

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

**Lesson 16**

This unit, the final unit of our course, brings with it one last shift in the focus and direction of study. Up to this point, we've portrayed the work of the magician-in-training as an essentially solitary project, a process of personal transformation carried out by an individual through his or her own studies and practical work.

This picture contains a good deal of truth. At the same time, there are also collective aspects of magic — directions of study and practice, kinds of magical work, and levels of development which come out of magical work carried out in a group context. While the foundation of magical development is always to be found in solitary work — no amount of group rituals, initiations, or the like will make up for neglecting the core work of personal transformation — and while it's entirely possible to reach the goals of magic on a wholly solitary basis, there are many benefits to group work as well.

A useful metaphor here is that of learning to play a musical instrument. A great deal of the work involved is personal, best done in privacy — and this is particularly true in the early stages, so that mistakes can be made and initial awkwardnesses worked through with a minimum of embarrassment. Here, too, it's entirely possible for a musician to spend his or her entire career as a solo artist. At the same time, there are levels of musicianship and kinds of music that can only be experienced by working together with other musicians. For the musician in training, too, feedback and instruction from more experienced musicians can speed up the process of learning the art, and allow a certain number of mistakes and dead ends to be skipped.

**The Magical Lodge**

The traditional structure of working groups among magicians in the West is the magical lodge. Derived from the medieval guild system by way of Freemasonry, the lodge system was the standard method of group organization in the Western esoteric tradition from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the modern occult renaissance in the 1960's; even at present, most traditional magical groups around the Western world use some variant of it. The Companions of the Stone, as a magical Order, is organized into lodges.

What is a magical lodge? Answers abound, depending on perspective. From a practical standpoint, though, a magical lodge is a group of magicians who:

1. Meet regularly for working purposes.

This first point is critical. A magical lodge is not merely a study group, or a network for support or the exchange of ideas (although it may be these things in addition to its other functions); if it is worth the

name, it has regular meetings at which rituals and other magical exercises are performed.

2. Have an established organizational and leadership structure.

Abuses of power at many levels of our society have produced — particularly in the countercultural circles where so many magicians are found — a distrust of organized systems of all sorts. Unfortunately, Nature abhors a power vacuum as much as any other kind; experiments in unorganized magical working groups have tended either to disintegrate or to become de facto dictatorships centered around one charismatic member. In a lodge system, by contrast, lodge members fill a series of offices with specific roles and responsibilities, and rotate from office to office at intervals, while a set of general rules (comparable to a constitution) provides a framework for the whole process.

3. Admit only lodge members to their meetings.

This habit has led to charges of elitism among magical lodges — charges which have now and again been well founded. Still, there are valid reasons for a working group to limit its meetings to its own members. Advanced levels of group work often require a high degree of training and experience among participants, and bringing in the general public — some of whom may have no background at all in magic, others of whom may have radically different ideas about how ritual work should be done — is an effective way to bring about confusion and failure. (Similarly, professional sports teams and theatrical companies don't usually invite members of the audience to join them in their performances, for much the same reasons; on the other hand, these groups do have audiences, while magic is not a spectator sport.)

4. Offer one or more initiations to members.

This is in many ways the heart of the magical lodge system. The subject of initiation will be discussed in more depth in a later lesson, but for now we can define an initiation as a group ritual designed to assist the magical development of one member of the group. Most magical lodges have a series of such rituals in stock, which are passed through in a specific order and which bring about specific kinds of transformation in those who go through them. Most often, the first such initiation is also used to formally bring new members into the lodge, while other initiations may have roles in the lodge's organizational structure; for example, there may be offices which can only be held by a member who has received a certain level of initiation.

All these four points, as may be surmised, are true of lodges of the Companions of the Stone, and should be kept in mind by prospective Initiate Companions.

