

COMPANIONS OF THE STONE

Instructional Letter Grade of Earth Series - No. 1

On the Work of Earth

One of the core themes in the training and instruction provided by the Order is the development of the ability to perceive, and work with, the structures of etheric energy which underlie the realm of physical matter. This theme is carried out in a number of aspects of the Order's work. Central to this part of the curriculum, however, is a series of "energy work" practices taught at each of the Degrees and Grades of the Order.

Just as the First Degree has as its keynote the awakening of Light in darkness, the Work of the First Degree teaches a heightened awareness of, and interaction with, the impact of this Light on the material basis of the Companion. Similarly, just as the Grade of Earth focuses on the most material of the Elements, the Work of Earth lays a foundation for the application of etheric force to the physical realm. It does so by introducing a very specific way of accumulating and storing etheric energy within the subtle body and its physical counterpart.

The Work of Earth is a specific sequence of practices done in a fixed way, which Companions in the Grade of Earth are expected to learn and practice. They should be learned from an experienced practitioner -- written language is rarely an effective way of communicating the details of physical movement and gesture -- and then practiced once each week, using this letter as a reference. While the Work is not difficult, it can involve some physical discomfort; perseverance, one of the virtues of the element of Earth, can definitely be of use here.

Opening

Begin with the usual gesture of opening, and then perform the Qabalistic Cross. After this, place the feet parallel to each other, shoulder-width apart or a little less, with the spine comfortably straight and the shoulders and belly relaxed. Most Americans tend to stand with their buttocks protruding and their spine arched; if you need to counter this, tuck your coccyx gently forward and drop your chin slightly. Stand this way for several minutes, breathing in the Fourfold Breath or other rhythmic pattern.

Accumulation

After this, raise your arms from your sides until they are nearly

parallel to the ground, but not so high that there is any strain in your shoulders. Your elbows may be slightly bent. Your wrists should be slightly flexed so that your hands face slightly outwards, and you can feel a slight tension across the palms. This is in many ways the most important stage of the practice; you should work until you are able to hold this position, without strain, for at least ten cycles of rhythmic breath. The primary goal here is to attain a state of stabilized, even crystallized, attentiveness, in which you are acutely aware of the experience of your whole body as a unit. Often, this takes place through the experience of discomfort, and it will be fostered if the Companion neither ignores the uncomfortable nature of the posture nor becomes completely caught up in the discomfort itself.

Next, rotate your arms so that the palms face outward and your fingers point forward. Ideally, this position should also be held for at least ten cycles, but in the beginning it's generally best to hold it just until stability returns after the transition. Then move your arms forward in an arc, bending them at the elbows, until your fingertips are pointing toward one another with an inch or two between them; your palms will be facing away from your body at chest level, and your arms will form a circle, as though you were hugging a large tree with the backs of your hands and arms. Hold this position for a time -- again, a minimum of ten cycles is ideal, and the interval necessary to return to stability after the movement is a good starting point. Then, leaving your arms in the same position, rotate your hands so that the palms face inward, fingertips still pointing at one another. This position should be held for at least the same interval as the two transitional positions.

Interaction with Earth Energies

The next step is to let your elbows drop somewhat, leaving room between your arms and your sides (to keep your chest uncompressed), and allow your palms to face each other. Be aware of the interaction between the two palms. Move your hands slightly together and farther apart, until a sense of resilience emerges, and manipulate this until the "large ball" stage is reached.

Lift the ball up above your head and establish the connection with the higher centers, then lower the ball through yourself (its center traversing your center) and push it deep into the ground. Wait for the reverberatory bounce or pulse as it returns. Catch this with your hands as it rises, and bring it up through yourself, through the top of your head, and then out like a fountain, down and around your Sphere of Sensation with a wide, sweeping opening gesture of your arms. Bring your hands together in front of your body, low, with the palms turned up, and lift up; turn the palms over, beginning about heart level, so they end up pressing up above your head; then repeat the outward and downward gesture. This "fountain" pattern should be done at least three times. Your joints should not be pushed to their full

extension during this process; roundedness and gentle movement are the keys to the desired effect.

While you are doing the "fountain" pattern, begin bending your knees as your arms descend: a little at first, and then more deeply. Again, do not push this too far; these should not be treated as some kind of Hermetic deep knee bends!

