

The Companions of the Stone

The Companions of the Stone is a fraternal organization dedicated to the preservation and transmission of the traditional teachings and disciplines of western esotericism.

- **What are these "teachings and disciplines"?**

An esoteric teaching, in our sense, is one that can only be properly understood from the inside, through practice and experience. Many things in life are esoteric in this sense. For example, it is possible to learn a great deal about the scientific aspects of taste and smell, but this knowledge has no definite connection with whether one is a great chef, or a skilled judge of wines.

"Esotericism," then, can mean the study of the esoteric — that is, of the aspect of life that can only be understood by experience. But it also means the claim that the essential core of human existence can only be understood from within, by participation, and not from without.

Although this claim has echoes in certain aspects of modern philosophy,

it is not primarily a philosophical claim. Nor is it a modern one. It is ancient, and it is practical. There is a developed and sophisticated body of theory and technique for exploring the esoteric aspect of the world, and for working with it. The traditional name for the technique is magic, understood as the name for a spiritual discipline.

It is this tradition, in its highest possible form, sophisticated form, that the Companions of the Stone wish to preserve and transmit.

- **Why "western"?**

We are well aware that the various cultures and traditions of the "Old World" are far less self-generating and independent than many of their admirers would like them to have been. Nevertheless, there is a definite quality to the cultural stream whose major tributaries arise in the Mediterranean region and Europe. It is not a homogeneous stream; in fact, one of its most important characteristics is the continuing interaction, even to the point of open conflict, between its tributary traditions. This creative tension has allowed for the development of a

spiritual tradition that can coexist with the modern world (many aspects of which grew out of that tradition) without being taken in by it, or feeling threatened by it.

Our aim is to help in preserving and transmitting this mode of spiritual knowledge and practice. One of the salient features of this cultural stream is the high value given individual autonomy and judgement.

- **What do the Companions do?**

The Companions of the Stone offers affiliate membership to those who are sympathetic with our aims and interested in our activities.

Affiliate Companions are eligible to work with the correspondence course in traditional western esotericism offered by the Companions, and to receive the semi-annual Companions of the Stone newsletter. Those who have become full Affiliates by completing the course are also eligible to participate in occasional group activities sponsored by the Companions.

Some students will go on to work and study more closely with the Companions.

ions of the Stone, and some of these may go on to become full teaching members of the society. At no stage, however, are students obliged to remain associated with the Companions.

- **How are these things taught?**

The level of teaching that we offer is a correspondence course in the theoretical and practical elements of esotericism, in the same tradition that gave birth to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and similar esoteric groups of the late nineteenth century.

This course consists of 18 supervised lessons, each of which takes at least two weeks to complete. Students should expect to spend some forty minutes to an hour each day on course work. The work for each lesson must be completed and approved before the next lesson can be begun.. In addition to providing a basic grounding in traditional esotericism, the course work allows the student and the Companions to assess each other, and to decide whether their aims and interests are compatible.

After finishing the course, suitable and interested students may be invited to apply for further training and work along traditional lines in a group of Companions. Students are free to end their connections with the Companions of the Stone at any time, at any stage of training.

Critical and independent thinking is an integral part of the traditional teachings we wish to preserve. Blind obedience is not.

- **How do people apply?**

Those who wish to apply for affiliate membership in the Companions of the Stone can do so by filling out an application form and sending it, with the application fee, to the address on the application form. Those who are accepted as Affiliate Companions will receive an introductory packet and the first lesson of the correspondence course.

Please note that the work of the Companions is focused in the Puget Sound area; applications from outside this area are less likely to be accepted.

Companions of the Stone

Affiliate Companions and the
Affiliate Work

{LOGO}

{Quotation}

Companions of the Stone
Po Box xxxxx
Seattle, WA 98YYY-YYYY
USA

The Companions of the Stone is a Fraternal Organization registered under provision ... etc, with tax number or whatever else is appropriate.

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

Lesson 1

In this first lesson we will deal with many things that on one level are matters of practical routine, but which also will lay the groundwork for everything you will do while working on the course

Like the tradition from which it derives, this course is intended to be experienced, not merely studied in an intellectual way. A large part of the material we'll be covering will involve doing practical exercises. To do these, and to get as much as possible from them, you'll need to provide yourself with certain things.

First among these is a suitable place to practice. Many of the old books in this tradition assume that the student can go to great extremes in this connection; fortunately, this isn't necessary, as disused castles and desert hermitages are in short supply nowadays. A private room, not too brightly lit, where you can be undisturbed for half an hour at a time, is quite sufficient. It should have enough open floor space to allow you to walk in a circle without bumping into furniture.

