

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.

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.

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 Oabalah 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

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 silly, bizarre, or otherwise memorable.

An example of the whole process might be useful. Imagine, then, that you are going to the grocery store to get some things for a friend who has a cold. On your list are tissue, chicken soup, saltine crackers and Vitamin C.

You visualize Trump 0, the Fool, to start the list. In your mental image, you change the rose in the Fool's hand to a big wad of tissue, and the bag on the stick over his shoulder into a dispenser box. For consistency's sake, you give the Fool a red nose and the other symptoms of a cold. Finally, the dog following him is also sneezing into a pawful of tissue.

Trump 1, the Magician, is next. In order to remember chicken soup through this image, you turn the altar or table in the Trump onto a stove, on which a large stock pot is heating. The Magician himself is wearing a chef's hat, and his upraised hand holds a live chicken upside down by its feet in place of a wand. The chicken is staring at the stock pot, and looks very nervous.

These examples show one way in which images can be constructed for this purpose; there are others, of course, and different people will find that different kinds of imagery work best for this purpose. (Take a few moments, right now, to experiment with the two items remaining on the list.) The use of the sort of silliness shown here is by no means mandatory! What matters is that the practitioner of this art finds a way of making images that works for himself or herself.

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 that chicken showing up at some later date, when the Magician is holding a date 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.

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Lesson 9

The Tree of Life has become one of the core tools of Western esotericism because of its wide applicability. It is not, of course, the Tree as a diagram on a piece of paper, or even as a diagram generated by a specific method of construction, that it is so widely applicable. It is as a diagram that has come to be used in a very particular way.

Although this idea has been dealt with in our textbook, we want to bring it up again from another angle of approach. Anyone who studies classical Latin will be set, fairly early, to reading selected passages from certain standard authors -- from Caesar's Gallic War, for example, or from Virgil's Aeneid. By learning the language through studying a standard text, one learns much more than what is in the text, or the basic rules of the language. One learns, by example, how texts are written in that language, and how they are read.

In very much the same way, by working with the Tree, by unpacking layer after layer of information, and mode after mode of gaining access to that information, we learn more than just vast tables of correspondences. We learn to perform the kinds of activities that lead us to contact the realms of living experience of which those correspondences are the outer and visible signs. The point, after all, of reading Virgil is not to learn the rules of Latin grammar and poetry for their own sake, but for the sake of the ability they give, when one has made them one's own, to allow one to experience Virgil's poetry. When we work with the Tree, we learn to experience the realms for which it provides a coordinate system.

Virtues and Vices

One very important use to which the Tree can be put is for increasing self knowledge, and one of the most important tasks for any aspirant to esoteric training is to come to know oneself. This is one of the ways in which esoteric training parts ways with modern education: esoteric tradition has not the slightest interest in so-called "self-esteem," in providing, maintaining, or protecting a positive self-image -- nor a negative one, nor any particular image at all. The point of esoteric training is to learn to see what is there to be seen, and not to flinch, slide, shiver, tap-dance, or otherwise turn away from it to some secondary representation.

On the most basic, down-home level, this means that we have to practice seeing ourselves clearly -- and this means we have to learn to discern our own virtues and vices. But before we can do

that, we have to learn to recognize what virtues and vices are. And this is where the Tree is a very great help indeed.

The correspondences given for the Sephirah in The Mystical Qabalah include, among many other things, virtues and vices. This sort of listing of specific actions and qualities can be seen as the first, shallowest aspect of the Tree's analysis: a somewhat arbitrary set of characteristics, assigned to the Sephiroth according to the usual symbolic scheme. This corresponds, in many ways, to the sort of rule-following morality common to most established religions.

Within the bare lists, though, is a deeper governing principle. Consider three responses to a threat of lethal violence -- say, a belligerent drunk looking for trouble, with a knife in his hand. One response might be to pull out a .357 Magnum and pump the man full of lead from ten yards' distance. Another might be to cringe in the shadows, hoping not to be seen, and hurry away as quickly as possible, trying to ignore the screams of some poor innocent not so good at hiding. A third might be to face the man and, taking advantage of the effects of alcohol on his reactions, kick the knife from his hand or trap it, and him, with a painful but nonlethal jujitsu hold.

All three of these responses (and, of course, the situation itself) have to do with the part of life the Qabalah assigns to Geburah. The first response goes too far in the direction of Geburah, while the second does not go far enough; both cruelty and cowardice are, in their own way, extremes. Between them, expressing Geburah in an appropriate manner, is the third response: courage. Similarly, most other vices can best be seen not as the opposite of a virtue but as the opposite of another vice, with a virtue as a third factor in between.

The characteristic of the third response might be called harmony, or appropriateness; most modern Qabalistic writings would use the term "balance." Easier to experience than to define, it serves as the central theme of the Western esoteric approach to morality. It is, precisely, the Middle Pillar upon the Tree of Life, as well as the Middle Path between extremes.

It is worth noting, finally, that this third alternative has one other characteristic: it often requires a significant amount of skill or special training. It would take far less knowledge and ability to empty a gun into our hypothetical drunk, or to hide behind a dumpster, than it would to disarm him in hand-to-hand combat. A respect for technical ability in any craft has been important in Western esoteric circles for centuries, and these considerations may help to explain one of the sources of that tradition.

Symbolism of Geburah

As part of this lesson's work, you will need to learn a

selection of the symbols traditionally assigned to the fifth Sefirah. These are as follows:

The Divine Name: ALHIM GBUR (pronounced "El-oh-heem Geh-boor");

The Archangel: Kamael, "He who sees God";

The Order of Angels: Seraphim, "Fiery Ones";

The Astrological Correspondence: Madim, the planet Mars;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Fives of the pack.

