

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

**Lesson 13**

One aspect of the Western esoteric tradition -- and, in fact, of traditional Western modes of spirituality in general -- which has come in for a great deal of criticism in recent years is its allegedly negative attitude toward the physical, material universe. To critics of this stripe, spiritual teachings which allot any more value to the nonphysical than to the world of matter are "negative" and "world-hating", if not simply neurotic attempts to flee from the real world into a desert of arid intellectualisms.

A certain amount of this criticism is simple partisan propaganda. Followers of several religious and philosophical viewpoints in the Western world -- scientific materialism, for one; various neo-Pagan revivals, for another; several branches of liberal Christianity, for a third -- have found the charge of "world-hating" a useful cudgel with which to belabor their doctrinal opponents.

Another part of the criticism, by contrast, is probably merited. It's hard to argue against the claim that those groups which, for example, practiced castration as a means to ritual purity, or who held that the physical universe is the creation of the Devil and humanity's one hope is to die out and get free of its worldly prison, were going overboard. On the other hand, such groups make up only a small portion of the history of alternative spirituality in the West.

Perhaps the largest part of this common criticism, though, is based on simple misunderstanding. It is true, certainly, that in the Western esoteric tradition one ancient description of the goal of the work is the departure or disentangling of the soul from the realm of matter. It is, however, quite untrue that this implies a contempt for the material world -- and equally untrue that the removal of the soul is equivalent to the removal of the entire self.

The key to the whole matter is the idea that the human self exists on all the levels of being. Each phase or aspect of the self, from yechidah to guph, has its proper equivalent along the

spectrum of existence.

The problem arises because, as presently constituted, most human beings are partly out of phase with the universe around them. The ruach, the collection of powers we might think of as our "ordinary personality," is designed to work on the levels of concrete and (to some extent) abstract consciousness. Instead, most of the time, it functions -- awkwardly -- as if it existed on the plane of physical matter.

What does this mean in concrete terms? The ruach has the function of perception; it encounters things by perceiving them. However, it can only perceive things of its own level.

Take a moment, now, to look around the room in which you're sitting. Are you perceiving the room itself, the furniture, the paint on the walls? No. You are perceiving a mental image of the room, reflected onto the level of concrete consciousness. That image comes to you by way of a Rube Goldberg apparatus made up of bouncing photons, eye pigments, electrochemical nerve reactions, and complicated processes in the brain and mind, and -- as any physicist can tell you -- it has next to nothing in common with the actual structure of matter in space-time around you.

It's certainly true that this mental image is a good enough fit to allow you to get through everyday life. Problems start arising, though, because the image is confused with the material reality behind it. Even on a physical level, what is true from one perspective may not be true from another. Worse, the ruach becomes so used to the apparent solidities of its surroundings that it begins to treat things of its own level -- memories, perceptions, beliefs -- as though they were as solid as bricks, and to relate astral and physical perceptions in a whole series of confused and irrational ways.

It's worth noting, as well, that the entanglement of the ruach with the physical plane is not, itself, a conscious matter. It happens automatically, as the background to the ruach's conscious thought and feeling.

The problem, then, is not with the material world, but with the current structure of human consciousness. Nor is it necessary to flee from the world of matter -- only to reorient the conscious mind so that it experiences its perceptions as perceptions rather than as solid things.

This process is the same one discussed in the last lesson as the parting of the Veil of the Sanctuary, seen from a slightly different perspective. A glance at the Tree of Life will show

the connection. Those Sephiroth which are below the Veil -- those, in other words, which can symbolize the aspects of ordinary human consciousness -- are precisely those which link up directly to Malkuth, the Sephirah of material existence. Those Sephiroth which do not have a direct link to Malkuth remain hidden, or at best function through one or more of those that do.

And this, again, is the situation which the Western esoteric tradition seeks to transcend.

---

### **Hod: Intellect**

Hod is the sphere of myriad structures and their endless manipulations. It is the proper sphere not only of the divinations that are based on models of the cosmos, but also of those magical methods which involve the manipulation of components to form significant patterns.

This, in turn, leads to one of the great difficulties associated with Hod: that significance becomes identified with the patterns, and the attention of the practitioner becomes fixated on the patterns and structures themselves, haunted by the sense that somewhere there is a key manipulation that would produce the ultimate, self-explanatory pattern.

This is an error reminiscent of all those jokes about the guru who is asked to reveal the meaning of life, and answers "42" or "a carrot". The problem lies in supposing that discovering the meaning of life is like solving the clues of a crossword puzzle. Life is not made meaningful by treating it as an object for consciousness: it is made meaningful through participation in it by consciousness. Structures become meaningful not when we decode them, but when we live through them, and thus make of them channels of life. The idea that sufficient cleverness of the puzzle-solving variety can solve "occult secrets" is an illusion. Esotericism is not a matter of hidden messages, but of depth upon depth of meaning, bringing to life the dead bones of the structures that embody it.

