

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

Lesson 10

In certain traditional magical orders, the candidates for initiation are asked at some point in the ceremony why they want to enter the path of occult knowledge. The proper answer is, "I desire to know in order to serve," but often enough the candidates are prompted to give it, and the implication of the rite becomes lost in a veil of nested ironies.

It is true enough that one must inevitably serve something -- if not a sense of justice, or a delight in beauty and distaste for bad taste, then at least the needs of one's belly or one's fear of pain or discomfort. And it is also true enough that trying to serve two masters leaves one pretty much unable to follow either one.

The intention of the ritual question is clear enough: it teaches by implication that it is dedication -- coherent service to some ideal or at least goal -- that opens the door to deeper awareness, and that it is a complete and integrated dedication to serving a certain kind of goal that leads to the deepest transmutations of one's life and very being. But the very ritual circumstances also point out that it is very unlikely that the candidate will already have any spontaneous tendency to understand that point. In ritual terms, at any rate, that understanding is beyond the immature spirit, and must be provided by a prompting from a deeper and more inward source.

But what of the actual candidate? In a ceremony one may well say what one is prompted to say, in order to get through the ceremony and be admitted to the group. But what is the real reason for putting up with it all? A real, honest attempt to answer this question about one's desires and purposes as they actually are, rather than as one supposes they ought to be, is really the first step in initiation. It is one way of following the great maxim of the Delphic Oracle, Know Thyself.

One of the most common reasons, though not necessarily the dominant one in any particular person, for studying magic is to gain power, specifically magical powers. These are the same

desires that, in other modes, provide markets for martial arts instruction, cosmetics and perfumes, the advertisements in the backs of comics for x-ray specs that let you see through people's clothes, courses in instant hypnotic power over others, and any number of other things. Others simply wish to dominate, often for the noblest and purest of reasons, since those they wish to dominate are clearly unable to do things correctly on their own. Similarly, there are those who wish power out of fear and a desire for protection from what they experience as a hostile and dangerous world.

Although this course does not explicitly set out to teach psychic "powers", the key to developing them is easy enough to describe. In fact, almost everyone reading this already knows it. The key to developing any skill (assuming one has the prerequisite ability or talent in some degree) is to use it, and to work at using it, with attention. We learn to walk by walking; we learn to run races by running races, noticing when we do well and when we do badly, and working to correct our running. We learn to read by reading, and to write by writing. There is no other way. Coaching makes any of these things easier by far, of course, but the key is always to have a clearly formulated goal, and to practice constantly with the goal in mind. Thus, to develop psychometric ability -- the ability to get information from objects about their history and connections -- the core practice is to practice touching objects with the intention of getting such information, and noting at each attempt the impressions (visual, auditory, emotional, conceptual, and so on) that may arise -- and testing them against the facts as far as one can find them out.

Another set of reasons that people are attracted to occult and magical activities is the promise of knowledge. This may range from simple curiosity through a desire to know the real rather than conventional limits of what can be known to a hostile "prove it" skepticism that masks, perhaps, a desire to be convinced.

Again, some people are attracted by the promise of pleasures of various kinds -- by a delight in beauty, or a desire to experience the unusual or outre, or by a delight in costumes, or desire for the pleasure of association with others in a group of the secretly (or not so secretly) superior, or of the like-minded.

Others are collectors and accumulators, who wish to know in order to have more knowledge, or more first editions, to add to their hoarded possessions.

There is at least one more class of motives, those having to do

with a desire or thirst for meaning, for an inner coherence to existence that makes it more than simply a succession of moments following each other like random beads strung by a bored child. This desire often expresses itself, in a derailed sort of way, in terms of a habitual heaping-up of kitchen appliances or other possessions, or a search for more intense or exotic pleasures, or a quest to increase one's sphere of authority, or a drive to know more and more. For those in whom it emerges on its own, however, the other kinds of motives often lose at least some of their charm.

A little later in this lesson, we will present an exercise which will draw upon these considerations, and help you explore some of your own motivations in this work. Such exercises can have a tendency to veer off into either self-admiration or self-reproach, to sort out motives such as these into the simpler categories of "right" and "wrong" and to preen or punish the self accordingly.