You'll also need a chair with a straight back – a folding chair is suitable for this. Some other things can be obtained from the school supplies section of the local drugstore: a three-ring binder for these lessons; a ruler; a pair of compasses (the sort used in geometry classes, with a pencil clipped to one side, will do); a set of colored pencils (the more colors the better) and a blank book or journal for your magical record.

Two other things, however, may take a visit to a specialist bookstore. The first is a copy of *The Mystical Qabalah*, by Dion Fortune. The Qabalah is the core symbolic system of the Western esoteric tradition, and Fortune's book, (despite certain flaws) is the best modern introduction to it. Readings from this book will be assigned in future lessons. Some people feel that *The Mystical Qabalah* is outdated, because they find certain ideas antiquated or foolish. The major texts of Western esotericism, however, have been written over a period of about twenty-five centuries, while Fortune's book was written just a bit over half a century ago. Learning to see behind the veil of a text that is almost contemporary can be good practice for learning to see beyond the outward forms of texts that are much older, and written with very different conventions.

The second item is a suitable Tarot deck. The first step is to make sure you have a Tarot deck that is suitable to the course. For your own private work you're free to use any deck you prefer, but for the purposes of the correspondence course we ask you to use one of the following: the deck designed by A E Waite (often known as the Rider, or Rider-Waite, or Waite-Smith deck); the Universal Waite deck, a version of the above re-colored by Mary Hanson-Roberts; the Magickal Tarot; The Thoth Tarot; the Gareth Knight Tarot; the Servants of the Light Tarot; the Golden Dawn Tarot; or the Golden

Dawn Ritual Tarot. The work in these lessons will require you to use a Tarot deck with the symbolism appropriate to the tradition we teach, and the decks listed here contain the proper symbolism in the proper form.

If you already own one of the decks listed above, and are comfortable working with it, you're set. If not, the most important thing to do is to find and use whichever one of these decks you feel the most comfortable with. Go to an occult bookstore that offers sample decks for the customer to look at and handle. Examine the appropriate decks one by one and select the deck that you would prefer to work with. If you dislike all of them, choose the one you dislike the least. If at all possible, you should use the same deck throughout the course, so keep this in mind when you make your choice.

Once you have your cards, you'll need to store them in some place where they will stay clean, dry, and undisturbed. If you want to wrap them in a cloth, or keep them in a bag or box, feel free, but a bureau drawer full of soft clothing will do just as well. It's also best not to allow another person to handle your cards, and you should *never* lend them to anyone.

The next step is to familiarize yourself with the cards. Even if you've used your deck for years, do the following exercise and try to look at your cards with new eyes. Each day, set aside five to ten minutes to spend working with your deck. Look at each card in turn, going through the deck as you would leaf through a photo album. Take a moment to absorb the image on each card, and then go on to the next. Record the practice in your journal, including anything you may have noticed or learned. Don't go on to do divinations yet; that will come later. Simply look through your cards each day.

Drawing the Tree of Life

If you have had any previous contact with the Western esoteric tradition, you will probably have encountered the diagram known as the Tree of Life. The ten Sephiroth or "numerations" (or "spheres") and the twenty-two paths of this diagram form a map (or coordinate system) for the universe and the human soul alike -- that is, to use the traditional terms, of the macrocosm (great world) and microcosm (little world).

Nowadays the Tree of Life is used by a great many different schools and systems of magic; few, however, are aware of the geometric plan that underlies the diagram, and which derives from ancient traditions of sacred geometry and mathematics central to Western esotericism. The following exercise will help you to begin exploring this aspect of the tradition. To do it, you'll need paper, a ruler and compasses, and a pencil.

1. Draw vertical straight line on the paper (in diagram 1, this is the line ADGJK).
2. With the compasses set at any convenient width, placing the sharp point near the top end of the line (A) to locate the center, draw a semicircle (BDC).
3. Keeping the compasses at the same width, move the center to the point where the semicircle crosses the vertical line (D), and draw a full circle around this point (circle ABEGFC).

Diagram 1

Diagram 2

4. Now repeat this operation twice more, tracing each new circle around the point where the before it crosses the central line (G and J). The result should look as shown in Diagram 1.
5. Finally, set the compasses to a smaller width, and trace a small circle around each point marked with a letter *except* are the Spheres or Sephiroth (numerations) of the Tree of Life.

If you wish, you can go on to erase the larger circles, and then connect the Sephiroth with Paths, as shown in Diagram 2. For this lesson, however, this isn't necessary. The focus here is the geometrical relationship between the Sephiroth and the process by which they are generated.

These relationships and this process have an extensive symbolism, and a wealth of meaning. For this lesson, however, simply work on drawing the Tree in this way a number of times (at least five) without trying to work up any conceptual or verbal interpretation.

