Liquitex also works well and is a less expensive option.

Exactly what shade you use or what you mix is up to you – the picture at the beginning of this article is a typical scheme but there is room for your own creative instincts in all areas.

The red almost always only needs one coat and the same is usually true for orange. The yellow, green, blue and purple benefit greatly from having a small amount of white mixed with them which makes them more opaque on the canvas. You may still need two coats for these but it will reduce the tendency for them to look streaky.

In recent years I've moved away from adding any water to make the paint easier to spread. Just a trickle, if you wish, will be enough.

Make sure the black paint is the blackest you can find – the blacker the surround the more it will point up the beauty of the Tree which symbolises the Universe itself. Ivory Black or Lamp Black seem to be the darkest – I had trouble with Mars Black – but these names vary from brand to brand and it's worth checking with the staff in the art shop.

In theory, one coat of black paint should be sufficient but in practice it is very unusual not to put on a second coat.

By the same token, Titanium White is the whitest white which is what I always use.

Not everybody chooses to apply paint to the paths and Sefirot of the Tree. Some people prefer the natural look of the white canvas and it certainly saves time in construction if you take this approach. My preference is to use white paint and usually means two coats plus more for touching up any spots where it has been difficult to erase all the pencil markings.

If you are just planning to build one Tree then a 35 ml or 50 ml tube of each of the colours will be more than sufficient.

You will need a bigger pot of white paint – 250 ml is more than enough.

A 500 ml pot of black is plenty for one Tree – 250 ml is probably sufficient.

13. Silver pen

You will need this for drawing the final three circles. It can feel scary with the compasses spread that wide - it's the final test of how accurate your work has been. Each circle should just brush the edge of every Sefirah it passes. No Tree is perfect just as no human is perfect or we wouldn't still be here. There is no end to the making of Kabbalistic diagrams...

14. 50 cm of 17 mm diameter wood dowling for the bottom of the Tree

15. 50 cm of 21 mm x 3 mm wood beading for the top of the Tree.

The size and shape of the wood has been tried and tested over the years but is in no sense obligatory. The dowling for the bottom does need to be heavy enough to keep the Tree unfurled when it is hung.

16. Jam jar or similar

For black paint

17. Small trays or pallets

For other paints -you almost always need less paint than you think!

18. A small hacksaw

19. All purpose glue

20. Cotton buds and razor blade (or similar)

These are useful to have available for repair jobs such as removing any paint which gets into places it shouldn't! The first rule of Tree Drawing is that there is almost no mistake which you make that cannot be repaired...

21. Scissors

22. Picture hanging cord

23. Drawing pins (thumb tacks)