A certain kind of writing in the Western esoteric tradition has tended to reinforce this habit by going on at great length about "right" and "wrong" motives for esoteric study, and to dismiss those who have "wrong" motives with scorn or lurid threats. While there is a certain justification for this sort of attitude -- a good deal of damage has been done, down through the years, by people whose desires for, say, sexual exploitation or financial enrichment have been channeled into esotericism -- it is still overly simplistic. Indeed, it can too easily provide an excuse for the sort of avoidance of self-knowledge we have discussed elsewhere in this course.

The transformation of motives is indeed a part of the work of our tradition, one aspect of that greater Work which is the transmutation of the whole self. The first step in that Work, however, must be a clear and nonjudgmental knowledge of what it is that is to be transmuted. Some of the exercises in this part of your studies are intended to lay a groundwork for this knowledge. These include the exercises which are aimed at bringing about change in yourself, for the self (and its motives) are anything but static -- and it is often under the stress of change that their authentic shape becomes most clearly visible.

Tiphareth: Harmony and Sacrifice

Although Tiphareth is associated with harmony, many of its symbols and emblems are associated with death, and the Microprosopus -- the "Lesser Countenance" or aspect of Divinity or the self -- is traditionally more allied with Severity than

with Mercy (which pertains to the Macroprosopus, the "Greater Countenance" in Kether).

One reason for this link with Severity is that the Lesser Countenance is a diminished and restricted form of the Greater Countenance. Another is that, despite the limitations of the Microprosopus, the ordinary personality, the ordinary conscious self, must undergo a kind of de-centering or re-centering transformation before it can come to know the realm of Tiphareth. At its most basic level, this de-centering occurs as the ordinary self begins to realize that it is not autonomous, that it is not the center and source of all its own activities and transformations, but that it is an element within a larger field -- a field with which it is not identical, but which is at the same time not exactly alien to it, or other than it.

One very important point to keep in mind is that, although this "higher self" is more than the physical or conscious aspects of the person, it is not separate from them. One does not need to reject the body, or the ego, to begin to make contact with the higher self. In fact, the body and the ego, and the "outer world" as well, are all fields of action of the higher self. One does not so much make contact with the higher self as recognize the contact that already exists. But in recognizing this contact, one begins to lose one's exclusive identification with one's physical or social existence, and to see the ways in which these and other aspects of experience, are expressions of an organizing center or principle that manifests through oneself and one's experiences.

At the same time, the symbolism of sacrifice, crucifixion, death, and suspension is not simply a matter of jocular false faces put on to make things more impressive. Although this contact with the higher self can begin with a relatively simple shift of viewpoint or emphasis, it is not simply a matter of intuitive reorientation, and even less a matter of exercising cleverness to solve some paradoxical puzzle. The alchemists said of their Art that it requires everything one has, and the sacrifice of Tiphareth requires no less than everything of us.

One less complete, but very important, mode of this transforming sacrifice is found in the experience of the kind of insupportable dilemma that can dominate one's experience. It often happens that, at some point in one's life, one finds oneself caught in an intellectual, moral or spiritual antinomy, a dilemma constituted by two things which cannot both be true, but which must both be true. This is a challenge unto death. Sometimes one can turn one's back on it, embracing one of the alternatives and refusing to recognize the other. But if one can stay embedded in the dilemma despite its insolubility, a

kind of re-orientation takes place in the depths of the darkness, and a kind of solution arises -- almost in spite of itself, or oneself. The emergence of this solution is the work of what Jung called the "transcendant function" of the psyche, and the Western esoteric tradition calls -- among other things -- the Higher Self. It is one mode of action of Tiphareth (although there is a higher mode of the same phenomenon which occurs beyond Daath).

This kind of radical reorientation to the terms of a dilemma has two results. Not only is the dilemma resolved, but consciousness is reoriented to some extent toward its own depth. One begins to awaken to one's foundations in the "higher" self. Avoiding the dilemma is an avoidance of this depth -- and this is true culturally as well as individually. The current situation of Western culture, as it has developed since the late seventeenth century and especially in the last century, is an example of this sort of cultural encounter with an insupportable dilemma. There are many obvious examples of avoidance of the dilemma as well, in retreats into the simplifications of fundamentalism, or scientism, or the adoption of the trappings of other, more "spiritual" cultures, or the adoption of a disdainful and obscurantist "traditionalist" esotericism.