These structures have a two-fold function. One, deriving in a sense from Chesed, is to serve as vehicles for meaning. The other, deriving in a sense from Geburah, is to limit and restrain the temptation to unfocused indulgence in either superficial cleverness or unbalanced energies.

Unbalanced energies often manifest as parts of oneself, as urges or desires that resonate so closely with small imbalances in one's own makeup that one takes them for one's own. One can be

swept away on a current of rage, for example, or desire, identifying with it and never realizing that it is some impersonal energy that has manifested through one's personality.

This is one of the functions of rules and regulations: to provide a system of coordinates against which breaches in balance can be detected. This is a standard theme in folk tales, in which success in a quest or some other activity depends on adherence to arbitrary rules. The rules may seem to have no connection with the quest -- until they are broken, and the quest fails, or has only partial success.

The older psychoanalysts developed a classification of ways in which people deal with problems. Careful reflection on this classification can be very helpful for the student of magic.

The first kind of response people have to a conflict is called "acting out". In other words, people act on their contradictory desires, and find themselves involved in recurrent self-defeating patterns or situations. The second response is called "suffering out". Some people, rather than acting without awareness, are aware of their impulses and desires but block their expression, experiencing instead a disruption of their inner lives. The third is called "working out". Here, not only do conflicts affect consciousness, but they are actually consciously recognized and examined, and (ideally, at any rate), resolved.

Embedded in this scheme is a model of increasingly conscious approaches to handling inner conflicts. The key is inhibition based on recognition. Realizing that some unconscious pattern is causing trouble, one refuses to act on impulses connected with it, thus forcing the conflict into conscious expression, first perhaps as an emotional turbulence, and then, with gradual attention, emerging into full consciousness as a pattern of desires, fears, and avoidances that needs to be resolved -- and can be resolved, once it is recognized for what it is.

This approach is especially useful in dealing with unbalanced impersonal energies when they manifest through one's own consciousness. And, it is important to remember, it is precisely through consciousness (and the unconscious underpinnings of consciousness) that the inner world is encountered. Consciousness, in other words, is deepened by difficulties, which is why effective initiations always involve challenges.

---

### **Symbolism of Hod**

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

The Divine Name: ALHIM TzBAVTh (pronounced Ell-oh-heem Tza-ba-oth);

The Archangel: Raphael, "Healing of God";

The Order of Angels: Beni Elohim, "Sons of Elohim";

The Astrological Correspondence: Kokab, the planet Mercury;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Eights 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 Hod on your Tree of Life diagram. Once this is done, the rest of Hod should be colored orange.

### **Reading**

For this lesson, your reading from The Mystical Qabalah will be Chapter XXIII, "Hod." This chapter concentrates on the symbolism of the Eighth Sephirah, but also discusses some of the theoretical groundings of practical magic.

As you read, 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.

In addition, please review Chapter XVII, "Binah, the Third Sephirah," and Chapter XIX, "Geburah, the Fifth Sephirah." The symbolism and traditional lore of the three Sephiroth of the Pillar of Severity will have a significant amount to teach about that Pillar's nature and function. What connections do you see in the material in these chapters?

### **Exercises**

Self-Perception Exercise: Intellect

The self-perception exercise introduced in the last lesson had two principal purposes. The first was to encourage you to become more aware of your usual moods and emotional fluctuations; the second was to begin the process of teaching a particular way of directing the awareness, a kind of "background noticing" that continues through the ordinary activities of life. Both purposes are part of the broader intention of

showing some of the uses of introspection and self-knowledge in the Western esoteric tradition.

For this lesson, the same exercise will be aimed at a different target: the intellect, the reasoning (and often verbal) mind in which information is processed and thinking takes place.

For many people, particularly in our current culture, this is a much harder target than the emotions because of its sheer speed: any five-minute period may see five dozen thoughts on as many different subjects. An attempt to write down one day's thoughts would take rather more than one day to carry out! For the sake of sanity -- as well as for other reasons -- the background awareness you are striving to develop will have a slightly different aim. Instead of trying to keep track of the subjects of thought, notice its quality -- its quickness or slowness, its general tone (critical, enthusiastic, bored, wandering), and its exactness or vagueness. Does it repeat itself, or wander from subject to subject? Does it tend to take any one tone habitually? Be aware of these things, and of how they change over time.

As with last lesson's exercise, work at developing this background awareness of thinking for the next two weeks, trying to keep it going throughout your waking hours. Keep track of your level of success in your magical record.

