

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

Lesson 6

Every way of thinking about the world, be it scientific, religious or magical, defines a relationship between the individual and the universe as a whole. Sometimes these definitions are explicit. More often they are unstated, and link up in unexpected ways with the worldview that underlies them. Medieval notions of the place of humanity in the cosmos followed the rigid hierarchical structure of medieval society, with God as a sort of ultimate feudal monarch and human beings as lowly vassals owing him fealty and service. In a similar fashion, current scientific notions about matter are reflected in the most common ways of thinking about what it means to be human; the free, autonomous individual, affecting society through mass actions such as voting or membership in an organization, is an exact mirror of the atom moving on its path through empty space, affecting the world we experience only when it combines with millions of others. (It's worth noting that the roots of the words "individual" and "atom" mean exactly the same thing.)

The Western esoteric tradition, similarly, defines a specific way of understanding the relationship between the individual and the universe. Where the two systems mentioned above have kept their definitions largely implicit, though, the traditional lore of magic includes its own definition as an explicit and essential principle of its teaching.

In Western esoteric thought, the universe and the individual are seen as reflections of each other, related to each other through an identity of structure. In traditional terms, the macrocosm ("great universe"), the cosmos as a whole, and the microcosm ("little universe"), the individual, are alike in nature.

From the modern perspective, which is used to looking at both the self and the world in largely material terms, this idea can look strange to say the least. In terms of their perceptible physical structure, certainly, the cosmos and the individual would seem to have little in common. (Does the universe have feet?) Behind the apparent bizarreness of the idea, though, are

two perceptions crucial to a magical understanding of the world and the self.

The first is the realization that, as human beings, we approach the universe through the medium of human senses and a human brain, and what we perceive is to a great extent determined by the nature and limitations of that medium. On the most basic level, we do not directly sense radio waves, cosmic rays, or any of a vast array of energies flowing through the world around us; our senses draw on a tiny fraction of the total range of available stimuli, and then only in tightly channeled and limited ways. More subtly, our brains tend to follow rigid, inborn patterns of perception and thought to a much greater extent than we often realize, particularly where survival, reproduction, and social dominance -- aspects of life we share with the animal realm -- are concerned. The universe we perceive, then, is largely shaped by, and even reflected from, who we are.

The second of these perceptions is the realization that certain aspects of the universe, as traditional magical thought understands it, are in fact mirrored in (or, possibly, from) corresponding aspects of the individual human being. The most important of these aspects, for our present purposes, is the recognition of different levels of being in the universe.

Levels of Self

The system of five levels of being, as presented in Lesson 2 and explored further in Lesson 5, thus has a precise analogue in the inner structure of the human individual. This mirroring of structure is not merely a matter of abstract theory; it can be shown directly, by a simple process of self-observation.

Take a moment, therefore, to consider this complicated thing you call "me." Turn your attention to yourself. What do you perceive?

Most likely, the first thing you notice is your physical body, your skin, flesh, bones. This shape of dense matter is the analogue of the physical level of being in the universe.

Next, move your hand, or the muscles of your face; observe the act of will expressed through the physical structure. Note your state of health, not in terms of symptoms but as a general feeling-state. Rub your palms together for a half-minute or so, then hold them, slightly cupped, a foot apart in front of your chest and move them slightly toward and away from each other, paying careful attention to the sensations.

These are all manifestations of one aspect or another of the etheric level of the self, the intermediate level between your physical body and the more concrete levels of your mind. Of all the levels of the self, this one is certainly the least understood or even noticed in our culture; in fact, many prominent scientists even today are reduced to spluttering indignation by such so-called "vitalistic" ideas. Nonetheless, the etheric level of the self can be perceived, strengthened, and used as a means of action just as much as the physical level. Many martial arts, in particular, have raised the technique of training the etheric side of the self to a high pitch of effectiveness.