In the remaining lessons of this unit we will discuss other features of the lodge system, including the role of secrecy in esoteric groups and the nature and functions of initiation. While specific examples from the workings of Companions of the Stone lodges will not be given, the material covered will be generally applicable to the lodges of our Order.

### Reading

The assigned reading given in Lesson 15 completes the work with The Mystical Qabalah required for

this course. There will therefore be no readings assigned for the lessons of this unit.

## Exercises

### Course Review

This lesson begins the final unit of our correspondence course for associate members. At this point, it's appropriate to survey some of what the course has covered.

Over the last thirty weeks we've presented some of the basic concepts of the Western esoteric tradition, including the different levels of being, the use of symbolism, the role of energy, the structure of the self, and the problems and possibilities involved in magical training; we've passed on certain basic methods of magical practice, including meditation, the Lesser Pentagram ritual, the Middle Pillar exercise, and the use of the Tarot deck; we've covered some of the symbolism and meaning of the Tree of Life, and of the Qabalistic philosophy from which it derives; we've offered a series of tests and challenges to be used for the purposes of self-knowledge.

All of this material, in turn, presupposes a willingness on your part to work with it, think about it, make use of it. This willingness will have increased and decreased with time and circumstances, and this was expected by us; in magic as in anything else, there are no perfect students! There may have been times over the last thirty weeks when your studies and practices went easily, and others when they went with difficulty, if at all; there may be gaps in your journal when no practices were done, or where they were done but never written down; there may be parts of the lessons which you found difficult, confusing, or offensive.

Such difficulties, in turn, can be put to use by the student of magic.

During the next two weeks, read through the complete series of lessons, from Lesson 1 to Lesson 15. Make a note of any part of the lessons, whether theoretical or practical, which was a difficulty to you. In particular, note any practice you did only occasionally, or did not do at all. (You may wish at this point to do such practices over again, or not, as you choose.) Once you have completed this review, consider the parts of the work that were difficult for you, and see what common elements or qualities these may have. What do these common factors say about your approach to magical training, or to the Western esoteric tradition as you understand it?

Note down in your practice journal anything you discover.

## Meditation

The meditations given in Lesson 15 completed the sequence of workings on the Tree of Life begun in Lesson 4. At this point, you've had the opportunity to work with the symbolism of each of the Sephiroth at a basic level, and in the process to learn something about one of the central methods of meditation in the Western esoteric tradition.

This method can be developed and expanded far beyond the boundaries we've set out in this course.

For this final unit of the course, though, your meditation practices will move in a somewhat different direction.

The keynote of this direction is the combination of meditative and ritual modes of working. That combination is the key to most of the methods used in magical practice, by groups as well as by solitary practitioners.

The following meditative exercise will help you to begin exploring this kind of working:

1. Prepare your practice space by putting a chair in the center of the area in which you usually perform your ritual work. The chair should face east.
2. Make the opening gesture, and then perform the Lesser Pentagram banishing ritual in the usual way. Stand directly behind the chair at those phases in which you would normally stand in the center.
3. When you have finished the banishing, sit down on the chair and begin the relaxation and breathing work you normally do at the beginning of a meditation.
4. When this is completed, turn your attention to the Tiphareth center at your solar plexus. Visualize this as a golden sphere of light, just as you would in the Middle Pillar exercise. Focus on this for a time, and then visualize the sphere of light expanding outward in all directions. Allow your awareness of your physical surroundings to fade out as the sphere expands to the size of a large room.
5. Now, within the sphere, build up the image of a magical lodge or temple. The lodge is a rectangular room twice as long (that is, in an east-west direction) as it is wide (in a north-south direction), and as high as it is wide. The walls, floor, and ceiling of the room are of pale golden stone. At its center is an altar, which is covered with a black cloth. In the center of each wall is a doorway, and a few feet in front of each doorway is an empty throne. The doorways themselves are closed by curtains, each of which bears the image of a Tarot Ace: ahead of you, in the east, a yellow curtain with the Ace of Swords; behind you, in the west, a blue curtain with the Ace of Cups; to your right, a red curtain with the Ace of Wands; to your left, a green curtain with the Ace of Pentacles. There is also a skylight above the altar, and clear light streams down through it. You yourself are sitting in a chair, facing east, halfway between the altar and the western wall of the room. (See Diagram 1 for a map of the room.)