#### Tarot: Patternmaking

The Tarot storytelling exercise covered in the last lesson introduced one of the skills useful in the process of Tarot divination. The free-flowing process of imaginative play with symbols is a crucial key to opening up the higher or deeper phases of awareness, beyond the Veil, where the information which comes through the Tarot has its home ground.

This, however, is the "force" aspect of the diviner's art. There is also, in turn, a "form" aspect. The same deep phases of the mind with which we are seeking to cooperate speak naturally in symbolic language, and that language is by no means random or disorganized; rather, it tends to shape itself around patterns of ordered symbolism which are presented to the deeper mind by the surface of awareness.

It is a commonplace of psychotherapy that patients of Freudian analysts tend to end up having Freudian dreams, while patients of Jungian analysts tend to dream Jungian dreams. In the same way, students of the Western esoteric tradition will find the symbols they have studied emerging from their own minds, in

dream, reverie, and divination. Some magicians in the past have taken this as proof of the objective truth of one or another system of symbolism, but what is actually happening is a function of a process we've discussed already: the aspects of the ruach above the Veil make use of those below the Veil in order to communicate.

The process of divination, then, combines a sensitivity to the play of symbols with an alertness to the way those symbols relate to each other, and to the symbolic matrix of the diviner's own system of magic. The following exercise is designed to help you learn the second of these elements, and to continue your development toward Tarot divination. Like the exercise in the last lesson, it should be done at least four times during the two weeks you spend on this lesson; half an hour per session is likely to be a good allotment.

1. Sit at (or on) a convenient flat surface, such as a table, a bed, or the floor, with your Tarot deck within reach. As before, begin with the opening gesture, and then shuffle the deck at least three times.

2. As with the previous exercise, deal out anything between three and ten cards from the deck, one at a time, turning them face up as you deal them. Set them side by side in a line before you.

3. Now consider the cards before you. Instead of seeing them as images in a story, though, pay attention strictly to their roles as elemental and magical symbols. Think of them as a progression of elements, running from left to right, each emerging and then giving way to the one which follows it. The four suits have their usual elemental meanings, and the court cards function as combinations of the elements; for the sake of this exercise, the Trumps can be assigned to the element of Spirit.

4. Pay special attention to the relationships between the elements. Traditional lore describes fire and water as opposites, as are earth and air; when cards of these elements are next to each other, the result is conflict. Cards of the same element next to each other tend to reinforce each other, while cards of elements which are not in opposition -- earth and water, for instance -- relate to each other harmoniously. (The Trumps, representing Spirit, can be seen as harmonizing with all elements.) The sequence of cards before you is thus a pattern of stresses and resolutions, with each card reacting to its neighbors as the whole moves from an initial situation to a conclusion.

5. Keep watch for two special situations in the cards. One is called the "Pattern of Balance," and occurs when two cards in opposition are preceded or followed by a third card which harmonizes with both. (An example would be the Three of Wands and the Eight of Cups, with the Four of Pentacles either just before or just after them.) When this occurs, the harmonizing card is seen as resolving the conflict between the two opposed cards, and the whole pattern is held to be harmonious. The other occurs when court cards interact with other elements. The minor elements in the court cards -- for example, the fire in the King of Cups -- also interacts with the elements of the other cards, influencing the relationship. Thus the King of Cups next to a Wand card would create less conflict than, for instance, the Queen of Cups in the same position, but the Queen of Wands would strengthen other Wand cards less than would the King.

6. When you have a clear sense of the relationships between the card, write down a brief description, and close with the usual gesture.

With practice, you'll find an awareness of the cards' interactions coming to you automatically as you consider a reading. The ability to do this is an important element of competence in Tarot divination, and allows the full implications of any given reading to be grasped.

---

#### Meditation

For this lesson's meditative work, you will be continuing with the system of meditation on symbols first introduced back in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, therefore, the topics for your meditation will be the four Eights of the Tarot pack. As before, you'll need to come up with a single word describing 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.

This meditation should be done each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. As always, a full description of your meditations should be entered in your magical record.

---

#### Ritual

The expanded Middle Pillar exercise, as given in Lesson 11, should be performed each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson. During these workings, seek maximum clarity and preciseness in the visualizations and physical movements alike. Pay attention to the effects this may have on the experience of the exercise.



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

First, to perform the meditation every day.

Second, to perform the Middle Pillar exercise every day.

Third, to perform the daily review every day upon going to bed.

Fourth, to carry out the self-perception exercise as given above.

Fifth, to do the Tarot patterning exercise at least four times.

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 Eights of the Tarot deck.

D. Briefly describe your experiences with the self-perception exercise in this lesson.

E. Copy out an account of one working of the Tarot patterning exercise.

F. 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.