From these considerations, turn your attention to the part of you which has been reading these words. Think about your phone number. How did the memory appear in your mind? As a visual image, a voice speaking the numbers, or in some other form? Think about a nearby room, a person you know, an emotion you once felt, something you intend to do tomorrow. What form did these perceptions take in your awareness? Thoughts and feelings of this sort, expressed in concrete sensory forms, make up the concrete consciousness, the level of human experience that corresponds to the astral level of being.

Behind these, however, are another class of inner perceptions which do not have a sensory element. Abstract rather than concrete, they inform and underlie the operations of concrete thinking. Like the etheric level, this level of perceptions is often not developed or noticed in our present culture, but like the etheric level it can be experienced and developed. For a glimpse of it, consider the words which you are reading right now. They relate together in specific ways to produce meaning in your mind. Unless you have recently taken a grammar class (or have an unusually good memory), you will probably not be able to describe more than a few of the rules that govern those relationships; nonetheless, some part of you knows them and applies them to every word you read. This is one function of the abstract consciousness, the analogue in yourself of the mental level of being.

Finally, turn your attention for a moment away from all these perceptions, and toward that which perceives them. When you read a word, something experiences the meaning; when you hear a sound, something registers the sensation. Formless and intangible, it forms the background to every perception and every state of consciousness. This inner awareness is the reflection of the spiritual level of being in the human individual.

These five levels of the microcosm are sometimes described as "bodies", so that in magical writings talk about the "astral body," the "etheric body" and the like is a common feature. This can be a useful shorthand, and it also stresses the real similarities between these levels of the self. It needs to be remembered, though, that any system of rigidly divided levels is a simplification and, to some extent, a distortion of a much more fluid reality. No one system is "true," if that word implies that all others are incomplete or false; rather, each of the many ways of mapping out the mirrored structures of self and universe are convenient for some uses, awkward for others. They are, ultimately, tools -- and possession of a hammer does not necessarily make a screwdriver useless.

The Number Three

As with the earlier two numbers, Three is not a counter, but a quality -- a quality that can be approached by reflecting on the connection of that quality with consciousness, and with our own experience. One of the features of the dyad, when we see it in terms of human relationships, is the endless cascade of doubling that can occur. For example: I am aware of you, and you of me; I am aware of me, and of your awareness of me; you are aware of yourself, and of my awareness of you. Or, similarly, a loaf of bread has a left side and a right side; when I cut it once, the piece on the left has a left and a right side, and the piece on the right has a left and a right side. There's no end to it: just an expanding proliferation of pairs, every boundary generating two more.

It is with three that structure emerges, and the possibility of stability. With three people, the third person can see the relationship of the other two as a unity, from the outside, without generating the mirroring cascade that the members of the dyad engender as they make images of their interaction, and interact with those images. And each person is a third to the other two. Once this configuration appears, as philosophers and psychoanalysts have recognized, the seeds of the eternal human drama of loyalty and betrayal have been planted.

When we are simply conscious of ourselves, and conscious of being conscious of ourselves, we simply wobble back and forth between the two possibilities. But when we recognize both possibilities as a set, we have, in a sense, stood outside them -- and suddenly our ability to take ourselves as an object of consciousness itself becomes an object of consciousness. We have created a triadic configuration, have re-unified the doubleness that emerged out of the original unity.

This movement of consciousness is mirrored in the first part of the divine name associated with Binah. It begins with the letters that constitute the name of Chokmah (I, fire, and H, water), but goes on to V (vau, which correspondes to air, a reflection of the original I that also incorporates H). There is, of course, the fourth letter, another H; this, corresponding to the element earth, represents the final crystallization or solidification of the form that has emerged from the interaction of the three.

It is in this sense that Chokmah as Wisdom is linked with Two: it is participatory, it involves knowing from within. Binah, as Understanding, is objective: it is knowing from without. It is Binah that is the root of the possibility of objective awareness: knowing something as an object, without any sense that it is looking back. Binah is thus the root of the possibility of form.