Finish this process with your hands at your sides, palms down.

Elemental Patterns

From this position, feel for the Earth with your palms, seeking the same quality of resilience between yourself and the ground beneath you that you felt between your hands earlier in the practice. When you have done so, move into the Sign of Earth: right foot six inches forward, and right arm raised up at a 45-degree angle, palm forward, while the left arm remains at the side, palm downward. While in the Sign, be aware of the quality of resilience with both hands: the left hand interacts with the energies of the ground, while the right hand interacts with whatever surface is in front of you.

Once again, this position (and the ones which follow) should be rounded and relaxed, not stiff. Hold each one for at least four cycles of rhythmic breath, and increase this with practice.

From the Sign of Earth, move into the Sign of Water: right foot back in its place beside the left, the two hands before the lower abdomen, below the navel, forming the downward-pointing triangle of Water. The palms face in toward the body, and the fingers are together. The elbows are comfortably wide, and the hands are a few inches in front of the body.

From here, move into the Sign of Air: arms raised in the position of Atlas supporting the heavens, palms facing upward at the level of the top of the head, fingers pointing in toward the head, chin slightly raised.

From here, move into the Sign of Fire: hands forming the upward-pointing triangle of Fire in front of the forehead, palms facing away from the head, fingers together, elbows comfortably wide, hands a few inches away from the head.

Closing

From the Sign of Fire, bring your hands down the front of your body, as though pressing something down, and then up and around to begin the reverse of the "fountain" pattern. Do this pattern the same number of times you did the original "fountain." When you have completed this, return your hands to your sides, and feel your connection with the Earth that supports you.

Remain in this stable, balanced position for a time, just as you did in the Opening, for several minutes. Then perform the Qabalistic Cross and the gesture of closing. It's often a good idea to turn to some mundane activity for a short time after finishing this practice.

Discussion

There are at least two ways in which magical theory can be used to understand the exercises of the Work of Earth. The first has to do with the role of attention, which is central to so much of the work of the magician. Normally we pay very little attention to our physical bodies, allowing habit and a range of unconscious patterns to shape sensation, posture and movement. This is convenient in terms of the demands of everyday life, but it robs us of an enormous range of perception and action, restricting the vast potential of the physical body to a handful of stereotyped (and often inefficiently handled) functions.

Here as elsewhere, self-knowledge is the magician's key. To hold any given posture without moving for any length of time is to force the attention to deal with the physical body directly and to become aware of the results -- often, uncomfortable ones -- of the way in which that body is being handled on a routine basis. With practice, this helps "body" and "mind" to function as the unity which, in a real sense, they always are. (The physical body, in magical thought, is simply the densest layer of the whole self -- a point made by William Blake, among many others.)

The second approach has to do with energy -- specifically, the etheric energy which forms the matrix for all physical manifestation. This energy is especially associated with those material patterns we call living things (a misnomer -- in magical terms, there are no nonliving things), and in higher animals has a special relationship to the breath; in Western esoteric tradition, it polarizes in specific patterns of charged areas and centers which can be traced on the physical body. Certain physical postures bring these patterns into special relationships with each other, and with the energy field or Sphere of Sensation surrounding the body, in ways that charge and balance the entire energy structure. As the hands contain major etheric centers, hand positions are particularly important in this process, as they are in methods of healing work based on the same principles.

There are also synergisms between attention and energy which come into play in this work. On the one hand, attention can be understood as a form of energy; Qabalistically, attention corresponds to Daath on the Tree of Life, and thus exists in a form of polarity relationship with the etheric realm, which corresponds to Yesod. Movements of attention are thus reflected in movements of etheric force. On the other hand, concentration of energy through the special effects of posture help to clear away

some of the blockages caused by lack of attention, since these blockages take form on the etheric level as areas of low energy. (Practitioners of certain kinds of bodywork refer to these as "dead zones" -- a good description in several senses, as they are both unresponsive due to lack of attention and literally less alive due to a lack of healthy levels of etheric energy.)

The Work of Earth is thus designed to unite attention and energy in a way which permits the subtle body and its physical reflection to function more effectively in magical work as well as in daily life. Along with the effects discussed here, it also lays the foundation for a range of other kinds of energy work, which will be developed in the Works of higher Grades, and for a series of practical applications including healing techniques and armed and unarmed combat arts.

