

COMPANIONS OF THE STONE
Correspondence Course in The Elements of
Traditional Western Esotericism

Lesson 8

Above the gateway of the great oracular shrine at Delphi, perhaps the holiest place in ancient Greece, were carved the words Gnothi Seauton -- "know yourself." From the standpoint of the Western esoteric tradition, this inscription might well be placed on the gateway to every kind of magical and spiritual practice. This complex structure we each call "I" is the primary tool for this, as for every other pursuit in life, and its potentials and powers -- not all of them obvious -- need to be understood if they are to be developed and used.

A significant part of this self-knowledge is wordless and incommunicable, and can be learned only through experience and introspection. Another part, however, is less evasive. The Western esoteric tradition contains a great deal of material on the nature and structure of the human microcosm, tracing out the details of an "anatomy" that does not stop at the borders of matter. Part of this material, dealing with different levels of the self, has already been covered in this course. Interacting with these levels, though, are a series of structures or functions of the self. These relate to the levels as given earlier, but in places the fit is not exact; there are overlaps and interconnections not obvious to a first glance.

The physical body, called the guph by Qabalists, corresponds closely to the material level of existence discussed in earlier lessons. Similarly, the vital body, called the nephesh, corresponds to the etheric level, although here there is a slight overlap; the nephesh reaches into the subtler aspects of the physical body, affecting among other things the endocrine glands. On the Tree of Life, these two correspond to Malkuth and Yesod, respectively.

It is with the next level, the ruach or personality, that things become more complicated. The ruach includes the astral level of concrete consciousness, and to some extent -- an extent which varies from person to person, depending on the state of inner development -- the mental level of abstract consciousness as well. The five aspects of ordinary human consciousness -- intellect, emotion, imagination, will, and memory -- are

assigned to the ruach, and correspond to the five Sephiroth Hod, Netzach, Tiphareth, Geburah, and Chesed, in that order. (These five aspects are not quite all on the same level; as we will show in a later lesson, some of them are present in ordinary human consciousness in a more direct sense than are others. For the time being, though, the difference is not of great importance.)

Above the ruach, in the place of the Supernal Triad, are the three spiritual aspects of the self: the neshamah or spiritual understanding, corresponding to Binah; the chiah or spiritual will, corresponding to Chokmah; and the yechidah or essential spiritual being, corresponding to Kether. These three are usually treated together as the spiritual self, and the one term neshamah is used for all.

To some extent, this classification can be understood as merely another set of correspondences to the Tree of Life, to be used in meditation and study as one might use, say, the astrological correspondences. Here, though, further potentials exist as well. In the work of coming to self-knowledge, it can be highly useful at times to distinguish between different parts of the self, to recognize the source or location of particular problems or issues, and to identify the factors involved in inner conflicts. In such situations, this sort of anatomy of the self is as useful -- indeed, as necessary -- as ordinary anatomy is to a physician. For this reason, you will want to become familiar with the classification given here, and explore the ways in which it relates to your own experience of yourself.

Chesed: Theory, Order, Correspondence

Theory has a rather problematic place in esotericism. Sometimes it seems, especially to people who look at esotericism from the outside, that theory is the only point of esotericism. An "occultist", in fact, is generally taken to be someone committed to a theory of what the world is like that is profoundly contrary both to science and common sense. Some aspects of esoteric thought do make claims about what kind of world we live in, claims that can be examined in the same way that scientific or philosophical claims can be. Certain important aspects of esoteric theory, however, are more akin to music theory: less about what is the case, and more about how to achieve certain results. Like music theory, this sort of esoteric theory has the double effect of both making results possible, and limiting the range of results that can be achieved.

Someone who encounters certain aspects of esoteric theory for

the first time will often misunderstand what the theory is for. One good example of this is the theory of correspondences, which seems like a highly implausible set of claims about the world until one begins to see how it is used. That the sun "corresponds" to gold, for example, makes at best an arbitrary and conventional sense, until one begins to see that the statement must be interpreted to mean something more like "the sun, among the traditional seven planets, is like gold among the metals". This is one reason why the same thing will have different traditional correspondences depending on the context in which it occurs.

It is not only sets of objects that correspond to other sets of objects: processes also exist in correspondence with each other. Thus, among the elements, fire can be taken as the initiating spark, and water the reflective, sustaining reaction or response. Their interaction generates vapor, the balance of the two -- that is, air. The three then stabilize into a solid triangular structure, a unity, which can then serve as the initiating trigger for a new development. Alternatively, a cycle can be taken to start with air, the tentative hints of dawn, and progress through the fire of noon and the fluidity of dusk into the deep, solid obscurity of midnight. Neither of these structures is exclusively true; either can serve as the key to other correspondences.

