

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

**Lesson 16**

This unit, the final unit of our course, brings with it one last shift in the focus and direction of study. Up to this point, we've portrayed the work of the magician-in-training largely as a solitary project, a process of personal transformation carried out by an individual through his or her own studies and practical work.

This picture contains a good deal of truth. At the same time, there are also collective aspects of magic -- directions of study and practice, kinds of magical work, and levels of development which come out of magical work carried out in a group context. While the foundation of magical development is always to be found in solitary work -- no amount of group rituals, initiations, or the like will make up for neglecting the core work of personal transformation -- and while it's entirely possible to reach the goals of magic on a wholly solitary basis, there are many benefits to group work as well.

A useful metaphor here is that of learning to play a musical instrument. A great deal of the work involved is personal, best done in privacy -- and this is particularly true in the early stages, so that mistakes can be made and initial awkwardnesses worked through with a minimum of embarrassment. Here, too, it's entirely possible for a musician to spend his or her entire career as a solo artist. At the same time, there are levels of musicianship and kinds of music that can only be experienced by working together with other musicians. For the musician in training, too, feedback and instruction from more experienced musicians can speed up the process of learning the art, and allow a certain number of mistakes and dead ends to be skipped.

**The Magical Lodge**

The traditional structure of working groups among magicians in the West is the magical lodge. Derived from the medieval guild system by way of Freemasonry, the lodge system was the standard method of group organization in the Western esoteric tradition from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the modern occult renaissance in the 1960's; even at present, most

traditional magical groups around the Western world use some variant of it. The Companions of the Stone, as a magical Order, is organized into lodges.

What is a magical lodge? Answers abound, depending on perspective. From a practical standpoint, though, a magical lodge is a group of magicians who:

1. Meet regularly for working purposes.

This first point is critical. A magical lodge is not merely a study group, or a network for support or the exchange of ideas (although it may be these things in addition to its other functions); if it is worth the name, it has regular meetings at which rituals and other magical exercises are performed.

2. Have an established organizational and leadership structure.

Abuses of power at many levels of our society have produced -- particularly in the countercultural circles where so many magicians are found -- a distrust of organized systems of all sorts. Unfortunately, Nature abhors a power vacuum as much as any other kind; experiments in unorganized magical working groups have tended either to disintegrate or to become de facto dictatorships centered around one charismatic member. In a lodge system, by contrast, lodge members fill a series of offices with specific roles and responsibilities, and rotate from office to office at intervals, while a set of general rules (comparable to a constitution) provides a framework for the whole process.

3. Admit only lodge members to their meetings.

This habit has led to charges of elitism among magical lodges -- charges which have now and again been well founded. Still, there are valid reasons for a working group to limit its meetings to its own members. Advanced levels of group work often require a high degree of training and experience among participants, and bringing in the general public -- some of whom may have no background at all in magic, others of whom may have radically different ideas about how ritual work should be done -- is an effective way to bring about confusion and failure. (Similarly, professional sports teams and theatrical companies don't usually invite members of the audience to join them in their performances, for much the same reasons; on the other hand, these groups do have audiences, while magic is not a spectator sport.)

4. Offer one or more initiations to members.

This is in many ways the heart of the magical lodge system. The subject of initiation will be discussed in more depth in a later lesson, but for now we can define an initiation as a group ritual designed to assist the magical development of one member of the group. Most magical lodges have a series of such rituals in stock, which are passed through in a specific order and which bring about specific kinds of transformation in those who go through them. Most often, the first such initiation is also used to formally bring new members into the lodge, while other initiations may have roles in the lodge's organizational structure; for example, there may be offices which can only be held by a member who has received a certain level of initiation.

All these four points, as may be surmised, are true of lodges of the Companions of the Stone, and should be kept in mind by prospective Initiate Companions.

In the remaining lessons of this unit we will discuss other features of the lodge system, including the role of secrecy in esoteric groups and the nature and functions of initiation. While specific examples from the workings of Companions of the Stone lodges will not be given, the material covered will be generally applicable to the lodges of our Order.