For the first week's work on this exercise, you should stop at this point, and mentally go over each detail of the image, building it up in your mind's eye as clearly as possible, for the period of time you've set aside for your meditation. When the meditation is at an end, go to Step 9 of this exercise and proceed from there.

For the second week's work, go on from Step 5 above to the following:

6. Visualize yourself rising to your feet within the lodge room you have built up. (Your physical body remains in its seat.) Move around the lodge, slowly at first; your visualized body should move and function in exactly the same way that your physical one does. When you are comfortable moving in the visualized temple — this may take a short time, or several sessions — go on to the next step.
7. Go to the west of the altar in your visualized body, and face east. Beginning there, without making

any physical movements or sounds, perform the Lesser Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram. This is identical to the banishing, except that the pentagram is traced differently:

Begin here

### Invoking Pentagram of Earth

When visualizing the four Archangels, imagine them seated in the thrones, and try to perceive the feeling or quality of each element present in the appropriate quarter of the room.

8. Stand in the room for a time, and be aware of the presence of the four elements in the lodge room. Then, still in your visualized body, rise again, go to the altar, and perform the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram. As you finish, be aware that the thrones now are empty and the energies of the elements gone.

9. Return to the chair. Then, slowly, visualize the sphere of light containing the lodge room contracting back into your solar plexus center, taking the lodge room with it. Withdraw the whole structure back into yourself, hold the image for a moment, and then allow it to fade. Finally, close the practice in the same way you normally close a meditation.

This practice should be performed each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson.

### Tarot Divination

For the next two weeks, continue with the Tarot divination exercise introduced in Lesson 15. In reviewing each day's reading, try to find the specific meanings of each Tarot symbol in terms of the day's events. Note what kinds of events each type of symbol seems to represent most often; if you find no such repeating patterns, note this also. Incorporate what you learn into your interpretations of the cards.

### Ritual

The Middle Pillar exercise, in its expanded form, should be done as part of your daily practices each day. As you work with the exercise, be aware of differences and similarities you may notice between the way you relate to it and the way you relate to meditative work. Does this change with this lesson's meditation? If so, how?

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

First, to perform the meditation 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 perform the Tarot divination exercise each day.

Fifth, to begin the course review as described in the lesson.

Sixth, to keep a record of your work, and to prepare and send in the test for this lesson.

### **Diagram 1** **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 from your practice journal accounts of two workings of this lesson's meditation, one from the first week, one from the second.
- B. Copy out one account of a working of the Middle Pillar exercise from the time you spent on this lesson.
- C. Copy out one of your daily divinations from this lesson's work, along with your comments on its outcome.
- D. Describe one or more of the things you discovered from the course review exercise given in this lesson.

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

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**Lesson 17**

The Companions of the Stone, as a magical Order organized in the midst of the current esoteric renaissance, has had the responsibility of choosing from among a wide range of traditional and modern practices, teachings, and approaches to the world. In many cases the choices to be made were straightforward ones, but certain decisions involved a broad range of issues. One of these was the Order's decision regarding the traditional relationship between Western magical Orders and the society surrounding them.

Here the Western esoteric tradition differs sharply from its partial equivalents in other cultures — the shamanic systems of tribal peoples, say, or the esoteric schools of great Eastern faiths such as Buddhism and Taoism. These traditions, in the past and at present, play active parts in their respective cultures, with well-defined and highly visible social roles. In the West, by contrast, esoteric traditions have existed on the fringes of society, in as much secrecy as possible. This secrecy has been so pervasive that one common term for the esoteric realm of knowledge — “occult” — literally means nothing more than “hidden.”