In certain states of delusion or delirium, the deep-rootedness of the theory of correspondences in the human mind becomes very clear. Most people have had the experience of seeing something in a dream and immediately knowing what it is, how it fits into the ongoing dream, and so on. A similar thing happens in delirium, when a hallucination, triggered by some stimulus, carries with it a complete organizing story that overlays and overrides other perceptions. Thus, someone may see the form of someone who died long ago, and have a long conversation with that form without any surprise or sense of incongruity, losing track of the surroundings to hand in the course of responding to the field of associations and images that has crystallized around one perceived form. Many experiences, especially meditative or magical experiences, are like emblems or icons: they are perceived as a whole, perhaps in a flash, and decoded gradually through a process of examination and attention. This is one reason that work with the Tarot keys is so valuable for students of magic.

When correspondences and their key structures have been assimilated, they achieve a certain autonomy: they begin to speak for themselves, so to speak, and to provide intuitive keys to a vast range of situations. There are times when certain correspondences, or rather their structures or formulae, can

come alive for the one who has assimilated them, so that one becomes aware of them not as objects of thought, but as centers of thought in their own right.

This is one of the modes of what is sometime called "inner plane communication": it is a contact with abstract structures which are experienced directly as having a life, an inwardness, of their own. It is this kind of experience that is indicated, in another context, when our textbook speaks of direct, abstract, mind-to-mind contact with "the Masters".

Theories about "Masters" can be understood as attempts to make possible, and assimilable, certain kinds of meditative or magical experience. In meditation, or in other forms of magical work, what may in one mode of consciousness seem like an abstract idea, or an impersonal energy, can come to seem instead like an entity with its own center of awareness, or its own vitality. With no theory, it would be very difficult to recognize and work with such relatively subtle and abstract realms of experience. At the same time, the theory, even when enlivened by experience, cannot simply be taken literally and concretely. Such literal, concrete interpretations of esoteric theory can easily lead to bigotry, to self-righteous impositions on others, to a blindness to seeing that a particular structure may be very useful in one situation without being universal true, or requiring one to enforce universal agreement.

In traditional terms, the grade of inner development which corresponds to Chesed is named Adeptus Exemptus, "exempt adept." The exemption of the Exempt Adepts consists at least in part in this: that they are not dominated by any one of the structures with which they work, since they do not mistake such structures as being the ultimate sources or springs of meaning. Their gaze is directed farther, and deeper, toward that from which these great abstract energies derive their being.

Symbolism of Chesed

As part of this lesson's work, you will need to learn a selection of the symbols attributed to the Fourth Sephirah. These are as follows:

The Divine Name: AL (pronounced "Ell");

The Archangel: Tzadkiel, "Justice of God";

The Order of Angels: Chashmalim, "Brilliant Ones";

The Astrological Correspondence: Tzedek, the planet Jupiter;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Fours of the pack.

As before, these correspondences should be committed to memory, and the first four should also be written onto your Tree of Life diagram in the four circles of Chesed as before; once this is done, the remainder of the Sephirah should be colored blue.

Reading

The assigned reading from The Mystical Qabalah for this lesson will be Chapter XII, "The Gods Upon The Tree," and Chapter XVIII, "Chesed, The Fourth Sephirah." The first of these suggests a way to interpret some of the symbolism of traditional Pagan religions in the light of the Qabalah -- a procedure which can easily be mishandled or taken too far, but which has a certain definite usefulness on its own terms. The second explores some of the traditional symbols of the fourth sphere of the Tree of Life.

As you read each of these chapters, compose a brief paragraph describing the main ideas of the chapter. You may use your own words, or take phrases and sentences from the text, as you prefer. Write down the paragraphs and include them with the test for this lesson.

Exercises

Self-Perception Exercise

A certain type of knowledge about the self, as we mentioned above, can be attained through the study of theoretical material on the various structures and functions of the human being. Another type, of course, cannot. No amount of Qabalistic theory will enable you to perceive the particular strengths and weaknesses, the particular stresses and interplays between levels which make you who you are. (The theory may help you understand what it is that you are perceiving, but that is a different matter.)

One part of the work facing any student of the Western mysteries, then, is simple introspection: the act of paying attention to the self, of learning to notice what is happening on the nearer side of the boundary between "I" and everything else.

To call introspection "simple," though, is to indulge in a half-truth. As with so many other things in esoteric work, it is simple in theory, annoyingly complex in practice; many of the

same difficulties that beset the would-be meditator interfere with self-perception as well, and for many of the same reasons. It is rarely sufficient to do as some schools have done, and simply tell the student to be aware of himself!

The following exercise is intended to help you begin exploring some of the issues involved in self-perception. It should be done each day, preferably just after your daily review at the end of the day. You will need paper and a pen or pencil.

1. Put the date at the top of the paper.
2. Write "Something I thought" on the paper. Then write down one thing from the day's experience which fits the description. Your account should be clear enough that you would be able to make sense of it if, for example, you read it a year from now, but there's no need to go into vast detail. A few sentences will be enough.
3. Write "Something I felt," and note down something you experienced that day which fits that description. Do the same with "Something I imagined," "Something I willed," and "Something I remembered."
4. Look over what you've written so far. Then write "Something I am," and put down your response to this.