Exercises

One of the things that sets the Hermetic tradition most sharply apart from the mainstream Western religions, especially in their popular forms, is its insistence on practical work. In most faiths, it is enough merely to accept some set of propositions about the supernatural, and perhaps follow some rules about how to behave. This rather simple approach to the world beyond the realm of the senses probably has much to do with the popularity of these faiths, but it is not, ultimately, satisfactory.

Learning to experience and work with the hidden side of reality is a skill, much as learning to deal with the world of meaning behind marks on paper is a skill. Few people who wanted to learn to ride a bicycle would be satisfied with a set of instructions that insisted that all a bicyclist needed to do is to lead a good life and believe in the existence of two-wheeled vehicles. Yet a very similar approach is taken by many people to issues that are among the most important that any human being can encounter.

Ethical questions do have an important place in this work, and in lessons to come we will cover the main elements of the Hermetic approach to ethics. This does not involve learning lists of things to do and things not to do, however. Here, as elsewhere, the Hermetic approach takes as its basis personal experience and understanding. Our goal, when dealing with ethical issues, will be to challenge you to find out what right and wrong mean to you – and then to put your discoveries to the test in your own life.

According to the Hermetic tradition, *faith and a rule-keeping morality are not enough*. Without personal experience of the hidden side of existence, in fact, they can be all but meaningless. Because of this, Hermetic teachings (and this course, which is an introduction to them) tend to focus mainly on ways of attaining and assessing such experience.

For this reason, we wish to begin right away with practical work. By doing this work, you will prepare yourself to deal more effectively with the theoretical aspects of the teaching that will be presented in the lessons that follow.

OPENING AND CLOSING

One very simple but very important practice, the omission of which has caused quite a bit of trouble, is the use of opening and closing gestures. In the *Companions of the Stone*, we use a simple set of gestures that can be performed easily under most circumstances without drawing undue attention.

The opening gesture begins with the hands together, palm to palm, held at an angle of about 45 degrees. Next, the hands are opened, as though they were a book; the palms face you. Third, the hands are separated and turned slightly so that the palms are facing each other, at a distance of about ten inches. Your gaze should move past your hands into the space between and beyond them, and you should at this point formulate the intention that your inner faculties are opening.

The closing gesture has the same steps, but in the reverse order. The hands, held apart but palm to palm, are rotated until both palms face you. They are then brought together, edge to edge, palms facing you. Finally, they are snapped together, as though you were snapping a book shut, with the firm intention of closing down your inner faculties. This last movement has a percussive quality; if you can actually get your hands to clap, so much the better.

The opening should be performed at the beginning of an exercise; the closing at the end.

AWARENESS

Each of the lessons in this course will include an awareness exercise. The ability to direct awareness at will, to turn it from one realm of experience to another (and especially toward or away from the realms of experience ignored or blotted out by many people, and overwhelming or addicting to others) is one of the most important skills a magician can have. Surprisingly often, the changes needed for effective magical work are subtle – but the ability to bring them about needs nevertheless to be learned, practiced and mastered.

In this lesson, the exercise focuses on developing the ability to perceive the subtle aspects of your surroundings. You may have noticed that certain places, people and things tend to have definite effects on your perceptions, your feelings, or your thinking processes. Each day for the next two weeks, choose a period of time (at least a half hour in length) to pay particular attention to these effects. Whatever you experience – certain part of town that makes you feel irritable, a person around whom you can't think clearly, a change in the sharpness of your senses that seems to happen whenever you go through a particular room – notice it, and note it down in your magical record.

The period you set aside for this should be done with the opening gesture and ended with the closing gesture. Outside of this period, you should *not* attempt to notice these subtle effects of the environment. This may prove at times more difficult than the work itself, but it too is an exercise, and a necessary discipline, the effects of which you will come to understand as you progress through these lessons.

ATTENTION

Although esoteric systems are notorious for their complexity, all their elaborate apparatus is in an important sense unnecessary, or beside the point – ideally, at least. It is in the space between the ideal and the actual that the systems flourish; it is the general (though not universal) human inability to do things the simple and direct way that makes them necessary.

The following exercise is a concrete example of that idea. From one perspective, it is one of the basic five-finger exercises of the esotericist. From another perspective, it is the only thing one needs to know or do. All other means, exercises, teachings and devices are for those who cannot do this exercise as it should be done.