**Secrecy**

In every culture, the magician exists in a border zone, a space between the socially constructed world and the unknown. Some societies establish a special occupation (such as “shaman”) for those who inhabit this zone, and value them; others declare the zone a no man's land and do their best to punish or kill those who set foot in it. American culture at present does neither of these. Pulled between incompatible systems of thought — scientific, which sees magic as crazy; orthodox religious, which sees it as evil; alternative religious, which sees it as possible; and folk, which has always assumed its existence and power — our society has yet to come up with a generally acceptable way to define the zone and react to its inhabitants.

To some extent, this gives the magician today an unusual freedom, the freedom to define his or her own place and role in the world. It may be inappropriate, though, to celebrate this too much, or too soon. Similar periods of social uncertainty have come and gone before.

Traditionally, magicians in the West have tended to practice their art at a level of secrecy we might more easily associate with espionage or organized crime. False names, passwords and signs, blood oaths and the like came into common use in the Western esoteric tradition in this way. These things were necessary in the days when even the suspicion of magical involvement could lead to torture and death; they continued to be useful later, when such a suspicion was enough to destroy careers and risk criminal charges or confinement for insanity.

This level of security seems excessive at present, in a country where religious freedom is perhaps more general than ever before in history. There have accordingly been a number of recent figures in the magical community who have roundly condemned the whole apparatus of traditional magical secrecy.

At the same time, there is something to be said for some of the technical devices of security which have become part of the tradition during the long years of hiding. The methods used for security in Western magical circles, particularly in the magical Orders of the last three hundred years, have taken on unexpected roles in esoteric practice. Thus the idea of taking a false name, sensible enough in its own context, has developed into the custom of choosing a magical name or motto to express one's aspirations in magic; passwords have taken on some of the functions of mantras; secret grips, used by magicians to identify each other in darkness, have come to be used as a way of linking energy prior to a group working. Over and above their function as a means of ensuring secrecy, these are effective magical techniques, and worth using in their own right.

On the other hand, there are still good reasons for a magician to choose to be quiet about his or her interests and practice. Some of these are psychological: the sense of isolation and focus created by a secret rigorously held can be a valuable tool for the magician in the work of transformation. So, also, can the taming of the ego involved in not parading one's status as a magician before all one's friends and acquaintances.

Other reasons are purely pragmatic. Although involvement in esoteric work is acceptable, even fashionable, in some countercultural circles, the levels of ignorance about magic in our culture as a whole are high enough to create suspicion and confused communication even when religious zealotry doesn't enter the picture. There are still parts of the United States where it is not physically safe to be too well known as a practitioner of magic, and — despite the optimism of some factions of the magical community — it cannot be assumed that the opposition to magic in our culture will necessarily grow feebler with the passage of time.

It's worth recalling that twenty-five years ago, the idea that anti-abortion sentiment might lead to the firebombing of clinics and the murder of doctors would have seemed outlandish even to the most radical of abortion-rights activists. Similarly, it's not impossible that religious opposition to the current renaissance of magical traditions might take on increasingly militant and violent forms. It is even possible that the current broad tolerance for alternative spirituality in our culture might give way to more repressive attitudes. At the moment, neither of these seems especially likely, but predicting the future is always the riskiest of magical arts.

Finally, there is an esthetic of secrecy within the Western esoteric tradition, a part of the culture of Western magic that has come to use secrecy, invisibility and elusiveness as a kind of artistic medium.

There is, of course, a case to be made against the habit of secrecy, and it has been made ably by a range of modern magical writers. The Companions of the Stone, on the other hand, has been organized as a magical Order along traditional lines, and has chosen to retain much of the apparatus of secrecy and to require its members to practice discretion when speaking of the Order to nonmembers. In this it moves in opposition to some of the more visible trends in our culture, but in harmony with the tradition of which it is a part.