Nothing from these sheets of paper will be part of the test for this or any other lesson, and you will probably find it useful to keep them away from other eyes as well. Try to be as honest as possible. There will be times, quite likely, when you will not be; if you notice these, simply be aware of them.

The Art Of Memory

As mentioned earlier in this lesson, the process and faculty of memory is both one of the correspondences of Chesed and the highest of the five aspects of the ruach, the ordinary human consciousness. It may seem strange that memory was given so important a place; current theories and practices of education have taught many modern people to despise "rote memorization" and to replace it wherever possible with artificial aids.

Memory, however, is quite literally the means by which each of us constructs the world in which we live. At any given moment, only a minute fraction of that world is perceptible to us by any other means; to the extent that we take anything outside of that fraction into account in our thoughts or actions, we are relying on memory. Furthermore, the meanings and significances of things in that world, perceived at the moment or not, are all

held in and founded on memory.

In earlier times, considerations such as these -- as well as the real advantages of a good memory in an age before public libraries and computer databases -- led to the creation of systems of memory training. Ultimately several of the most effective of these were combined and adapted by magicians into a system of inner work, the Art of Memory, in which a thoroughly trained memory became a vessel for transformative powers.

Such a system is well beyond the scope of this introductory course. A simpler version of the Art of Memory, though, will be found useful both practically and as a magical discipline. This can be learned as follows:

1. Study the trumps of your Tarot deck until you can call all twenty-two to mind, in the proper order, visualizing each of the images clearly.
2. When you have a number of things you wish to remember -- for example, a grocery list -- take the first thing on the list, call to mind the first Trump, and imagine the thing you wish to remember as part of the Trump. Alter the Trump image as much as you need to. Be sure to visualize the card in its altered form as clearly as possible.
3. Go on to the second thing on the list, call the second Trump to mind, and repeat the process. Go on until you have finished the list or run out of Trumps.
4. When you need to remember the list, mentally go through the Trumps again, visualizing each card in order. You will find the images you put in the Trumps just as you placed them.

It's best if you start with short lists and work up gradually to long ones, and of course practice makes perfect here as elsewhere. You may also find it helpful to make the images you put into the Trumps striking in some way, so that memory retains them more easily. Here, the personal element is central; some people will find humorous or bizarre images most effective, others will not. You will want to experiment until you find the sort of image that sticks best in your mind.

With practice, the construction of these images becomes both quick and easy. You will find, as well, that the alterations you make in the Trumps for memory purposes do not remain after they are no longer needed; you needn't worry about items from a grocery list showing up at some later date, when the Trumps are holding dates for a history test!

Your assignment for this part of the work will be to use the method of memory given here at least four times during the next two weeks. The more often you use it and the longer you continue to use it, the more prepared you will be for more advanced forms of the Art of Memory.

Meditation

For this lesson's meditative work, we will be returning to the form and format introduced in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, then, the topic for your meditations will be the four Fours of the Tarot. As the expressions of Chesed through the four elements and Four Worlds, these cards have much to teach about the essential ordering principles of the Western esoteric tradition. As before, work with one card in each session of meditation, and feel free to draw on this lesson's reading assignment and your other studies.

Here, as with your earlier meditative work with the Tarot, you'll need to come up with a single word which best expresses the meaning of each of the cards. These words should be committed to memory, and will be part of the test for this lesson.

For this and subsequent lessons, plan on doing at least eight sessions of meditation during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. As before, every day in which you do not do a meditation, you should do the relaxation and attention exercise given in Lesson 3.

Ritual

The Middle Pillar exercise, as given in the last lesson, should be performed each day during the time you spend on this lesson. As you work with this rite over the next two weeks, review the instructions in Lesson 7 frequently, and concentrate on making the visualizations as clear and exact as possible.

To summarize, then, the work for this lesson is as follows:

- First, to perform the meditation or attention exercise each day.
- Second, to perform the daily review each day on going to bed.
- Third, to perform the Middle Pillar exercise each day.
- Fourth, to use the Art of Memory exercise at least four times over the next two weeks.
- Fifth, to continue working on the number exercise presented in the last lesson.
- Sixth, to keep a record of your work, and to prepare and send in the test for this lesson.

Test

The following questions are intended to help us track your progress through the work of this lesson. As before, your responses should be typed or written legibly on 8 1/2" x 11" sheets of plain white paper, with your name and address written in the upper right corner of the first sheet.

- A. Copy out an account of one of this lesson's meditations from your magical record.
- B. Copy out an account of one working of the Middle Pillar exercise.
- C. Give the four keywords you found in your meditations on the four Fours of the Tarot deck.
- D. Describe the results of one of your experiences with the Art of Memory exercise.
- E. Copy out the paragraphs you wrote to summarize ideas from the assigned reading for this lesson.

Please mail in your responses to P.O. Box 95536, Seattle, WA 98145. "Attn: Tutorial Committee" should be written on the envelope.