Symbolism of Binah

In this lesson, as in the last two, you will need to learn a selection of the symbols which are traditionally assigned to the Tree of Life. Here, the aspect of the Tree to be studied is the Third Sephirah. The symbols are as follows:

The Divine Name: YHVH ALHIM (pronounced Yehowah Elohim);

The Archangel: Tzaphkiel, "Contemplation of God";

The Order of Angels: Aralim, "Valiant Ones";

The Astrological Correspondence: Shabbatai, the planet Saturn;

The Tarot Correspondence: the four Threes of the pack.

As before, these correspondences will need to be committed to memory. As you do so, you'll want to review the correspondences of Kether and Chokmah as well. The first four of these symbols are also to be written into the four circles of Binah on your Tree of Life diagram; once this has been done, the background of the Sephirah should be colored black.

Reading

For this lesson, the assigned reading from The Mystical Qabalah will be Chapter IX, "The Ten Sephiroth In The Four Worlds," and Chapter XVII, "Binah, The Third Sephirah." The first of these provides a more detailed look at the topic of magical symbolism and correspondences, while the second analyzes the essential

symbols of the third sphere of the Tree of Life.

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

Exercises

Number Exercise

The work with number symbolism in the last two lessons will, we hope, have given you a certain basic sense of the ways in which the philosophers and magicians of the past have thought of the world in terms of number. This lesson's work is intended to build on this sense.

The number that will be the focus of your work for the next two weeks will be the number three, and as before, your task will be to notice and think about those things in your experience that can be described by, or are in some way linked with, this number. As before, also, you may find it useful to keep a list, in your practice journal or elsewhere.

The numbers one and two are, to a great extent, so basic to our experience of the world that it is difficult not to see them everywhere. In fact, the ancient Pythagorean philosophers, whose insights into number became the foundation for the entire structure of numerical symbolism in the West, considered one and two to be so abstract and undefined that, in a sense, they could not be considered "numbers" at all. With three, and the numbers following it, you will find this to be considerably less true. Threes in the world are still relatively easy to find, but they tend to be confined to much more specific areas of experience. Like the Sephirah Binah, to which it is linked, the number three tends toward a certain limitation in its expressions -- and the numbers beyond three partake of the same limitation, just as all the Sephiroth below Binah are conditioned by the restrictive power of the third Sephirah.

It may be worth noting also that the number three appears also, more often than any other, in folktales and legends from the Western world and from many other cultures as well. Genies' wishes, fairies with blessings, brothers setting out on a quest, and many other things in such stories, come in threes more often than in any other number. In the study of folklore, a repeated numerical structure like this is called a pattern number. While three is by no means the only such pattern number in the

folklore of the Western world, and many nonwestern cultures use different pattern numbers -- for example, four predominates in Native American legends, and five is common in Chinese folklore -- three holds a dominant position in the traditions of the world.

Meditation

This lesson's meditative work will continue along the lines set out in Lesson 4. For the next two weeks, the topic of your meditations will be the four Threes of the Tarot. These can be understood as expressions of Binah through the four elements and Four Worlds. As before, work with one card in each session of meditation, and feel free to draw on your readings for this lesson, and on your own studies as well.

As you did with the Aces and Twos, you will need to come up with a single word that best expresses the meaning of each of the Threes as you understand it. These should be committed to memory, and should be sent in along with your journal entries for this lesson.

As before, you should do at least four sessions of meditation during the two weeks you spend on this lesson, and you are free to do more, up to as often as once each day. Any day in which you do not do a meditation, you should do the relaxation and attention drill given in Lesson 3.

Ritual

The Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram, as given in Lesson 3, should be a part of your daily routine by this point. Continue to practice it each day. As you work with this rite over the next two weeks, put particular effort into tracing and visualizing the pentagrams and other imagery as clearly and exactly as possible. Try to build up the images so clearly in your imagination that they appear to be present even to your ordinary senses.

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

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

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

Third, to perform the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram each day.

Fourth, to work on the number exercise over the next two weeks.

Fifth, 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 Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram.

C. Give the four keywords you found in your meditations on the Threes of the Tarot deck.

D. Describe some of the meanings of the number three you found through your work with the number exercise.

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.