## Exercises

### Course Review

### Meditation

### Tarot Divination

### Ritual

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A.

B.

C.

D.

E. Copy out the paragraphs you wrote to summarize ideas from the assigned reading for this lesson.

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**Lesson 18**

This lesson concludes the Companions of the Stone correspondence course for associate members. In it, we have two major goals: to finish our discussion of certain themes which have appeared earlier in this course, and to provide some grounding in what is ahead for those who wish to seek the next stage of involvement in the work of the Companions of the Stone.

Ultimately, these two goals are one and the same, because the further levels of magical study and practice are simply ways of pursuing the same ends we've discussed already, with the aid of progressively subtler and more powerful techniques and energies.

The most important difference between the material we've covered in this course and the work taught at further levels has already been discussed: the inclusion of group workings, in which the efforts of a number of trained magicians can be directed toward a single end. Here as elsewhere, from the perspective of the Western esoteric tradition, the most important such end is the process of personal transformation; the generic term for workings that have this purpose is initiation.

**Initiation**

There has probably been more nonsense written about the topic of initiation than about anything else in the Western esoteric tradition (with the possible exception of the so-called lost continent of Atlantis!). Much of this nonsense presents initiation as a veiled, mysterious thing, presided over by vast powers and Secret Chiefs and granting powers that belong inside a comic book. On the other hand, there is a substantial amount of nonsense dedicated to the opposite view — that every initiation is a farce, a hoax, or a fraud, a mummery designed to conceal the fact that any real inner development is a matter of personal work and that alone.

As usual, the balanced view lies somewhere between the extremes. An initiation, in the terms used by the Western esoteric tradition, is a ritual working designed to do certain specific things:

1. It forms a link between the subtle energies of the initiate and those of the group egregor;
2. It establishes certain symbols in the awareness of the initiate, which serve as “handles” for the energy link;
3. It provides the initiate with a set of methods for using these “handles” in individual work, so that the collective energy of the group can be brought to bear in specific ways on the task of personal transformation.

The effect of initiation is thus an increase in the amount of force available for individual work. This point is critical: initiation does not replace solitary work; rather, it requires solitary work in order for its potential to be brought out.

The same is true of any form of group working, from the simplest to the most complex and powerful. The work of the further levels of the Companions of the Stone thus involves continued daily practices of the sort you've experienced in this course, but focused in part on the development of the potentials inherent in the group work of the Order.

How does initiation function in practical terms? It would be inappropriate to give too many details of the initiations used by the Companions of the Stone, for the simple reason that a certain amount of surprise plays an important role in any initiation's psychological effect. Still, a general outline can be given, one that is true for most of the initiatory rites practiced by traditional Western magical groups.

In general terms, then, the candidate for initiation is placed in a receptive state of awareness by certain simple and non-invasive means, and brought into a specially prepared space. In this space the candidate takes an obligation, binding himself or herself to follow certain rules of conduct as a member of the group, and then moves through a set of experiences in which the symbols of the initiation are presented in dramatic form. The candidate then receives the keys that allow access to certain aspects of the group's energies, and is formally welcomed into the group as an initiate. Throughout the process, the candidate's own awareness interacts at several levels with that of the group's egregor, and these interactions energize the symbols and keys presented, making them usable by the initiate in personal and group work alike.

The actual effects of an initiation are often subtle, and may not be apparent until after a certain amount of time and further work. It sometimes happens that a candidate who has reached a crisis point in his or her own inner progress may find that an initiatory ritual will catalyze dramatic changes; still, this is fairly rare. More often the real results can be seen clearly only in hindsight.

Still, these results are definite, and make the initiatory process one of the central parts of most traditionally oriented magical groups in the Western world. Even the watered-down version of the process practiced by fraternal groups such as the Freemasons and Odd Fellows have kept enough effectiveness to give these groups a surprising longevity and influence.

### Exercises

### Course Review

### Meditation

### Tarot Divination

## Ritual

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