As before, these correspondences should be committed to memory, and the first four should also be written into the four circles of Geburah on your Tree of Life diagram. Once this is done, the rest of Geburah should be colored red.

Reading

For this lesson, your reading from The Mystical Qabalah will be Chapter XIII, "Practical Work Upon The Tree," and Chapter XIX, "Geburah, the Fifth Sphere." The first of these, despite its title, is primarily a discussion of the meaning of the different sorts of correspondences used in Qabalah, while the second explores some of the symbolism of the fifth Sefirah of the Tree.

As you read each of these chapters, compose a brief paragraph describing the main ideas covered in the chapter. Use your own words, or phrases and sentences taken from the text, as you wish. Write down these paragraphs and include them with the test for this lesson.

Exercises

Self-Transmutation Exercise

As you will recall from previous lessons, one of the things represented by Geburah in Qabalistic thought is the human will. This aspect of human consciousness comes in for a good deal of misunderstanding in our present culture. Too often "willpower" is associated with notions of white knuckles and internal conflict, or of some mental equivalent of the bulging muscles of bodybuilders.

In fact, all of this is quite beside the point. Inner conflict and strain arise not from strength of will but from its weakness -- or, more precisely, its division. When the will is unified, when all the different aspects of the self seek the same goal in the same way, that goal can be reached without the sort of fuss and difficulty encountered by the "strong-willed."

Obviously, then, attaining this unity of will is something well worth seeking, in ordinary life as well as in esoteric matters. At the same time, such a quest has a certain circularity to it.

How is one to attain the unity of will to effectively seek unity of will? This problem may seem like little more than a word game, but difficulties like this are in fact the reasons behind most of the complicated methods of the esoteric path.

The following exercise will help you begin exploring some of the issues surrounding will, and continue your training -- a training which has been going on since the beginning of this course -- in the unity of will we have been discussing. At the same time, it will introduce a simple but effective technique of practical magic, one that is particularly useful for the transmutation and balancing of undeveloped or undesired aspects of the personality. The exercise is as follows:

1. Choose a part of your personality which you feel "needs work" -- either an overdeveloped aspect that you would like to diminish, or an underdeveloped one you would like to expand. Consider your choice carefully. If you like, talk to people who know you, and get their opinions on your strengths and weaknesses; however, you should make the final decision yourself, and you should not let anyone else know just what part of your personality you've decided to work with. This last is critical, and a failure to observe this stricture will most likely make the exercise ineffective.

(It would be best not to choose an addiction you wish to get rid of as the focus of this exercise, at least for now. Most addicts have tried and failed to break the addictive cycle in the past, and this creates a habit of failure and an automatic division of will that can easily frustrate the inexperienced practitioner. The same applies, even more strongly, to issues surrounding body weight, since natural processes in the metabolism make dieting and other weight-loss methods self-defeating, except in the short term, for most people.)

2. Think about the aspect of your personality that you've chosen in the context of the four elements and their symbolism. Does it seem to be a thing of fire, of water, of air, or of earth? It may well overlap into several elements; still, choose the one which seems most appropriate.

3. Now choose a Tarot Ace appropriate to the work you are setting out to do. If you have chosen to expand an underdeveloped part of your personality, choose the Ace assigned to that aspect's element; if you wish to diminish an overdeveloped aspect, choose the Ace of the opposite element. (For this purpose, fire and water are opposites, as are earth and air.)

4. Every morning upon rising for the next two weeks, take the Ace you have chosen out from the deck, sit in the usual position, and perform the opening gesture. Think briefly about the aspect of your personality you have chosen for this work, and then let that fade and simply focus on the card. As far as possible, keep

your mind entirely on the card for the duration of the exercise, which should be at least five minutes. When you have finished, do the closing gesture and put the card away. During the two week period, make no special effort to change your thoughts or behavior, or for that matter to keep these the same as they have been.

5. At the end of the two weeks, discontinue the practice, and assess any changes that you may notice. Write a full description in your practice record.

Meditation

For this lesson's meditative work, we will be continuing with the method of symbolic meditation introduced in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, therefore, your topics for work will be the four Fives of the Tarot pack. As the expression of Geburah through the four elements and Four Worlds, these have much to teach about the esoteric understanding of energy and of transformation, in the universe as well as in the self. Work with one card in each meditation session, and draw on your readings and other studies as you see fit.

As before, you'll need to come up with a single word to best express the meaning of each card as you understand it. These words should be committed to memory, and will be part of the test for this lesson.

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

Ritual

The Middle Pillar exercise, as given in Lesson 7, should be performed each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. As you work with this ritual, concentrate on being aware of any changes in feeling or energy, either in yourself or in your practice space, during and after the rite.

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

First, to perform the meditation or attention exercise every day.

Second, to perform the daily review each day upon going to bed.

Third, to perform the Middle Pillar exercise each day.

Fourth, to perform the Transmutation exercise each morning on rising.

Fifth, to continue working on the number exercise given in Lesson 7.

Sixth, to keep a record of your work, and to prepare and send in a 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. Without mentioning the goal or subject of your work with the self-transmutation exercise, describe briefly any effects you may have noticed. (I.e., was there any change? Of what sort? Were there any other effects, expected or unexpected?)

B. Copy out, from your magical record, an account of one session of meditation and one performance of the Middle Pillar exercise from this lesson's work.

C. 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.