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### **Reading**

The assigned reading given in Lesson 15 completes the work with The Mystical Qabalah required for this course. There will therefore be no readings assigned for the lessons of this unit.

### **Exercises**

#### Course Review

This lesson begins the final unit of our correspondence course for associate members. At this point, it's appropriate to survey some of what the course has covered.

Over the last thirty weeks we've presented some of the basic concepts of the Western esoteric tradition, including the different levels of being, the use of symbolism, the role of energy, the structure of the self, and the problems and possibilities involved in magical training; we've passed on certain basic methods of magical practice, including meditation, the Lesser Pentagram ritual, the Middle Pillar exercise, and the use of the Tarot deck; we've covered some of the symbolism and meaning of the Tree of Life, and of the Qabalistic philosophy

from which it derives; we've offered a series of tests and challenges to be used for the purposes of self-knowledge.

All of this material, in turn, presupposes a willingness on your part to work with it, think about it, make use of it. This willingness will have increased and decreased with time and circumstances, and this was expected by us; in magic as in anything else, there are no perfect students! There may have been times over the last thirty weeks when your studies and practices went easily, and others when they went with difficulty, if at all; there may be gaps in your journal when no practices were done, or where they were done but never written down; there may be parts of the lessons which you found difficult, confusing, or offensive.

Such difficulties, in turn, can be put to use by the student of magic.

During the next two weeks, read through the complete series of lessons, from Lesson 1 to Lesson 15. Make a note of any part of the lessons, whether theoretical or practical, which was a difficulty to you. In particular, note any practice you did only occasionally, or did not do at all. (You may wish at this point to do such practices over again, or not, as you choose.) Once you have completed this review, consider the parts of the work that were difficult for you, and see what common elements or qualities these may have. What do these common factors say about your approach to magical training, or to the Western esoteric tradition as you understand it?

Note down in your practice journal anything you discover.

### Meditation

The meditations given in Lesson 15 completed the sequence of workings on the Tree of Life begun in Lesson 4. At this point, you've had the opportunity to work with the symbolism of each of the Sephiroth at a basic level, and in the process to learn something about one of the central methods of meditation in the Western esoteric tradition.

This method can be developed and expanded far beyond the boundaries we've set out in this course. For this final unit of the course, though, your meditation practices will move in a somewhat different direction.

The keynote of this direction is the combination of meditative and ritual modes of working. That combination is the key to most of the methods used in magical practice, by groups as well

as by solitary practitioners.

The following meditative exercise will help you to begin exploring this kind of working:

1. Prepare your practice space by putting a chair in the center of the area in which you usually perform your ritual work. The chair should face east.
2. Make the opening gesture, and then perform the Lesser Pentagram banishing ritual in the usual way. Stand directly behind the chair at those phases in which you would normally stand in the center.
3. When you have finished the banishing, sit down on the chair and begin the relaxation and breathing work you normally do at the beginning of a meditation.
4. When this is completed, turn your attention to the Tiphareth center at your solar plexus. Visualize this as a golden sphere of light, just as you would in the Middle Pillar exercise. Focus on this for a time, and then visualize the sphere of light expanding outward in all directions. Allow your awareness of your physical surroundings to fade out as the sphere expands to the size of a large room.
5. Now, again from your solar plexus center, visualize the image of a magical lodge or temple expanding outward until its corners nearly touch the boundaries of the sphere. The lodge is a rectangular room twice as long (that is, in an east-west direction) as it is wide (in a north-south direction), and as high as it is wide. The walls, floor, and ceiling of the room are of pale golden stone. At its center is an altar, which is covered with a black cloth. In the center of each wall is a doorway, and a few feet in front of each doorway is an empty throne. The doorways themselves are closed by curtains, each of which bears the image of a Tarot Ace: ahead of you, in the east, a yellow curtain with the Ace of Swords; behind you, in the west, a blue curtain with the Ace of Cups; to your right, a red curtain with the Ace of Wands; to your left, a green curtain with the Ace of Pentacles. There is also a skylight above the altar, and clear light streams down through it. You yourself are sitting in a chair, facing east, halfway between the altar and the western wall of the room. (See Diagram 1 for a map of the room.)