From a certain point of view, again, this exercise is the key to the development of the magical will. That description, though, can be either helpful or confusing depending on how one thinks of "will". Esoterically understood, will is not exactly a matter of effortful striving; nor is the cultivation of will a matter of building up some distended, flaming, throbbing mental faculty that imposes itself on all and sundry like some big, over-familiar dog. Developed will is effortless, simple, almost unconscious, and effective without needing a lot of fuss. The same thing is true of concentration. Effective concentration is not a matter of gripping tightly to only one thing, but of simply letting everything else go, as though one picked up a pebble from the bottom of a stream, and let the water carry away everything but the one pebble you wanted.

This exercise should be done if possible at the same time every day, or at the same time in your daily cycle – for example, just after waking, or just before dinner. At the beginning of your work on this lesson, you should not do it for more than five minutes; by the end, you should be doing it for at least twenty minutes at a time.

The exercise itself, as we have said, is simple: Stand, or sit, without moving, for the period of the exercise. Alternate standing and sitting: that is, on one day stand for the allotted time; on the next day sit; on the next day stand, and so on.

When you are doing the exercise, do not try to do nothing, or think nothing, or feel nothing -- but above all do not let yourself follow any thoughts or feelings that lead you away from being aware that you are sitting, or standing (as the case may be). Most people will find it best to sit in a straight-backed chair that allows them to have their feet flat on the floor, and their thighs parallel to the floor, so that their backs are straight and their hands can rest on their thighs. Similarly, most people will find it best to stand with their feet parallel and as far apart as their hips or shoulders. Feel free to experiment until you find the position that works best for you -- that allows you to stand or sit stably without moving, for the allotted time. The experimentation, though, does not count as part of the exercise time unless you do not move for the whole allotted time you are trying out that particular position.

At this point, do not worry about whether you are relaxed or tense. If you find uncomfortable or intrusive tensions, you may relax them if you can do so without changing position. Don't, however, try to maintain a rigid immobility – if nothing else,

simply breathing will make your body move, and you will notice perhaps other movements as well.

Try always to bring your attention back to your body, without focusing on any particular part of it. Feel it as a unified whole, both tactilely (in terms of touch) and kinesthetically (in terms of muscles and position). Certain sensations may intrude: you may find yourself feeling discomfort, or restlessness, or tickling, for example. Do not try to flinch away from these sensations, but attend to them calmly and easily, putting them in the context of all your other sensations.

Record the times and results of this exercise in the journal you send in to your tutor.

DAILY REVIEW

Every night, before you fall asleep, think back over the events of the day in reverse, as though you were watching a film running backwards. Start with the events that took place just before beginning the review, go to the events before those, and so on, back to what you did on waking up that morning. At this stage, do not try to judge or assess the things you remember. Just observe them.

In your magical record, note the approximate time at which you began this exercise, as well as how much of the day you reviewed before falling asleep.

To recapitulate, then, the activities for this lesson are as follows:

First, to buy the necessary supplies.

Second, to become familiar with the process of drawing the Tree of Life.

Third, to begin examining the Tarot deck.

Fourth, to perform the attention exercise daily.

Fifth, to perform the daily review on going to bed.

Throughout this course, you'll be keeping a magical record. This is a journal of your esoteric training, in which all of the practices and readings you do are noted down. Each entry should include the date, time, circumstances and results of your work, as well as any feelings or reactions you may have from doing it. Your magical record will become an important resource for your training; make a habit of writing up each piece of work as soon as possible after doing it.

The specific format is up to you, but using a standard format makes it much easier to keep such a record. Here is an example.

12 June 1993

6:30 AM: Practiced opening and closing. Vague effect, nothing definite.

7:15 AM: Went through Tarot deck after breakfast.

8:00 AM: Did awareness exercise on bus ride to work.

Interesting: I noticed that my mood shifted this way and that as various people got on and off the bus. Usually the effect was subtle, but not always -- there was one man in particular who seemed to be the center of an overpowering cloud of gloom. I was glad when he got off! Question: how many of my moods, or anyone's, are caused by this kind of overflow from other people?

10:45 PM: Began review. Got as far as lunch, I think, then fell asleep.

Your magical record is primarily a tool for your own use. During the course of your training with the Companions, however, it is also the principal method we will use to track your progress. Once a week, therefore, we ask you to copy out your record for the last week and mail it to us. You can, of course, omit anything you feel is too personal, as well as any work you are doing that is unrelated to the work of this course. It may be worth stating explicitly, here, that we do not require you to give up any other magical or religious practices you may be doing. If, however, you are currently doing any form of breathing exercise, please contact us: certain aspects of the course work may need to be adjusted to avoid problems.

The copies you send to us should be typed or printed out in a readable way. Please note that *if we do not receive copies of your record, further lessons will not be mailed*. Your tutor will be relying on this regular feedback to gauge your progress and provide such guidance as you may need.