These dilemmas are painful, wrenching. disruptive -- but, if one can bear with them, profoundly transforming. The problem, as an alchemist might say, is to be sure that the vessel in which the reaction occurs is strong enough to contain the process from beginning to end.

Symbolism of Tiphareth

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

The Divine Name: YHVH ALVH VDAaTh (pronounced "Yeh-ho-wah Ell-ah Vah Dah-ath");

The Archangel: Michael, "He who is as God";

The Order of Angels: Malakim, "Kings";

The Astrological Correspondence: Shemesh, the Sun;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Sixes of the pack.

As in previous lessons, these correspondences should be committed to memory, and the first four should also be written

into the four circles of Tiphareth on your Tree of Life diagram. Once this is done, the rest of Tiphareth should be colored golden yellow.

Reading

For this lesson, the assigned reading from The Mystical Qabalah will be Chapter XX, "Tiphareth, The Sixth Sephirah." This chapter covers and synthesizes the symbolism of this, the central sphere of the Tree of Life.

As you read the chapter, compose a brief paragraph describing the main ideas Fortune covers. You may use your own words or, if you prefer, phrases and sentences taken from the text. Write down the paragraph and include it in the test for this lesson.

Exercises

Self-Transmutation Followup

For the last two weeks, you have worked with a simple technique for reshaping aspects of yourself. Any number of things may have happened in that time. You may have noted improvements in the direction you desired; you may have noticed no change at all, or even a worsening in the situation; you may have become aware of something unexpected coming out of the exercise; you may have realized that the choice you made, or the perceptions behind it, were flawed or wholly inaccurate.

All of these outcomes are valuable, although their value may not be instantly apparent. (In fact, the first of them -- simple success -- may be the least useful in terms of the broader work of this course.) For now, discontinue the practice, and for the next two weeks observe the aspect of yourself you sought to change. Note down in your journal anything that catches your attention.

Motive Exploration Exercise

This exercise follows on from the discussion of motives for esoteric study at the beginning of this lesson. That discussion spoke of several different categories of reasons why you, or anyone, might take up the study of magic: desires for power, for knowledge, for pleasure, for sheer accumulation, and for meaning.

You may be able to think of other categories, and trying to do so is part of the assignment for this lesson. But the core of the assignment is to try to examine the whole ensemble of your

motives for taking up this study, without indulging in self-reproach or self-admiration, and to try to distinguish the different classes into which these motives fall.

Some students find a written list useful in this work; nearly all find that time, and a certain amount of brooding, play an important part. Whatever route you find best, though, it should end with a list of categories, each of which has one or more specific motives under it.

Next, try to assign these classes of motive to the symbolic scheme of the five elements. (If you are familiar enough with another system -- for example, the seven planetary powers, or twelve zodiacal signs -- and find that your motives seem to fit these classifications better than they do the elemental scheme, please feel free to use the other system instead.)

For your test, you will need to be able to describe in one or two paragraphs the system of classes of motives you have developed in this way: describe the classes of motives and how they correspond to the symbolic system (of elements, or of some alternative), and give examples of specific possible motives in each class. These examples do not have to be your own. Although we do not ask you to give details of any of the self-analyses you carry out, it is a real part of your training to learn to be aware of your own actual inner state. You should carry out this elementary self-analysis and write it up, and store it in a secure place. As you progress along your path, there will come a point when it will be very helpful to be able to review what you have done.

Meditation

For this lesson's meditative work, we will be continuing with the method of symbolic work introduced in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, then, the topic for your meditations will be the four Sixes of the Tarot. As the expressions of Tiphareth, the central sphere of the Tree, through the four elements and Four Worlds, these cards symbolize some of the most important practical 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 lesson, plan on doing at least eight sessions of meditation during the next two weeks. 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, concentrate on seeing the rite as far as possible as a unity, a single act, rather than as a collection of disparate gestures and sounds. Pay attention to any factors which seem to influence your ability to perceive this.

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 work with the motive exploration exercise, and the followup to last lesson's self-transmutation exercise, over the next two weeks.
- Fifth, to continue working on the number exercise presented in Lesson 7.
- 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 Sixes of the Tarot deck.
- D. Describe the system of motives you worked out as part of the motive exploration exercise, and give several examples (not necessarily from your own set of motives) of motives in each category.
- E. 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.