For the first week's work on this exercise, you should stop at this point, and mentally go over each detail of the image, building it up in your mind's eye as clearly as possible, for the period of time you've set aside for your meditation. When

the meditation is at an end, go to Step 9 of this exercise and proceed from there.

For the second week's work, go on from Step 5 above to the following:

6. Visualize yourself rising to your feet within the lodge room you have built up. (Your physical body remains in its seat.) Move around the lodge, slowly at first; your visualized body should move and function in exactly the same way that your physical one does. When you are comfortable moving in the visualized temple -- this may take a short time, or several sessions -- go on to the next step.

7. Go to the west of the altar in your visualized body, and face east. Beginning there, without making any physical movements or sounds, perform the Lesser Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram. This is identical to the banishing, except that the pentagram is traced differently:

Begin here

## Invoking Pentagram of Earth

When visualizing the four Archangels, imagine them seated in the thrones, and try to perceive the feeling or quality of each element present in the appropriate quarter of the room.

8. Stand in the room for a time, and be aware of the presence of the four elements in the lodge room. The images of the archangels should remain in the thrones. Then, still in your visualized body, go to the altar, and perform the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram. As you finish, be aware that the thrones now are empty and the energies of the elements gone.

9. Return to the chair. Then, slowly, visualize the lodge room contracting back into your solar plexus center. When you have done this, bring the sphere of light back into yourself as well, reversing the process of opening. Hold the image of the Tiphareth sphere for a moment, and then allow it to fade. Finally, close the practice in the same way you normally close a meditation.

The complete temple structure must always be withdrawn back into yourself at the end of each practice session. Since it is formed out of the substance of your astral-level body, leaving it externalized in this fashion will bring about exhaustion and a range of health problems.

This practice should be performed each day during the two weeks you spend on this lesson.

### Tarot Divination

For the next two weeks, continue with the Tarot divination exercise introduced in Lesson 15. In reviewing each day's reading, try to find the specific meanings of each Tarot symbol in terms of the day's events. Note what kinds of events each type of symbol seems to represent most often; if you find no such repeating patterns, note this also. Incorporate what you learn into your interpretations of the cards.

## Ritual

The Middle Pillar exercise, in its expanded form, should be done as part of your daily practices each day. As you work with the exercise, be aware of differences and similarities you may notice between the way you relate to it and the way you relate to meditative work. Does this change with this lesson's meditation? If so, how?

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

- First, to perform the meditation 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 perform the Tarot divination exercise each day.
- Fifth, to begin the course review as described in the lesson.
- Sixth, to keep a record of your work, and to prepare and send in the test for this lesson.

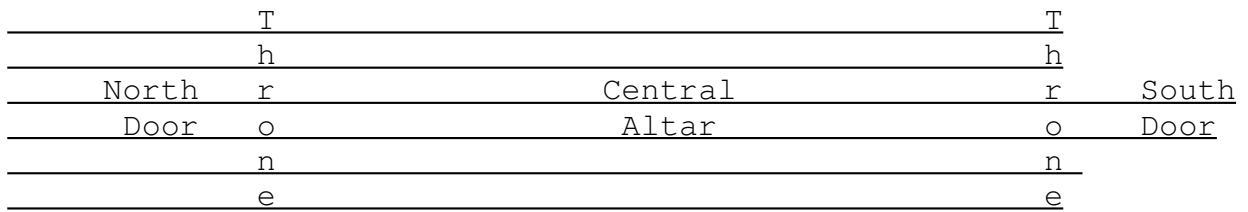


**Diagram 1**

East

Door

Throne



Your

Seat

Throne

West

Door

## 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 from your practice journal accounts of two workings of this lesson's meditation, one from the first week, one from the second.

B. Copy out one account of a working of the Middle Pillar exercise from the time you spent on this lesson.

C. Copy out one of your daily divinations from this lesson's work, along with your comments on its outcome.

D. Describe one or more of the things you discovered from the course review exercise given in this lesson.

Please mail in your responses to P.O. Box 95536, Seattle, WA 98145. "Attn: Tutorial Committee" should be written on the envelope.